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WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF REBUILDING LIVES WITH CHILDREN
AFTER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Violence: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of women who have been exposed to domestic violence and separated to rebuild lives with their children in Turkey. Semi-structured interviews with 8 women who have left abusive conjugal relationships to form single-parent families at least 6 months prior to the interview were conducted. In the interviews, the separation and post-separation experiences of participants with a special focus on their relations with their children is explored. The mean age of the participants was 39, and the mean duration of the violent marriage was 14 years and participant women had either 2 or 3 children. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and through analysis three main themes are developed which are Children as Relational Sources of Resilience: Cycle of Empowerment, Coming to Terms with the Destructiveness and Absence of Father, and Bonds of Care in a Hostile Context. The findings of this study demonstrated how participants needed to reorganize their various relationships, delineating new familial roles and internal and external boundaries during separation and post-separation period to achieve relative security and stability in their lives. While women seemed to have strengthened their relationship with their children and with extra-familial people who support them, they managed to limit their contact and expectations from the perpetrator and their family of origin. Women are documented to have struggled not only against violent partners but also a debilitating social, economic, political, and institutional context in terms of child-care, job security, and legal measures to prevent post-separation violence which also impacts and over-burdens children. The findings are discussed in relation to the existing literature in the field. Limitations and suggestions for further studies and clinical implications of the study are presented.

Keywords: domestic violence, post-separation, motherhood, welfare policies, family roles and boundaries

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de aile içi şiddete maruz kalmış ve çocuklarıyla birlikte yeni hayatlar kurmak üzere ayrılmış kadınların deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Bu amaçla, görüşmeden en az altı ay önce şiddet içeren evlilik ilişkilerini bırakarak tek ebeveynli aileler kuran kadınlarla, yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Mülakatlarda katılımcıların, ayrılık ve ayrılık sonrası deneyimleri, özellikle çocuklarla olan ilişkilerine odaklanılarak araştırılmıştır. Katılımcıların ortalama yaşı 39, ortalama şiddet içeren ilişkide kalma süreleri 14 yıldır ve 2 ya da 3 çocukları bulunmaktadır. Veriler, Tematik Analiz yöntemi kullanılarak değerlendirilmiş ve bu analiz ışığında 3 tema oluşturulmuştur. Bu temalar: İlişkisel Dayanıklılık Kaynağı Olarak Çocuklar: Güçlenme Döngüsü, Babanın Yıkıcılığı ve Yokluğuyla Baş Etmek, Hasmane bir Bağlamda Bakım İlişkileri. Çalışmanın sonucu, katılımcıların ayrılık sonrası ve sonrasında, hayatlarında görece bir güvenlik ve istikrar sağlayabilmek adına, yeni aile rolleri üstlenerek ve ailelerinin iç ve dış sınırlarını yeniden çizerek, ilişkilerini tekrardan düzenleme ihtiyacı hissettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Kadın katılımcıların çocuklarıyla ve onları destekleyen aile dışı kişilerle ilişkilerini güçlendirirken, şiddet gösteren eşten ve kök ailelerinden olan beklentilerini ve onlarla olan temaslarını sınırladıkları anlaşılmaktadır. Katılımcı kadınların, sadece şiddet gösteren eşlere karşı değil, çocuk bakımı, iş güvencesi, ve ayrılık sonrası şiddete karşı hukuki tedbirler bakımından destekçi olmayan sosyal, ekonomik, politik ve kurumsal bir bağlamla mücadele ettikleri ve bunun çocukları da etkilediği ve onlar üzerinde ağır yükler oluşturduğu kaydedilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları var olan alan yazın içerisinde tartışılmıştır. Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları, ileri çalışmalar için öneriler ve çalışmanın klinik yansımaları değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: aile içi şiddet, ayrılık sonrası, annelik, sosyal politika, aile rol ve sınırları

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to investigate the experiences of women who have left abusive conjugal relationships to build lives with their children. 8 women contributed to the research by sharing their stories of building lives in the aftermath of domestic violence in Istanbul, Turkey.

This study aims to make a contribution to this area, exploring the family dynamics in terms of interaction patterns, roles, boundaries, narratives and rituals with a special focus on the relationship of the mother and child(ren) who constitute the core of this family. According to family systems theory every member of the system is affected by and affects the other members, and the family system is affected by and affects the larger systems. In this respect, the study also aims to explore the role cultural norms and social support play on family functioning as an outer system that influences the family.

As domestic violence is a highly prevalent form of injustice that affects women and children's health, survival, and life prospects, this study aims to contribute to the work of the clinical psychologists, social workers, family therapists and activists in the field, who work for the empowerment of women and children exposed to domestic violence. Interventions can be designed by taking into account the identified needs and resilience factors which would build on women and children's strengths and abilities.

1.1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

1.1.1. What is Domestic Violence?

Council of Europe (2011), Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (The Istanbul Convention) defines these terms as such:

“violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life;

“domestic violence” shall mean all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim” (p.3)

Women encounter violence mostly at home in the family by an intimate. The Convention's one of the major contribution's is considered as highlighting the structural nature of this violence and pointing to the historical and contemporary unequal power relations between men and women as an enabler of this gender-based discrimination that led to the subordination of women and hamper their full growth and autonomy. Gender equality and violence against women are linked. In that respect, Stark (2018) draws our attention to how The Istanbul Convention recognized how violence against women is not only a result of women's subordination but a means to further the subordination of women.

1.1.2. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious violation of human rights and a social problem with devastating consequences for women and children. According to United Nations data, 1 in 3 women face physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner throughout their lifetime, worldwide. Similarly, World Health Organization's (2021) report estimates the lifetime prevalence of physical and /or sexual violence to be 26% (UI 22–30%) among ever-married/ partnered women. According to the same report prevalence in the last 12 months is highest for women between ages 20-44. Among 28 member European Union states, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2015) documents the mean rate of IPV to be 22%. There are significant gaps of regional differences of prevalence both in the world and within Turkey. United Nations report demonstrates that the prevalence of IPV in 2020 varies between 2% to 46% across countries. In Turkey, the lifetime prevalence for Intimate Partner Violence is found to be % 37,5 for physical and /or sexual violence, 43,9% for psychological violence, 30% for economical violence by the 2014 countrywide study (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al., 2015). Most often, women are exposed to combined forms of violence.

Considering the effect of demographic variables on rates of violence exposure, although education level seems to have a significant impact, working status does not seem to have a similar impact. For women who have no education or left primary school the prevalence rate of physical/ sexual violence is 43.3% and 41.8 for primary school graduates. By contrast, for women who are university graduates or higher, the prevalence rate is documented to be 21%. On the other hand, exposure to physical/ sexual male partner violence rate changes between 36.8% and 39.1% for employed or not employed women respectively. Wealth level just like education, seems to make a difference as well, with 31% for high levels, 40.1% moderate and 43.4% low levels. A serious vulnerability factor for being exposed to violence is underage marriages. Lifetime physical and/or sexual violence exposure by women who have married before the age of 18 is 50 %, while this rate is 33 % among those married after the age of 18.

According to marital status, a striking difference is observed in numbers relating to exposure to violence. For divorced/ separated women life-time prevalence of physical and /or sexual violence is found to be 75.1 % while this rate is 35.5 % for currently married women, and 44.8 for widowed women. Six out of every 10 women who were divorced or separated reported having injuries due to violence which is almost three times the rate for the women who are currently married. This is also in line with Arat & Altınay's (2009) research which document that 78 % of divorced/ separated women report having been exposed to physical violence by a male intimate partner. Furthermore, one fourth of divorced/separated women who have been exposed to violence have reported to be threatened with a knife or gun or these weapons have been used against them. Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al. (2015) warns that this should be considered together with femicides. They also interpret the drastic proportions of the results about divorced/ separated women's exposure to violence as: *"The fact that the proportion of violence increases with divorce or separation implies that violence might be a reason for divorce and that the divorce claim might lead to violence"* (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al., 2015, p.126). According to Arat & Altınay (2009) one reason behind this difference could also be the relative difficulty of speaking about ongoing violence to the interviewers while in an ongoing marriage compared to in a terminated relationship.

Finally, considering help seeking behaviours, the percentage of women who have made at least one individual application to the institutions/organizations working for the combat against violence is 10.6 % which is very low. On the other hand, for this same category, the percentage is 45.3 for divorced women.

1.1.3. Techniques of Power and Control

Beyond the different forms of violence like physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, in recent years some writers have been focusing on the technologies of power in intimate relationships that erode women's subjectivity and autonomy and make it harder for them to move away from destructive relationships (Kelly and Johnson 2008, Lundgren 2012, Stark 2018).

Johnson (2008) differentiates different forms of domestic violence and later revises them under the names of coercive controlling violence (formerly named intimate terrorism or patriarchal terrorism), situational couple violence, separation instigated violence and violent resistance (Kelly and Johnson, 2008). They point to coercive controlling violence (intimate terrorism or patriarchal terrorism) as a distinct form that is disproportionately used by men in heterosexual relationships and aimed to control women through a series of tactics depicted in the classic power and control wheel of Pence & Paymar (Pence & Paymar, 1993 cited in Kelly and Johnson, 2008). These are “intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying, and blaming; use of children; asserting male privilege; economic abuse; and coercion and threats” (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p. 481). Furthermore, Kelly and Johnson (2008) underline that coercive controlling violence is more frequent and tends to cycle up to more severe violence.

Stark (2018) refers to a pattern where frequent low-level assaults with intermittent severe abuse intended to exert power and control and intimidate partners, physical violence is often accompanied by sexual coercion. He conceptualizes coercive control as making up of isolation, exploitation, deprivation, regulation strategies such as threats to kill, to take the children away or to hurt them, to harm relatives, friends, pets or property, silent treatment, abuse of drugs and alcohol, threats to suicide or self-harm, manipulation through inducing guilt, gaslighting, denying access to money or taking away her money, surveillance inducing a feeling of omnipresence, stalking, eroding women’s “safety zones” or resources, shaming, swearing, ordering around, attacking and devaluing her strengths, sexual, and bodily humiliation tactics, jealous interrogations, frequent calls and disturbance at work, isolation from support, and depriving from contact with others (forbidding to see her family of origin, to work, to leave the house) which makes him the centre of her life and enables him to manipulate her perception of reality. These methods are used to keep women in a constant state of fear and intimidation and erode their self-esteem and autonomy. In time, as the women try to appease the abuser their life gets ever smaller, leading to their subordination. (Stark, 2018)

In a similar vein, Lungren (2012) elaborates on how male partner violence gets internalized and normalized with men's use of techniques such as surveillance, isolation, the interchanging use of intimacy and violence, humiliation, and intimidation. This leads to an erosion of self and women's adoption of men's perspectives in order to survive in the threatening intimate context of domestic violence.

Along with the above theoreticians, Abrahams (2010), recounting the experiences of women who have been exposed to male partner violence point to their narrative: *"how criticism and derogatory comments had eaten away at their self- esteem and confidence, how their abusers had come to control their entire world, isolating them from the community around them, and how they had lived in a permanent state of fear and apprehension"*. (p.154)

1.1.4. Effects of Violence on Women

World Health Organization calls attention to intimate partner violence as a public health issue that has serious consequences for women and children all over the world. There has accumulated a substantial literature documenting the adverse long- and short-term effects of violence on women's physical and mental health beyond the injuries and the loss of lives it costs. (Campbell, 2002; Dillon et. al, 2013; Ellsberg, 2008)

WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence is based on a population study with standardised questionnaires and data collection methods across the countries. It was conducted in 10 countries and 15 sites (urban and rural) with women aged 15-49 years old during 2000 and 2003. In line with the literature the results showed that physical and sexual intimate partner violence is significantly associated with certain adverse health conditions across and within diverse countries (Ellsberg et al., 2008). There seems to exist an increased risk for women to report poorer health, more days in bed, more psychological and physical symptoms and illnesses. Among physical health conditions most often shown to be related to intimate partner violence are gynaecological or urinary system disorders,

sexually transmitted diseases, adverse pregnancy outcomes, gastrointestinal disorders, various chronic-pain syndromes, respiratory conditions, musculoskeletal conditions, cardiovascular disorders, diabetes, fainting, seizures, convulsions (Campbell, 2002; Dillon et al. 2013; Ellsberg et al., 2008).

Dillon et al. (2013), in their extensive literature review paper covering 75 studies in 3 major databases between 2006 and 2012 dwell on the relations between mental and physical mental health and intimate partner violence. With respect to mental health, they report a higher risk for depression, PTSD, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, self-harm, insomnia. Other mental disorders associated with intimate partner violence exposure are phobias, alcohol, and drug abuse (Devries et al., 2013; Ellsberg et al., 2008). Furthermore, researchers point to the dose-response relationship between the severity and frequency of violence and the exposure to multiple types of violence and health outcomes. (Black, 2011; Dillon et. al, 2013; Ellsberg, 2008)

Dillon et al. (2013) refers to Wong's studies who have showed that psychological abuse is more influential than physical abuse to predict depressive symptoms in women. Coker et al. (2002), who based their studies on the population data of National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) conducted through randomised phone calls with 8001 men and 8005 women in US found that psychological abuse of power and control were more strongly associated with negative physical and psychological adverse health outcomes than physical violence.

The literature draws our attention to the higher rates of medical care utilization of women exposed to intimate partner violence (Black, 2011; Campbell, 2002; Stockman, 2015). However, this general usage contrasts with the lower rates of preventive medical care usage (such as regular mammography checks). Black (2011), calls for the screening of IPV in primary care especially by family physicians and also to equip physicians about awareness of IPV and appropriate interventions. Finally, Stockman (2015) draws out attention to ethnic minority women who suffer from similar sequelae of intimate partner violence but have

lower usage of medical system due to institutional mistrust and anticipated discrimination.

Researchers draw our attention to the fact that just like childhood abuse and neglect, lifetime experience of IPV may have long-lasting effects that continue even after the end of the violent relationship (Black 2011; Dillon et al., 2013). Research supports the fact that women's overall health improves after leaving an abusive relationship, still women exposed to IPV seem to have lower levels of reported health than the average population. (Black 2011; Dillon et al., 2013)

1.1.5. Effects of Violence on Children

Children exposed to domestic violence are under risk for in terms of mental and physical health as well. Physical and cognitive development impairments, emotional and behavioural problems, depression, PTSD, high anxiety, social adjustment difficulties, decrease in school performance and attentional focusing are reported to be significantly higher in children exposed to domestic violence (Reading, 2008, Adams, 2006). Children growing up in the context of domestic violence, witness their mother attacked, can more often be a target of violence, live in an environment where their needs can be neglected especially during violent episodes, be exposed to a constant state of fear and alertness. This poses serious threat to children's mental and physical health (Thiara & Humphreys, 2017).

Mullender et al. (2002), explicates the risk and resilience factors for children. These are severity of violence, if the child is directly abused or not, children's sources of safety and support in their environment, the extent of neglect, mother- child attachment, mother's capacity to parent under adverse conditions, mother's mental health, level of family and community support.

1.2. MOTHERING DURING AND IN THE AFTERMATH OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The relations between mothers and her child(ren) and their parenting experiences are influenced by the context of intimate partner violence (IPV). There seems to be two different pathways in the literature on parenting in the context of IPV. One of them focuses on IPV's effects on mothers (such as PTSS, depression, emotional regulation deficiencies or resilience) and these are associated with child outcomes. The other one focuses of women's experiences of parenting through qualitative studies. Lapierre (2008) criticizes the first line of research for assuming a "deficit model of mothering" not allowing to grasp the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and their coping and resilience. Additionally, he criticizes it as rendering the IPV's, therefore the perpetrator's destructive effects on children and focuses on relations between mother's "pathology or resilience" and children's well-being. Children living in the context of domestic violence, may need higher parenting practices as they are adversely affected and can demonstrate more internalising or externalizing problems. Lapierre (2010) explains how in the context of IPV women face heavier demands as mothers but have less power and control over the resources. In this respect, placing this burden of responsibility of compensation on abused women pathologizes their mothering. Another, important criticism is about children's agency. Children are conceptualized as passive receivers of their mother's parenting, which renders their agency invisible. Furthermore, some writes point to how resilience and psychopathology can co-exist (Anderson et al., 2012; Humphreys, 2003 cited in Anderson et al.; 2012) that is, women can exhibit psychological distress symptoms at the same time as they grapple assertively and creatively with building a life from scratch or being exposed to post-separation violence.

The other pathway in the literature is more recent and focuses on mothers's own parenting experiences through predominantly qualitative research (Fogarty, 2019; Goldblatt et al. 2014; Lapierre, 2010; Letourneau et al., 2013; Levendosky et al., 2000; Pels et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2010; Weinzimmer, 2013). They explore

the challenges women face and the coping mechanisms they devise to mitigate the effects of IPV on their children and their relationship with their children.

1.2.1. Challenges Of Mothering in The Context of Domestic Violence

1.2.1.1. Male Partner Violence Can Threaten the Early Caregiving System and Attachment Security

Lapierre (2009) and Levendovsky et al. (2018) draw our attention to the fact that women experiencing IPV have less control over their own reproductivity which results in higher risk of unplanned pregnancies due to sexual and contraception coercion, being forced to abortion and miscarriages as a result of physical violence. Levendovsky et al. (2018) explores mother child attachment in the context of IPV. They explain how during pregnancy exposure to IPV can make women feel insecure and helpless and unable to provide safety for the unborn child, therefore, mothers can disengage themselves from their children and may not be able to provide necessary mirroring or emotional regulation. They further emphasize, how children witnessing violence to their mother can develop internal working models of the self and other as fearful and helpless.

1.2.1.2. Violent Partners Can Attack Women's Mothering and The Mother-Child Relationship

Many research findings (Humphereys et al, 2006; Lapierre, 2009 & 2010; Weinzimmer 2013) point that, violent partners intend to undermine mothering and mother-child relations through various strategies. Using physical violence in front of children to assert his authority can lead the children think that their mother is unable to protect herself therefore, unable to protect them as well. This may damage children's feeling of trust in their relationship to their mothers. Furthermore, psychological violence such as humiliating, insulting by calling names, belittling against mothers deprives mothers of the respect and authority they need for

parenting their children (Holden et al., 1998 cited in Humphereys et al, 2006). Therefore, the mother also loses control over the model she serves for her children (Lapierre, 2010). Moreover, Humphereys et al. (2006) also warn that smaller children may have a tendency to believe that their mother is punished because she has done something wrong (Mullender et al., 2002 cited in Humphereys et al., 2006). Finally, as the perpetrator attacks the mother-child relationship, not only does he isolate the woman, but he also rids her of a potential source of “positive identity” of motherhood where she can derive self-respect and confidence. (Lapierre, 2009 & 2010 & Mullender et al., 2002)

1.2.1.3. Mothers’ Depleted Emotional Resources Can Interfere with Their Parenting Capacity

Although motherhood can serve as a powerful source of “positive identity”, it also an extremely demanding, challenging role. Many women experience psychological distress due to IPV (Pico-Alfonso et al., 2006). Many quantitative research point to how mothers’ psychological distress (PTSS, depression, anxiety), emotional regulation and parenting behaviours are related to children’s mental health during IPV (Greene, 2018; Greenson, 2014; Gurtovenko, 2017; Pinto 2016). On the other hand, qualitative researches on the subject, give voice to women’s reports as they stress how their depleted emotional resources interfere with being responsive to the emotional needs of their children, and their diminished energy interfere with spending quality time or being nice to them, sometimes only responding to the vital physical needs like “automatic pilot” and sometimes even not being able to that and neglecting their children (Levendosky et al., 2000; Pels et al., 2015). Both Levendosky et al. (2000) and Pels et al. (2015) explain how women report that they may have hard time coping with their anger and scold or be physically abusive with their children and then regret it for acting like the violent partner and being a negative role model for their children. Weinzimmer et al. (2013), point to feelings of “self-blame” as an emergent theme in their research. They report that mothers felt responsible and blamed themselves for exposing their

children to a domestic violence environment although they were not responsible for the violence. Lapierre (2010a, 2010b), explains how women considered themselves and women in general as “the responsible” for children’s care and well-being with a biological ideology that collates mothers and children. They believed as mothers they should prioritise children in their lives. In the literature, it is amply underlined that there is a significant contradiction where mothers are hold responsible but are not often in control of the means and resources in the family, and society which results in feelings of failure, self-blame, and guilt (Lapierre 2010a, 2010b, Mullender, 2002). Likewise, Bayraktar (2011) and Sirman (2020) make similar points about the contradiction inherent in patriarchal motherhood ideologies which demand responsibility but rid women of necessary authority to decide and access to resources (Bayraktar, 2011; Sirman, 2020). Even though society’s standards for motherhood can be impossible to fulfil as Mullender et al. (2002) expresses plainly, *“the conditions in which women parent either facilitate or limit the extent to which they can fulfil their own and others’ expectations of them.”* (p.157)

Bayraktar (2011) in her ethnographic work in a municipality center in Gazi District Istanbul where women from lower classes are trained in parenting skills with the cooperation of an NGO focuses on motherhood discourses and practices and how women utilise these discourses as tactics to negotiate their status in their social relations and immediate and extended families. Bayraktar (2011) explains how an individualised and idealized middle class motherhood fantasy that holds women responsible for their children disregarding power relations inherent in the context serves to discipline women and by setting norms and referring to “good and bad” motherhood. She emphasizes how the gap between the ideal middle class motherhood fantasy that considers mother-child inseparable and that holds women responsible for their children renders invisible the real conditions and power relations inherent in the context which is also shaped through patriarchy and class. She adds that this gap may lead women to feel guilty and inadequate and forecloses the articulation of their lived experiences, dilemmas, challenges that the power of patriarchy and class creates. Furthermore, this normative pedagogy drives women

into a competition with each other which may also hamper their homosocial relations and contribute to an isolation.

1.2.1.4. Parenting During Male Partner Violence Risks Being a Lone Endeavour for Mothers: Lack of Social and Material Support

Economic abuse such as violent partner's control of money and other material resources can make parenting more difficult (Lapierre, 2010; Weinzimmer et al., 2013). This is even more vital for families of lower classes.

In their study, Pels et al. (2015), report that two thirds of the mothers interviewed perceived that their partners did not share the responsibility of parenting in an enabling way. Furthermore, partner's use of isolation as a coercive control technique such as not letting the women see their families or friends, rids women of the necessary support for the care of children. (Lapierre, 2010; Pels et al., 2015).

1.2.1.5. Violent Partner's Inappropriate Ways of Relating to And Instrumentalizing Children in Their Use Of Violence Can Adversely Affect Children

Many writers in the field draw attention to the co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and child maltreatment (Appel and Holden, 1998; Edelson, 1999; Renner, 2021; Stark 2002, cited in Rhodes, et al., 2010). In Pels et al.'s (2015) study, a third of the participant mothers reported aggression, humiliation, and power displays of the fathers towards their children. Furthermore, the perpetrator can use the children to control and intimate the woman. Threats to take children away, or harm them, or bullying the children to provoke the mother which have negative consequences for both children and their relations with the children (Kelly, 1994 cited in Humphereys et al., 2006). Mullender et al. (2002) mentions a conundrum for women where, as they placate the abuser in order to prevent the escalation of violence and protect their children, they are perceived as weak and subservient by

their children and as they lose respect their parenting would become much harder. However, if they respond with challenging the abuser then they risk further harm to themselves and their children, unable to protect them (Mullender et al., 2002). Children can also accuse their mother of being unable to prevent abuse or for not leaving at the time (Mullender et al., 2002).

1.2.1.6. Children's Affective, Behavioural Responses to Male Partner Violence Can Make Parenting Harder

Children's physical and mental health are adversely affected in the context of domestic violence and can display more internalizing and externalizing problems. They require better skills and resilience for parenting as they need more emotion regulation, attention, and support. However, this contrasts with the exhaustion and mental and physical health deterioration of women exposed to domestic violence whose resources might be depleted to a critical extent. (Humphreys et al., 2006; Lapierre, 2010; Mullender, 2002).

1.2.2. Mothers' Protective Strategies

There are some studies in the literature that apply a strengths-based approach and point to the importance of recognizing women's various strategies to protect and care for their children in the destructive context of IPV. Lapierre (2009, 2010) stresses that not only the professionals in the child welfare area fail to recognize women's resourcefulness and creativity (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Magen, 1999 cited in Lapierre, 2009), women themselves also tend to underestimate their efforts and abilities.

1.2.2.1. Keeping Children Safe

Lapierre (2010), in his study about parenting practices of mothers in the context of IPV, explains how participant mothers expressed the need for prioritizing

their children's needs, well-being over theirs and considered protecting their children as their foremost aim under the circumstances. These can be reading partner's cues to predict violence and take precautions to protect children. Furthermore, they try to protect their children from witnessing or being exposed to their partner's violence by intervening themselves or calling for support from police, social services or spiritual help, family, or friends (Fogarty et al., 2019; Lapierre 2010; Pels et al., 2015). Another strategy is trying to keep children silent, placating the partner and responding to his demands, at the same time as ignoring children so that the mother-child relationship would not seem as a threat or rival to the partner. (Buchanan et al., 2014 as cited in Levendosky et al., 2018).

Goldblatt et al. (2014) reports how mothers can conceal or minimize violent episodes, avoid children hearing or seeing the violence by turning on music, closing doors, sending them away, and keeping injuries secret, or avoid conversations regarding their distress. Yet, they also stress that these strategies do not suffice to protect children from the awareness of violence as Mullender et al. 2002, has highlighted with their study with the participation of children, children know much more than what they mothers assume.

Finally, Weinzimmer (2013) reports mothers avoiding speaking negatively about the father in front of the children and also avoiding others to do so (such as their parents or friends).

1.2.2.2. Expressing the Unacceptability of Violence Despite the Circumstances

Both Fogarty et al. (2019); Pels et al. (2015) and Weinzimmer et al.'s (2013), studies shed light to how some women make use of talking about the faultiness of violence as an attempt to prevent their children not to normalize and model violence. Some of the mothers talk about their feelings and thoughts about IPV and encourage their children to do so. They also talk about healthy relationships. They emphasize violence is not their fault and encourage their children to be assertive and independent.

1.2.2.3. Focusing On Children's Needs and Compensating for the Abusive Environment

There are some studies who highlight mothers' efforts to compensate for the violence by being more responsive and warmer to their children. Letourneau's (2007), study depending on a large longitudinal data sample from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), found that mothers exposed to IPV at time 1 (children 24-48 months) show a greater increase in positive discipline and warm and nurturing behaviours compared to mothers of children not exposed to violence at time 1 until the children are 12 years old. Some mothers in Pels. et al.'s (2015) study expressed that they tended to spoil their children because they felt responsible and guilty for the abuse. Others explained how they intentionally tried to boost their children's self-esteem by compliments. These are consistent with Lapierre's (2010) study that despite difficulties of being emotionally unavailable at times, women spent efforts spending time with their children, doing activities and fun things, listening to and reassuring them.

