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FEMALE PRISONERS' MOTIVATIONS OF VIOLENT CRIMES: DEFENSIVE OR AGGRESSIVE?

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Abstract

Based on an empirical research, this paper examines whether there is a relation between imprisonment of female offenders and their history of violence. This empirical research was conducted with female prisoners at Ankara Sincan Women's Closed Prison. During the field work, a survey with 134 female prisoners and in-depth interviews were implemented with 22 female prisoners and a focus group study was conducted with eight female prisoners. While crime types are categorized according to the quality of crime and one third of female prisoners were prisoned due to violent crimes; there is no any record about female prisoners' motivation and context of violent crimes. According to the filed study findings, it is found that nearly 80 % of female prisoners was exposed to or witnessed violence before their imprisonment. Besides, it was explored that 12 women out of 22 interviewees and 4 women out of 5 married female offenders from focus group study have been prisoned due to killing/injuring their male abusers.

Keywords: Female Prisoners, Prison, Violence Experiences, Violent Crimes.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the underlying reasons for female prisoners' violent crimes and their violence experiences before their imprisonment in order to see whether there is a link between their imprisonment and their history of violence.

In this paper, female prisoners' background is analyzed from a feminist perspective in which it is argued that female violent crimes are usually arising from their past violence experiences (Dutton and Nicholls, 2005; Daly and Maher, 1998; Schauer, 2006). Similarly, it is also argued here that women commit violent crime against their abusers due to limited choices surrounded them and as a last resort to free themselves from male violence.

Although *violence against women* and *female offending* seem to be two separate social problems, recent studies have been asserting the contrary (Browne, 1997; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011; Dobash and Dobash, 2000). Besides, in spite of a large number of studies conducted primarily on violence against women outside the prison, there is a lack of research in Turkey on female prisoners as victims of violence. Furthermore, limited research on female offenders have focused rather on female prisoners' demographic characteristics and socio-cultural and economic factors pushing them into crime, instead of studying on motivation and context of their violent crimes. Therefore, this study explores a possible relation between women offenders' history of violence and their committing violent crimes. Ankara Sincan Women's Closed Prison has been chosen for a field study.

In order to be able to conduct the field study at Ankara Sincan Women's Closed Prison, a one-year period legal permission from the Ministry of Justice was obtained. To get the legal permission from the ministry, the required legal procedures were followed by submitting letter of application together with the summary of the study and questionnaire, in-depth interview, and focus group study forms. After evaluation of all submitted documents, the ministry has approved implementation of the field study at the prison with female offenders during one-year period. During the field study, a survey was conducted with 134 female prisoners, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted with female prisoners who have been convicted of violent crimes, and a focus group study was conducted with eight female prisoners, who received heavy life sentence.

For this research, especially the underlying reasons for women's violent crimes and their violence experiences are essential to understand whether there is a relation between their imprisonment and their history of violence. However, without violating ethical rules of social science and in order not to re-

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traumatize female offenders by questioning them for their convictions, their violence experiences and crime types were not asked them directly. Such type of sensitive data was provided by the support of social service experts at the prison by examining offenders' criminal records through National Judiciary Informatics System (UYAP) and through indirect questions posed to female offenders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criminology theories usually ignore women by focusing exclusively on explaining male crime or ignore gender issue in crime¹. Calling more attention to male crime than female is probably due to overwhelming domination of men in violent crimes (Britton, 2000: 58).

When women engage in crime, they are perceived as *doubly deviant* as they have violated not only the law but also their gender roles (Marchbank and Letherby, 2007: 285; Heidensohn, 1985: 44). Although female violent crime rates are quite lower than male crime rates, societal reactions to women's violent acts are often more punitive. Women, who challenged their traditional gender roles, are viewed as transgressors deserving to be punished (Heidensohn, 1985: 44).

When female offending is analyzed, it is seen that women commit crime, especially murder or injury, mostly in order to protect themselves against male violence (Ortaköylü et. al, 2004). It is asserted that such crimes committed by women, who were subjected to violence, are mostly arising out of a violent reaction and thus are *not* premeditated (İçli, 1995). Many feminist scholars agree on that women are most likely to commit violent crimes in intimate relationships in a *defensive or reactive* manner and their victimization by their partners is often prior to their offending (Daly and Maher, 1998; Schauer, 2006; Dutton and Nicholls, 2005).