Pinto et al. (2016), in their quantitative study, examine how parenting stress, maternal satisfaction, and maternal social support affect PTSD symptoms and psychological distress in women controlling for characteristics of IPV and socioeconomic variables. They further test how these three variables (mother's maternal satisfaction, parenting stress, and social support) have a bearing on children's emotional and behavioural problems. The findings document that maternal satisfaction and social support are significantly negatively associated with PTSD symptoms and psychological distress. They stress how social support's negative relation to maternal stress is already well-established in the literature. However, IPV leading to isolation, low self-worth and low self-esteem relatedly lead to the lessened social support. Therefore, they offer increasing social support for women who are exposed to IPV as a protective factor. Furthermore, they draw attention to the finding that maternal satisfaction is the only variable that resulted in reduced maternal psychological distress and PTSD symptoms as well as reduced

child emotional and behavioural problems. Therefore, maternal satisfaction is a resilience factor for both mothers and children. They explain that:

“It is possible that parenting gives mothers a purpose and meaning in life, and satisfaction with this role, providing them with psychological resources to deal with the violence, as well as increasing their ability to attend to the children’s emotional and social needs.” (p. 15)

They stress that this finding draws attention to many mothers’ capacity to respond effectively and care for their children even amidst violence.

Similarly, Greeson et al. (2014), in their study with low-income mothers who have been subject to domestic violence, found that women who are exposed to IPV at time 1 of their study later showed more authoritative (warm, accepting, firm) parenting and their children showed fewer externalizing problems. They understand it in line with Levendosky’s (2003) work that also found a relation with positive parenting practices and IPV and attributed it to a compensating behaviour response by mothers.

1.3. LEAVING VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS AND THE PROCESS OF BUILDING NEW LIVES

As Walker et al. (2004) point the divorce/separation literature and IPV literature take on different paths and there is a need to integrate the two fields to understand separation in the context of IPV. Although adjustment after separation is an area that has taken considerable attention in the literature, there are few studies that focus on single parent families’ adjustment after separation in the context of IPV (Abrahams, 2010; Ford Gilboe et al. 2005; Hardesty et al, 2012). For Turkey, there are very few studies regarding women’s experiences against violence especially emerging in the last few years (Bayram et al., 2014, Dissensus, 2021, Ekal, 2011, Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022, Mor Çatı Kolektifi 2009, Sallan Gül, 2012, Soyduinç, 2018, Ülkümen 2014, Yalçınöz- Uçan, 2019). Nevertheless, the post-separation family dynamics in the context of abuse does not seem to gather attention in the literature. This study is considered as a contribution

to this area, as the post-separation period is unique so that the transition both brings challenges and opportunities as new boundaries, roles, and patterns of interaction are built both within the family system.

1.3.1. Decision to Leave

Mahony (1994), in her article “Victimization or Oppression: Women’s Lives, Violence and Agency” problematizes the concept of agency in its widespread understanding in the context of domestic violence. She explains how social and cultural stereotypes and expectations about “battered women” equate “agency” with “leaving the relationship” and impede the recognition of the variety of ways women construct their agency in the context of domestic violence. Women can struggle against violence while at the same time, staying in the relationship. They may try to reach out to formal and informal support, make temporary arrangements for leaving, and accept returning conditionally on promises or assurances from the abuser. She emphasizes how women’s attempts to improve or correct the relationship can be considered as pathological in the case of violence. Furthermore, women can base their decision making on prioritizing survival. Emphasis on leaving assumes that leaving is a possible and safe option at that time/ context. When there is a lethal threat than day to day survival becomes the aim, which makes long-term plans difficult, and women may not want to risk their and their children’s lives unless they feel safe enough. Not least of all, Mahony (1994) stresses that considering agency solely in terms of “leaving” conceals the multiple responsibilities women carry and overlook emotional and economic interdependence. Women may try to forge a family, to keep bonds, and can be cautious about not being able to care and provide for oneself and their dependent children. Agency as the functioning of an autonomous, atomistic, mobile individual disregards ties of interdependency. It also disregards the social structures of inequality and lack of state’s positive obligations that do not provide minimal living standards for women and children. Therefore, juxtaposing “staying” or “leaving” is too narrow a perspective to understand women’s agency. Rather Mahony (1994)

offers to consider the issue a complex tension between and a coexistence of oppression and resistance, or victimization and agency in women's lived experiences.

In a similar vein, Greenspun (2000) elaborates on the feminist critique of psychoanalytic and family therapy, that brings a gendered light to understanding women's decision to stay with a violent partner. Referring to feminist theorists like Nancy Chodorow or Carol Gilligan's critiques, she emphasizes that women's decision can be understood in line with their socialization for "making relationships work" which also requires a certain form of agency which is in contrast to considering women as pathologically dependent (Goldberg et al., 1990 cited in Greenspun, 2000).

Many studies in the literature point to how women's decisions around leaving or staying are shaped by a consideration of children and their perceived needs (Chang et al., 2010; Fogarty et al., 2019; Lapierre, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2010; Varcoe & Irwin, 2004; Weinzimmer, 2013; Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019). In the article "I Didn't Want To Put Them Through That": The Influence Of Children on Victim Decision-making in Intimate Partner Violence Cases", Rhodes et al. (2010) focus on the help seeking behaviours of women and elaborates on how this is impacted by the presence of children. Rhodes et al. (2010), highlight how complex the decision-making process for separation becomes when children are involved. The women in the study expressed uprooting their children, seeing their father arrested, involving children in court processes, children's risk of being placed in foster care and the uncertainty about being able to provide for them as concerns that facilitate staying. On the other hand, concern for children being negatively affected by witnessing or being a target of violence, or about their risk of modelling and normalizing violence in their adult lives were cited as compelling forces to leave (Rhodes et al, 2010). Both Lapierre (2010) and Weinzimmer (2013) stress that women's decision making is highly influenced by children's perceived well-being and women's perception of their roles as mothers. Lapierre (2010) remarks that the decision to leave is mostly taken when a safety threat to children seem unavoidable. He similarly draws our attention to the complexity of the process of leaving the

abuser and the risks and difficulties inherent in this process. Women often may feel they might be putting themselves and their children at a more serious danger if they attempt to leave when they are threatened or if they feel unable to provide for them. For this reason, he underlines that accusing mothers for “failing to protect” their children or “neglecting” them are totally unjust and disregards the context and real conditions of domestic violence. On the other hand, Fogarty et al. (2019), also stress how children were central to mothers’ decisions about leaving or staying in their study. They point to father involvement as a possible barrier to leaving, as father’s presence in children’s lives were considered important for their well-being. However, they consider mothers’ decision-making processes around this issue as dynamic and open to change over time. When women recognize the impact of IPV on their children they feel accountable to protect their children and more likely to leave.

Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019), in her doctoral dissertation, explores women’s leaving and post-separation processes with a feminist intersectionalist approach highlighting women’s coping and resilience in the face of adverse and unjust structures that shape their lives. Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019) theorizes the decision to separate according to the narratives of the women participating in her study. She stresses how the participant women had considered violence as unacceptable from the start and made many attempts to survive it. Still their final disengagement took a long time and required much effort and persistence. She explains how in the pre-separation period, women’s experiences of self-doubt and helplessness evolve into gaining a sense of agency, gradually through their unceasing efforts to leave violent relationships even in the face of oppressive conditions. She describes the process by a double move: “Transforming disappointments: Observing the self as capable and sufficient” and “Resolving ambivalence: a growing sense of emotional detachment”. She recounts how, disappointed by both their husbands and their family of origins, women move into a process of disentanglement. She elaborates on how participant women question the role of their husband not only due to physical violence but also and even more so, due to economic violence as providing for the family is considered to be men’s major role in patriarchal society. Participant

women considered themselves as dependent on the protection and support of their families, and they sought their help many times, not getting support but facing indifference, or accusations by their families. The repeated disappointments also paved the way for a process of distancing from families and opened an area for owning their own agency and capability. Through building new connections with the outside world, the participants' sense of inexperience and vulnerability as well as their economic worries decrease. Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019), also highlights the role children play for their mothers in this theorization. She describes how as women began to recognize that their children are affected by violence, they feel insufficient as a parent for not being able to protect them, which is also a blow to their identity as mothers. Furthermore, as children get older, they become less dependent on their mothers, and also show their support and understanding to their mothers. Finally, Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019) points to the role of anger coming with growing disappointments, that enable breaking the cycle.

Chang et al. (2010) identifies, five major themes that impact women's decisions to leave in their study. These are protecting others from the abuser, particularly the children; increased severity and humiliation of abuse, increased awareness of options and access to support and resources, fatigue, and recognition that the abuser was not going to change; and partner betrayal, infidelity.

Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran (2022), conducted a study with 13 women who had been exposed to male partner violence and divorced and sought help from government shelters or an NGO in Ankara. They aimed to investigate women's coping experiences post-divorce and the factors that empower or disempower them. They report the factors that enabled the participants' separation as *“the support of their families, the fear of domestic violence resulting in death, the existence of other women in similar circumstances, the best interest of their children, and/or witnessing violence against their children”* (p.16).

1.3.2. The Context of Post-Separation After Leaving an Abusive Partner

Leaving the violent relationship does not bring immediate relief and non-violence for many women and children. Increased risk of violence and stalking after separation is a serious threat to the physical and psychological well-being of women and children (DeKeseredy et al., 2004; Fleury et al., 2000; Hardesty, 2002, cited in Hardesty et al., 2012; Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022; Varcoe & Irwin, 2004; Wuest et al., 2003; Yüksel Kaptanoğlu et al., 2015). Moreover, adjustment difficulties, and continued long-term physical, psychological and relational effects of IPV make the time after separation especially risky and challenging where women and children may need more social and institutional support.

Abrahams (2010), draws our attention to how challenging and exhausting the post-separation period and building an independent life can be, especially initially. Women confront new problems and need to develop new skills, attitudes and relationships to deal with them, such as the need to be assertive and taking control after years of subjugation. However, she stresses that as women take control, with each new step and achievement, their self-esteem is boosted and can get consolidated in time. Abrahams, 2010, drawing from participant women's descriptions describe the process as both daunting and exciting with anxieties around safety of themselves and their children and managing livelihood. She cites "appropriate housing", "continued support" and "building their own network of supportive relationships" as the pillars of a sustained transition.

For some women and children, leaving the abuser means leaving one's home, neighbourhood, community connections, work, school, friends and sometimes one's immediate and extended family as well. This can be accompanied by financial losses. Wuest et al. (2003) referring to Amato (2000) explain how single mothers who have the custody of children are documented to be financially more disadvantaged compared to divorced men or married women. Women with smaller children may prefer flexible jobs that allow child-care, yet the earnings are then most often insufficient to provide for family's needs. Nevertheless, Wuest et al. (2003) also draws our attention to the fact that some single parent, woman

headed families are better off financially compared to their pre-separation conditions, as women gain control of their income. Furthermore, leaving abruptly due to safety concerns and moving several times can be difficult experiences for children which means children also need to adjust to new schools and environments. Many women are unable to get their own or children's possessions or the household furniture and equipment due to violence of the abusing partner/parent (Wuest et al., 2003). This brings new challenges as the family need to mourn and adapt to a series of losses and adjust to new conditions (Humphereys et al., 2006; Lapierre, 2010).

Along with other writers, Dufy (2015) draws attention to the need for a wide range of services to support women and children and ensure that they sustain safety and well-being in the aftermath of male partner violence. However, she also draws our attention to the quality of these services in terms of being informed by the complex needs of women and children, and being comprehensive, well- integrated across sites and institutions and not heavily bureaucratic.

1.3.3. The Legacy of Violence on the Mother-Child Relations

Many studies point to how mother-child(ren) relations most often improve after leaving the abusive partner and the tense and destructive family environment (Bancroft et al., 2012). In Pels et al.'s (2015) study, women who were exposed to male partner violence explain how they have more time, energy and attention for their children and more self-confidence about the ways of raising them after separation. Accordingly, Levendosky et al., (2018) explain leaving an abusive partner have impact upon the mother- child attachment for infants and young children. They found that attachment tends to evolve towards a more secure style and mothers tend to develop more positive maternal representations of their children.

Another positive impact documented is that surviving through abusive relationships as a mother-child(ren) team can bring them together and closer. However, research also cautions that, this may have a heavy cost on children when they take adult roles and responsibilities as part of the team (Humphereys, 2006;

Pels, 2015; Weinzimmer, 2013). The parentification of children may be due to mother's unmet support and protection needs. Children can move into roles such as rescuing mother from violence, looking after younger children, being mother's confidant. Along with adverse effects on children, this might contribute to the erosion of mother's authority even after the violence in their lives is over. Children's perception of their mother as weak whose boundaries can be encroached upon may continue. Especially sons can show violent behaviour towards their mothers modelling their father. The children may not respect their mother and allow for her authority and guidance (Weinzimmer et al., 2013).

In the article "Re-Experiencing Motherhood: Transformation of Relationships Between Formerly Abused Women and Their Children" Goldblatt et al., 2014 explore how formerly abused women perceive their mothering after divorce, and how mother-child relationships change following separation from the perpetrator. 12 formerly abused women with children, who were divorced for at least 5 years were interviewed. Women during violence can be in a day-to-day survival mode with fear and tension occupying their everyday spaces. Therefore, they express how they have more control of their lives away from violence which enables the peace of mind to reflect on their past and present relations of motherhood. They try to make sense of what they have gone through and what was wanting in the mother-child relationships. After years of emotional denial, they had a safe environment to release some of restrained emotions. This might bring the mother and child(ren) closer and/or it can let loose the unresolved pain in a more hindering way. For some of the women in the study, especially the initial phase of the post-separation relationship was marked by children's expression of anger and accusations to their mother's emotional absence and erratic involvement during IPV. As Goldblatt et al. (2014) writes:

"Some women succeeded in fully restoring their relationships, yet others described damaged relationships, which could be explained as the children's retaliation for the divorce or for the unsatisfactory parenting during the marriage. They learned that relationships can be only partially mended, and with only some of their children. Acknowledging this was

painful but realistic, enabling a reconstruction of more genuine mother–children’s relationships, where the mothers are more capable of recognizing their children’s needs.” (p.573-574)

Finally, Humphereys et al (2006), remark what she calls a “conspiracy of silence” as a barrier over repairing mother-child relations in the aftermath of IPV. During IPV mothers may avoid talking about the existing violence as they may adopt a coping style of staying silent and keeping secrets from their children or their social network out of fear, shame and guilt. Furthermore, they may want to protect their children by not sharing painful truths, however, she stresses how mothers can overlook the fact that children already know much and hiding can be more terrifying to children as they can imagine the worst. On the other hand, children may learn as a family rule to stay silent and may not want to trouble their mothers who they perceive as having more than enough to protect them (Humphereys et al. 2006). Yet, the secrecy can impede close and trusting relations, and working through.

1.3.4. Resilience in Post-Separation Families

Looking from a systemic perspective, different families have different ways of responding to traumatic events and major stressors. Figley (1989) and Walsh (2012) have theorized about how families can more efficiently cope with traumatic events and show family resilience. Adjustment after traumatic events and building a new post-separation family, requires new rules, boundaries, and patterns of interaction to be established in the new family system.

1.3.4.1. Family Resilience and Functional Family Coping in the Face of Trauma and Stressors

Figley (1989) identifies characteristics of functional family coping against traumatic events and differentiates it from dysfunctional ways of coping. Families with functional coping have “clear acceptance of the stressor”, they quickly take action after a short period of being overwhelmed instead of “denial or

misperception of the problem”. They have a “family centred locus of problem” avoid keeping responsible a person or persons but prepare to deal with the stressor(s) as a family. They utilize “solution-oriented problem solving” instead of blaming a member. They have high tolerance for each other and exchange clear and direct expressions of commitment and affections. They openly and effectively communicate their needs and emotions. They have high family cohesion, spend time together, enjoy each other’s company and feel proud of each other. Their family roles are flexible, so that one member plays more than one role and therefore, they can more aptly adapt to temporary loss of function of one family member in time of traumatic events. They quickly recognize their need for resources and efficiently reach out for resources inside and outside the family. They know the importance of relying on others in times of crises and provide similar help themselves, when others are in need. They do not resort to violence regardless of the extent of the trauma or stressor instead, there is room for the expression of big emotions like outbursts, crying, screaming. They do not depend on alcohol or drugs, if a member start showing signs of such a problem, they quickly recognize and take action to deal with it.

Furthermore, Figley (1989), describes four main steps about how family members support each other’s healing after a traumatic event. The first step; “*Detecting traumatic stress*” is noticing the effect of the traumatic event on the family member. The second way of helping is called “*Confronting the stressor*” which is linking the cause of the dysfunctional behaviour of the family member with the traumatic event, understanding it as a stress reaction. The third one is “*Urging recapitulation of the catastrophe*”, which entails a remembering the traumatic event, reconsidering, telling and elaborating on its crucial aspects. At this step, Figley (1989) urges to grapple with five questions: “(1) *what happened?* (2) *Why did it happen?*, (3) *Why did I and others act as we did then?* (4) *Why did I and others act as we did since then?* (5) *If something like this happened again, would I be able to cope more effectively?*” (p.14). Finally, the fourth step is called “*Facilitating the resolution of the conflicts*”, which is helping victims regard the traumatic event in alternative ways and reframe its consequences in a more positive

and optimistic way. The family members are urged to use their knowledge of the traumatized members and adjust their responses in the way to developing a healing theory.

Walsh (2012), considers family resilience in a broad light and emphasizing that it comprises not only coping with stressful conditions and adapting to them but also developing personal and relational growth, developing insights, and new capabilities out of going through adverse conditions. She highlights that the family resilience concept is crucial as it provides a perspective that recognizes the potential for healing and growth as the family faces adversity, this is in contrast to a deficit-based model, that sees these families exposed to traumatic events as damaged. She further delineates the key processes in family resilience. She groups resilience related characteristics in three areas which are belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication/ problem solving patterns of families.

According to Walsh (2012), family belief systems shape how families perceive adversity and understand their relation to it. They respond and make decisions about their options for coping and recovery accordingly. Families with a more functional coping “make meaning out of adversity”, they have a “relational view of resilience” and recognize adversity as a shared challenge to overcome together. They “normalize and contextualize distress” without blaming, shaming or pathologizing. They have a “sense of coherence: view crisis as meaningful, comprehensible, manageable challenge” as a result of attempts to understand and give meaning to what they have gone through. They have a “positive outlook”, know to sustain hope in face of adversity leaning on an optimistic bias and enhance confidence by recognizing and affirming their strengths, potential and limits as well. Sometimes this entails, “tolerating uncertainty” and “accepting what can’t be changed”. As Walsh (2012), refers to Aponte (1994 cited in Walsh, 2012), to be able to create and preserve a “positive outlook” repeated successful experiences and a nurturing enough social context is necessary. Finally, regarding belief systems, Walsh (2012), stress the importance of “Transcendent beliefs and spirituality” which comprise cultural and spiritual traditions, practices such as praying, meditating, coming together with spiritual groups or community. Walsh (2012)

draws our attention to practices out of formal religion such as social activism, deep involvement with nature, music or arts.

According to Walsh (2012), another area of family resilience lies in “family organizational patterns”. Families who find a balance between flexibility and stability can better adapt in the long run. Families need a relatively flexible structure to meet the demands of new challenges of an adversity and adapt to a “new normal”. However, this needs to be balanced with daily routines and rituals especially for children and elderly, to provide a sense of predictability and continuity. Furthermore, authoritative parenting/ leadership also helps establish rules and limits and stick to a structure taking account of the needs of family members. Family connectedness that allows both for mutual support, collaboration and drawing together to meet challenges and room for individual differences in needs and expectations and boundaries. Furthermore, Walsh (2012) emphasizes the importance of reaching out to social and economic resources such as emotional, material or practical support of family and kin, friend, loved ones, community.

Finally, Walsh (2012), delineates “Communication Processes and Problem Solving” as an area of family resilience. She emphasizes giving clear and consistent messages, not creating secrecy, or denying even with the best intentions but to acknowledge and share truths of painful experiences even with children in age-appropriate ways. She then emphasizes the importance of allowing open and varied emotional expressions in face of adversity and balancing it with positive experiences, pleasurable interactions, humour, and respite. Creative brainstorming increases family’s creativity and resourcefulness. Shared decision making allows family members resolve conflict and improve negotiation skills. Learning from mistakes and recognizing strengths and taking a proactive stance to be prepared to new challenges are other crucial skills resilient families develop.

All these qualities of resilience in families are interactive and synergetic which means one reinforces the unfolding of others or balance each other depending on different needs at the particular time and condition. While taking into account family resilience Walsh (2012), urges us to take into consideration larger sociocultural contexts of individual and family functioning namely a

biopsychosocial approach that also entails a developmental and time span perspective. What can be functional in response to a crisis in the short run can cause novel difficulties in the long run and as families move across the lifespan, their needs and capabilities change, requiring new adaptations.

1.3.4.2. Adjustment to Separation in the Aftermath of Domestic Violence

There are few studies in the literature that focus on single parent families' adjustment to separation in the context of IPV (Abrahams, 2010; Broughton, & Ford-Gilboe, 2016; Duffy, 2015.; Ford Gilboe et al., 2005; Hardesty et al, 2012; Walker, et al. 2004; Wuest et al., 2003). These authors urge us to attempt to understand single parent families' strength and how they promote their well-being after domestic violence.

Wuest et al.'s (2004)'s article "Regenerating Family: Strengthening the Emotional Health of Mothers and Children in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence" focuses on the health promotion processes of single parent families. There are 40 participant mothers and 11 participant children who are interviewed. The time from separation varies between 1 to 20 years and the study uses the grounded theory method to analyse interviews. Wuest et al. (2004) stress that after leaving, mothers and older children orient themselves towards the future. Two sub-processes are observed to generating a new family. These are working as a team and living together differently (than the past with abusive interactions). Although the families orient towards the future to build lives, they often confront new and sometimes many different stressing life events with which they need to deal at a time. The most often confronted issues can be limited material resources, harassment by ex-partner, and mental and physical health issues. Wuest et al. (2004), report that as the family feels responsible for each other, they "work as a team" which is an important coping mechanism. They further stress that what makes possible working as a team is "constructing a storyline" (a family story of the past moving to the future) and "creating new expectations of one another". As the coping mechanism of the family of "working as a team" to meet upcoming needs

works, this further increases their “confidence in family capability”. On the other hand, “living together differently” is achieved by paying attention and reflecting, buying in, and enacting new standards and letting new standards evolve.

In the article, “Strengthening Capacity to Limit Intrusion: Theorizing Family Health Promotion in the Aftermath of Woman Abuse” Ford-Gilboe, et al. (2005) attempt to theorise how families promote health after leaving an abusive relationship. This study is conducted with 40 repeat in-depth interviews with single parent families with a history of domestic violence and feminist grounded theory is used to analyse data. The results refer to “providing”, “regenerating family”, “renewing self”, and “rebuilding security” as key processes in the making. These processes are shaped by family ideals, connections with family, friends and community, developmental stages of children and service accessibility/quality. Ford-Gilboe, et al. (2005), draw attention to “intrusions” which they define as an external interference that the family needs to gather its focus and energy to deal with. They elaborate on the common causes of intrusions:

“Intrusion stems from (a) harassment and abuse from the ex-partner, commonly, although not exclusively, associated with issues of custody, access, and child support; (b) health outcomes associated with past and ongoing abuse; (c) the costs of seeking and obtaining help; and (d) undesirable changes to patterns of living consequent to leaving the abusive partner/father.” (p. 600)

This limits choices available and divert the family’s energy from family ideals and priorities. Survival mode is interchanged with long-term goal focus mode. Broughton and Ford-Gilboe (2016) further explore the concept of “intrusion” in their article, “Predicting family health and well-being after separation from an abusive partner: role of coercive control, mother’s depression and social support”. Broughton and Ford-Gilboe (2016) test if “intrusion” operationalized as unwanted interference from coercive control, custody, and access difficulties and “mother’s depressive symptoms” predict family health after IPV. The role of social support is also explored as a moderator of these effects. 154 women’s data who participated in Wave 2 of the Women’s Health Effects Study (Canada) was included for

secondary analysis. An important finding was that the health and well-being of families in the sample was similar to the families in the general population which points to the resilience of post-separation families. Family health and well-being were found to be significantly affected by mothers' depression and social support. Depression was found to be a common problem in the sample. On the other hand, social support did not moderate the effects of "intrusion" that is coercive control and custody and access problems. A remarkable finding of the study was that neither coercive control nor custody and access problems (intrusion) predicted family health and well-being in a negative direction, but to the contrary, in a positive direction. The authors attribute it to the family's pulling together and working as a team in the face of adversity, which may be a common pattern in post-separation families. This is also in line with the many studies which refer to mothers' compensating behaviours in parenting in the context of domestic violence (Lapierre, 2010; Letourneau, 2007; Pels et al., 2015).

Regenerating a new family both requires renewing the self and being able to form new representations of others and interpersonal relations. In that respect, social support in face of adversity seems to be a crucial factor of resilience for the regeneration of a new family away from violence. There are many studies that refer to the importance of social support in recovery processes (Anderson et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2015; Nikparvar et al., 2021) coming from family, friends, employers, religious officials and community, and other women who have gone through similar male partner violence experiences. As a result, it seems as the family needs to be flexible enough to accept social support and build new relationships yet still to establish firm boundaries to limit intrusion. This also involves the question of abuser's relation to the new family and organizing boundaries around father involvement in the context of post-separation violence.

1.3.5. Post- Separation Contact with Fathers

Another issue often stressed in the literature is how separation is not a panacea for risk of violence, on the contrary, increased risk of violence is reported

for time of separation and immediately afterwards (Bancroft et al., 2012, Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019, James- Hanman & Holt, 2021, Humphereys et al., 2019, Katz et al., 2020, Chiara & Humphereys, 2017). At this critical time, issues related to children can be gateways for perpetrators to further abuse partners and their children (Davies et al, 2009, Bancroft et al., 2012, Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019, James- Hanman & Holt, 2021, Humphereys et al., 2019, Katz et al., 2020, Chiara & Humphereys, 2017).

Katz et al., 2020, drawing on their research, refer to “dangerous fathering” actions of the fathers that perpetuate coercive control such as stalking, domestic intrusions, making death threats, intimidating, punishing behaviours against children. These can lead to the necessity of repeated moving, change of schools, leaving behind routines, friends, and familiar neighbourhoods. On the other hand, what they call “admirable fathering” is fathers’ way of emotional manipulation appearing “caring”, indulgent”, “concerned” or “vulnerable victim” to the children or (to other audience) to further coercive control. Katz et al. (2020), reports that as a result of the interchanging use of “dangerous fathering” and “admirable fathering” children get confused. Children tend to experience a mental and emotional state of perpetual anxiety and fear which they call “omnipresent fathering” to refer to children’s preoccupation with the father and the dangers that threaten her/ his own security, or mother or loved ones. Similarly, James- Hanman & Holt, 2021, draws our attention to the fact that even when fathers do not directly show violence to their children, witnessing their mother attacked, harassed, humiliated creates an atmosphere of fear and subjugation that harms children. Authors emphasize the evidence that the strongest determinant of children’s resilience is often the relationship with the non-offending parent, that is most often, the mother- child relationship. Therefore, targeting the mother or the mother-child relationship is a strong threat children’s basic relational resources.