Feminist criminology argues that female and male offending are qualitatively distinct especially in terms of spousal murders (Steffensmeier and Schwartz, 2004: 116); Bernard et al.'s (1982) study explored different factors operational in the murder of wives by husbands and murder of husbands by wives. For *men*, the triggering event to kill their partners was usually *jealousy, separation, or threat of separation* by their female partners. On the other hand, for *women*, the triggering event was usually a physical attack or threat by their male partners, thus homicides committed by women were often motivated by *self-defense*. Bernard et al. found that 70% of the women convicted of such murders had a history of violence by their male partners (Browne, 2005: 239).

Since men mostly killed their partners in reaction to separation or the threat of separation, they most typically commit the homicide outside the couple's shared house, such as on the street or in the victim's private house. Male perpetrators are most likely to kill also other people, such as children or relatives of women, who were with their wives at the time of the homicide and they may kill themselves immediately after the homicide. In such homicide cases, threat of separation or real separation itself is usually reported by the male perpetrators as the trigger event (Bernard et al., 1982: 278 cited in Browne, 1997: 64).

Contrary to men, women are less likely to kill their ex-partners or ex-husbands. Women most typically commit the partner homicides within the couple's shared house or in the women's private house if the former partner threatens her there. Homicides are committed by women mostly due to increasing attacks, sexual assaults, and threats. Although it is commonly assumed that women are most likely to kill their partners while they are sleeping in order to accomplish the homicide, most partner homicides by women were committed at the time of attack against the woman (Maguigan, 1991 cited in Browne, 1997: 64).

Considering the above arguments claiming that female prisoners usually commit violent crimes in response to the male violence, it might be asserted that violence against women, especially intimate partner violence, *doubly victimizes* abused women; which in turn put many women in prison, as a result of injuring/killing their abusers.

Women Convicted of Killing Their Partners

In her research on homicides, Browne found the link between homicides by women and violence against women by male partners because a significant proportion of partner homicides by women are committed in self-defense and in response to aggression and/or threats by their male partners. Furthermore, while most women, who killed their violent partners, had no history of crime or violent behavior, their struggles to live with their violent partners eventually resulted in their violent acts as well (Browne, 1997: 65).

According to Totman (1986), although several studies argue that some female victims of male violence might resort to violence, only a few studies have focused on the motives and consequences of such female violence. Having research on the background of female offenders, Totman found that, when women's

¹ See Merton's anomie theory (1961), Lombroso's theory of born criminal (1876), Robert Agnew's general strain theory (1992), Cohen's lower class reaction theory (1955) in Ronald L. Akers and Christine S. Sellers (2008). *Criminological Theories: Introduction, Evaluation, and Application*, OUP USA

several strategies to cope with intimate violence, such as leaving home or attempting suicide failed, they saw killing their abusive partners as the only way out (cited in Browne, 2005: 240).

The murder or injury of male abusers by female survivor of violence usually leads women's imprisonment. In 1994 in the US, the number of women, who were held in prison for defending themselves against the abuser, was around 2,000 and most of these female prisoners pose no threat to society (Ferraro, 1997: 137).

These studies show that female survivors of violence usually use violence against their male partners as a result of being exposed to their assault. Therefore research on female offenders' violence against their intimate partner emphasizes the importance of analyzing the *context* and *motivation* of women's use of violence (Conradi et al., 2012: 121).

Motivation of Female Offenders

Although several small-scale surveys (i.e. Aizenman and Kelley, 1998; Amen-Monaghan study, 1998; Archer, 1999; New Zealand Dunedin survey) show that men and women are equally aggressive in domestic relationships, the gendered aspect of motivation for this aggression has been ignored. Increasing arrest rates of women in domestic violence indicates the importance of understanding the reasons for women's use of intimate partner violence, as well as men's (Caldwell et al., 2012: 127).

Motives refer to underlying psychological processes activating people's thinking, feeling, and behaving. Hamberger (1997) found that the common motivations of both men and women are control, anger expression, and threatening communication. On the other hand, motivations peculiar to male prisoners were alcohol and attempts to control, while motivations peculiar to female perpetrators were response to verbal abuse and retaliation or self-defense. Therefore, motivations behind violent acts of women and men seem to be different (Conradi et al., 2012: 122).