Often fathers are not held responsible for the effects of violence they directly or indirectly expose their children. Davies et. al. (2009) and Humphereys (2010), draw attention to how the State, through child protection institutions (courts or social services), place women as the main responsible for children, in contrast to the little expectation of fathers as parents, not even keeping them accountable for

“failing to protect” their children. Davies et al. (2009) and Katz et al. (2020) consider it as an ideology that considers fathering as distinct from abusive behaviours of perpetrators and that maintaining father involvement legally facilitates and sanctions the continuing abuse of mothers in the post-separation period.

Humphereys et al. (2019) emphasize that positive fathering contributes to resilience and well-being of children, however, fathers who are domestically violent can cause more vulnerability than resilience for children (Katz, 2016; Heward-Belle, 2016; McGavock & Spratt, 2017 cited in Humphereys et al., 2019; Bancroft et al., 2012; Mackay, 2017; Thiara and Gill, 2012 cited in Katz et al., 2020). There is also an emerging literature centred on the fathering skills of perpetrators. They emphasize that perpetrators may deny the effects of the violence on their children, often relying on a sense of entitlement and refraining from taking responsibility for it and often show poor fathering skills (James- Hanman & Holt, 2021, Bancroft, 2012).

1.4. THE TURKISH CONTEXT

1.4.1. The History of Women’s Movement and Combat against Violence against Women

Although women’s movement have a long history in Turkey, violence against women has been in the centre of feminist struggle since the 80s and since then many rights have been gained and policies issued that attempted to combat violence against women with the organized campaigning and relentless efforts of feminists (Ekal, 2019).

Turkey signed Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. 90’s saw the establishment of commissions in state apparatus for furthering women’s rights and preventing violence against women. First independent shelters by women’s organizations Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Foundation and Ankara Women’s Solidarity

Foundation and municipalities were founded in the beginning of 1990s, followed by General Directorate of Social Services and the Protection of Children (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgerme Kurumu- SHÇEK*) in 1998. Women's studies centers are founded in universities. The legislation Law No. 4320 on the Protection of the Family (4320 sayılı Ailenin Korunmasına Dair Kanun) enabling the issuing of restraint orders were passed in 1998. In 1998 feminist organizations from all over the country convened for the first time under the Shelters and Solidarity/ Counselling Centres Congress. Throughout the 2000s, many favourable legal gains for women were obtained in penal and civil law such as the abolishment of men's status as the head of the household, or requirement of husband's permission for women's employment, penalization of marital rape, women's right to half of property gained during the time of marriage in case of death of husband or divorce, right to alimony. In 2004, women and men's right to equal rights became a constitutional right. Turkey was the first signatory of The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2012. After its signing, law number 6284 and Centres for Prevention and Monitoring of Violence (Şiddet Önleme ve İzleme Merkezleri – ŞÖNİM) were formed as mechanisms of centralized state intervention against domestic violence. However, the implementation of legislation went far behind legislation and insufficiently organized and functioning institutions lead to the continuation of the violation of women's rights (Uçan et al., 2021). This discourages women from seeking their rights or makes help-seeking a highly risky, arduous and long endeavour (Ekal, 2011). Furthermore, violence against women is considered to threaten the “family” as an institution. Primarily penal law measures are offered, and women are offered protection within the family. Issues that are related to conservative patriarchal family like early marriages are not taken on the policy agenda. (Acar & Altınok, 2012)

Started giving its first signs during the 2010's to the present day there is a backlash on women's rights. In July 2010 Prime Minister Erdoğan expressed that he did not believe in the equality of men and women and that their natures (“*fitrat*”) are different, and women's major duty is homemaking and motherhood. Later on

May 2012, he equated abortion with murder and often insisted women to bear at least three children (Kandiyoti, 2016). Policy or de facto implementations of pronatalist policies, laws limiting rights to abortion and its de facto abolition, emphasis on women's caregiver roles in families, equation of womanhood with motherhood, policing gender norms have continued. The term "gender equality" is removed from all recent state policy documents (Türkiye CEDAW Sivil Toplum Yürütme Kurulu, 2021). Finally, on March 20, 2020 Turkey's now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a decree at midnight that withdrew Turkey from Istanbul Convention.

1.4.2. Divorce and Single Parent Families

The divorce rate in Turkey is 1.6 in 2020 and 2.07 in 2021 (rate fluctuates due to pandemics). Although divorce rates are increasing in Turkey, it is still low in comparison to other OECD countries.

Upon divorce, the custody of children is most often given to mothers, especially when they are small. The percentage of children whose mother has the custody is %75,8; in comparison to fathers' 24,2 percent in 2020. Shared custody has started to be implemented in the last few years, but it is still exceptionally rare. Single parent families are on the rise while the percentage was 6.1 % in 2014, it has risen to 9.7% in 2020, 10.1% in 2021 with 2.3 (2021) father headed and 7.8 % (2021) mother headed.

Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012, draw our attention to the discrimination women face in the face of divorce in Turkey. They highlight how women risk significant loss of income or risk of poverty, meaning not being able to cover the basic expenses of themselves and their children. Generally, very low amounts of alimony are ruled, and it is often hard to encash for women. Women have very low rates of participation in the workforce especially in urban settings. They are often inexperienced and not equipped for the job market due to gendered roles. They carry most of the burden of child-care which interferes with work life demands. Divorced women face stigmatization and family and community pressure (Demircioğlu 2000,

Sucu 2007 cited in Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012) and they are more open to sexual harassment and discrimination.

Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012, accentuate how social support provided to widowed women are not provided to divorced women in state policies. They emphasize how public policies that may support divorced women are discouraged with the fear that it would encourage women to build independent homes and threaten the patriarchal family. The widowed women's loss of spouse is not considered as such a threat as when the man of the household dies, the family is still imagined continuing and the state intervenes to support women. However, when women divorce, they are considered as stepping out of male power and control and are not supported (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012). Although both groups of women and children face similar conditions, divorced women are discriminated. Özar and Yakut-Çakar, 2012 interpret it as the de facto restraining of divorced women's right to divorce.

1.4.3. Welfare Policies Regarding Women and Children

Many writers point to the global shift towards neoliberalism and the resultant retreat of the state from health care, education and social services relegating these functions to the market, civil society (charity), and the family (Acar & Altınok, 2012, Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012, Yazıcı, 2012). They explain how in this frame, the individual is considered as the entrepreneur of her/ his own life.

Turkey is grouped among the welfare regime of the South European model where there are weaker public services and a heavily informal job market. In this model, compensation of social security and welfare systems are done by the family, mostly through women's labour (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012). Yazıcı (2012), delineates how Justice and Development Party (AKP) (ruling party since 2002) which follows a neoliberal economic and a religio- conservative social agenda has implemented welfare policies that places the family as the main unit of care to alleviate "social burdens" on the state. Accordingly, instead of building functioning and widespread institutions of care, payments are done to families for disabled care,

elderly care, foster parenting etc. Furthermore, Acar & Altınok 2012, draw our attention to AKP's regulation of social and political domains through moral notions and values framed by religion. In this particular exertion of neo-conservatism, familialism and family are crucial for creating and maintaining the desired moral regime. Yazıcı (2012), elaborates on how posing the "strength of the Turkish family", three generational extended family, not the nuclear family as the solution to problems both donates AKP with a conservative identity and legitimizes the neoliberal welfare regime, bringing together neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. Nonetheless, as it is highlighted in the literature, the process is full of contradictions between neo-liberal and neo-conservative tendencies. AKP's adoption of European Union (EU) directives on gender equality policies lead to the trimming of women's rights which were granted in a traditional frame as "dependent citizens" of male breadwinners, recognizing women's traditional forms of domestic labour to a certain extent. The EU reforms assume the joining of women to workforce as men's equals. However, the new care regime and the insufficiency of public services for child-care blocks women's entry into the job market. Main obstacle to workforce participation for women is the gendered division of labour. Domestic responsibilities, pregnancy and child-care, husband's demand not to work are the major reasons women cite for not joining the workforce (Kılıç, 2010). Women with younger children are more unlikely to be able to work unless they have informal support from extended family, as public or affordable child-care is insufficient. Women's likelihood of employment increases with the child's age. In Turkey, employment rates of women have been very low traditionally with 28 percentage for 2021 which is even lower in urban settings and for married women (Turkish Statistical Institution; 2022). In terms of education, women's participation in all levels of education are lower than males. As women's education level increases so does their strength in the labour market and they are able to afford child-care facilities (İlkkaracan 2012). On the other hand, lower education often means lower wages, and women are pushed to leave the workforce when they have children due to lack of affordable public day care.

Acar & Altınok, 2012, underline, how neo-conservatism of AKP regime, emphasizes women's care-giver roles and equates womanhood with motherhood. Gender equality is clearly not a concern in this respect; especially not in terms of social, political, economic equality that would render women more independent. Therefore, it is emphasized that these impediments against workforce participation lead to women's integration into the welfare regime as subjects of social aid and benevolence rather than equal, rights bearing citizens (Buğra, 2012; Kılıç, 2008 cited in Dedeoğlu, 2012). Babül (2015) calls this form of relating as a "moral economy of gratitude" where the state emerges as a "benevolent protector" and women having a dependent status of being protected need to prove that they are "deserving protection" through patriarchal gender appropriate conduct (Ekal, 2011). Kandiyoti (2016) in her article refers to Sirman's (2005) concept of "familial citizenship" where the new Republic is founded as a community of equal men as sovereign heads of households and women as dependent citizens having their rights through their dependent status inside the family. Kandiyoti (2016), considers the widespread use of violence against women as a reaction to the threatening of patriarchal order. As she writes:

The recourse to violence (or the condoning of violence) points not to the routine functioning of patriarchy or the resurgence of traditionalism, but to its threatened demise at a point when notions of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic (Kandiyoti 2013). Women's rising aspirations and determined male resistance create a perfect storm in the gender order that manifests itself in both semi-official attempts to 'tame' women and uphold men's privileges (contra the letter of written laws, hence attempts at by-passing and eroding them), and in the unofficial excesses of street-level male violence (which the judiciary often meets with leniency).

As of March 20, 2020 Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a decree that withdrew Turkey from Istanbul Convention. Turkey was the first to sign and ratify the treaty, yet feminist activists have warned how since its ratification in 2014, the judicial and institutional reforms required by the convention were not followed and implemented as supposed to be (Kaya, 2021).

In a similar vein, Özkazanç (2020), in her interview on the anti-gender movements in Turkey and across the world, points to a crisis of masculinity. She considers the rising anti-gender movements that attempt to curtail woman's rights and defend a gendered division of labour and patriarchal family as a masculinist reaction. Özkazanç (2020) understands this crisis as being triggered by women's empowerment, earned feminist rights (such as Istanbul Convention, restriction orders, alimony etc.), the semi- dissolution of the patriarchal family, neoliberal politics that cause poverty, insecurity, unemployment, increased vulnerability and helplessness and increased visibility of LGBTI+ communities. In line with Kandiyoti (2016) she interprets the increased violence against women as a "masculinist show of force" ("*eril gövde gösterisi*"), where crude power and violence are used by men to regain control and privileges.

1.5. THE PRESENT STUDY

Although leaving an abusive relationship is a major step, building new lives is another challenge ahead. The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the difficulties, needs and resilience of women and children forming families after abusive relationships. This study is a contribution to the recently flourishing literature in Turkey, taking its focus on women's experiences of living with domestic violence and their relentless struggle to build lives away from violence (Bayram et al., 2014, Dissensus, 2021, Ekal, 2011, Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022, Mor Çatı Kolektifi 2009, Sallan Gül, 2012, Soydiñ, 2018, Ülkümen 2014, Yalçınöz- Uçan, 2019). It is unique in the sense that it also attempts to adopt a systemic perspective, in order to understand the newly formed single parent family's dynamics in terms of roles, boundaries, cohesiveness, its responses to the challenges it faces and the resilience it manages to create. Moreover, the study attempts to understand this, taking into account the larger social, cultural, political, economic dynamics that comprise the larger systemic context. Learning from the experiences of women, understanding how they cope with the aftermath of violence is crucial to mitigate the post-separation effects of domestic violence

and to support families in their unique roads to establishing functional families where the emotional and material needs of their members can be dealt with in diverse ways. With this aim, the research questions that has structured this study is as follows:

1. What are the challenges, strengths and needs arising for women in rebuilding lives with their children after-separation?
2. What are the family dynamics in single parent families formed after leaving an abusive partner? How do women rebuild their relationships with their children?
3. How does the new family system affect and is affected by the larger systems of extended families, community, and the society with its implicit ideologies and explicit policies and practices? Specifically, how do women reorganize their relationship to them?

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

2.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

This study aims to understand women's experiences of rebuilding of new families after separation from an abusive marriage relationship. With this purpose, interviews with 8 women participants who have been exposed to domestic violence and separated and/or divorced to form single-parent families with their children, were carried out. Participants' ages varied between 30 and 52 and their mean age was 39. The duration of the violent relationships ranged between 8 to 24 years and the mean is duration is 14 years. The divorce dates showed variance from 2008 to 2019, only one participant was divorced in 1999. Her narrative was included in the research as it showed many parallels with the other participants, and the issues she raised were still prevalent. All were mothers, half of them having 2 and the other half having 3 children. All the participants had built relatively stable lives in terms of security and non-violence.

The sampling was carried out according to purposive convenience sampling, as the population criteria were restricted and not easily accessible. Participants were recruited with the help of social workers from women' solidarity centres of women's organizations, the municipality or the social service institutions in Istanbul, Turkey. One pilot interview was carried out.

In order to protect the privacy and security of participants, pseudonyms for names are used and certain irrelevant information that might reveal the identity of the participants are changed to ensure participant confidentiality. Information about demographics and violence exposure of women and their children are listed in Table 2.1.

Tablo 2.1.*Demographic Information of Participants*

	Age	Marital Status	Duration of marriage (years)	Time after separation (years)	Children's sex and age during interviews	Living arrangement after separation	Income level during interviews
Nilay	45	Divorced	24	1	21F, 16M, 6F	Women's Organization Shelter	Low
Günseli	30	Still in court	12	2	M12, M10	Municipality shelter	Low
Esmâ	35	Divorced	20	2	M19, M16, F10	Women's Organization Shelter	Low
Elif	42	Divorced	19	6	F24, M18	Women's Organization Shelter	Low
Kübra	38	Divorced	10	8	M17, M11	Moves to rented apartment	Low
Mine	33	Separated, has not legally married	8	9	16F, 14M, 9M	State and municipality shelter	Low
Derya	44	Divorced / ex-husband deceased	12	14	M25, M19	Moves to rented apartment	Middle
Süheyla	52	Divorced	12	21	32F, 29M, 26F	Moves to parent's home	Middle

2.2. DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

After obtaining İstanbul Bilgi University Ethics Committee's approval, participants falling into the sampling criteria are contacted. The participation to the study was voluntary.

The participants were provided informed consent form that gives information about the research topic and procedure, which is also explained orally by the researcher. Additionally, contact information sheet that includes information about institutions that provide psychological, social or emergency support services related to domestic violence is shared. A demographic form was filled by the researcher at the beginning of the interview.

The study was explained to the participants, and they are informed that they are free to refuse the interview or in case they feel any stress they can leave the interview during any time they want during the process. In order to ensure ongoing consent, during the interviews, when the researcher recognized any cues of distress, the interviewer stopped and made a check-in with the participant. Researcher's contact information was also shared to enable them to ask any further questions if needed.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted face to face between June 2020 and October 2020 in Istanbul, Turkey. Four participants were interviewed in their own homes, two in cafés of the participants' choosing, and 2 in a women's organization's solidarity centre. The places of the interviews were important to ensure that women felt free to talk openly. Duration of the interview ranged between 1,5 to 2,5 hours with short breaks when needed.

Audio records during all interviews were taken and later transcribed.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis method is chosen for this study as it allows for an exploration of participants' experiences located within the wider social, historical, and political, contexts. Through a "thick description" of data, moving beyond the

surface and capturing the complexity and divergence within it becomes possible (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This is especially important when working in a much less researched area such as understanding women's experiences related to domestic violence and moving away from it as parents is limited in the context of Turkey.

Among the different qualitative research methods, thematic analysis method is chosen for the analysis of interviews. Thematic analysis is especially useful as it is a flexible method of research that allows for a social as well as a psychological perspective. It takes into account participants' subjective experiences, explanations and their meaning creation in a particular context (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The six phases of thematic analysis were followed. Initially, transcriptions and field notes were read many times carefully, and pieces of interest from the data were noted. The primary investigator started the initial open coding. The second investigator, the thesis supervisor, helped with naming the initial codes. The different phases of the process that women went through, starting with the marital context were coded, staying as close to the participants' words as possible. Complete coding of the data was carried out keeping the research questions as a frame. In the meantime, memo-writing is given a special importance to capture any associations that enable a better engagement with the data. In this reflection, major silences were also integrated into the analysis. Final list of codes was developed in consultation with the supervisor. Some candidate themes were developed and then the final themes were arrived at. In order for a more systematic process, MAXQDA software program for data analysis is used during coding data and creating themes.

The second investigator's (supervisor's) engagement with the data and the coding process can be considered to allow for inter-rater reliability and field notes can be considered as enhancing trustworthiness through triangulation. On the other hand, it was not possible to make member check-in which would enhance trustworthiness.

Tablo 2.2.*Example of codes leading to sub-themes and themes*

Theme I: Children as Sources of Resilience: Cycle of Empowerment		
Sub-theme I: Children as Sources of Meaning and Aim	Sub-theme II: Mother-Child Attachment as a Source of Emotional Support	Sub-theme III: Mother and Children as a Team for Solidarity
Striving to protect children: 14	Being closer with children helps: 16	Children taking responsibility at home: 8
Setting an example to and being appreciated by children: 11	Children being freer and more confident: 15	Children support separation: 6
Mother's empowerment empowers children 9	Spending time/effort to make children feel loved 13	Feeling supported by children: 5
Feeling love and gratefulness for children: 8	Increased communication with children: 8	Children standing up to protect mother: 4
Need to be strong for children: 6	Feeling proud of children: 5	Not wanting anyone but one's children: 4
Trying to avoid children feel falling short of anything: 4		Working together as a team with children: 3

2.4. RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Reflexivity in qualitative research is an important part of the analysis. It is necessary to render the contribution of the researcher more visible reflecting on the assumptions and biases of the researcher. It also locates the researcher as an active agent and draws attention to the contingency of findings (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The process and analysis of this research is informed with systemic, feminist, and social science perspectives.

My interest on how gender operates in society dates to collage years as a sociology student learning about how power and inequality operates through structures of society and different aspects of our identities like gender, class, age, ethnic, racial, migration status, ability, sexual orientation etc. However, as individuals navigate through structures, they also manage to open ways to exert their agency and affect what has affected them. They may show upright resistance or use the discourses that serve to oppress them and turn them round in various ways and put them in use to enable their empowerment (Bayraktar, 2011). Women's agency has always impressed me with its usually less confrontational and silent but deep down resistant and persistent ways. As a woman growing up in a patriarchal and conservative society, although, in a relatively more open middle-class community where women's access to education and employment is the norm, the gendered dynamics of oppression in society have had its bearings on my own life, therefore, I was drawn to the feminist movement. Feminist movement in Turkey has been intensely focused on violence against women since the 1980s, which is a burning issue with devastating consequences for women's lives and well-being. As a feminist activist focusing on gendered oppression and its most pressing form as domestic and male partner violence is part of a more general political struggle that I wage for myself in solidarity with other women.

As a feminist activist, my interest in the subject of women's post-separation experiences of building lives with children dates back to years when I worked as shelter staff, in a women's organization's shelter which has been founded to form feminist solidarity with women exposed to domestic violence. As one of the most

well-established, leading feminist independent organizations, the institution thought me ways to build feminist solidarity, to constantly search for equal relations despite the existence of structural inequalities among women, to be part of an empowerment process where women's strength is recognised and mirrored, decision-making, autonomy and agency is supported, to problematize our personal lives, emotions, communication, or daily interactions as political and as worth giving thought and negotiating. These practices of relating to women and oneself has impressed the way I conducted the interviews and also caused dilemmas for me. For example, during the interviews I couldn't help but be active at times to point to a structural gendered inequality where the woman tended to blame herself or by marking how impressive it was for me to witness her courage and strength. Yet, I was also worried that these interventions were impacting the way they reported their stories.

As a student of family and couples' therapy program, systemic theory has fascinated me as it takes issues beyond individuals in the broader relational context and emphasizes strengths and resilience as a fundamental part of healing. During the interviews, the systemic perspective allowed me to recognize how the family is in a constant negotiation of boundaries among the individuals and sub-systems that comprise it but that it also negotiates its boundaries with outside kin, community and unique historical socio-political forces. As the family tries to find balance, respond and adjust to life cycle developments or major stressors, its members need to be flexible as new patterns of interactions, roles and boundaries are woven. As a former shelter staff, I have been curious about post-separation family dynamics, especially how women reorganize their relationship with the various actors in their lives, especially their children. Systemic perspective allowed me to appreciate this transition as a time of unique challenges and opportunities inherent for growth. Both feminist theory and systemic theory provided a mindset to recognize the agency and strengths of women even in the most oppressive conditions.

I feel thankful to the participant women who have spared their valuable time, generous efforts and emotional labour to narrate their stories. I believe they perceived me as an educated, middle-class, middle aged secular woman, a student

of psychology and as someone doing advocacy for women's rights. I had a chance to conduct half of the interviews in women's homes which gave me a chance to see the setting of their new lives. Even though, my main intention was focusing on the post-separation time period and how women have built lives with their children, women were more eager to explain the oppression and violence they were subject to and how they managed to open a way through it. The tone of the interviews generally shifted from pain, anger, resentment to intense pride and self-reliance with occasional doubts and regrets. For two women, a feeling of being obliged, having had no other options but to leave, was more intense than pride. Listening to stories of moving through violence was difficult and painful and also unexpected for me as I was planning to concentrate on the after-separation period. However, participant women's eagerness to prioritize and tell in length this part of their story may hint at a need for an affirming witness to the injustices suffered and the need to process it despite the time-period after separation, among other reasons. I am so impressed with their relentless efforts to build non-violent and sustainable lives, their creative capacity to heal themselves and support their children's healing, their regenerative capacity to form relationships despite their relational injuries that often date back to their family of origins and their capacity to proliferate scarce resources. I made my best efforts to learn from it. Allen and Jaramillo-Sierra (2015) declare how for feminist scholarship research, theory development and activism complement each other. In a historical time and context of ever-strengthening conservative socio-political forces that threaten women's basic rights and livelihood like the annulment of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), women's narratives have been a source of resilience and hope in the face of injustices.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This study is an attempt to gain insight about women's experiences of rebuilding lives with their children in the aftermath of domestic violence. With this aim, semi-structured interviews with eight participants are conducted. Although the study's major focus was the period of separation and its aftermath, participants' experiences of getting married and living with a violent partner are also briefly inquired. However, often women were more enthusiastic to explain what they have been through in the violent relationship and how they managed to open a way out of it, than the period after. One of the ways to understand it can be, considering it as the point where they place their agency in their unique stories. Therefore, a rich but unintended narration about the time before separation was collected. Before the themes, this narration of women's experiences of domestic violence is attempted to be summarized with the hope to bear witness to their accounts and provide a context to better understand the experiences of rebuilding lives of the eight women who shared their stories. Following are the three themes and nine subthemes that are arrived at through the analysis of their narrations.

Tablo 3.1.

Themes and Subthemes

Theme I	Children as Sources of Resilience: Cycle of Empowerment
	Children as Sources of Meaning and Aim
	Mother Child Attachment as a Source of Emotional Support
	Mother and Children as a Team for Solidarity
Theme II	Coming to Terms with the Destructiveness and Absence of Father
	Divorce, Post-separation Violence and the Lack of Fathering Functions
	Negotiating the Gap Between the “Normative” Father and the “Real” One
Theme III	Bonds of Care in a Hostile Context
	Resentment to Family of Origin
	Being a Single Parent in a Hostile Context
	Overburdening of Women and Children in the Absence of State Responsibility
	Who’s Family?: Alternative Forms of Solidarity

3.1. THE MARITAL CONTEXT

3.1.1. Getting Married

Among the 8 women this study was carried out with, all got into roles as wives and mothers very early. Women’s age of marriage ranged between 15 and 20 in the sample. They were either still children or have just become a major when they got married. Therefore, they entered their marriages disadvantaged and as bereft of their basic rights as children. They described themselves as not knowing the world around as they did not have a chance to know it as an adult.

Because I got married at a very young age. Inevitably. For me Istanbul was a place on the other side of the window. Only that much, what is seen through this window. (Esma: 47)

Because I married at a very young age, I didn't know anything. (Derya Hn: 308)

Participants usually knew their prospective husbands for a short time before marriage and seem to take the decision hastily without due scrupulousness which can be expected considering they were merely adolescent women/ children at the time. Elif knew her husband only for a month when she eloped with him. Derya, Elif and Nilay married against the decision of their families. Derya expressed how going against family's consent made it harder for her to raise any complaints afterwards and to divorce.

Kübra who married with bride wealth gave her consent because people told her that her prospective husband would look after her as he is an imam "hoca" and pious. Yet after marriage, she discovers that it is his nickname and not the profession and he has scarce knowledge of religious matters.

Only Esma and Derya said they had married feeling love for their prospective husbands. Süheyla expresses how although she was willing to get married to her prospective husband at the beginning when she was only 16, during engagement she realized something was wrong and wanted to withdraw yet she was not allowed so by her family due to issues of honour and was exposed to their violence to control her.

When I was sixteen, I wanted... I got married at nineteen... When we were engaged, I realised certain things and wanted to withdraw but my parents did not allow because they were worried about what other people would think, then I went through a period full of beating. (Suheyla: 12-15)

Two of the women were raped as children and then forced by their families to marry the men who raped them. Mine who was kidnapped, and gang raped were forced to withdraw her complaint by her family with the intention to protect her brother. She also explained how at the police station which is an institution responsible to protect her, her statement was changed and she was accused of upsetting her family. Similarly, Günseli explained how she endured the man who

raped her, in order for her family not to be disreputed due to honour. It seems as children, they were violently attacked and forced into violent homes with the consent of their families, the complicity of police forces and cultural norms.

M: They took me to the police station but they altered my statement there due to my father's wish, pressure of society, neighbourhood, village etc. there my statement was altered, stating that I ran away on my own will, as a matter of fact a policeman even blamed me, they accused me of upsetting my father and my family, I never told what I experienced, not even to my family. After I ran away, they found out many things and they acknowledged me... I have a brother; he would be endangered as well. We were most probably cheated. I was very ignorant in the past. Experiences made me more aware.

S: You were a child not ignorant, a child
M: I was a child wasn't I, I get them mixed up, because of sincere good intention I guess, I loved my brother...Then there wasn't an unbroken part of my body left when I was with him, he used to sniff thinner (Ms. Mine: 26-32)

To protect my family, just to protect my family I did everything he wanted just so that I wouldn't dishonour my family, as a child I got pregnant, I became a wife, I had to endure many things. (Günseli: 61)

Almost all the women participating in the study, started their married life living with husband's family and moved to a separate home in the following years.

Esma, Mine and Günseli who were married to men from the eastern part of Turkey attributed the oppression of their husbands to their ethnic/ geographical roots. On the other hand, Derya attributed her family of origin's conservatism to her geographical roots as well.

Cohabiting meant getting adapted to husband's culture as Esma's mother advised her, doing all the housework, and often being the target of physical and

psychological violence by in-laws. Women explain how being surrounded with husband's family made them feel even more helpless.

God rest her soul my mother used to say "my dear, if you come to a community where people with one eye closed live, then even if you have your both eyes open, you will eventually close one of your eyes as well. You will adapt to him; they will not adapt to you." (Esma: 97)

I got married, the day I got married I was working, they immediately snatched my salary card from my hands... I had two sister-in laws, a mother-in law, a father-in-law, when I was with them, I was like Cinderella. Neighbour would come for a visit, I was Hoovering, my sister-in law came and unplugged it and said we took this girl because she was an orphan, but she doesn't know how to do cleaning and plugged the Hoover again and started Hoovering the places I have already done, I couldn't say a word because I was under pressure... I was working, going to work every day but I didn't have my salary, he had it, he considered himself as the man of the house, with authority, knowing everything. (Kubra: 5-9)

3.1.2. Violence Throughout the Marriage

Women describe how they were exposed to multiple forms of violence during marriage at the hands of their husbands and how violence started simultaneously with the marriage except for Esma.

My marriage has always been troubled. He was very oppressive and prone to violence. He was constantly humiliating me... He started doing this right from the beginning. (Nilay:6)

He was violent towards me from the first day. And his violence never stopped. (Günseli:47)

Günseli, Mine, Derya, Süheyla and Kübra explain how physical violence has become a "routine". The normalization of violence seems to be enabled by the

family of origins and the community making women feel either helpless or in a kind of enforced “forgetfulness”.

I thought I could not get away from him. I was so accustomed to violence, it was as ordinary as having three meals a day, I didn't even mind getting beaten. (Gunseli:83)

My family was witnessing this, people around me were witnessing this but everyone got used to it, it was just something ordinary that Mine was beaten, her eye was purple, she was hungry, just as if something usual. (Mine:36)

That day I asked him why he was late. I said look what time it is. He came at two o'clock. He punched me in the face. I started bleeding from my nose and mouth. I didn't feel pain as I am so used to being beaten up by him... as he beat me up constantly, I could just go to sleep and forget about it the next day. I was erasing it from my memory but that day my child witnessed it. (Kubra: 29-31)

Psychological violence such as being intimidated, humiliated, judged, restricted, isolated or being the target of jealousy. Women described psychological violence as most hurtful, even more intolerable and damaging than physical violence.

He was physically violent but what a person says hurts more, the humiliation. (Nilay: 14)

...the wound goes away but the scars stay, the scars are still there... scars won't go away... In actual fact maybe he did not damage my face and eyes, but he destroyed my soul. (Esma: 247-249)

Economic violence was mentioned as often as physical and psychological violence. Working intermittently, not taking responsibility to make a living, not providing for the basic needs of the family, taking control of women's earnings, spending women's money on gambling or cigarettes were the recurrently disclosed forms of economic violence. Economic violence seems to constitute a “rightful”

pillar to question the status of marriage as according to gendered division of labour men's main responsibility is considered as providing for the family.

I said "what are you doing with your salary, you are of no use to us, I have all the responsibility of the household, you don't even bring bread home. Take a little bit of the responsibilities off my shoulders, do something, you are the man of this house, why am I having you here as a man" then we started arguing (Elif: 72)

I was thinking like this. It was not my fault. Not me, the person who did it should be ashamed... he does not contribute to the household, he drinks, he is violent. I tried to find one reason to blame myself, but I couldn't... when I talked to other people, they couldn't find a reason either. When I couldn't find a solution, I thought to myself like this, you are working, you must look after two kids, you don't have another salary, you have to pay the rent, why would you look after a third person. Why would I pay for his extra expenses. That was the hardest for me, that's why I filed for a divorce. (Ms. Derya: 170-171)

Five women in the sample had husbands/ partners having addictions (alcohol, drugs or gambling) which they expressed as having detrimental effects on their relationship and already limited finances. Furthermore, Mine and Elif's husbands/partners were in and out of prison during marriage which caused them to live alone and support themselves and their children for long periods.

Every week I was visiting him (in prison), I was taking his dirty clothes and bringing clean ones, I was taking him money. He was not only taking money from me but as well from his parents, can you imagine, I am looking after two kids, I am paying all household expenses and he was still asking me for money...But I was a fool, I gave money. I regret it very much. He was again imprisoned for one year... He was very violent, drinking a lot, gambling, that time when he came out of prison, he said he would not do any of those

things anymore, but he started again. He spent my son's savings from his birthdays on gambling. (Elif: 60-76)

As indicated above, Günseli and Mine's marriages were based on rape by their later husbands/partners which continued throughout the marriage. They expressed how sexual violence is harder to tell others and does not have witnesses. Esma expressed how it is also harder to fight back for her.

My first experience was like that, I was first exposed to violence at age fifteen and then it continued, I never wanted to sleep with my husband.... because being raped was always a part of my life, I never wanted him, never... I didn't want to experience this everyday with the man who caused my biggest trauma. (Ms.Günseli: 61-63)

I was not exposed to violence at home, it was in our room... Actually, everyone was on the other side of the door. When I wanted to raise my voice, then everyone heard certain things. (Esma:2-4)

3.1.3. Effects of Violence on Women

All women detailed how violence had negatively impacted their well-being during marriage and after separation.

Most often recounted experience is one of losing trust in men/ people. This seems to be especially important as losing oneself and losing trust in other human beings directly harms the capacity to form relationships.

You start getting afraid of people thinking that if your closest one does this to you and thinks this is what you are worth, then why a stranger should not do the same. You start thinking like that... Your feelings of trust gets destroyed. You break your walls totally and thicken the shell around you. (Esma: 62-64)

The other effects most often recounted refer to the erosion of self, such as feeling non-existent, lacking self-confidence, feeling shame, being silent and obedient.

At the beginning I didn't look for a job, in that state of mind anyway it would be impossible to work. Then the staff in the shelter were constantly trying to find me a job. There were a few jobs, because of my low self-esteem I said I could not do them. I still don't have self-confidence. I keep myself away from people, I always see myself right at the bottom. (Nilay: 34)

Because it was so hard for me just to get on a minibus from here and go to Avclar, that's how I was feeling. I was thinking that everyone was looking at me when I was out. (Elif: 58)

Another recounted effect is feeling fearful and helpless.
Until 2006, I considered myself as very weak, I thought I could not succeed in anything, I could not do anything. I thought my life would end in between these four walls with two kids, that's how I thought. (Derya Hn: 358)

Because my two elder children were aware of everything, especially my daughter. She told me that it was enough and that I could not continue like this. Otherwise, I could not get away myself. Because of my fear. And because I had no self-confidence as I never had the right to say anything all through my marriage. I was restricted. Restricted by my family, friends, other people since 1989. (Nilay: 10)

Another one is exhaustion. Derya elaborates on how she tried to control the violence in the home for herself and children by keeping herself in a continuous state of alertness.

I realised this later when I went to my sister. She used to try to put me asleep. Why? Because at home I could never sleep, I was always on guard. I was thinking now he will come home, what will he be angry at this time, for what

reason will he start shouting, which kid will he bully? I was constantly trying to keep him pleased for the well-being of my kids. I wanted to make him happy so there would be peace at home for my kids. (Derya: 130)

Finally physical and psychological health disorders such as depression, panic attacks, suicide attempts, heart and skeletomuscular diseases are mentioned in the interviews.

On the basis of just two questions from my physiotherapist, my doctor diagnosed me...The problem you are experiencing with your shoulder totally derives from your past, things accumulated and then broke out...during that period of violence you don't even think whether you are sick or not, you cannot even feel your pain... you are very busy, your mind is full, you are anxious... meanwhile you are trying to raise two kids...then after all that when you don't worry anymore of getting hurt, there is a relaxation in the body. When you are relieved, you start to feel each pain one by one... I was in the hospital 52 days. After a long treatment, now I am better. (Derya: 107-113)

... because I was not taking my pills, because I did not want to take pills, I wanted to die, and I was thinking I would not be able to escape from that man... I committed suicide, after the suicide they admitted me to the hospital. I was in the hospital for three months, they treated me with medications, there I told my doctor that I wanted to run away. (Gunseli: 81-83)

3.1.4. Father-Child Relations during Marriage

Most of the participants in the study explained how during their marriage, they were the main caregivers of children and fathers did not take much responsibility and had distant relations.

S: How was your son's relationship with his father?

E: My children didn't like their father at all, they were coming to me, we

were cuddling, watching films in the evening, doing things, he would sit on a corner, they would not get close to him, he was even asking why our children and everyone loved me such much, then I was asking him if he was at all affectionate to his children as a father... spend a bit of time with your children, take them out for shopping or for a meal on a Sunday... he was all the time shouting, he was not nice to them. (Elif: 142-145)

Kübra explains how ignorant his husband was about his children's needs and had to fight to get nourishing food during pregnancy or to stop him from chain smoking in the only room with a stove in winter which left them without oxygen and negatively affected children and especially her child with a heart problem. Esma complains about the indifference of her husband in the latest years of her marriage to children.

The more you do the right things, the more they will learn the right ways because you are their role model. If you are not doing the right thing you cannot ask them to do the right thing... you cannot make them do it... They were going through puberty, and they needed their father more than ever, but to no avail. (Elif)

They wanted to learn certain things from their father, but they had to learn from me and that was annoying for them. The activities they should do with their father they were doing with me. A child should go to a football match with his father, not his mother. Certain things are just the way they are. My children actually had already accepted the idea of losing their father. I just helped them. (Esma: 85)

Furthermore, Derya, Elif, Günseli, Kübra and Mine stressed that their children were intimidated and fearful by their fathers.

Once my older son broke his father's nargile bottle, my son didn't come home all night because he was so scared of his father, all night I was worried if he had a seizure somewhere, I was very anxious, all night I tried to find

him, he didn't come home because he did not want to be beaten by his father. (Günseli: 91-93)

Lastly, three participants reported that fathers discriminated one child from the other.

My younger son was very similar to his father, he used to call him my son and he would favour the younger one and sometimes even when he was violent, he would beat my older son more than the younger one even though he was ill. (Günseli Hn: 182-186)

You know what happened, I gave birth then this man who never steps in a hospital came to the hospital. He took Mehmet in his arms, he loved Mehmet so much, something I have not seen with Murat (first child). I brought Murat home in my arms as if I got him from the bazaar. Murat grew up with me. Mehmet but Mehmet was very much loved by his father. (Kubra: 219-221)

3.1.5. Motherhood During Intimate Partner Violence to Separation

Women in the sample, were between 15 and 20 years old (mostly children themselves) when they gave birth to their children. Women explained how this affected their motherhood. For both Derya and Günseli, although Derya chose her husband herself due to love and Günseli was pregnant due to rape, motherhood was not something that came “naturally” to them as “supposed to be”.

G: I gave birth, only two hours after birth I went out of the hospital to my family. I left my baby, they put the baby in the incubator. Before I could reach my family, I was exposed to psychologic violence over the phone, they were threatening me, they said they would kill my family, I was scared, halfway I went back...they say feeling of motherhood starts when you give birth but I did not have such a feeling. I became a mother, but I could not feel that.

S: You were a child and you got pregnant unwillingly

G: Now if they would ask if I could leave my baby, I would say I would rather die but I could not leave. (Günseli: 49-57)

Other women explained how they experienced their first child as a companion and friend. Esma, Mine, Kübra express how they grew up alongside their first child.

With my older son we are not just like mother and son but also like two friends, because I gave birth to him when I was sixteen. I raised him but he raised me as well. Our relationship with him is a bit different. (Esma, 299)

Because we grew up together like friends. I say we grew up because I also grew up with them. (Mine: 218)

Furthermore, Günseli, Mine, Elif who recounted the most severe physical violence also recounted low birth weight and other health issues such as epileptic seizures and hypertension during pregnancy and birth.

I was trying to escape since then, I had a premature birth at 7 months because I was beaten up. (Günseli: 49)

During birth I opened my eye, I was lying in a dark room for eight days because of an epilepsy attack, I couldn't breastfeed, I had no milk, then I had hypertension. (Mine: 55)

Parenting during male partner violence seems to be a tense line between protecting children from the violence in the home and falling short of doing that. Women in the study explained how they actively stood up to protect their children or used creative strategies to control the escalation of violence and children being harmed.

N: When her father was having anger outbursts, he would say to our daughter you will not go to school anymore... One day he said I will put all

your school books in the bin, then I told him if you put her books in the bin you will find me hanging down from here, then he stopped.

S: You were protecting your daughter?

N: I was protecting my daughter. What else could I do? My only aim was that my daughter could graduate and would not depend on her husband. I didn't want him to depend on anyone, I wanted her to be independent, thank God. (Nilay: 173-176)

That is what saddens me the most. Despite the scarcity I used to prepare dinner, set the table, so that my two children could eat a little bit in peace but then he would get angry because of small, insignificant things, he would put the table upside down before the children could eat anything. Then in the last two years whenever I sensed that something would go wrong again, I started inviting neighbours for dinner, so my children would have peace at home for at least a few hours, so they would be safe. (Derya: 176-182)

They also explained how they could not help children being adversely affected by violence and how their psychological resources for mothering were depleted leaving them feeling guilty and inadequate at times.

I became like a mentally ill person. I have no patience anymore, no patience with my children either because I had to endure a lot of trouble. (Nilay: 148)

When their father was at home their mother didn't exist. She was there but she didn't exist... She had no say in anything, totally silent, like a dishwasher, how you just fill it up, it washes the dishes... just press the button, it will work and will stop automatically when its duty ends. I was like that. (Esma: 129-133)

What kind of a mother I was when I was with my ex-husband, I was thinking should I protect myself, should I protect my children, I didn't know what to do. At that time, I had some feeling of motherhood, but it wasn't that intense

as it is now, because I was feeling insufficient and powerless, I was thinking that I was not able to protect... I was suspecting my motherhood. (Günseli: 287)

Throughout the interviews women's stories of their journey of moving away from violence was interwoven with their roles as mothers.

The participants expressed how they felt they had to stay because of the children. Some did not have the means to provide for them and look after them at the same time. They were also often told by their family of origin that they could live with them on condition of leaving their children which seemed out of the question for the women participating the study.

They said she should leave her children with her grandmother or at an orphanage then she can come and live with us. How can I leave my children, I can't exist without them, I live for them, you cannot get rid of your child. (Elif: 322)

Furthermore, when they wanted to separate, they were reminded of their children not only by their families but by their communities as well.

On the street an elderly lady one day asked me to sit on the pavement next to her. She said to me look you have three kids. I said yes, I know I gave birth to them. She said "you have to get along with your husband" ... So many people told me this. They constantly reminded me that I had three kids as if I didn't know that. (Suheyla: 83)

My parents didn't allow me to go to court because they said you have young kids, what will you do if you divorce. (Elif: 56-60)

However, participants also expressed that they realized at some point how children are adversely affected by violence. This can be witnessing the violence towards their mother or sometimes being exposed to their father's violence themselves or being exposed to the consequences of economic violence. Paradoxical to children's perception as a constraint for separation Derya, Günseli,

Kübra, Süheyla explained how realizing the effects of violence on their children was fundamental in their decision to leave. They feared that the children would have psychological disorders, or they would be violent themselves when they grow up. Women also explained how they had to reserve a considerable amount of energy and resources to attempt to control their husbands' destructive behaviours. This is explained as impeding them from allocating already scarce financial resources by prioritising their children. Furthermore, their time, energy and focus were also compromised by staying close to and in the service of their husband in order to avoid anything that might lead to violence. Their decision to separate seem to be also based on taking control to better protect and prioritise their children.

I always say this, I left so that my children could grow up in a healthy way. If it wasn't for my kids, if it was only for my parents, I would stay and endure all the troubles but for me my children come first. If we stayed maybe when they grew up, they would be even more violent than their father or they would have psychological problems. Either they would grow up in an environment like that or we would leave. I had two options. (Derya: 324)

I can never forget how one day he was talking on the phone and the volume of the television was too high, so he put the phone down, and started beating up the kids with his slipper... I could somehow put up with all the violence, for years I put up with it, for my children, but this time my children are exposed to violence and I cannot protect them. (Gunseli: 87-91)

One day my husband was beating me up and the children were just watching television, they had serious problems... that was the final point for me. (Suheyla: 25,250)

In a similar vein, Elif, Esma and Nilay expressed how they felt accountable towards their children and were afraid to be accused by them in the future. Adolescent children seem to be more vocal as in Elif and Nilay's case and seem to have encouraged and insisted on their mother to leave.

I could not get together with him once again, otherwise I would lose my children, either they would leave, or they would hate me (Elif: 167-178)

I have to do this; I will not be imprisoned in this house. Now when am still young I should do it otherwise when I get older what will I tell my children when they will ask why did you to choose to endure all the violence, why did you let us grow up in this hopeless house and get exposed to all this. (Esma: 54)

3.1.6. Decision to Leave

Five of the participants seem to have tried to get the consent of their family's (parents as well as brothers who are considered as male power and authority figures) to separate but as they lost hope of their consent and support and as violence increased, they decided to take the initiative themselves. Derya separates after renting an independent apartment, yet she does not file for divorce until getting her father's consent following another violent incident. Still, she stressed how after supporting her daughter for divorce, her father hid her divorce from his sons and other relatives, how divorce was considered as unacceptable.

Because we are originally from east, divorce is unacceptable. There is a saying of our ancestor's, you leave with your bridal dress you come back in a shroud. Thanks God my father was very open minded. When we needed, he would support us, but he would do this secretly. Because there were family elders, siblings, other people who opposed. So, we would try to deal with things in between us. For example, I have two cousins who are very sad in their marriages, they want to divorce but they continue to stay in their marriages. They are told they could not come back to their parents' house if they would get a divorce. They are not supported at all. (Derya: 53-73)

Süheyla explains how she had to go against her parents, her in-laws and others who tried to dissuade her from divorce.

My father-in law told me just put up with him three or six months more, he said I will get him treated. I said if you knew he had psychological disorders where have you been in the last 12 years. Then they started again saying he will get treated, you have three children...but for me it was the end point. Then my family, friends they all tried to persuade me, I said OKAY to all of them but the next day I got myself a lawyer and filed for a divorce. (Suheyla: 27)

Decision to leave seem to be taken as the culmination of a long process of making attempts to separate, feeling obliged to go back and try to survive in the midst of the violent relationship. 7 women out of 8 had tried to separate many times before they finally could do so. Attempts to separate seem to start even before marriage during engagement. On separation, women explained how they temporarily stayed with their parents or sisters/brothers, however, they were sent back to violent homes or accepted to stay on condition to leave their children behind.

I was telling everyone that I would leave, meanwhile I went many times to my parents' and back. My parents were not protecting me. When I understood that I could not expect any support from them... (Günseli: 67-71)

Most often women describe one last violence incident where they felt they have come to the last point of where they felt exhausted and done with it. Elif and Günseli were saved by their children from murder by their husbands as they left without going back. Some women explained they felt the relationship was over is through exhaustion, feeling coming to the edge, not being able to tolerate any more, feeling rage and destructiveness themselves.

I was worn out, I had no more patience, I was exhausted, totally drained. (Nilay: 100)

...it was impossible, either he would kill me, or I would kill him, one of us would die, it was getting very serious, I couldn't take it anymore... I told my parents, let's sit down and talk, if the solution is a divorce I will get a divorce, I cannot put up with this anymore, let's try to find a way out... (Elif: 72)

Separation seemed to have been possible for Süheyla, Derya, Günseli, Elif on giving up hopes for family's consent and support after going back and forth many times for years. Mine met another man she could escape her violent partner and get married, yet he also left giving in to the threats of her partner in prison. She took control of her and her children's life on realizing that neither her family nor the man he trusted and seen as a saviour would help. As many other women in the study, she made an escape plan, she sold her household appliances to buy tickets for Istanbul where she thought she can hide due to the scale of the city. Other women like Elif made plans with friends to go to shelter, packed a few belongings, fabricated stories about their whereabouts to husbands and family and went to the police office to file complaints or to Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (an independent women's organization) and been referred to a shelter. Günseli, Mine, Elif, Nilay and Esma all went to the shelter as a first step for final separation. Derya and Kübra moved to build their separate homes and Süheyla moved into a room in her family home with two of her children. Sooner or later all the women in the sample built independent homes from scratch.

3.2. THEME I: CHILDREN AS RELATIONAL SOURCES OF RESILIENCE: CYCLE OF EMPOWERMENT

3.2.1. Children as Sources of Meaning and Aim

Just as protecting and prioritizing children seem to be one of the major motivators of separation, after separation, striving to protect and care for children to ensure their well-being seem to be another motivation to hold on to life in creative

ways. Women explained how they felt responsible and obliged to stand straight and be strong for their children and often hide their more vulnerable feelings to set an example to them as the only available parent.

I thank to God, I say to myself this is a test by God, I am very grateful that I have my children, they are everything to me. I love them very much. They give me strength because I am obliged. I must be a strong woman for Murat and Mehmet, I cannot disregard them, I cannot let anything bad happening to them. I don't cry for them anymore as I used to, I used to cry all the time (Kubra: 297) (56)

After divorce mothering is very difficult and important. You have to be a mother and a father. On one hand, you are trying to protect them, showing them their mistakes, on the other hand you try not to do any mistakes, stay strong, not to show you have failed, you are sad and defeated. The more you stand straight the stronger are your children because they take you as a model. (Elif: 362) (57)

Although this gives them an aim to strive for, this seems to be especially tough considering the huge struggle women have to give and the turbulence of the after-separation period. As Esma explains, *"the hardest job is the mothers' as you have to put together others when you haven't done it for yourself yet."* (Esma Hn: 289) Moreover children also seem to manifest externalizing behaviours, themselves grappling with challenging events in their lives. Almost all participating mothers mentioned how difficult it was for them to deal with their children from time to time.

... after divorcing my children were more naughty, they were more misbehaving, I considered this normal as they were only kids, but that time I wasn't so understanding because we were living in very difficult conditions, everything was so overwhelming, when my children for whom I sacrifice everything were misbehaving I would lose my patience, actually it wasn't my children's mistake. (Derya:346)

Meanwhile my children were growing up, my older daughter was at high school, she was a very difficult child, I was every day at her high school, every day they were calling me... she was causing a lot of trouble and constantly misbehaving... she was hard work, she wanted to drop out of school. (Suheyla: 51-53)

Many of the participants explained a circle where, as they moved away from the violence and managed to take control of their lives with new accomplishments, children also got empowered feeling trust in their mother's capability. Furthermore, children's testimony to their mother's efforts to make a "good" living and their expression of gratefulness seem to be an invaluable source for women, which consolidates their faith in their capability as a parent which further empowers them, their children and the relationship.

They were quiet, untalkative, children who couldn't express themselves... When I started to be strong, they became stronger as well, they started to express themselves... They had dreams... I tried my best, used all my resources so that their dreams would come true, and they did, so they were feeling better... (Gunseli:323)

It was half term, I was buying material from Osmanbey, making clothes and accessories, and giving them around. Then my daughter saw me with these huge heavy sacks on my back ... I was carrying goods, my daughter helped me. Then we stopped in Şişli to rest, she asked me if that is what I am doing to raise her, I said yes. She said I promise I will finish my school this year and she did. (Suheyla: 71)

Moreover, children's perception of their mother seems to be altered as they witness their mother not oppressed and being subject to violence but as making her own decisions and respected by other people which further seemed to have empowered children.

I became a different mother, because when I was with my in-laws, I was feeling a bit like an inferior. They were constantly ordering me, sweep here, bring this, take that, do this... But now it is different... Here, when I am on my own, I feel more free, stronger and like a leader... The old Kubra who felt like a loser under pressure has changed, I feel like a knowledgeable teacher with authority. But like a teacher who is loved and respected by her students... Now I am such a mother, stronger, who can stand behind her decisions. (Kubra: 235-237)

They started to have more self- confidence, because they were not in a place where there was violence anymore. Their mother started to exist actually. Until then their mother was beaten up, but now they see their mother doing things at school, people come to her and say thank you, they respect her. That was something very important for them. My younger child was still stubborn, crying a lot, that's a different story but my older child started to stand much stronger. (Suheyla: 258)

3.2.2. Mother Child Attachment as a Source of Emotional Support

Participants often portray a world where they stick together with their children facing the difficulties, trying to stand as a safe haven together for each other. When asked about what helped them cope with the difficulties in the after-separation period, children emerged as the most often cited relational resource. “Being closer with children” were among the most often mentioned codes for the after-separation parenting experiences.

After separation, women explain how they stick closer with children in the face of fears about the new unknown they have stepped in, to protect and gather strength from each other. Elif, Günseli and Mine mentioned the scene where they all slept together in one bed in the shelter.

When we were there, we were all sleeping together, we were given two three beds, but we were all in one bed. In bed we were all the time talking about

our new life and our dreams, three of us we were dreaming together.
(Gunseli: 122)

Expressions like “*I don’t need anyone but my children*” or “*they are my wealth*” are common. This is often contrasted with the resentment to families of origin or in-laws.

I can do more, if I was able to get so far then I can as well do more. I don’t need a man, a relative or my parents. I need my children and they need me.
(Mine:279-280)

I wasted my life with two faced people for nothing... that’s why I don’t want anyone. My children are enough for me. (Nilay: 276-278)

Because I don’t want to drain my kids, my psychology is ruined because of physical violence, my sister-in laws, and their humiliation, I don’t want my children to go through the same things, they are my only treasure, I would starve, go to work but I wouldn’t let anyone say anything bad to them, this is the feeling in my heart. My children are my everything. (Kubra: 165)

Throughout the interviews participants expressed how they felt grateful for the presence of their children. Participants who had to go through unplanned or forced pregnancies expressed this gratefulness as well.

I had a foolish ignorant period in my life... I didn’t know about birth control, but I have never regretted having my children. There are 4 things that I did right in my life, and I am proud of, three of them are my children and the fourth one is divorce. (Suheyla:25)

I am so glad that they were born, I had my daughter as a result of rape, but I am so happy that she was born. (Mine: 172)

Furthermore, as women and children move away from controlling relationships, they seem to find new ways to connect and spend time together. Women describe both themselves and their children as becoming freer from fear and oppression and more confident. They indicate they make a conscious effort to carry this sense of freedom as well as watching for their needs and desires to their relationship with children. Accordingly, they describe communicating more democratically with children which they sometimes depict as being “like friends”.

We started to talk when we were in shelter. We started to talk more; we were more actively involved in each other's lives. We started to share our plans. The most important thing was that we started to talk to each other. Our dialogues were more intense because mother started to talk. (Esma: 215)

Spending leisure time together in and out of home as they please “even late at night” is also mentioned a few times to underline the newly acquired freedom.