Women's motivation for aggression against intimate partners can be categorized into two types: *defensive/reactive* motives (response to an attack) and *active/goal oriented* motives (such as retaliation). Research shows that *self-defense* is the primary motivation of women's aggressive behavior, as the justification of the majority of female prisoners of intimate partner violence is self-defense. Frequency of self-defense motivation among female prisoners is not surprising as the majority of women who resorted to intimate partner violence also experienced violence from their partners (Caldwell et al., 2012: 127).

Some national studies indicate that self-defense is not the only motivation reported by women. Other motivations such as controlling their partners, calling their partner's attention, retaliation for an emotional hurt, or expression of anger could be identified for women's aggression (Walley-Jean and Swan, 2009). Given our society's male-dominated structure, mentioning about other motivations for women's aggression rather than self-defense, such as attempt to control their male partner or expression of anger seems not to be valid or common in Turkey's conditions due to the oppressive patriarchal social structure.

Context of Women's Use of Violence

It is important to analyze the context of women's use of violence in examining female offenders because although the violent act is the same, the reasons for women's use of violence may be very different from those of men's use of violence. The context of a crime is often ignored by quantitative studies, particularly those focusing on the differences between male and female offending rates in intimate partner violence. Context refers to the characteristics of an offense, which include the location where the offense happened, the features of the prisoners and victims, relationship between victim and prisoner, the extent of the injury, and the aim of the offense. Hamberger (1997) found, in his research on the context of female prisoners of intimate partner violence, that two-thirds of the female prisoners had been assaulted and used violence to protect themselves or to retaliate for previous violence against them (Conradi et al., 2012: 122).

It can be concluded from the above arguments that analyzing the *context* and *motivation* of women's committing violent crimes is crucial in order to see whether there is a link between women's use of violence and their history of violence.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the aim of this study a field study was conducted with female prisoners in Ankara Sincan Women's Closed Prison by using qualitative and quantitative research methods. After getting one year legal permission from the Ministry of Justice, the field study was started in March 2014.

During the field study, a questionnaire was distributed to 134 female prisoners out of total 287 female prisoners, in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 female prisoners convicted of violent crimes, and a focus group study was conducted with the participation of eight female offenders, who received heavy life sentences.

There was no pre-determined selection criteria for female prisoners' participation to the *questionnaire*. In order to obtain detailed data about background of women's use of violent crimes, female

prisoners convicted of violent crimes were selected for the *in-depth interviews* and female offenders punished with heavy life sentence were selected for the *focus group study*.

The research was designed as a descriptive study due to the nature of the topic thus; this study was conducted within the framework of a *case study* and does not intend to generalize collected data to all female prisoners in Turkey. Even if the collected data may give us an idea about socio-demographic characteristics of female offenders to be generalized to all female offenders in Turkey, their life stories could not be generalized to all offenders normally.

Questionnaire forms are composed of open- and close-ended questions including socio-demographic characteristics and violence experiences of female prisoners. Collected data was analyzed through SPSS for Windows Version 20 Statistics Program by using frequency distribution.

Survey study was conducted at classrooms above the wards accompanied by a social service expert at prison. Social service experts have been providing various training programs for female offenders at those classrooms at certain times of the day. For each questionnaire study, a female guardian brought female offenders and she waited outside the classroom until the end of the survey in order to take offenders back to their wards. Around 10 female offenders came to the classroom from the same ward to participate in the questionnaire study. When they came to the classroom, I closed the door so that female offenders would not feel that they were observed by anybody outside the classroom and before distributing the questionnaires, I introduced myself as a researcher at a university and mentioned about the content of my study by reminding them this study was based totally on their voluntariness but meanwhile by mentioning that their participation in the study and their sincere answers would be valuable for my research. Besides, I warned them not to mention about their identity on the questionnaire forms, as well as explaining how they should fill in the questionnaire. Female offenders unwilling to participate in the study were not included in the survey but unfortunately they had to wait for other female offenders in the classroom until the end of the questionnaire study as they had to be taken back to their wards together by the female guardian waiting outside the classroom. Questionnaire forms were filled out according to female prisoners' preference. As the educational level of prisoners was quite low, I conducted 62 questionnaires as a face-to-face interview by filling in the questionnaires, while 72 female prisoners filled out the questionnaires by themselves. Each questionnaire study took around 45-60 minutes. When they filled the questionnaire, the guardian took them to their wards after the body search. Each questionnaire study day passed through this way and by this means all available and voluntary female offenders staying at each ward were ensured to be included in the questionnaire study.