So, when I think how my kids have changed, if we were living in the same house with their father my daughter couldn't live the way she would like to, she could not go out or meet with her friends. She became free as well. She went out with her friends, sometimes even in the evenings. Before the divorce she could not do any of these, her father would not let her. So, she is happy, she is free, same thing goes for my son as well. (Nilay: 322-324)

On the weekends, before this pandemic we would always go somewhere. We would go to the cinema, theatre, funfair, for a meal, to the park... Now there is no one limiting us, nobody questions us why we went there, why we got dressed like that, why did we do that. All three of us respect each other's decisions... (Gunseli: 178)

Finally, they also mention engaging in more physical touch such as more hugging and expressing their love. Esma explained how watching a movie they lied on each other's lap which wouldn't be possible if she had her husband there with them.

Now let's say watching a film is much more fun, we don't have a computer or a laptop, but we have telephones... I find a horror film or a comedy, we prepare pop corns, tea then we sit as we wish lying down on each other's legs, we could not do any of these with their father. (Esma: 24)

S: What was helpful for you when you were tired, stressed or hurt, what were you doing?

Su: My children. I was hugging them a lot. (Suheyla: 245-248)

3.2.3. Mother And Children as a Team for Solidarity

Participants often highlight that what they have accomplished, they have accomplished together with their children. They acknowledge how their children had to go through so many difficult and painful experiences themselves but that they hold on to each other throughout the process.

All three of us we lived in very difficult conditions...we went through very sad events but now we are very happy, and we achieved this together. Now finally we are healthy and happy. (Gunseli: 198)

Three of us we were constantly protecting each other, protecting our home and outside. We were like a triangle, our backs together, each of us watching one side, it was always like that but at the end we succeeded. (Derya: 354)

As if Murat and Mehmet are not my children but individuals living in the same house, we have free will. We don't have anyone, but we protect each other, and I am respectful to their views because although they are only kids they went through the same things as I did. I am glad, I can understand their feelings. (Kubra: 237)

Children are described as taking responsibility in household chores. Furthermore, participants considered maturing fast as the most significant feature of children's experiences of violence. Some children especially older children were described as having to take responsibilities that are beyond what is appropriate for their age such as looking after small children or quitting school and working. This will be explored in detail in the third theme.

... we were even sharing the household tasks. They were very little but when I came from work would prepare salad, set the table, sometimes even cook the soup. All three of us we were all working hard, I never say I did it on my own. We always strived together and reached this day. (Derya: 224-226)

I was working on Saturdays and was at home on Sundays...I was resting at home, first I was quickly doing housework then I was pulling the curtains and sleeping till one o'clock... I am so grateful that they would close the door and watch TV, they would say our mother works, she gets very tired, and they would be quiet...they were saying our mother will go to work tomorrow, she should sleep. (Günseli:305-313)

3.3. THEME II: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE DESTRUCTIVENESS AND ABSENCE OF FATHER

3.3.1. Divorce, Post-separation Violence and the Lack of Fathering Functions

Divorce as the legal ending of marriage as well as separation has been full of challenges for many of the women in the sample. Günseli, Mine and Elif went to shelter with life security risk and got confidentiality and restraint orders. Although Derya moved to her rented apartment, she had to get confidentiality and restraint orders as well due to severe post-separation violence. Living with confidentiality and renewing orders seems to have been another burden on their shoulders. Esma, Süheyla and Nilay mentioned psychological post-separation violence such as threats, humiliation and disparaging their mother to children. Not only men can

increase violence just before and after divorce, many conflictual issues also need to be dealt with such as custody and alimony at this period. Kübra and Süheyla had to give up the custody of one of their children to their father. They are also the only two women in the sample who did not get support of social work from a women's organization or a shelter. In time, Kübra manages to get her child back on observing that his father is often absent, and he is not looked after well by his father's family.

They went to Istanbul to their sister's house, and I lived in Kütahya for one and a half or two years. I was renting a flat there... but I missed Murat very much, because he is my first child, first one who called me mother. I was calling him every two or three days. When he started to ask me when I would come, I didn't want to stay in Kütahya anymore. I thought to myself that I should go to Istanbul, rent a flat close to him and find a job. I realised that he was not eating much, he still doesn't... (Kubra: 67-69)

For Süheyla, leaving her child with his father and his family is a sore point that she came back again and again during the interview. She narrated how as the judge advised her to leave the custody of her son to her husband and to get the custody of her two girls to speed up the court process, she accepted as she felt she had come to the last point she could bear. From then on, she has been accused by his son and her own family for leaving him behind. In the process, she describes her struggle also against his husband and his family's accusations against her. Although she seems to be highly involved with her son even after divorce, she describes her relationship with her son as strained. At the time of the interview, his adult son did not want to see her. This was very upsetting for her, she both accused herself for not having struggled enough and comforted herself saying if he is in need, he knows well that I am always here for him.

They told my son that I took her sisters with me and left him behind, but actually that wasn't the case. My son is a big sorrow for me...He stayed with me as well, but they had his custody, actually they were just acting as they pleased. When the school started, he was with me... he had difficulties with

reading and writing...I blame myself for many things and one of them is that I didn't struggle enough for my son... but the conditions I was in were very difficult... I didn't look after him enough, I couldn't do it, my parents and others always accused me of this as well. (Suheyla:31-65)

Other women in the study already had or managed to keep the custody of their children without such difficulty.

None of the women in the sample were able to get alimony after separation for their children or for themselves. Both Esma and Süheyla gave up alimony for consensual divorce to finalise the divorce process as soon as possible. For other women, although the court ordered alimony for children, fathers did not pay it. Except few women in the sample, participants did not decide to make a lawsuit to the fathers either as they were hopeless to get the money or as they wanted to keep away from and sever the ties of any dependency from their former husbands. As a result, they carried the economic burden of making a living for their children solely by themselves.

He was ordered to pay alimony, 250 liras for each child. He didn't pay anything, and I didn't ask for it. I said just stay away from me I don't need anything else. I worked, I was again a security guard, I had a gun with ID... I am happy I stopped being a worker. Now I am earning more, which is enough for me. I never asked for alimony. He never gave anything anyway; he didn't even offer it. (Kubra: 57-64)

There was absolutely no support from the father, I just wanted to divorce, I didn't want the alimony. Anyway, he wouldn't pay. (Nilay:214)

I didn't want it... I just wanted to divorce as quick as possible, anyway he has never supported us. So, I just wanted to part with him as soon as possible. (Suheyla: 82-83)

Derya, Nilay and Süheyla recounted that fathers were also perpetrators of post-separation violence that affected their children. When there is post-separation violence, father-child contact seems to harm children and their trust to and relationship with their mother. Children are reported to be abused to get to the women. Nilay recounted how her ex-husband gave her daughter to state care saying “her mother does not look after her” with false accusations. She had hard time taking her child back and managed to do so with a smart plan only after 10 days.

He was taking her on visitation days. I was not limiting him; I was not telling him to bring her back as soon as his visitation time was over. Sometimes she was staying with him for two weeks. Although I was not limiting him, I don't know why he was damaging her psychological well-being like this. Once he took my daughter to child services and left her there saying her mother doesn't want to give her on visitation days and she doesn't look after her. She stayed there 10 days... He was putting me under psychological pressure so that I would return to him. How could he do that to her I can't understand (Nilay: 40-46)

Actually, I prefer that she doesn't go to her father. I am sure she has sadness and longing in her heart but believe me when she goes there, she becomes so confused. I cannot understand how they can teach a child to swear to her mother. My daughter was only 5 years old, they sent voice messages to me saying you are a whore. (Nilay: 52-56)

After divorce I was exposed to serious psychological violence. He was always using children as an excuse. He was saying they are my children; I can tell you whatever I want, you are the mother of my children. (Nilay: 84-86)

Derya has taken restriction orders one after the other to protect herself and her children from the violence of their father during the divorce process. Still, she

narrated a life with constant tension and repeated attacks to herself, her children and their home.

I had the temporary custody of my children... during the process two three times my children were kidnapped... He was planning these kidnappings very carefully. On the day his restraining order ended, because we were still not divorced he had a right as a father... But my children didn't want to see their father, they ran away many times... Once he took my older son to a night club when he was 15, I can never forget my son's panic, never. He went to the toilet, called me and begged me to save him. Thanks God on that occasion I had first time the support of the police. After that incident the harassments started again. He came to the street where I lived and broke my window many times. I was renting the flat and was worried what the neighbours were thinking... (Derya: 13-31)

In Süheyla's case, father's family of origin seems to have been another source of child abuse as the father lived with his FOO and had his son with him.

They were constantly manipulating my children. At my ex-mother-in law's house they were telling my older daughter that I was a widow now and that's why nobody would marry her, nobody would want her, and to my son they were saying that his father had cancer because his mother divorced and didn't want to go back to him. They were very stressed. They were telling them to convince me to return to their father. Just at the start of puberty, such things... Just when their self-confidence would get better when we were together, it would go worse again once they would be there. (Suheyla:175)

After divorce, Mine, Günseli and Elif were cut off with their children's fathers due to life security risk. Other fathers continued to exist in their children's life no matter how sporadic. Whether the fathers are physically present, or they are totally absent due to security reasons, participant women described a general lack of fathering functions.

...outside in the neighbourhood when Mehmet used to play, sometimes his father used to call him and show him affection. I saw him doing these sorts of things. When Mehmet saw his father, he would run to him, he wanted to see him. Those days, I was letting him, but it is over now. Anyway, we rarely see him, we don't know where he is or what he does. (Kubra: 142-147)

I said he is your father, I am your mother, even God will not and cannot change this, he will always be your father and I will always be your mother... But because he has never been like a real father, when we got divorced as if he divorced his children as well. Generally, it is like that with men, of course there are some exceptions. He divorced his children until they were adults. (Suheyla: 109)

In the relationship with father “trust” seems to be the basic emotion missing. Both Elif and Süheyla stressed how their daughters are affected and still have hard time trusting men due to their relationship with their fathers.

My younger daughter is 26 years old. There is no man in her life who can be a good role model. The two closest men to her, her father and brother unfortunately lack self-confidence and disappointed her many times. Now at the age of 26 she has no boyfriends; she never had a serious relationship. There is a saying that a father is like a mountain that you can lean your back to him. That mountain is absent in her life. (Suheyla: 163-165)

Participants mentioned the need for a father in areas of generating a feeling of trust, maintaining the future psychological well-being of children, health of future relations of girls with men, an authority figure to set limits, provider of economic needs, consultant to male children in adolescence, and football companion.

Elif recounts how she has had hard time trying to deal with his son's “motorcycle passion” who had accidents one of which had been so serious that he

was hospitalized then had a long and difficult recovery period. She assumes that if his son had a father, he would put limits with his authority.

Ersan (Elif's son) had a traffic accident. I am thinking maybe if he had a father, it wouldn't have happened, he would maybe be scared of him and if he wouldn't let him drive a motorbike maybe he wouldn't... as a mother although I told him not to do it, I was angry with him and I raised my voice, he listened to me, but he never considered me as an authority... When Ersan was in the hospital, it was so difficult for me to get there and back, I was exhausted, he was sorry for me, he promised me that he would not drive a motorbike again but later he bought one. If he had a father maybe, he wouldn't. (Elif: 364-370)

Derya explained how hard it was for her to be an authority and consultant to her adolescent sons as they were maturing into manhood. She described how she felt she had to convert herself to two models “mother and father” then when the need is fulfilled how she switched back to being “just mother” again portraying a flexibility of roles.

During the time of their adolescence, it was very difficult to have both roles, to be a mother and a father at the same time...As a mother when I had to be very authoritative it wasn't easy, I would suspect myself... It was very difficult as a woman to explain to my sons' things regarding the period after puberty, but I had to explain them, there was no one else who could do that...In an open manner, although I was blushing I explained everything to them. They would say “but mother!” but I told them there was no one else who could explain all this to them. After a while I shifted to the mother role again. (Derya: 137-144)

Similarly, Günseli explained how after her empowerment and separation she began to feel “good enough” as a mother and even thought she performed well fathering roles that their fathers didn't perform.

I understand the feelings of both being a mother and a father. I feel empowered, I feel like now my mothering abilities are higher than average, there has been a pleasant improvement...When I come home, I do housework and deal with other kinds of things of mothers would do, then I go to work, and I feel like a father. I think I am good in both roles. At times I was talking to my children the way a father would talk. I haven't seen this with my husband and father, but I have observed some good fathers and I did just like them. (Gunseli :289-297)

Although women had different ways to come to terms with the lack of what they considered as fathering, as will be mentioned in the following subtheme, the most often used strategy seems to be prioritizing the bond with the children in order to ensure their future well-being.

3.3.2. Negotiating the Gap Between the “Normative” and the “Real” Father

Concerning the father child relations after separation participants' narration of their experiences could be grouped around describing an absence of the fathering role and their difficulty with coming to terms with this absence in their children's lives both practically and emotionally.

Participants described feelings of their children towards their fathers on a spectrum of yearning and love to fear and revengefulness. Furthermore, they described how their children had confused and complicated feelings.

One day, three or four years ago when Yusuf was 15 years old, he saw a news on television about a woman who was murdered. I realised that he had watery eyes. He said to me “if my father wasn't dead maybe today, I would be watching a news about you or maybe I would have already... I don't know whether I should be sad or happy that my father has died. I never know this. Actually, I feel deep sorrow but when I think of you, then I say I am glad he died.” It is very difficult for children to be in such a dilemma. And that he shares this with me, that is something special. (Derya: 162-166)

Seven or eight years ago their father had a heart surgery. My older daughter stayed with her father. At the hospital, one day he was given lentil soup for dinner. Then he said to his father “you see, look it is lentil soup...”, she implied the time when she was seven or eight years old, and I was beaten by her father because of a lentil soup. At the age of 28, after so many years, she remembered this and confronted him... One day when I came home from work, I found her crying on the sofa. I asked her what happened if her father... She said I am crying because I think I love my father. I was very sad to hear that. I just said that it is natural that she loves him as he is her father, and I left the room. Then she came to terms with herself, even loving his father was painful. (Suheyli:107)

Kübra, Süheyli, Günseli and Nilay explained how their different children had different experiences of their father's. For them the older children were more of witnesses of the violence of their father, and they were at an age where they could better grasp the situation. Therefore, their reaction to their fathers seems to be more of anger, revengefulness and resentment. On the other hand, Derya, Kübra and Günseli (all of whom have two sons) narrated how their fathers discriminated children and were violent towards the elder son and showed more sympathy towards the younger ones. In a similar vein, the younger children are told to express yearning for their father while older children were depicted as angry and resentful more often.

My younger son used to cry saying “I miss my father. I know he was beating me up but I miss him” ... then his brother would say “ do you miss getting beaten up?” and he would answer “no anyway my father was not beating me up” and then his brother would say “ so just for your sake, should we get beaten up?”... we had conversations like these... I was trying to tell him that if he would go to his father once, then his father would again be a part of our lives. I tried to explain, and he understood. Now in the last one year we don't have such problems. It's over now, now we lead a happy life.

Because neither my children nor I am exposed to violence anymore and we can really appreciate this now. (Gunseli: 186-192)

Murat was in high school and Mehmet in first grade of junior high school. One day Mehmet told me that his father came to his school, called him and asked him if he had any money, and he gave the pocket money I gave him because he said his father stroked his head in front of his friends. His friends asked him who he was, and he was very happy to say that it was his father. Because he admires his father and he is away, he becomes very happy when he gets a bit of affection from him... Murat on the other hand doesn't want to see his father but Mehmet wants that. (Kubra: 81-87)

Participants of the study, grieve over their children's lack of fatherly presence especially when they recognize their children's yearning for it.

The most difficult thing for me is when my children see their friends' sincere conversations with their fathers. Then I see their yearning for a father, these are the most painful times for me. (Elif: 318)

... Because a father figure is important for a girl. My younger daughter was 5 years old, she used to admire all my friends' husbands who would show a bit of interest in her. After the divorce they were even paying more attention to her. When two of us were alone she used to say things like "I want uncle Tamer to be my father, I want to call him father". I was saying "He is somebody else's father, he is your uncle Tamer. And you have a father". I understand her, there was a picture in her mind with an empty space. She wanted to fill that space. She doesn't remember much of the times we were living together. In fact, she has got a good memory, but I think she must have erased everything in her mind. Then she wanted uncle Hakan to be her father and then she wanted the others to be her father... One of her biggest traumas is when she was 5, one day my father was on the balcony, we were talking, and I called him father then my daughter asked him if she can call

him father as well. My father reacted in a very harsh tone, he shouted at her and said “no, you have a father”. From then on, she never asked anything like that again. She has no trust in a father figure. (Suheyla: 55)

Participants, for except the three of them who had a life security risk, all stressed how they did not impede their children from seeing their father.

I never did something like not letting him see his children. (Kubra: 59)

I had to see him for the sake of my younger daughter. I never limited the visits. My older children didn't want to see him, if they wanted, they did, but my younger daughter admired his father. I never restricted his visits, he came and picked her up, took her back but it affected the psychological well-being of my daughter in a very negative way. (Nilay: 36)

Furthermore, Elif and Süheyla remarked how they encouraged and/or pushed their children to keep contact with their fathers despite their children's reactions to the contrary. On the other hand, Derya explained how she had to let her ex-husband see children despite the high level of post-separation violence and children's unwillingness.

I said to my son “I am your mother but as well he is your father, despite of everything you may miss him, want to see him. I won't be angry or offended, you can meet your father if you like, at the end of the day he is your father” and he said to me “Don't even mention it. I don't want to even hear his name, I don't have such a father, if I would see him on the street, I would beat him up, I don't want to see him. Never again mention this.” (Elif: 204)

I forced them to visit their father during the time when they would still listen to me. When they were older, they decided by themselves... When they were young, in front of my family, I told them “your father had problems with me but he is your father, if you don't go to him now when he needs, I would

never forgive you, even if I would be dead, because I raised you.” Because the children were objecting saying he did all those things to you.

In a similar vein, they underlined how they tried to hide the vices of their fathers to safeguard a father image no matter how inexistant and/ or destructive. The father is assumed to be necessary for the future psychological well-being of children and daughters’ relations with men.

You are one of the rare people who knows that I was raped. The secret will go with me to my graveyard. My children will never know this. I don’t want them to be negatively affected. I don’t want to say anything bad about their father anymore. I want my children to think about their future not their past, that’s why I won’t tell them. (Mine: 443)

I don’t want them to remember the difficult times they went through because it can have an adverse effect on all their lives. When I compare the two of them, Kaan was 11 years old, since he was 5-6 years old, he witnessed a lot of things, not only the incidents about me but as well his fights outside. (Derya: 206)

Let’s say I never did that. My younger daughter doesn’t know that his father abuses drugs... I never said anything bad about their father to them. (Suheyla: 109)

As a result, it seems as if mothers in the study try to keep “the father” at its position as a “supposed to be form” despite the real father’s failure to carry out fathering functions. There seems to be a tension between on the one hand, trying to protect children and on the other hand the anxiety that the absence of “the father” will impact them adversely. Many participants expressed how they observed children to be more confident and freer after separation and moreover, they are well aware how children can be psychologically harmed during contact and can be used to reach out and harm them as well.

After the divorce they changed, especially Murat felt himself free. He felt like before he was under a heavy rock and now, he is out, he was free to express himself and make choices. Before it was different, now he talks and expresses his ideas with self-confidence. (Kubra: 317)

Because there is no more fear and pressure of the father, as they are not judged or criticised as before, now they have much more self-confidence. (Elif: 82-83)

Still, they seem to be anxious that their children will be adversely affected by the absence of their fathers. In this respect, many participants detailed how they actively spent more time with their children and how they expressed their love more often and held their children much tighter. Mothers' involvement is often framed in a compensatory reasoning as a "remedy" to the absence of the father. They seem to actively use it as a protective mothering strategy. Many participants detailed family rituals such as reading time together, praying together, going out to have fun with children together. This seems to have put more weight on the mothers' shoulders as they try to compensate and burden themselves with what they are not responsible for, yet on the other hand, this seems to work for many of them and seems to have strengthened the bonds of attachment between mothers and their children. This is also what they call as "being both a mother and father", where providing and caring, basic material needs, and emotional needs are both vital.

When I say loving, I don't mean taking them in my laps and giving them kisses. We had limited time in the evenings, in that two three hours I tried to do as many things as possible with them, like playing, doing homework, having fun. Sometimes we played funny games at home... on the weekends we went on outings... I was very strict about not working on every 23rd April. I went to their school in every 23rd April ... after school we did many activities, we were out until ten or eleven...I believe engaging like this with your children has a positive impact on their well-being and I think this is

the case for us. Despite of coming from a very unfavorable family background now they are doing very well. (Derya: 216-222)

Before I didn't have time for it but after I got divorced, I made this as a rule to myself. Every night when they are going to bed, I tell them that I love them very much, that I am so glad I have given birth to them and that I am a very lucky woman... Although they wouldn't express it very much, they have an unease since their father is not here. Even though their father was mostly absent in family life, he still was taking up space physically. Following his absence now they have worries, for example financially. (Suheyla: 167-169)

3.4. THEME III: BONDS OF CARE IN A HOSTILE CONTEXT

3.4.1. Resentment towards Family of Origin

Resentment towards family of origin (FOO) is one of the most recurrent code groups in the study. It is voiced by all the participants and for some women it was an issue that they visited again and again during the interview. They express how disappointed, angry, worthless, and alone they felt to be left alone by their parents and siblings when they were subject to forms of violence and atrocities by their husbands.

Süheyla explained her expectation about her family's unconditional support to protect and support her both emotionally and materially.

At the beginning my parents didn't accept my divorce but one day I went to them and said "I don't need any money, I have money, I am not expecting any money from you" then they accepted my divorce. In reality, my friends were supporting me financially. I said this to deceive myself, actually from my parents I just wanted to hear "we are here for you, the money is not important" but I didn't hear that. That hurts me very much. If someone else would do this to me, it wouldn't hurt me. (Suheyla: 278)

As recounted earlier 6 of the participants escaped violence by their husbands and went to their FOO many times before separation, some also stayed there some time, only to be faced with their disapproval for separation/ divorce and sent back or accepted to stay on condition to leave their children behind.

Once we divorced in 2010... he sent me away and I went to my sister, but my sister used to live with her father-in law. We stayed there about a week but then my sister said, "you are more than welcomed to stay but I am living with my father-in law, so you should either put your children in an orphanage or should take them to their father". So, we went back home. (Nilay:106)

I tried several times. I went to my parents' and stayed there several months... My parents are very dominant because they are originally from the east. After 4-5 months long separation, my parents insisted that I should go back to my husband, and I did. (Derya: 8-10)

I call only my mother and sister because the others didn't want my children right from the beginning. They were saying "leave your children and come". I came here to save them; I can't have a life without them. (Gunseli: 343-345)

Süheyla narrated how after many attempts to separate, she filed for divorce, finally stood up against all oppression from her family, her husband and his family, and the community. Yet she still resented her family for accusing her and her friends instead of her husband who is the perpetrator of violence.

Firstly, I went to my mother's house and said, "I want you to know that I filed for divorce and made allegations against my husband at the prosecutors' office". Then they accused my friends, they didn't put any attention on the fact that I was beaten up. All of a sudden, they forgot that I was beaten up and being tortured, that sometimes my mother had to bring food so my children could eat, that there were periods when I had a purple

eye and wounded lips... these were all forgotten instead they blamed Ayse, Fatma, Mehmet, others and of course me except the man I divorced. (Suheyla:101)

Mine, Günseli and Elif who were exposed to most severe forms of violence and life security risk, detailed how they chose to cut off with parts of their families especially fathers or brothers as they themselves took control of their lives and their children's to survive.

Elif explained how on the day she was saved by her children from strangling by her husband, she went to the police station where her brother joined her yet he tried to take her back home where she was about to be murdered regardless of any concerns for her life safety. She stressed how her brother had actually refused to help her on many different occasions. She decided to go to her friend's and finally cuts off ties with his brother as well as her hopes for his solidarity.

We were going to the hospital, he didn't even want to come close to us, he was saying "sister, now you will get an assault report, you will file a complaint and this will cause us big trouble, please don't file a complaint and go back home" I told him "today I could have died at home, I am not ever going back there, I am not giving up my future"... It was 5 o'clock in the morning, we went out of the police station, he drove the car aside and told me "Let me take you back home". I told him "Just give me your phone, I will call my friend Binnur and you take me to her's and you go and do whatever you want so you won't be in trouble". After that day I was never again in touch with him. (Elif, 84-88)

Similarly, Günseli and Mine who are forced to marry the man who raped them explain their path to a selective cut off with their FOO, feeling that they do not owe anything to them. They talk with some members of their family from a distance. Often this is contrasted with the relationship they built with their children and the efforts they've put for their well-being.

I was strong and I was feeling that I was getting even stronger because I have not left anything behind, I had everything with me, I had two children and they were with me. Now I was dreaming of starting a new life. (Gunseli: 120)

Mine elaborated on how her family didn't "protect/adopt" her (*"ailem sahip çıkmadı"*), and that she didn't give her blessing (*"hakkımı helal etmiyorum"* meaning "they have infringed upon my rights, and I don't forgive them for it"). It is like she says, she has done her duty as a girl child being "docile" like a "blessing" just like her daughter but that her parents didn't carry out their duty as parents. She expressed the anger she felt that her FOO, as a witness to and facilitator of her violent abuse.

My parents didn't protect me. I am so happy that I don't have their surname anymore. Now we have no connections anymore. My mother gave birth to me but everyone who give birth do not become mothers. Sorry to say that but even dogs look after their puppies better... In our family girls don't have any value and boys are considered very important. Should I discriminate my daughter and son, that would be impossible for me, the love you feel for each of them is different. A girl's affection is even stronger, she is like a blessing, very gentle. We were like that with our mother, but she never protected us and many things happened to us. This man thought to himself there wasn't anyone to protect me so he could do anything he wanted, so he hit me, humiliated me...Look my nose is still broken. Why should I be tortured? (Mine:270)

Some participants also underlined how their families' ignorance, allowed their husbands feel more unbounded about the violence.

I was telling everyone that I would leave, meanwhile I went many times to my parents' house and back. My parents didn't protect me...Then I finally realised that they wouldn't help me, when my husband's family was aware

of this as well, they kept on with the beatings and the violence. (Gunseli: 67-71)

I am coming from a large family, 4 girls, 4 boys. Actually, our family ties are very strong but if you marry someone without their permission then the ties are cut off, if you are not strong enough and don't have the ability to convince your parents then you are excluded from the family... and if the man you married is aware of this, he crushes you down even more. This is very important. (Derya: 152)

As a result, with their deep resentment to family of origin, they seem to remark their boundaries and differentiate themselves and their newly formed families.

3.4.2. Being a Single Parent in a Gendered Hostile Context

During the separation process as many women started working and got out of their home spaces more, there seems to be a double effect. On the one hand, they realize their capacity to be respected for who they are, which is mostly in contrast to the destructive ways of relating of their ex-husbands and/or families. For example, as Süheyla starts going to her children's school union, to better keep an eye on them, she realizes people treat her with respect. She first works voluntarily and then after some time starts working on payment there. On the other hand, many women explained how hard it was for them emotionally, to confront the discrimination and stigmatization against divorced women, not only in their families but also in society. Süheyla described how as she got divorced, she first had to get over her feeling of shame and guilt through a performance she staged to leave home.

Following the divorce, I didn't go out for 3-4 months. I was not working during that period. I had in my mind this belief that everyone was looking at me and blaming me. Where I live there is a square with cafes. Generally, the locals don't pass in front of the cafes, but they go from behind, it's a habit. One day I thought to myself that I couldn't continue like this, that I

had to do something... one day I slowly walked in front of the cafes pulling my shopping trolley and went home. I said yes, I succeeded, I can go out from now on. From then on, I started going out and taking part in daily life. (Suheyla: 86-89)

Some participants stressed the hardship they faced finding an apartment to rent as a divorced woman. Participants seem to use different strategies to survive that range from hiding to active confrontation in this hostile gendered environment. Both Derya and Günseli explain how they had to hide that they were divorced from their landlord and neighbours.

In a city like Istanbul, it is very difficult to live on your own as a woman. I used to put a pair of men's shoes in front of the door, so that the neighbours would think that an adult man was living in the flat. I was divorced but they didn't know that. Not only getting divorced but the period following that is very difficult... We made up a lie. We said that he is in the Black Sea region and must go on to long sea journeys. That was the only way. (Derya: 47-49)

S: What was challenging for you when you were setting up a new life and getting away from the violence?

G: When we were trying to rent a flat the biggest challenge was that I was a widow ("dul"). Because I would be living alone with my children they were saying "we don't rent the flat to a widow ("dul"), I looked for a flat for a month and a half... Nobody gave their flat to me for rent. At the end I decided to take my cousin with me. Here I have only one cousin.

S: Your male cousin?

G: Yes, he came with me to rent a flat.

S: You introduced him as your husband?

G: (silence, embarrassed smile) What else could I do?

S: Of course, you acted strategically. (Günseli: 219-227)

Mine recounted how she was expelled from her rented home in the neighbourhood of the shelter due to discrimination towards women who come from shelters.

The landlord didn't want us because I didn't have a husband, then we went to another flat in that neighbourhood, it was winter... because the flat was on the same street as the shelter, they knew that we were from the shelter, women from the shelter were considered as bad women, they didn't have a good image. I don't know why but maybe because the woman leaves everything behind. Even in programmes I watched, shelter was shown as somewhere not nice, but actually this is not the case, shelters are there to protect and I am glad they exist. (Mine: 287-290)

Similarly, Günseli also had to leave her first home getting tired of pressures of her landlord. She explained how she felt relieved in her new apartment as there are other single women living there, whom she can ask for help if she is in need for children and that they don't humiliate her for being divorced.

Here, we didn't have any problems. My landlord is not here. There are two women in the block of flats like me... So, the people in the block of flats accept my children... they understand, and they don't humiliate. They don't consider the absence of a father as a problem. Because they don't have a father, when there is a need for it, they look after my children, if I can't reach home by phone, I call my neighbour next door or the one from downstairs. Yes, I don't have a family but the people from our block of flats are like my family. (Günseli:238-240)

Kübra narrates how she felt furious and humiliated by the grocer's expressions and relates this to his learning that she was divorced. Although it was a shop, she could buy groceries and pay later as she got her salary, she explained how she settled her account lending money from a friend and stopped shopping from there.

From the locals he must have heard that I was divorced and told my child “Tell your mother to come”. I have a son, the way he talks is so inappropriate. If I let, he would go further... This sort of language really has a negative effect on my psychology. I am a friend and a mother to my children, I grow up with them, I am trying to set up a new life... Who does he think he is, he is an old grocery shop owner, doesn't he believe in God, he is so old that he could be my father, how does he dare to talk to me and my son like this? (Kubra:161-163)

As according to traditional gender norms men are breadwinners, women can be poorly equipped for working life in terms of education and experience. Some participants were denied the right to education as children. Their schooling changed from no formal education to primary or middle school. Three of the participants reported that they were already working when they were separated, and five of them, to have started working during the separation process. With little or no schooling most of the women worked as cleaners or child carers in middle class homes, one woman worked as a textile worker and two women worked part-time informally washing dishes in restaurants. Their stories of separation are also stories of poverty and living without social security. Currently, as they moved on after-separation, and as their children grew up at the same time, 5 of the participants reported how they advanced their formal and/or occupational education and progressed to better earning jobs with social security. Three other participants didn't work due to pandemics or health reasons, their children were the main breadwinners.

The areas women had hardest time to settle initially seem to be providing for themselves and their children and ensuring their care and safety at the same time. “Striving for childcare and safety” is the most recurrent code considering challenging parenting experiences after separation.

Women often leave shelter with the small amount they have saved and temporary social aid for rent and children or furniture from state, municipality, NGOs or women's organizations. However, the aids are temporary and far from

enabling women securing an independent life with children. Even these insufficient social welfare functions seem to serve them and appreciated with “gratefulness” in these moments of crises and vulnerability.

We settled down, then we had rent allowance from the government for one year. Because of my son, we got this rent allowance for one year, I am very grateful. (Elif:18)

Furthermore, adverse conditions like the pandemics or a disease can unsettle the already vulnerable system they have built. As Kübra and Esma lost their jobs temporarily during pandemics or as Derya had to stay in the hospital for more than a month. Kübra explains how as she lost her job during pandemics; social aid was indispensable for her.

I am very thankful to Ms. Deniz (social worker), I am very glad I met her, she saved us from financial problems. I hope God rewards her. Her help was the food in our kitchen and our money for basic expenses. She said we would not receive money anymore once I would start working, I was a bit disappointed, but I prayed to her all the time. (Kubra:181)

Half of the women had pre-school children when they finally separated. This seems to be especially difficult as state policies regarding day care are highly insufficient. Moreover, preschool/ school times and work times do not overlap, leaving women making hard choices between providing for the livelihood of their children and ensuring their safety. Especially in the first years of separation some women explained how they had to over-work sometimes 6-7 days a week to ensure economic safety and independence.

I always signed up for more work thinking I need to make sure that my children are comfortable, and we are not hungry. If I could earn more money, I could buy more necessities. When my children are happy, I am happy. But if I have to depend on someone then I feel very sad, I feel like a loser, something gets stuck in my throat, I can't say it, I just swallow it. (Kubra: 250-251)

I thought my children should not be hungry at home so they wouldn't look for things outside. I was sometimes even working 6-7 days a week. Sometimes I was taking my children with me sometimes I was leaving them at home. (Derya:208)

I worked and worked non-stop for about a year...non-stop. I left for work, but my children (7 and 9 years old) were waiting for me alone at home, because there was no one to look after them. I wasn't in touch with my parents. They were waiting, watching TV, doing things. I was cooking the meal in the evening and putting it in the fridge, they were warming it up and eating, waiting for me, locking all the doors and windows. Anyway, we had confidentiality order (Gunseli:161-163)

Some participant mothers explained how they had to lock their children home as they went to work, or given keys to a 6-year-old, or entrusting 1 year old child to an 8-year-old sister. Mine who has 3 children left shelter with another woman having a small baby, they supported each other as Mine worked, and her friend looked after the children. However, after some time, as her friend decided to move, she was left alone with her three children. She explained how when she worked, her eldest girl child didn't go to school and cared for her 1-year-old brother. She recorded how her children missed the life in shelter where they had had a solid routine, enough food and time to play. After some time, she decided to give children to state care as she felt anxious about their safety leaving them locked in a flat. She explained how she was cognizant of the opportunity to give her children to state care thanks to the social work in shelter and how her sister supported her in her decision.

After that woman left and it was very difficult for me. I was leaving my children and going to work, I was leaving them to my daughter... Ceyla was 7-8 yeras old. I was locking the door and going to cleaning... my second child was about 5 years old and Furkan my youngest was not even one year

old... I was preparing their meals in the evenings and leaving for them... on the days I went cleaning Ceyla couldn't go to school... when I was coming from work, I would find my youngest with a red bottom, of course Ceyla at the age of 7-8 didn't know how to change nappies. (Mine: 126-132)

I was scared something would happen to my children. My sister said, "what if there would be a fire and something would happen to them, then you would be responsible for that". I couldn't think of certain things because I didn't want to be separate from them, but then I thought, it would be better for them if they would be in state care, they would sleep and eat better and would be able to go to school. (Mine: 319-320)

Mine, Derya and Kübra had close relations with their sisters. Kübra and Derya were the only women in the sample who were supported by their sisters for childcare from time to time. Derya explained how when her sister helped, her sister's support felt relieving feeling sure about the safety of their children.

We are four sisters. I have one older and two younger ones. I always had the support of them. As sisters we have very close bonds. We were helping each other financially and emotionally. My children were young, it was great for me that my sister undertook the responsibility of taking care of them. She gave me strength, at least I could go to work with a peace of mind knowing that my children were in good hands. My work overload was less thanks to her. I had otherwise difficult working conditions, cleaning a different house every day. (Derya: 89-91)

Süheyla was the only participant in the sample who moved to live in with her FOO after final separation which is in a family building. She explained she tried to make a living on her own with the help of her friends but couldn't manage more than 6 months. Moving to her parents, although she did not have problems with her children's safety, she narrated in detail how hard it was for her to live with her

parents and being subject to their authority, interference with children's upbringing and psychological violence.

At the beginning we managed to stay in our own flat but then because of financial reasons we had to move to my mother's house. I moved into one of her rooms with my two children. I had to adapt to the authority and other things there. (Suheyla: 49)

Everything was difficult, living with my mother was also very difficult. We lived about 10 years together. Long period... It was maybe even a harder period than getting divorced, being married. Because they were interfering with everything, anyway everything about me was wrong, I am a divorced woman. I am a widow ("dul"). But I am glad it is over now. (Suheyla: 139-141)

3.4.3. Overburdening of Women and Children in the Absence of State Responsibility

It is more than understandable to expect care and support from one's closest kin and resent their inaction when women are exposed to traumatic experiences of domestic violence. Besides that, resentment regarding family responsibility, there seems to be a remarkable silence regarding state responsibility, especially regarding the social welfare functions of the state. It is as if participants accepted that it is the family, or the market is the main responsible institution to support them even during their adult lives and not the state's policies regarding violence against women and social, economic welfare. Women referring to the lack of support for child-care either referred to lack of family support or to not having the money to afford a "nanny", not referring to the state's responsibility to regulate work conditions with parents' and children's needs and providing accessible child-care facilities. Derya was the only participant who referred to state's responsibility.

If you don't have childcare for your children which is very difficult in our country, financial independency is very difficult to achieve. There are no

jobs anyway, and if you are divorced and have children it is even more complicated to find one because employees don't accept children... There is no support of the state. You get divorced, you get away from something but at the same time you step in an even harder life with your children. (Derya: 152-154)

It seems that women and children are the ones who carry the burden of state's not fulfilling its welfare functions. The most recurrent code regarding effects of violence on children was "children maturing fast". Children seems to have been overburdened with responsibilities above their developmental capacities.

Maybe Kaan's tiredness and mystery is due to this. Maybe I gave him too many responsibilities when he was young. He left school when he was at the first grade of high school at the age of sixteen. He saw that I couldn't earn enough, or he assumed like that, I don't know. He started working. Maybe he has this tiredness due to working as a child... On our street there was bazaar on Thursdays. Kaan would hurry from school and work there half a day. However, little he wanted to contribute, he worked since he was 14 and at the age of 16 he started working full time. He was like an adult at home... I don't know, maybe he wanted to be a male role model at home because there wasn't a father. (Derya: 276-286)

When I got divorced in a way, she had all the burden on his shoulders. First, she started to work, I was working as well but I was earning very little, I couldn't contribute much, it was all on her. Now she feels like a mother and father to his siblings. She always asks me and her siblings if we need something. But I feel shy to ask for anything. Let's say if there is a bill that needs to be paid, I can't ask for it... when the date comes that it needs to be paid urgently my daughter tells me "but why didn't you tell him before?", but I can't help it, I feel shy. There is so much burden on her shoulders, yes, I am her mother and she has two siblings but we have absolutely no support from the father. (Nilay: 214)

Elif, Nilay, Süheyla and Derya's sons are reported to have prematurely left school. Three of them in the first year of high school one of them during university.

Similarly, another recurrent code was children's changing of roles with their parents, in other words, being pushed to the role of "parentified children". Most often it is the older children who take up this role and serve as a "small mother/father" to younger siblings and companion to mother.

S: So, what did you need the most during that period?

G: Actually, more than financial we needed social support, because I would leave the children by themselves at home. The difficulty was that there was no one to look after children, they were too old to go to kindergarten, so they were alone at home and I was worrying about them... The school was half day, but there wasn't anyone who could take them to school and pick them up, so eventually my older son took over this responsibility, he started taking his brother to school. (Gunseli: 245-248)

Furthermore, some children can also take up roles as protecting the mother during domestic violence; two of the women were saved by their children from being murdered by their husbands. This state of vigilance can be thought to be prevailing even after immediate risk of violence is over.

My daughter many nights waited in front of the bedroom door. She was worried I could be beaten up. (Nilay: 18)

She was worrying a lot. I couldn't go anywhere without letting her know. Really, she was like my mother. I tried once to go out without letting her know but as soon as I got on the bus, she called me and asked, "where are you mum?", and I said I was going out for a coffee and she asked "where, with whom" and I said I would meet a friend and have coffee. She asked me to call her when I get there. I agreed. So, she knows everything about me, and I know everything about her. As if we are not mother and daughter but two friends...That's why we have a very good relationship. (Nilay:212)

Ceyla looked after her little brother very well, she was a mother more than I could be, she was even like a mother to me, let's say when she was in the state care, I would go to her, and she would tell me not to go out in the dark and to lock the door. She was like a mother even to me. (Mine: 188)

Two women in the study stated that they decided to work with very low daily payment in a restaurant washing dishes to match times of their young children's school. However, in their cases older children were the main breadwinners. Esma explained how she refrained from a full-time job to ensure the safety of her child. Her dream is to open a fast-food shop near her daughter's school to be able to keep an eye on her.

I take my daughter to school then I go the restaurant. There I wash the dishes until there is an hour for her to finish school. I get 30 liras and go home... Today I can get a job in a factory. I would have insurance. It would be an investment for the future, but I might lose my daughter. The times are bad, people are bad. You are living in a city where you cannot even trust your father. I don't have anyone who can look after my daughter... that's why I want to have a shop right in front of her school. So, she can go to school from the shop and come back after school. (Esma: 197-204)

Apart from children's overburdening women seem to be over-burdened as well. Considering motherhood, women seem to be compelled to show heroic levels of efforts and resilience. To compensate for father's absence, they give extra importance to spending time with children and their emotional well-being trying to make them feel loved. To meet their material needs they work sometimes for the first time in their lives often in difficult jobs like house cleaning. They describe this as being "both a mother and a father". Some of them also fight with post-separation violence and the discrimination of the society and their families. Mothers also voiced how they sometimes had hard time responding to their children's emotional

needs in the midst of this struggle. Yet still, they recognized these needs and put their best efforts to respond to them.

When he talks Mehmet wants that I don't do anything else but stand like a robot in front of him and listen to him...I tell him "My dear, I have limited time, my hands are working but my ears are open" ... I iron, wash the dishes, put cream on Murat... I am very busy at home... I go to work, come home, buy necessities, pay the bills, do many other things, I am the mother and father and everything of this house, I must keep everything under control and have authority. When I say I am tired sometimes he is understanding and sometimes he insistingly requires my affection... I show him affection sometimes but generally from a distance. (Kubra: 311-315)

S: What did the children need?

M: My children needed affection and attention. They were not hungry...they were very happy in the shelter...when we came home, they were not so content.... I was working and Furkan was a very difficult baby...I had to give a lot of attention to him, when he was feeling better, I had to leave him with that woman and go...I couldn't spend much time with my children during that time. (Mine: 315-316)

3.4.4. Who's Family?: Alternative Forms of Solidarity

In the process of separation and after separation, social support other than the family seem to have played a major part. Among the ways of coping the participants described, "making use of social support" was the most recurrent theme. Female friends especially the ones who have gone through similar experiences, employers, colleagues, social workers and for one woman her sister-in-law has been strong relational sources of solidarity.

Separation at the beginning "*feels like one is thrown into a void*" where for many of the women in the sample a new beginning also is an end to what is familiar (most often their homes, neighbour(s), neighbourhoods, daily routines...). The challenge

to build a life as the only adult and caregiver to children is simultaneous with this loss. In this respect, Süheyla, Esma and Nilay all in their ways express their biggest need as someone to be there for them practically and emotionally.

All of a sudden, you are distant from everything and everyone you have been living together for many years. One feels some sort of emptiness, looks for a close friend. (Nilay: 274)

At that period, I needed that, they were supporting me at work.... I was not thinking of my family anymore but to have a family even though it was not my biological family was giving me strength and I knew I could lean on them... because I was like a newborn kitten with closed eyes. They helped me open my eyes. They supported me so I could study at open university. (Gunseli: 250-266)

I am very glad and feel very lucky that I had very good friends who supported me when I didn't know what to do and I knew I was alone... I only had my friends... After the divorce for a long time, they supported me. (Suheyla:99-101)

Although women also recounted an array of relations in the shelter where they witnessed other women's stories, compared themselves with them, empathized or conflicted with, disappointed and/or supported each other. Through all these complicated relations and feelings, it seems participants who have stayed in shelters, could carry a good enough relationship to their lives. All recounted having one or more strong and lasting relations from there. Trust and sharing as common experiences are recited as important themes with friends from shelter.

I have two friends from the shelter, they are like my siblings... these two friends know all my life...generally I cannot trust anyone but I trust them very much, they come to my home, one of them even stays weeks or months with me, we talk all night, sometimes we cry sometimes we laugh...we really

love each other from the heart, yes, they have experienced some unpleasant things too. (Mine:139-144)

Moreover, they seem to be sources of healing for rebuilding trust in relationships.

I like Handan very much. Thanks to her I have confidence again. (Esma:125)

Similarly, Kübra who doesn't have a shelter experience, recounts how she finds support as a mirror for her strength in her friend from her son's school.

K: I have a close friend (Selma). Her son Onur is my son Mehmet's best friend. Selma is my best friend...She often calls me or sends me a message saying "I gave Onur cakes and cookies, tell Mehmet not to buy anything at school so they can eat together" ... We share many things with Selma, we have very nice conversations, I love her...It feels very good to have these conversations and that someone listens to me. I feel understood. Selma says that I am a strong woman, she supports me like this.

S: Can you feel your strength as well?

K: When she supports me, I feel very strong. (Kubra:339-351)

Employers and colleagues were among other sources of support. For example, Derya, who used to work as a house cleaner, explained how one of his employers who was a high-ranking police used to accompany her in the police station at night after her ex-husband's assaults.

Whenever I had to be at the police station, even at midnight Mr. Ahmet (high level security officer) was immediately coming there as well, I am very thankful to him. As well people whose homes I cleaned supported me financially and emotionally. (Derya:39-41)

Günseli, Elif and Kübra also explained how they were supported by employers or colleagues for many different needs ranging from furniture or clothes

to providing for children's psychological support or circumcision to finding a job for one's children. Employers' acknowledgement of the difficulties participants goes through and their flexibility are also appreciated such as allowing bringing one's child to work, easily getting permission when having to deal with court processes or similar tasks.

For those relationships, "family" is used as a strong analogy. They contrast their feelings of being left alone by their FOO to finding support and understanding in other relations as a contradiction. Some participants also underlined that they cherish these relations more. However, the contrast, the bonds of care that are "supposed to" come from families coming from other people seem to make these bonds on the one hand stronger as if more genuine but on the other hand, more fragile as well, as they are not named and culturally or institutionally secured creating a sense of surprise.

Handan (friend from the shelter), she is actually a total stranger, and also totally unrelated, but so very dear. I know many things about her, and she understands me. (Esma:143)

They are my chosen siblings. We are not from the same mother, but they are my chosen siblings, they think the same for me... I love them more than my older and younger sisters. (Mine:274-278)

I can leave my family, but I can't leave my friends and my circle...My circle is different, I have a perfect circle. (Elif:116-120)

Mine and Derya referred to social workers (in women's organizations, state or municipality), as sources of support. They indicated that they felt confident knowing that when they are need, they can get reliable information about their rights and also different needs from them like psychological support for children or help with finding a job. Furthermore, social workers are also mentioned as serving as a mirror for their strength.

Finally, women seem to set an example to and encourage their friends to leave male violence. Günseli narrated proudly how she helped three of her friends to leave their violent homes.

...they were my close friends. When we were talking about the violence, we used to show our wounds and bruises to each other. We were planning to escape together but then only I escaped, only I had the courage to do it. I still get together with these friends. I directed them here. I even helped one of them to find work. She is working in another branch of my workplace. She escaped as well. In a matter of nine months all of my three friends escaped and came to the shelter...I am very happy, I won a victory, some may think what I did was breaking up families, but I don't think so... I made a nest, but I made it on happiness, first I made it for myself then helped and encouraged my friends to make them for themselves. Now my friends regret it that they haven't done this before. (Günseli:202-208)

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study explores the experiences of women's rebuilding lives with their children leaving abusive conjugal relationships in Istanbul, Turkey. An analysis of women's narratives led to three main themes which are Children as Relational Sources of Resilience: Cycle of Empowerment, Coming to Terms with the Destructiveness and Absence of Father, and Bonds of Care in a Hostile Context. The first theme elaborates on how children play an active part in women's empowerment both emotionally and practically as they struggle to build lives away from violence. The second theme focuses on how women deal with the absence and presence of their children's father in the context of divorce and often post-separation violence. Finally, the third theme explores how in the absence of welfare state functions, women and children are overburdened and how their empowerment is linked to sources of support and solidarity other than the family where it is most insistently sought.

The results revealed how participants managed their relations with their children, ex-spouses, family of origins and other people while struggling to earn a living, maintain security, parent their children, and heal from the effects of an abusive relationship. In their narratives, participants highlighted the difficulties and dilemmas they were faced with, their needs as well as their processes of empowerment. Furthermore, the study also attempted to understand from a systemic lens, how women and children acquired new roles by the reorganization of their families, and how internal and external boundaries of the family system were negotiated. In this section, results obtained through an analysis of narratives of the participants using the Thematic Analysis Method will be discussed with the help of relevant literature highlighting similarities, differences and limitations and areas that require further research. Finally, clinical implications of the study will be suggested.

In discussing participants' stories about their weaving their unique roads to rebuilding their lives and families, the echoes of the larger social and cultural systems in the reconfiguration of the family system will be dwelled on. A contribution of feminist and intersectionalist interventions in the family systems theory highlighted the influence of patriarchal social and cultural ideology and its interactions with other social identities such as class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, ability creating unique configurations in particular contexts influencing the structure of the family, and the roles, rules, and boundary negotiations within it (Anderson et al, 130-131). These interactions enable for its members differential access to resources and power and facilitate certain ways of being, feeling and thinking and discourage others.

4.1. THE MARITAL CONTEXT

Participant women in the study were married between ages 15 and 20. They were well aware of the disadvantaged position they were put into, as they described themselves "*ignorant*", "*naïve*", "*not knowing the world around*". The United Nation's Population Fund Turkey's report on risks and consequences of child, early, and forced marriages (Köseli & Çelik, 2020) draws attention to the many adverse and even lethal consequences of child marriages such as breach of the right to education, greater risk of psychological, physical health issues, social isolation, as well as exposure to domestic violence and exploitation. Furthermore, it emphasizes the inefficiency or inaction of institutional responses in terms of legal, health and social service interventions in these cases and advises to take solid measures for its prevention.

Two of the participant women were raped and forced to marry the men who raped them. Both women explained how they had to accept this horrid condition as they tried to protect their families and family's "honour". In both of their cases, there seems to be an unlawful complicity of the police blaming the victim and not registering the complaint and health workers' not reporting a child giving birth. Gunseli's resistance to marry and stay married was met with physical violence as a

means of coercion. In Turkey, the code and practice of “*namus*” or “honour” works to control women’s sexuality and impose power over them. It permeates into and regulates women’s individual, familial and social lives. Male kin are considered to be responsible as protectors of “honour” of the family, for which they can go as far as killing their sisters to restore family “honour”. Koğacıoğlu (2004), warns about attributing “honour crimes” which are perpetrated by male kin as a practice of “tradition”, as it makes invisible the contemporary structures of power, and the multiple political, social, and institutional dynamics at play in the very present that reproduce the code of “honour”. Any conduct considered as harming honour is considered as causing the loss of “honour” of the protectors’ and therefore, it binds the individual to family, kin, and community (Meeth, 1976, as cited in Sunar and Fişek, 2005). Notwithstanding, the code of “honour” can work as an internalised surveillance of one’s conduct where women themselves reproduce the norms of “honour”, as this is also a form of symbolic capital to be mobilized in interactions with the family and community to survive and gain power (Göksel, 2012).

In Süheyla’s case, where she objected getting married with her fiancé, she was not allowed to do so by her family. Once women are associated with a man, the exits can be closed. Furthermore, two of the participants indicated that they married against their family’s consent. Derya elaborates how this has put her even in a more strained position. As she could not get the protection of her family of origin, she became more vulnerable to her husband’s violence. It seems the choice of autonomy means, losing security (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Kübra narrating her story of getting married explains that she consented marrying her husband as he was told to be very pious and, she thought that would mean “he would look after her well”. His conservatism seems to have stood as a guarantee that he would follow his patriarchal gender role obligations of providing for and protecting her as a husband. However, contrary to her expectations, his husband and his family took her bank card where her wage as a worker was being deposited, and his husband turned out to work intermittently, spending the money in his control as he pleased disregarding children’s basic needs and Kübra’s insistent demands. She described violence as routine and her continuous

exploitation of labour and psychological violence by his family as other challenges she faced. She put forth his husband's not taking proper responsibility as a breadwinner, usurping her wage and the effects of his violence and reckless behaviours' effects on her children as leading her way to a divorce and taking control of her life. The patriarchal bargain of protection (Kandiyoti, 1988) failing, seems to have opened the way for her building of her autonomous subjectivity. All the participants in the study put forth their ex-husband's economic violence such as not taking responsibility to make a living or such as spending the money for himself like betting while ignoring children's needs like proper nutrition. Some participants began to work themselves as a response to this deprivation and some had already been working. Their financial independence seems to have been an important contribution to their empowerment, confidence and severing ties of dependency for some of these women. In a similar vein, Yalçınöz-Uçan's (2019) research observed a similar trend where economic violence was unacceptable as men's traditional breadwinner roles were subverted.