In-depth interviews were conducted with female offenders in the same classrooms accompanied by, but without intervention of, a social service expert. 22 voluntary female offenders prisoned due to violent crimes were randomly selected and included in the in-depth interviews. Before each interview, the social expert already shared each female offender's background with me to have an idea about her. In the meanwhile, during my research I observed that the volunteer participants have been in a close relation with female social service experts, thus presence of a social worker in the interviews did not seem to bother female offenders as they already shared their life stories with the social experts. After each interview, I explored that each female offender sincerely shared her life story as their statements were consistent with social experts' statements about their experiences. As in the survey study, I introduced myself to each female offender and mentioned about my study and reminded them the interview was based on their willingness. I had the opportunity to record in-depth interviews through a desktop computer existing in the classroom and I was able to save each interview into my personal flash disk. Most of the interviewees were willing to share their experiences and ideas about the issues related to this study. While this sincerity of participants facilitated to get data in detail, some interviews took 3-3.5 hours, although some took 45-60 minutes.

I started interviews by asking several demographic questions such as age, educational level, marital status, occupation, familial structure, etc. to the interviewees. After having data about socio-economic and familial background of female offenders, a certain question, "which reason did bring you to the prison?" was posed to the female offenders by expecting them to tell their experiences from their childhood until their imprisonment. Without needing to pose them any direct question about their violence experiences, fortunately most of them told their life stories by giving all details. This helped me most of the time to learn female offenders' violence experiences without facing any difficulty during the interviews as they told their violence experiences spontaneously.

On the other hand, regarding the psychological aspect of the field study, especially during the in-depth interviews, I was badly affected by the positions of female offenders, when they were explaining their life stories by crying in despair. I sometimes had difficulty to keep my temper when listening to details of their violence experiences but I was able to keep calm by only focusing on listening and recording their statements. However, on the other side, I thought that these offenders were fortunately able to express and

share their bad violence experiences, for them to feel relax as at the end of the interviews, many female offenders stated that they felt relieved after they shared their feelings. During the interviews, when female offenders felt bad and started to crying, I said if they want we can stop interviewing or they can skip that event but they mostly wanted to tell until the end of their bad experiences to relief.

In order to support collected data through questionnaire and in-depth interviews, a focus group study was also conducted with eight female prisoners punished with heavy life sentence. Focus group discussion was conducted in the same classroom, under the monitoring of a social expert, by positioning women as if they were at a round table meeting so that everybody might see each other during the study. Rather than questioning their individual experiences, their opinions about the underlying reasons for female offending were tried to be explored through the focus group discussion. During the focus group study, some of the participants shared the reason for their imprisonment and I learnt the reasons for others' imprisonment from the social experts.

FINDINGS

Crime Type

According to gendered Prison Statistics of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat², 2011), the top three offenses are 'opposition to the bankruptcy and enforcement code', 'opposition to cheque laws', and 'assault' among men; while women are usually imprisoned for being 'opposition to the bankruptcy and enforcement code', 'opposition to cheque laws', and 'theft'. These statistics indicate that men and women have similar types of offenses, of which they are most often convicted, and that both men and women are more heavily involved in minor property offenses than in serious crimes. However, men offend at much higher rates than women for all crime categories except *prostitution*. This gender gap in crime is maximum for serious crimes and minimum for minor property crimes.

During the questionnaire study, before understanding the underlying reasons for women's imprisonment, due to which crime type they were prisoned was questioned indirectly through obtaining this data from social experts at the prison. After collecting each filled questionnaire from female participants in the classroom, the crime type of each female offender was written at the back page of her questionnaire form according to the social expert's expression.