4.2. THEME I: CHILDREN AS RELATIONAL SOURCES OF RESILIENCE: CYCLE OF EMPOWERMENT

4.2.1. Children as Sources of Meaning and Aim

All the women participating in the study stressed consistently the rewarding aspects of their relationship with their children, notwithstanding the challenges in the same relationships. The children were recounted to have provided meaning and aim to their lives going through turbulent times. They seem to derive a strong sense of emotional support from this relationship which is often contrasted with their relationship with their family of origins which is a source of disappointment and deep feelings of resentment. This theme is in line with the literature on motherhood during and after Intimate Partner Violence. Goldblatt et al. (2014), Lapierre (2010a), Mullender et al. (2002), and Weinzimmer et al. (2013) all describe how women can gain strength and fulfilment from their roles as mothers in the face of

the self -eroding forces of the abuse relationship. Weinzimmer et al. (2013), in their article “Motherhood, Empowerment, and Resilience within the Context of Intimate Partner Violence”, elaborate on the positive aspects of motherhood and stress that in the relationship with the children women acquire a chance to give and receive unconditional love. Furthermore, they also point to how children’s presence can serve as “something to live for” in the face of adversity, providing both a sense of meaning and purpose, and a sense of “normalcy” and “stability” in life. The motherhood role provides a firm source of positive identity. This is also a highly valued and entitling role in society therefore, it facilitates the mother-child relationship as a place where women can restore self-worth. (Goldblatt et al., 2014; Lapierre, 2010; Weinzimmer et al., 2013)

Sirman (2020), emphasizes the complexity inherent in motherhood and that it has many faces. As she writes, it is a social institution comprised of economic and power relations and the ideologies surrounding them, a system of emotions, an experience and a utopia. She refers to Adrienne Rich’s differentiation between motherhood as an “institution” and as a “practice or experience” in her book “Of Woman Born”. She emphasizes that the “experience” of motherhood is often insufficiently theorized due to motherhood’s idealization and considering it comprised of emotions like love and care yet disregarding its dark side that may also involve regrets, doubts, mistakes, or anger like feelings. She further elaborates on the complexity of motherhood and the conflicting dynamics it engenders, she describes how motherhood is both a form of subjugation and a form of “power”.

In this study, despite and at the same time with emphasizing the rewarding aspects of motherhood and mother-child relations, some of the participant mothers narrated how their relationship with their children are strained and that they had at times doubts and regrets about their motherhood as well. Süheyla explained how her son has been angry with her, as she did not get the custody of him but her two daughters or Esma who resented with his son for getting into a coalition with his father for reunion, at the expense of her. Derya and Nilay, had doubts about the well-being their sons who were silent and did not share their feelings which lead them to question their motherhood. Moreover, the time following separation seems

to be challenging as children might show behaviour problems, learning difficulties, emotional dysregulation, tics, and somatic illnesses which renders motherhood more demanding. This is often emphasized in the literature, how with patriarchal motherhood ideologies, mothers are held responsible but often are not in control of the conditions, resources, and authority in the family (Bayraktar, 2011; Lapierre 2010a, 2010b; Mullender, 2002, Sirman, 2020). It is the conditions under which women parent, that determine the limits of their motherhood (Mullender, 2002).

Ekal, (2011) in her anthropological study on shelters in Turkey, elaborates on how women residents of shelters, perceive shelters and their staff as the representatives of the “Party” or the “State”. They attribute a function of protecting their “honour”, keeping them away from the ills of the outside world, “not leaving them on the streets” to this authority. She underlines how this leads women to display a gender-correct “womanhood” or “motherhood”, to prove that they are worthy of protection. She considers it as a way of compensation for women who have been highly marginalized losing their extended and immediate families in society to “ensure their integrity as a person” as the family is so central to the construction of social order in Turkey (Ekal, 2011, p.9). In this respect, the over-emphasis on the value and exchange with children in this study can be considered as a place where women compensate for their marginalized status and re-establish their dignity. However, as they do so, the extensive investment in this relational bond seemed to have strengthened both the mothers and their children, making them more resilient as especially for children the relationship with the non-abusing parent is the major source of resilience.

4.2.2. Mother- Child Attachment as a Source of Emotional Support

Women and children seem to display many aspects of families that manage to bring about resilience after adversity according to Figley’s (1989) and Walsh’s (2012) theorizations.

According to Figley (1989) for functional family coping after a traumatic event, families need to first have a clear acceptance of the stressor and take action

instead of denial. In the case of participants, leaving an abusive conjugal relationship means acknowledging the problem and taking an active functional coping stance towards it, instead of denial. In line with this active coping style, mothers' stress on "needing to be strong" or "needing to stand upright for children" can be considered as referring to their capacity for leadership/ authoritative parenting which contributes to resilience according to Walsh (2012).

Many mothers explained how after separation, they were closer with children. Feeling free from oppression, they devised new ways to connect and spend time together, being determinate to make room for leisure time activities. These activities were also framed in a compensatory way, this also leads to Walsh's (2012) emphasis on the importance of balancing hard truths and painful experiences with positive, pleasurable experiences as a respite that promotes resilience. These activities, as well as the outright expression of commitment and affection which women underline to have been easier, after being away from the perpetrator are all factors contributing to family cohesion according to Figley's (1989) model.

Participant mothers also explained how they had more intense and open communication, they shared their dreams and plans together and took decisions as a family in a participatory way. According to Walsh (2012) these are resilience determinants in terms of "communication processes and problem solving" in families.

Finally, Walsh also underlines the synergetic and interactive nature of family resilience, resilience in one area triggers the resilience in other areas, such as mother's empowerment triggering children's, or repeated successes increasing confidence as is the case with the results of this study.

4.2.3. Mother and Child as a Team for Solidarity

In terms of family organizational patterns, participants explained how they managed to stick together in the face of male violence and during building lives into the "unknown". They seemed to show family connectedness, even in the face of traumatic events. Walsh (2012) explains how family connectedness enables

mutual support and collaboration to meet challenges. Furthermore, participants seem to be solution-focused instead of blaming a member which is a determinant of functional coping style according to Figley (1989).

Another resilient quality of participant mothers' newly formed family's seem to be flexibility. Participants described being flexible enough to meet different needs of family members such as mothers taking up father roles or children supporting the mother by taking diverse responsibilities as the family adapts to new conditions. Although taking up adult roles obviously has its toll on children's well-being, this seems to be a survival strategy the post-separation family managed to devise in this context. A mother explained how she needed to function as a "father" during her sons' adolescence but gave up that role, as it was no longer necessary afterwards. This also highlights the flexibility to adapt to new developmental needs of children and shifting when necessary. Furthermore, some mothers who underlined their children had to mature fast, acknowledged, and mirrored to their children, their contribution and the weight of the burden they were obliged to but not supposed to carry as children. They also seemed to find a balance between flexibility and stability as they explained many family rituals and routines or school or work activities as anchors.

As a result, not only this theme refers to a substantial resilience on the part of the mother- child relations and the newly formed family, they also are skills and capabilities that may serve to prevent the transmission of violence to the following generations.

4.3. THEME II: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE DESTRUCTIVENESS AND ABSENCE OF FATHER

4.3.1. Divorce, Post-separation Violence and the Lack of Fathering Functions

The process of divorce involves many issues that can be highly conflictual such as custody of children or alimony. Women's getting legal and social aid during this time is crucial (Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022) as the legal processes

is highly demanding and exhausting and women often not only struggle against their violent partners but to a whole patriarchal system embedded in institutions (Ekal 2011; Humphereys, 2010). In the sample, two women who did not get institutional support as they separated were also the ones who had to give the custody of one of their children to their fathers who were perpetrators of violence. It is documented in the literature that post-separation is a time where there is increased risk of violence (Bancroft et al., 2012; Chiara & Humphereys, 2017; Humphereys et al., 2019; James- Hanman & Holt, 2021; Katz et al., 2020; Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019). At this critical time, handover of children to fathers for child contact provides an opportunity for perpetrators to further abuse partners and their children. Perpetrators can use it to pressure the woman for re-union, to retaliate with harassment, threats to instil fear and stalking and to use the legal system to cause harm to women and children (Bancroft et al., 2012; Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019). This also poses serious risk for mother and child murders (Bancroft et al., 2012; James- Hanman and Holt 2021). It is underlined that often child services demand women to leave their abusive partners for children's well-being, however, when courts or other institutions advise or rule for father involvement violence continues, and women and children's safety is jeopardised (Chiara & Humphereys, 2017; Humphereys et al., 2019). This is what Peled (2000 cited in James- Hanman & Holt, 2021) calls the "construction of fatherhood in terms of rights to children" rather than prioritizing children's well-being and nurturance. This also causes an obstacle for women and children to continue to build stable and thriving lives. Wuest et al. (2003), draws attention to this problem in the context of the newly formed family. They emphasize that "intrusion" in the form of unwanted interference from coercive control, custody and access difficulties take the post-separation family from long-term focus goal mode to survival mode which interferes with its growth and stability. Similarly, Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019), conceptualizes the post-separation process as a tension between *"growing through struggles: transforming the self towards healing and empowerment"* and *"losing frame being in a state of loss and uncertainty"*. She documents how struggling with post-separation violence disrupts

women's feeling of safety in their new environments, and their sense of control, autonomy and agency.

Similarly, in this research 6 of the 8 participant women had been exposed to post-separation violence and 4 of the participants got restraint orders as their life security was at risk after separation. Living with confidentiality orders constricted women and children's lives and kept them at a state of alertness and caused them to leave their jobs or schools when perpetrators found their place. Three other women whose children had contact with their fathers, recounted that their fathers were also perpetrators of post-separation violence that affected their children. Derya explained how the perpetrator attacked the house she was living, breaking windows many times causing the police to intervene, or attacked the houses she was working causing her to lose her jobs that put further strain on their already precarious living conditions.

As explained in the previous theme, children can be used to harm the women as a tool after separation. In a similar vein, in this research children are reported to be abused to get to the women. Nilay, recounted how her ex-husband gave her daughter to state care saying "*her mother does not look after her*" with false accusations and the child needed to stay there for 10 days until the authorities handed back the child to her mother. She further explained how his husband used to make her 6-year-old daughter swear her on the phone.

Thiara and Humphereys (2017) in their article demonstrate the ways the perpetrator of abuse remains in the lives of children. They encourage practitioners to try to understand the "absent presence" of fathers in children's lives and psyches (traumatic memories like sleep problems, nightmares, angry outbursts, low self-esteem) and perpetrator's impact on the mother-child relationship even after separation. Perpetrators may undermine a mother's parental authority, they may try to manipulate the children to turn against their mother, children may be allied with the perpetrator to feel safe as they perceive him to be stronger (Bancroft, 2012). The impact of the abuser may not be immediately visible, and mothers can be held responsible for children's problems. Thiara and Humphereys (2017) underline how even the terminology tends to hide it, as domestic violence is considered under the

umbrella term violence against women and a term that refers to the destructive impact of fathers on children such as “fathers who use violence” is not used (Humphereys et al., 2018).

4.3.2. Negotiating the Gap Between the “Normative” and the “Real” Father

Many researchers in the literature, explain how fathers who use violence and abuse tend to cause more harm to children’s well-being, mental health and development rather than causing resilience (Bancroft et al., 2012; Harne, 2011; Heward-Belle, 2016; Humphreys et al., 2019; Mackay, 2017; Thiara and Gill, 2012 cited in Katz et al., 2020). The focus on the fathering skills of perpetrators and their deficiency is emphasized in the field as an emerging area of research. It is documented how perpetrators resist to see the impact of violence on their children and take responsibility for it (Bancroft, 2012; James- Hanman & Holt, 2021). Humphereys et al. (2019) refer to qualitative studies conducted (Stover & Margos, 2013 cited in Humphereys et al., 2019), and emphasize that the sense of entitlement, self-centred attitudes, and over-controlling behaviour of some men does not allow for a good enough fathering that need perceiving the needs of their children. They are more often authoritarian, rigid, neglectful, inconsistent, uninvolved and/or overly permissive, and manipulative and tend to use physical violence towards their children as a disciplining technique more often (Humphereys et al., 2018; Katz et al., 2020). Furthermore, as mentioned in the discussion of the previous theme, fathers during child contact can attack mother’s parenting authority and dignity in their children’s eyes or try to turn children against her (Bancroft et al., 2012; Humphereys et al., 2019) and sometimes, other family members are also involved (Chiara & Humphereys, 2017). However, when mothers are the main caregivers of the children, after child contact, they need to deal with the destabilizing after-effects on children (Bancroft et al., 2012). As one of the participants of the study explained she needed to “repair” their children every time they went to stay with their father and his family who scared the children to pressure them to convince their mother for a reunion. In a similar vein, Jaffe et. al (cited in James- Hanman & Holt, 2021)

warns about the perils of children's exposure to poor role modelling during contact arrangements which is now beyond the supervision of the mother (Bancroft, 2012). This poses a serious impediment for the post-separation recovery and adjustment of children.

Similarly, the results of this study point to a general lack of fathering functions. Fathers did not contribute financially to children, (which is also a continuation of economical violence) they made the already challenging post-separation life of mothers and children more fragile with their destructiveness whether in the form of threats that lead women to take confidentiality orders or through abuse via child contact. Bancroft et al. (2012), emphasizes that perpetrators more often refrain from paying child support (than non-batterer fathers). They also underline how women refrain from being insistent about it as they may threaten to hurt the woman, or the woman may be afraid of retaliation if she makes a case for it. Women in the study, were not able to get child support, and they refrained from pressing for it as either they were hopeless to get it due to the economic violence they were already exposed to during marriage and because they wanted to sever any ties that might contribute to the continuation of abuse.

In this respect women in the study, recounted conflicting emotions. On the one hand, they were grieving because their children had absent fathers, and were anxious that children would be adversely affected by this absence, on the other hand, they often acknowledged that children felt freer and more confident after moving away from their fathers. Furthermore, for the ones who had child contact, this often came with continued abuse that also affected their children or neglect and inconsistency appearing and disappearing for indeterminate time periods, on the part of the father. It was surprising how despite fathers' pervasive destructiveness or absence women tried to keep them in their place as "normative fathers" and denoted how they didn't impede their children from seeing their father or how they hid the vices of their fathers with the assumption that "every child needs a father". This is in the line with the tension mentioned in the literature that protecting children's well-being often contradicts with anxieties related to the normative

expectation that children need both parents for healthy development (Fogarty et al, 2019).

Finally, the general absence of fathers or their fathering functions can be thought to be more visible after separation. Women seemed to attempt to compensate for this absence by saying *“I have become both a mother and a father”*. Although this seems to bring extra burdens to women and the relationship nevertheless, it involves an acknowledgement and an attempt to repair that seems to have strengthened the mother-child bonds. The absence/ loss of the fathers and its undeniability after separation can be considered to open a place for its acknowledgement and for grieving. Otherwise, in violent intact marriage relationships fathers can be present but at the same time more immediately destructive or absent with respect to fathering functions which can render it to be experienced as an “ambiguous loss” (Boss, 2009) creating even more complicated feelings for children and limiting mothers’ capacity to take charge.

Sibling relations seemed to be affected by fathers’ abuse. Some of the participant women explained how their father discriminated children, often favouring the younger one for the elder or showing violence more to one of them. The divisive behaviours and favouritism of fathers who use violence is also mentioned in the literature (Bancroft et. al., 2012). This is recounted to have caused continuing strife among siblings even after separation. Younger children who can feel yearning for their fathers can be judged by older ones to betray the mother. Katz et al. (2020) warns that coercive controlling fathers can display what they call “admirable fathering” and “dangerous fathering” interchangeably which creates confusion in the feelings of children. As “admirable fathering” creates a bond between fathers and children, “dangerous fathering” instils fear. Therefore, especially younger children can miss their fathers after separation even though they suffer from coercive control. On the other hand, the older children positioned as the companion and supporter of mothers can be parentified and bully the younger sibling identifying with the perpetrator. Bancroft et al. (2012) also draws attention to the danger that violence among siblings is more common among children growing up with violent fathers especially boys who can identify with the

perpetrator. Therefore, dynamics of violence might re-surface even after separation leading to an intergenerational transmission.

4.4. THEME III: BONDS OF CARE IN A HOSTILE CONTEXT

4.4.1. Resentment towards Family of Origin

One of the most recurrent codes is the “resentment to family of origin” where women express a deep disappointment, anger and feelings of being left alone in their struggle to leave their abusers. Participant women got married and had children either as children or at a very early age (between 16-19 years old). Almost all participant women except one, went back to the home of their family of origin or siblings with their children to escape violence many times before they finally managed to separate. However, after a short stay they were sent back to their abusers or allowed to stay on condition of leaving their children behind with the perpetrators. Two of the participants were forced to marry the man who raped them. Their resentment and anger are unavoidably understandable. Furthermore, as Mine put it explicitly saying her family didn’t “protect/adopt” her (“*ailem sahip çıkmadı*”), and that she didn’t give her blessing to them (“*hakkımı helal etmiyorum*” meaning “they have infringed upon my rights, and I don’t forgive them for it). This can be considered in the light of Kandiyoti’s (1988) concept of patriarchal bargain, where loyalty is exchanged for protection and participant women felt betrayed because despite their propriety and loyalty to their families, they did not grant the protection they so much needed, while being exposed to their husband’s violence. Ekal (2017), in her ethnographic work on shelters, explain how women coming to shelters considered themselves weak and unprotected (*sahip çıkılmamış*) by their families in the face of domestic violence and imagined the state to have been their protector/ guardian. She points to how when there is not an empowering work in shelters that convey women that they are not weak or “lacking” when they do not have families, women continue to feel themselves as “deficient”. This leads the way to reproducing a hierarchical relation of guardianship, where women do not appear

as autonomous agents of their lives. She elaborates how a patriarchal familial imagination also structures the relations with the state and does not posit women as rights bearing citizens.

In that respect, participant women in this study explained how betrayed they felt in terms of paternalistic familial protection, however, it was also striking how they constructed themselves mainly in their relations to their children and then their own agency and friends and other social support. Mine asserted: *“I can do more, if I was able to get so far then I can as well do more. I don’t need a man, a relative or my parents. I need my children and they need me.”* (Mine:279-280). Her expression although as a result of disappointments with the family and the violence endured at their hands (also a betrayal and disillusionment about the patriarchal family) imply a strong sense of agency and she refers to motherhood as a position of mutual relational empowerment. It can also be helpful to remember how some participants expressed they have become *“both a mother and father”*. Motherhood and its diverse roles and entanglements in women’s lives particularly in the context of domestic violence needs further thought and research.

Finally, some women were able to derive partial support from their families. One of the participants expressed how grateful she was when her father finally accepted to support her for divorce, the same participant had considered her mother’s constant support invaluable, and three participants expressed how their sisters were there for them. Family’s support is considered as fundamental, so is its absence. This is understandable considering the centrality of the family in social, community, institutional, economic, and political life in contemporary Turkey. Similarly, Dissensus’ (2021) research points to the centrality of family as having a supporting or impeding role in women’s decisions to leave violent relationships. However, they also stress how the intervening of woman’s family reproduces the paternalistic guardianship relations in the family instead of opening a way to autonomy.

4.4.2. Being a Single Parent in a Gendered Hostile Context

In parallel with Yalçınöz-Uçan's (2019) findings, when women in the study went out of solely domestic roles to work or to deal with life's exigencies in public spaces (such as shelter or children's schools), this seemed to have empowered them with new relational sources which helped them build self-esteem. However, they also explained how they faced stigmatization and discrimination as divorced women. This is also in parallel with Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, (2022); Nikparvar (2021) and Özar and Yakut-Çakar's (2012) delineations of social, familial and policy discrimination against divorced women in different settings. The neo-conservative regime of AKP (Acar & Altınok, 2012; Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012; Yazıcı, 2012) that places the patriarchal family at the centre, contribute to the marginalization of single parent families formed through divorce. Participant women explained how tiring and also emotionally draining it was for them to confront this when they were already vulnerable fighting for building new lives in the aftermath of domestic violence. They described strategies they devised to work around it, that ranged from hiding being divorced from kin, neighbours, or landlords to confronting them by self-assertion.

4.4.3. Overburdening of Women and Children in the Absence of State Responsibility

Many writers point to a global shift towards neoliberalism and the resultant retreat of the state from health care, education and social services relegating these functions to the market, civil society, and the family (Acar & Altınok, 2012, Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2012, Yazıcı, 2012) which has its particular manifestations in different regions and local non-Western contexts. Acar & Altınok (2012) draws attention to the coming together of neo-conservatism with neoliberalism and its implications for "the politics of the intimate" which they describe as policies, decisions, discourses, laws, and norms that make up the private realm. This new moral, economic, political order, has serious implications for women's rights and

violence against women. Women's attributed gendered roles of homemaking and caregiving are ideologically supported as their fundamental sometimes only roles. Moreover, the welfare system is built in such a way as to overload these domestic vocations such as allocating small allowances for disabled care instead of opening institutions that would take responsibility. The insufficiency of public pre-school and child-care services, long working hours and the unmatching times of work and school practically impedes women's employment options or make them obliged to arbitrary family support. The family support most often comes from other women in the family, where mothers may feel dependent on their elder family members. Furthermore, child-care becomes a life-long profession for many women even in later ages.

In the absence of family support, institutional facilities or enough income to afford child-care, participant women in the study, felt obliged to leave a one-year-old child to the care of an eight year old child, to give keys to a six year old, to appoint one child to fetch the younger from school, to lock children to the apartment which endangered children's safety. On the other hand, two women had adult children that were employed, they made a living with their earnings while mothers looked after younger children. This economic dependency created unease for the mothers, and they explained how they were looking for ways for reconciling work with the care of their younger children. There were many children in the sample who started working as children, which points to the burdens children have to carry as "parentified children" in case of diminished state responsibility for welfare functions which endanger their growth, well-being and future prospects and rights. Older children seemed to be required to take on parental roles in the family not only in terms of tasks but also frequently assuming the role of emotional caretaker by hiding their own feelings and fears for the parent who is drained through being exposed to violence and an overload of responsibilities. Other smaller children can act out in an attempt to express their anger and to gain parental attention which can make parenting more challenging for women. One of the participants, were living with her family of origin on separation, yet she explained in detail how hard it was

for her to be obliged to her family, subject to her family's authority, unwanted interventions, and judgements about being divorced and "deficient".

For some women, a supportive adult was able to be integrated to child-care labour, these were sisters' solidarity for two women, employers' tolerance about bringing children to work and neighbour support for another woman who lived in an apartment building where there were other single mothers who kept an eye on each other's children in need. Sisters emerge as a more equal solidarity companion. As one of the participants explained how she tried to build a reciprocity by supporting her sister's needs like buying groceries for her or another participant who gathered support from neighbours explained how as they were also single parents, they did not consider her as "deficient for not having a man".

Women participating the study described in detail how hard it was for them to rebuild lives as of ensuring day to day care, safety, and stability for their children at the same time as earning a living and how alone they felt at times along the way. The participants of this study not only had to combat against domestic violence but also against poverty and living without social security. As children, most women were not able to benefit from their right to education and many only started being employed shortly before or after they separated. Therefore, they were not equipped for the job market and, mostly worked in informal jobs with low payments. Those leaving the shelters were supported by temporary aids which they appreciated yet were insufficient. Not having social security seems to have made them especially vulnerable in cases of crises such as a serious illness that need long time for recovery or more general crises like pandemics. One of the participant's 16-year-old son started a full-time job just before her mother was hospitalized for an extensive period and she admitted how they had to depend on his income and how this made her feel cornered between survival needs, and his son's well-being.

Furthermore, Mullender (2002) draws attention to how women who are exposed to domestic violence are less likely to receive child-support, more often have more disadvantageous property settlements and are supported less by the father of their child and kin about child-care (Mullender, 2002).

Participant women in the study, often voiced their resentment to their families of origin, which is more than understandable as many families described, were either silent witnesses or perpetrators themselves like forcing their child to marry the man who raped her. However, the demands for protection from the family is not voiced by most women from the state except two participants. It seems that women were also considering the family as the primary address of social security. It seems, therefore, highly critical to raise these demands on a social, and political level even more strongly that would enhance women's autonomy.

In that respect, a psychological perspective that integrates structural family interventions that would support the family to relegate "parentified children's" adult roles to adults after the traumatic life events of domestic violence would be conducive, yet, this may not be possible or insufficient in cases where the context of narrowed down neo-liberal and neo-conservative policy does not offer alternatives and respite for sustaining lives. As Walsh (2012) emphasizes a biopsychosocial approach that takes into account the context is crucial to enhance resilience and well-being. In that respect, policy and mental health and well-being of women and children are intricately interwoven.

4.4.4. Who's Family?: Alternative Forms of Solidarity

Help seeking and reaching out to resources in and out of the family, being able to rely on others and providing support for others in difficult times are important determinants of family resilience (Figley, 1989). In this respect, participant women were able to mobilize the solidarity of diverse relational resources like female friends (especially who have gone through similar struggles), employers, social workers and feminist advocates, and few selected female kin. These people were often mentioned with reference to a family analogy as people who have been there for them, with gratefulness. However, the surprise and gratefulness also seemed to refer to an assumption that primary solidarity and care can only be provided by family. As Yalçınöz-Uçan (2019) denotes, cut off with families bring a feeling of being isolated and alone as a feeling and also in practice.

These promising relations of solidarity are not culturally recognized, and this may be thought of imbuing them with a feeling of intangibility no matter how present and influential they are in women's lives. It seems to be critical task, to be able to understand and build on the powerful the role of these informal networks of solidarity and affection in women's lives.

Luepnitz (1997), insisting on the impossibility of a value neutral therapeutic stance encourages therapists to be cognizant of their ideologies and belief systems that affect the therapy process. She further draws our attention to the implications of thinking of the family as a social and historical construct which is also in line with the feminist motto "the personal is political" (Luepnitz, 1997). In that respect, a critical thinking of family and bonds of care, affection and productive labour is necessary especially for family therapists, social workers and feminists that work with women and children from diverse backgrounds who are rebuilding lives in the aftermath of domestic violence.

Although a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is an inspiring literature that focuses on families and ties of solidarity beyond the conventional family. For example, Budgeon and Rosenail's (2004) collection of articles attempt to inquire the multiplicity of practices of care and intimacy that emerge on the margins or outside the category of the "family". Daskalaki and Fotaki (2017) investigate how feminist solidarity can respond to the neoliberal crisis that make lives hard to sustain in crisis-stricken Greece, also dwelling on its potential for subverting existing power relations. Mizielinska, (2017, 2022), focuses on "families of choice" and queer kinship ties based on research on Central and Eastern European contexts. Finally, the book compiled by the collection of presentations named "Is Another Family Possible?" (Başka Bir Aile Mümkün mü?), Boztekin (2014) dwells on how the family structure and imagination in Turkey is shaped by social, political, and legal forces and how alternatives can be imagined, and space opened for diverse practices. These inspiring efforts can also be thought in connection with the backlash on women's rights and anti-gender movements across the globe that centre themselves around a conservative notion of "the family". As a result, this literature attempts to diversify the concept of family to encompass

alternative ways of forming bonds of care in its complexity in the face of the eroding forces of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. Yet, a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, this can be an area to focus for further studies.

4.5. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

4.5.1. Promoting Resilience in Women, Children and Families in the aftermath of Domestic Violence

Many postmodern systemic theories emphasize building on strengths of individuals and families to bring out meaningful change. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of taking a biopsychosocial perspective that takes into account diverse factors in interaction (Walsh, 2012). This research specifically focuses on and demonstrates how male partner violence has devastating effects on women and children's lives, how social, cultural, economic, political factors enable the perpetuation of this violence, and how women and children devise ways to build non-violent, creative, and nurturing lives. In this respect, this research can help social workers and therapists in the field of domestic violence to have an understanding of socio-cultural context and women's agency working through it. The participant population of this study was especially resourceful and resilient in their struggle to build safe and nurturing lives. It is crucial to understand the complex dynamics at play and learning from the experiences of women and children to support them in their unique roads to establishing secure and nurturing relationships.

More specifically, understanding how women devise strategies in the challenging context of IPV to protect and care for their children is valuable. This understanding runs counter to a deficiency model about women's parenting that enables disguising the responsibility of the perpetrator of violence (Lapierre, 2008). A working model based on assets, strengths and capacities need to be encouraged as women and children are resilient even in the face of the destructiveness of IPV. Children may function not different from or even better than their peers. As this

study also demonstrated, the mother-child relationship is an especially important relational source of resilience in the journey to rebuilding lives. Supporting this relationship can be highly conducive in this respect (Mullender et al., 2002). Focusing on, not the normative but the experienced motherhood is important to understand women and children's experiences and to help them make sense of and process what they have gone through (Bayraktar, 2011). Furthermore, there can be a shroud of secrecy that permeates the mother child-relations as they both want to protect each other from hard truths. In that respect, researchers in the field point to the importance of women and children talking together on their experiences and constructing a narrative together. This will also support family connectedness, increase the communication of needs, and facilitate working as a team (Mullender et al., 2002). Figley's (1989) theorization of "helping traumatized families" offers robust interventions to work with families. The five steps of the treatment are described by Barnes & Figley (2005) as (1) building a commitment to therapeutic objectives, (2) framing the problem, (3) reframing the problem, (4) developing a healing theory, (5) closure and preparedness. Through these processes the family, first listens to how each member is affected by the traumatic event openly without any interruptions. As the writes explain:

"First and foremost, the family members should be instructed to tell their whole story. From their perspective, what happened? What did they do during and following the most upsetting moments of the event? What were they feeling at the time of the event and how are they feeling since?" (p.321)

As the family members speak, rules of silence are broken, and new rules of communication are experienced in session. In later stages, the family through listening, asking, confronting each other integrates different perspectives of its members. Resentments can be expected to be voiced in this phase, for example children can cry out against how hard it was for them to step in for younger siblings when their mother was too physically and emotionally drained due to violence. The family need to be able to answer the following questions together in the end forming a "healing theory": "what happened", "why did it happen", "why did we act as we did during the event", "why have we reacted as we have since the traumatic event",

“what if something like this happens again?” Purging of feelings, understanding, and accepting different perspectives without blaming or victimizing, and recognizing trauma-related consequences, developing a “healing theory” together and projecting on the future, pave the way to family cohesion and acting as a team (Barnes & Figley, 2005).

Services most often focus on crises stages of intervention. However, the post-separation period is crucial as a time of regeneration of a new order both within and outside the new family for women and children. This is a momentous time where new roles, rules, rituals, communication, and interaction patterns are formed as the family searches for a new homeostatic balance.

In the absence of state institutions’ taking necessary measures and support systems to facilitate women’s separation and building non-violent lives with their children, it is the women who carry the whole responsibility without having necessary means and power to support their children and the children are overburdened with responsibilities well beyond their ages. Therefore, relevant public services need to be settled with taking women’s and children’s well-being and autonomy as their basis. Increasing support for mothers decreases the burden that children carry. It is stressed in the literature how women, who benefit from intensive advocacy and appropriate legal services, are more likely to receive social support, experience less violence, and are less likely to be re-abused over time than women who do not have access to advocacy and legal services (Bell & Goodman, 2001; Sullivan, 1991; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999 cited in Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022).

This also has implications for children’s well-being, after the crisis is over, the family structure can be reworked so that children are relegated their proper places, leaving behind some of the burdens they carry as “parentified children”. Barnes and Figley (2005), emphasize the importance of using Minuchin’s (1974) Structural Family Therapy along with Figley’s (1989) empowerment model. It offers a solid model to understand family’s organizational patterns that can be defensively build during living with domestic violence or in the aftermath, both as a response to survival needs and as of avoiding difficult feelings and memories.

Structural interventions can be used to intervene to re-establish boundaries between parent and child subsystems to relieve children from parentified roles and responsibilities. More healthy, adult support systems can be enhanced to support the mother.

Recognizing the “absent presence of the perpetrator” both in the mother-child relationship and the sibling relationship dynamics is critical as this may also contribute the non-transmission of violence intergenerationally (Chiara & Humphereys, 2017).

Limiting intrusion that often comes with father involvement is facilitative to protect family boundaries and avoid re-traumatization. Public policies need to be informed about post-separation violence of perpetrators and strengthen women and children in establishing protective boundaries with appropriate legal, social, economic measures that are well- coordinated. Father-child relationship should take as its basis the well-being and nonviolence of children, not fathers’ unlimited “rights” or entitlement to children (Peled, 2000 cited in James- Hanman & Holt, 2021).

Women can be strengthened to gain a critical understanding of violence and father involvement to better equip them to protect themselves and their children and draw healthy and robust familial boundaries. These boundaries need to be closed to harassment coming from ex-partners or family of origin but open to alternative forms of social support which is crucial in family’s regeneration. Male children can be supported with healthy, nonviolent male role models. Women and children can be supported in grieving about destructive but intimate connections, to avoid pathological hope and support autonomy and taking control.

Support services designed to support women and children in the aftermath of domestic violence is essential. This needs to move beyond the crisis periods, as women and children’s time of stay can be very limited in shelters and mostly women are at a moment of intense stress dealing with diverse and emergency issues when they arrive at the shelter. Individual mental health issues as a result of exposure to male partner violence, maintaining safety, limiting intrusion, mother-child relations, perpetrator’s role as a father and his presence, family rules, roles,

cohesion, communication, memory work of dealing with the traumatic events of domestic violence, building a “healing story” together, reaching out to new relational, institutional and material support, self-care emerge as areas of address that can be worked in diverse modalities such as family therapy, group or individual therapy supported by social work.

From this research importance of strengthening and widening women’s informal networks of solidarity also emerge as a vital area to build on, as they seem to have a major role in women’s survival and thriving. Beyond all these interventions appropriate policies and a well-coordinated institutional response to domestic violence that build on women’s and children’s and feminist advocates experiences in their struggle need to be put in place. Effective policies for women’s and children’s well-being and autonomy in combatting against domestic violence are also crucial for preventing the intergenerational transmission of violence.

4.5.2. Domestic Violence, Systemic Theory and Treatment Interventions for Domestic Violence

Johnson (2008) differentiates different forms of domestic violence. Violence differentiated under the category “intimate terrorism”, “patriarchal terrorism” or “coercive controlling violence” (Kelly and Johnson, 2008) is more frequent, persistent, escalates in severity and frequency. It is exclusively perpetrated by men with the aim of exerting control and dominance, and female partner’s use of aggression is defensive (Johnson, 2008). It is more common in shelter populations (Stith & McCollum, 2011). In this type of violence, battering is not a result of an outburst of anger but a strategy to control one’s partner and ensure dominance in the relationship (Harway, 2003). It is considered as a man’s entitlement and abusive men hold on to this entitlement through self-pity, denial, rationalization, manipulation, and lack of empathy for their partner (Harway, 2003). On the other hand, another prevalent form of violence is categorized as “common couple violence or situational couple violence” by Johnson (2008). This is characterized by poorly managed conflict between partners that escalate, it is

mutual, the severity of violence is mild to moderate with low frequency, it is less likely to endanger the female partner and instil fear. Other types of violence described by Kelly and Johnson (2008) are “violent resistance” which denotes women’s violent response to “coercive controlling violence” to protect themselves or others from injury. Finally, “separation instigated violence” refers to violence perpetrated by men or women with no prior history of violence during the time of the relationship. It is limited to one or two episodes following unexpected or traumatic events. The participants of this study were exclusively exposed to “intimate/ patriarchal terrorism” type of violence, where violence is serious, frequent, and unilateral, perpetrated with the aim of exerting power and control.

Feminist theorists have criticized systemic theory’s approach when applied to male partner violence, as systemic theory has a relational approach that assumes each member of the couple contributes to the violence which fail to hold responsible the perpetrator and puts blame on the victim (Greenspun, 2000). Furthermore, it leads the way to the perpetrators’ argument that “she made me do it” (Stith & McCollum, 2011). Another issue raised by feminists, is the so-called neutral stance of the systemic therapist which might disregard the power and control dynamics used by the perpetrator, and not hold him responsible or show a clear position against violence (Stith & McCollum, 2011). A neutral stance would mean, not recognizing the gendered discourses in sessions and perpetuating inequality and oppression (Janusz et al., 2018 cited in Kılıçer et al., 2020). This is an especially difficult point for couple and family therapists as Kılıçer et al.’s (2020) study shows for Turkish therapists’ experiences where they report having to tackle with hard feelings against men’s sexist attitudes in sessions. Nonetheless, those therapists who do not self-identify as feminists defend adopting a neutral stance, while those therapists self-identified as feminist, reported to actively deal with issues related to gender power imbalance during sessions (Kılıçer et al., 2020). Therefore, therapists training can be enhanced by a gender power and inequality perspective. Accordingly, conjoint treatment of couples is not recommended for cases of “intimate terrorism”. The possible disagreement and dealing with conflictual issues

during therapy can put the woman at risk and the woman may refrain from talking honestly with fear of retaliation (Greenspun, 2000).

Greenspun (2000), describes the possible routes to take working with domestic violence. These are individual therapy for domestic violence survivors, support groups for individual men or women, batterer group interventions for the perpetrators or couple therapy for couples that fulfil certain conditions. These interventions can be used consecutively or conjointly.

Stith and McCollum (2011) who has developed a model to work with couples conjointly, emphasizes that the model is not suitable for “intimate terrorism” but for “situational couple violence”. They adhere to conjoint treatment within safety limits and regulations by stating the possible benefits for this subset population. Stith and McCollum, 2011 emphasize that some women want to end violence but keep the relationship, both partners may want to have couples therapy, when both partners are violent teaching skills to all is more helpful, research demonstrates that low relationship satisfaction can increase IPV, and sometimes when a therapist reflects the relationship dynamics of the couple, victims can feel empowered to leave and finally research reports not high success rates with batterer intervention programs. Many writes point to the centrality of a thorough assessment when working with domestic violence (Greenspun, 2008, O’Leary, 2015, Stith & McCollum, 2011). Stith and McCollum 2011, delineate the clinical guidelines of conjoint work with couples which are assessment, therapist training, community collaboration, and safeguards. For assessment they propagate the use of both assessment instruments and face-to face interviews to assess the severity and type of violence. They want to make sure if the perpetrator takes responsibility for the violence or they blame the other partner for it, if the partner is afraid that conjoint sessions can escalate violence, and if there is serious mental illness or alcohol or drug abuse. They advocate an advanced therapist training in working with domestic violence and high conflict couples, and that therapist be a part of the network for well-coordinated community services such as shelters. They advise making use of different modalities with the same couple such as sessions with individual, couple, and significant others from family systems, or including a stable third in the work

with couples such as a referring agency. Six weeks of separate gender sessions before starting conjoint session and separate sessions before each conjoint session are carried out to check if it is safe to make a conjoint session that particular day and after, it is done to check if it is safe to send the couple home together. In a similar vein, O'Leary, 2015, refers to Aldorondo and Mederos's (2002) provide guidelines for doing couple therapy in the context of domestic violence. These are: the abused partner chooses to enter couple therapy in the existence of other treatment options, abusive men's physical violence is limited to few incidents of minor violence, abusive men's psychological violence is mild and infrequent and not intimidating for the woman, no risk of lethality, man takes responsibility for violent behaviour, man committed to refrain from physical violence and intimidation, the victim is taken in a confidential interview to make sure she does not feel afraid to speak openly during conjoint sessions and does not fear retaliation (O'Leary, 2015).

Therefore, even when conjoint treatment is decided to be safe in some exceptional cases, ongoing safety checks and strict following of clinical guidelines are crucial by equipped therapists with access to well-coordinated domestic violence services. In Turkey, Akyıl et al.'s (2015) study demonstrates how couple and family therapists reported not feeling competent in working with domestic violence issues in contrast to other issues like child-parent or couple relations, or anxiety, and depression. The writers emphasize, how the training curriculums of couple and family therapists need to include specific clinical issues of concern rather than only techniques of different family therapy schools which can often be the case. Furthermore, every couple coming for treatment need to be inquired for violence as fewer than %5 of couples spontaneously report violence on intake, yet two thirds report on self-report measures (Vivian and Malone, 1992 cited in O'Leary, 2015).

Among the participants of the study, one participant woman who had been raped and forced to marry the man who raped her and who had been exposed to lethal forms of violence explained how they were admitted to couple therapy which is a serious violation of woman's safety and work ethics.

Finally, along with using an informed model and modality of treatment, it is crucial to respond to domestic violence holistically on multiple levels such as psychological, social, political, and community levels. As the Istanbul Convention stresses it is the structural inequality between men and women which lead to violence.

4.6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is a contribution to the literature as an investigation about women's experiences of building lives after separation from an abusive conjugal relationship in Istanbul, Turkey with a special focus on women's relations with children highlighting the resilience and challenges pertaining to parenting. There exists few qualitative research focusing on women's experiences during and in the aftermath of domestic violence (Dissensus 2021; Ekal 2011; Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022; Sallan Gül 2012; Soyding, 2018; Ülkümen 2014; Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019), even less so focusing on women's experiences of parenting.

Considering the limitations of the present study, first of all, the sample size of the study was small and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all women who have gone through abusive relationships. The study was conducted with 8 women participants, the group was relatively homogenous as the participants were all under-educated and low SES when they got divorced. Therefore, in terms of class, the study does not encompass women from middle or higher classes who are educated and/ or professionals. Similarly, the study is conducted in Istanbul which is a highly cosmopolitan metropolis with 15 million 462 thousand inhabitants according to Turkish Statistical Institute (2021). The city seemed to be facilitating in terms of hiding and anonymity as one of the participants explains the reason behind her decision to run away from a much smaller Anatolian city where she was inhabiting with her family. In this respect, rural and smaller city experiences can vary significantly where such anonymity is impossible to maintain and the family and community's surveillance over women in the name of "honour" is facilitated. On the other hand, the anonymity is also considered as a hinderance to the security

and safety of children, making women anxious about leaving their children unattended in the streets or other public spaces. Finally, although the job opportunities are more in the metropolis, the longer working hours and the scope of the city makes prolonged commutes inevitable which leads to women's leaving their children alone for longer hours. The conditions in the context of other cities might differ and lead to diverging experiences. Future research can be carried out in different cities allowing for a comparison of the uniqueness and commonalities of experiences.

Except Derya who has Kurdish and Sahafi's origins, the other women defined themselves as Turkish and Sunni, therefore ethnically and religiously, the study does not allow to observe differences. All women were able bodied as they divorced from their former husbands/abusers, how disability impacts women's experiences of separation and building lives would be another topic to further investigate. In terms of age, younger women, women with more than 3 children are not represented in the sample. Pels et al. (2015) in their article, "The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Parenting by Mothers Within an Ethnically Diverse Population in the Netherlands", remark that the context of some migrant communities can make it even harder to talk about and seek support for intimate partner violence due to the existing family and community collectivism. Furthermore, isolation, not having a social support network, problems with finding one's way in a new institutional system aggravates and alters the way intimate partner violence is experienced (Lapierre, 2010). Similarly, the Dissensus Research (2021), also draws attention to the fact that migrant and refugee women have more difficulty in taking the decision to leave as they inhabit in a country where they are not a citizen, as they might not have somewhere to return to or as they may be afraid of losing their children. Consequently, the relative homogeneity of the sample does not allow to discern how gender, class, education, ethnicity, nationality, and ability interact to subject women to differential power dynamics in different contexts (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, A. L., 2015). This is a limitation as women's experiences are structured through these different determinants of identity where intersectional

feminists of the third wave draw our attention. As a result, future research can consider sampling participants from more heterogeneous identities and contexts.

In the study, the duration from time of separation shows divergence. 3 women are separated in the last 1-2 years, 3 women 6-9 years, and 2 women 14-21 years. This variance is taken into account during the discussion as they may lead to different experiences and memory work. The duration is important as it impacts women's and children's adjustment and long-term well-being as well short term. The duration passed after the participants time of divorce/ separation varies in a wide range. For one participant, 21 years has passed after her divorce yet still her narration was included in the study as it had so many parallels with the rest of the participants and the issues, she has raised unfortunately kept their prominence in social life. All the women in the study despite the time that has passed after separation, have built relatively stable and secure lives after going through more turbulent times which points to their resilience. Although some were shaken by pandemics at the time of the research. Further research can be more sensitive to the duration passed from separation to better account for the differences.

Another limitation of the study can be considered as the women were recruited by connections from social services or NGOs. In that respect, all the women had some sort of institutional support, although two of the women reached to services many years after their divorce. Furthermore, 5 of the women had been in shelters as a way to building non-violent lives. Shelter experience which can serve as important resources for empowerment in times of crises when there is qualified feminist social work (Soydinç, 2018; Yalçınöz-Uçan, 2019). Participant women in this study show high levels of resilience and post-traumatic growth in the face of destructive forces of domestic violence. This can be due to the recruitment process as these are all women willing to join a study about domestic violence to tell their experiences of rebuilding lives. It may be assumed that they were at ease and have processed to a certain degree what they have gone through. Furthermore, as social workers were the intermediaries, it can be assumed that they would chose to contact women who have built relatively stable lives and for whom they could have been a source of support. Finally, research shows that shelter populations show

more resilience, less psychopathology and have a more active coping style when compared to women who are exposed to domestic violence but do not leave the abusive relationship (Irmak & Altıntaş, 2017). Women who did not have access to social services or NGOs but chose to leave and rebuild lives can also be included in further research.

A major limitation of the study was the absence of children's voices and perspectives. Although the study attempted to understand how women's relationship with their children evolved in the aftermath of domestic violence, only women were interviewed. As noted before, this is due to mothers' concerns about their children being adversely affected by joining a study about domestic violence and their attempts to protect their children who have already been through so much. Still as Mullender et al. (2002), stress children are not "passive victims or witnesses" but rather have their own unique perspectives, needs and coping strategies in the context of domestic violence which can sometimes be even incompatible with that of their mothers'. Mullender (2002), further suggest that understanding their viewpoints and needs with child-centred research is crucial to tailor services to their needs and develop informed policy. In this respect, developing carefully designed studies appropriate to children's developmental levels and ethically sensitive to encompass children's experiences of domestic violence for diverse populations in Turkey would be an important contribution to the field. Additionally, women hinted at some important points about siblings' relations and how they are differently influenced by and react to domestic violence and adjustment after separation. Nonetheless, the data was not enough to make solid points around the issue. An area of research can be understanding the ways the sibling subsystem reacts to and functions in the resilience of children.

Self of the researcher is a component in qualitative research. The researcher's own experience in working in a feminist domestic violence shelter and having a collection of experiences and observations herself in the field is both an asset as it prepares the researcher to the subject of study but also an inevitable influence both for the conduct and analysis of women's narratives.

Finally, unfortunately member check-in couldn't be done. This would have increased the trustworthiness of the study and to open more space to participant women's decisions and contribution.



CONCLUSION

It is observed that women's separation/ divorce processes also encompassed a disentanglement process with their family of origins and a drawing together with their children. Furthermore, new relationships which may not be defined and recognised culturally as "bonds of obligation" emerge as relational sources of support in women's journey.

In the face of an insufficient social welfare system, negligence and malpractice of institutions, carrying the mental and physical effects of being exposed to violence for themselves and their children, dysfunctional or absent fathers, post-separation violence, stigmatizing society, families that blame or exclude them, women's resilience were impressive. Once they took charge as the sole remaining heads of households instead of feeling dependent on protection, women seemed to find creative ways not only to open a way through life with their children but also provide a holding environment for them, being vigilant about their needs despite being overloaded with responsibilities. Their resilience and the solidarity they are able to gather, seems to be paving the way for breaking the intergenerational cycle violence. Therefore, it is enriching and inspiring to learn from their experiences. However, although the sample was extremely resilient and resourceful, we cannot expect such heroism as there are many other stories of women and children which are marked by the destructiveness of gendered violence to the point of losing lives whose stories remain untold.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Bilgilendirilmiş Onam Formu

Sayın Katılımcı,

Bu araştırma, Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav danışmanlığında İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Selin Ayşe Kaner tarafından tez çalışması kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, şiddetten uzaklaşarak bağımsız hayatlar kurmuş kadınlar ve çocuklarının yeniden aile kurma sürecindeki deneyimlerini, yaşadıkları zorlukları ve ihtiyaçları daha iyi anlamak ve geliştirdikleri baş etme yöntemlerinden öğrenmektir. Bu araştırmanın bulgularının, şiddetle mücadele eden kadın ve çocuklara, onlarla dayanışan kişilere ya da onlara hizmet veren kurum ve kişilere faydalı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Çalışmaya katılmak tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır. Görüşme boyunca konuşmak istemediğiniz bir konu olursa buna değinilmeyecektir. Sorular olumlu hayat deneyimlerinin yanı sıra olumsuz hayat deneyimlerini de kapsadığı için rahatsızlık hissedebilirsiniz. Çalışmanın herhangi bir aşamasında rahatsızlık duymanız durumunda soruları yanıtlamayı bırakabilirsiniz ve istediğiniz zaman hiç bir gerekçe göstermeden görüşmeyi sonlandırabilirsiniz. Araştırmadan çekilmeniz halinde verdiğiniz bilgiler araştırma için kullanılmayacak ve silinecektir. Eğer bu çalışmadan olumsuz etkilendiğinizi düşünürseniz psikolojik destek alabileceğiniz kurumlar hakkında araştırmacı ile iletişime geçebilir veya sizinle paylaşılan bilgi formunda yer alan kurumlara başvuruda bulunabilirsiniz.

Bu çalışmada verdiğiniz bilgileri doğru bir şekilde hatırlayabilmek adına ses kaydı tutulacaktır. Kayıtlar yazılı hale getirildikten sonra silinecektir. Verdiğiniz bilgiler tamamen araştırma amacı ile kullanılacak ve gizli tutulacaktır. Kayıtlara sadece araştırmayı yürüten kişiler ulaşabilecek, 3. şahıs ve kurumlarla asla

paylaşılmayacaktır. Bu çalışmanın hiçbir aşamasında kimlik bilgileriniz istenmemektedir. Araştırmanın yayınlaması halinde kimliğinizi açığa çıkarabilecek bilgiler gizli tutulacak ve araştırmaya farklı katılımcıların verdiği tüm cevaplar birlikte değerlendirilecektir.

Yapılacak görüşmenin 1,5- 2 saat sürmesi planlanmaktadır. Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgiye ihtiyaç duyarsanız ya da yorumlarınızı paylaşmak isterseniz araştırmacıya aşağıda bulunan iletişim bilgileri aracılığıyla ulaşabilirsiniz.

...

Araştırmamıza katıldığınız için teşekkür ederiz.

Bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum ve istediğim zaman görüşmeyi sonlandırabileceğimi biliyorum. Araştırma sonuçlarının benim deneyimlerini yansıtmayı yansıtmadığını anlamak ve teyit etmek için tarafıma e-posta yoluyla ulaşılmasını onaylıyorum. Verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayımlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.

Onaylıyorum ☐

APPENDIX B

Demographic Information Form

Demografik Soru Formu

Doğum yılı

Medeni Durumu

- ☐ Evli- Ayrılmış (boşanma davası açmamış)
- ☐ Evli- Ayrılmış (boşanma davası devam ediyor)
- ☐ Boşanmış
- ☐ Evli değil- Ayrılmış
- ☐ Diğer

Evlilik süresi/ süreleri

Ayrılma tarihi

Boşanma tarihi

Çocuk sayısı

Çocukların yaşı ve cinsiyeti

Çocukların velayet durumu:

- ☐ Annede
- ☐ Babada
- ☐ Ortak
- ☐ Diğer

Eğitim Durumu

- ☐ Eğitim hakkından yararlanamamış
- ☐ İlkokul Mezunu
- ☐ Ortaokul Mezunu
- ☐ Lise Mezunu
- ☐ Üniversite Mezunu
- ☐ Yüksek Lisans Mezunu

☐ Doktora Mezunu

Çalışma durumu

☐ Evet

☐ Hayır

Meslek

Ekonomik Durum

☐ Alt

☐ Orta Alt

☐ Orta

☐ Orta Üst

☐ Üst

Memleket

Etnik köken

Din-mezhep

Fiziksel ya da psikiyatrik rahatsızlık

Alkol/ madde kullanımı

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Yarı Yapılandırılmış Mülakat Soruları

- 1) Bu çalışmada şiddetten uzaklaşarak yeni hayatlar kurmuş kadınlar ve çocuklarının deneyimlerini anlamaya çalışıyorum. Hayatında büyük bir değişimi gerçekleştirmiş ve çocuklarıyla yeniden hayat kurmuş bir kadın olarak sizin de sürecinizi merak ediyorum. Kendi hikayenizden bahseder misiniz?
- 2) Şiddet gördüğünüz ilişkinizden bahsetmek istediğiniz kadar bahseder misiniz? Nasıl başladı, ilerledi, nasıl ayrılmaya karar verdiniz?
- 3) Yeni düzeninizi anlatır mısınız?
 - Nasıl bir hayat düzeniniz var? Nasıl değişti?
 - Yeni hayat düzeninizi kurarken hangi zorluklarla mücadele etmeniz gerekti? Neler size iyi geldi, güç verdi?
 - Sizce çocuklarınızın deneyimi nasıldı? Onlara neler iyi geldi, güç verdi? Nelerde zorlandılar?
 - Eski eşinizle, çocuklarınızın babasıyla birlikte olmamak aile ilişkilerinizi nasıl etkiledi?
 - Çocuklarınızla ilişkileriniz nasıl değişti? Bu süreçte onlara annelik yapmak sizin için nasıl bir deneyimdi? Nelere ihtiyacınız oldu?
 - Yorulduğunuzda, sıkıldığınızda, canınız yandığında iyi hissetmek için neler yaparsınız? Kimlerle zaman geçirirsiniz? (ailecek ve bireysel olarak)
 - Siz bu süreçte nasıl değiştiniz? Kendinizle ilgili neler keşfettiniz?
 - Hayata bakış açınızda bir değişim oldu mu? Bunun yeni kurduğunuz düzeninize bir etkisi oluyor mu?
 - Çocuklarınız nasıl değişti? Onlarla ilgili neleri fark ettiniz?
 - Çocuklarınız bütün bu süreçten ne hatırlasın, neyi öğrensın isterdiniz?
- 4) Kendiniz ve çocuklarınız için gelecekte beklentileriniz neler?

5) Bugün bu konuyla ilgili konuşmak size nasıl geldi?

Son olarak eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?



ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.