Table 1: Crime Types of Female Offenders at Sincan Prison

	Frequency	Percent
Homicide/ Assault	42	33,6
Property crimes	53	42,4
Prostitution	13	10,4
Drug	17	13,6
Total	125	100,0
Unknown	9	
Total	134	

Table 1 shows crime types of 125 female prisoners out of total 134 participants of the questionnaire. According to the table above, while 33.6 % of 125 respondents are convicted of *violent crimes*, 42.4 % are imprisoned due to the *property crimes*. Besides, while 10.4 % of 125 participants are prisoned due to crime of *prostitution*, 13.6 % are imprisoned due to crime of *drug*. This table indicates that property crimes are more common among female prisoners but one out of three female prisoners has been hold at the prison due to the *violent crimes* and this is an important and quite enough proportion to analyze the underlying reasons for women's violent crimes.

In the database of General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses, female violent crimes are categorized into subcategories according to the *quality of crime* such as, intentional homicide, attempted murder, premeditated murder, instigate, injury etc. However, during the field study, it was explored that underlying reasons for women's violent crimes are not categorized in the data bank of the prison. In other words, women's violent crimes are not classified in terms of victims and reasons of these crimes. Therefore, there is a lack of statistical and descriptive data about motives and context of such female violent crimes. I could get details about the motives and the context of female prisoners' violent crimes only through their statements during the interviews and through expressions of social experts at the prison, just before each interview. For instance, one of the female prisoners is officially categorized to be convicted of *killing close relative*, although it is not that simple in reality; she killed her brother because she had been repeatedly exposed to his sexual assaults. More surprisingly, another female prisoner is officially categorized to be convicted of again *killing close relative*, while her victim was her abusive husband and at the same time her

² See www.cte.adalet.gov.tr

cousin. Another prisoner is recorded in the database as convicted of only *murder*, although the victim of murder was her abusive husband and she killed her husband in a self-defense manner at the time of the abuse. I explored during the field study that such specific offenses should have been recorded separately so that such important data could be used in sociological analyses of female offending or victimization of women.

Marital Status

Table 2: Marital Status of Female Offenders at Sincan Prison

	Frequency	Percent
Married	50	37,3
Single	19	14,2
Divorced	52	38,8
Widowed	13	9,7
Total	134	100,0

Table 2 shows marital status of 134 female offenders prisoned at Sincan Prison. According to the table above, apart from a small part of single (14.2 %) and widowed (9.7 %) female prisoners, 38.8 % of 134 respondents are currently divorced, while 37.3 % are still married. This data shows that the rate of divorced prisoners is higher than the rate of married female prisoners (37.3 %) in Ankara Sincan Women's Closed Prison. Considering the divorce rate (20.88 %) in Turkey (TurkStat³, 2013), which is much lower than the divorce rate in Sincan women's prison, it can be asserted that female prisoners, different from women outside the prison, are more likely to be in tendency to challenge the traditional roles within the family. Besides, it seems that they have achieved to end their marriages despite various types of familial and social pressures to which they were most probably exposed before and after the separation due to the traditional patriarchal structure of our society. Therefore, it can be said that these women are women survivors of male lethal violence during and after separation, although they were perceived as transgressors by their male partners and their families.

Violence Experiences

During the survey study female prisoners' violence experiences were questioned indirectly by asking whether they have witnessed a violent event or not and 118 participants out of 134 female offenders replied this question. According to the Table 3 below, while 20.3 % reported that they have never witnessed any violent event, 36.4 % mentioned that they witnessed violence within their immediate environment and 11 % reported that their mothers were subject to their fathers' assault. Furthermore, 21.2 % reported that they were exposed to their husbands' violence, while 2.5 % were subject to their parents' violence and 5.1 % mentioned that they were exposed to both their parents' and husbands' assault. From the general picture, it can be concluded that apart from 20.3 % of 118 female offenders prisoned at Sincan Prison, nearly 80 % of female offenders witnessed/experienced violence especially by their husbands and parents before their imprisonment.

Table 3: Have you ever witnessed a violent event?

	Frequency	Percent
Never witnessed violence	24	20,3
I exposed to violence by my husband	25	21,2
I exposed to violence by my parents	3	2,5
I exposed to violence both my parents and my husband	6	5,1
My mother exposed to violence by my father	13	11,0
My neighbor/friend/relative exposed to violence	43	36,4
I exposed to discrimination in the society	2	1,7
As I was betrayed I killed my husband	1	,8
I exposed to verbal and physical violence by my business partner	1	,8
Total	118	100,0
Unknown	16	
Total	134	

Table 4: Perpetrators of Violence

	Yes (Frequency)	No (Frequency)	Total Participants
Did you expose to violence by your parents?	10	12	22
Did you expose to violence by your mother?	9	13	22
Did you expose to violence by your father?	8	14	22

³ www.turkstat.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist

Did you expose to violence by your husband?	16	3	19
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In addition to questioning whether female offenders have witnessed violent event during their lifetime, in order to get more details about female offenders' violence experiences, 22 female offenders included in interviews were asked whether they have ever experienced violence by their parents and/or husbands. According to the Table 4 above, 10 out of 22 interviewees reported that they were exposed to violence by their *parents*. To learn the main perpetrator of violence against them by whom they were exposed to violence within the family was asked female prisoners. According to the female prisoners' expressions, the number of women (9) exposed to physical violence by their *mothers* is more than those of women (8) assaulted by their fathers. Furthermore, during the in-depth interviews, participants reported that their mothers were more oppressive and more aggressive than their fathers were. According to the opinions of female offenders, the main reason for mothers' further aggression against their daughters might be daughters' close relation with mother rather than with father in the household during the day and mothers' given roles in childcare and taking care of children's behaviors.

From 22 participants of interviews, 3 female offenders were single, 3 female offenders were married, 10 female offenders were divorced, 3 were widowed, and 3 female offenders killed their husbands. Apart from 3 single female offenders of 22 interviewees, 19 ever-married women were asked whether they were exposed to violence by their *husbands* and 16 out of 19 ever-married female prisoners reported that they were subjected to different types of violence by their husbands.

The above findings from the informants show that 10 out of 22 female prisoners were exposed to violence by their *parents* and 16 out of 19 married women were subjected to violence by their *husbands* before their imprisonment. These figures seem to be high enough to study on female offenders' male violence experiences.

Female Prisoners Convicted of Killing Their Abusers

As mentioned in the previous part, several studies found a meaningful relation between homicides by women and their history of violence (Caldwell et al., 2012; Hamberger, 1997). Besides, studies show that when women's different strategies to cope with intimate partner violence such as, leaving home or attempting to suicide failed, they saw killing their abusive partners as the only way out (Saunders, 1986). My research also shows similar findings as I found during the interviews that, 12 out of 22 female prisoners convicted of killing their abusers had tried various ways to escape from violence such as leaving home, sharing their bad experiences with their parents, and attempting suicide, staying with silence, before they resorted to violence against their abusers. However, when they saw those strategies failed, in order to be able to protect themselves against male violence they had to kill their abusers at the end.

In such data about female prisoners, who committed violent crimes against their abusers it is crucial to see the relation between violence against women and women's use of violence. However, as mentioned, during the field study, it was seen that there is no any specific data about women convicted of such homicides and female prisoners' crime types are categorized into only minor and major crimes in the database of Sincan Prison. Although 22 women convicted of violent crimes were randomly selected for the in-depth interviews, it was explored that 12 out of 22 interviewees are prisoned due to injuring or killing their abusers and 10 out of these 12 female prisoners killed/injured their abusive (ex) husbands. This striking result supports the feminist argument claiming the existence of causal relation between women's history of violence and the main reason for their imprisonment.

Furthermore, it was explored from the focus group study that although women convicted of such murders have usually no any criminal records, they often faced harsher penalties than men who kill their female partners especially in the name of *honour*. While men are usually given a mitigating cause, women are usually exempt from this excuse such as Nevin Yıldırım, who killed her rapist and received heavy life sentence due to the crime of intentional homicide in 2015. My research, especially focus group study results, also support this argument; the focus group study was composed of eight female prisoners who received *heavy life sentence* and although these eight women were randomly selected, it was found that four out of five married women among the participants received such a heavy punishment due to killing their abusive husbands. This striking result shows that although many female prisoners committed violent crimes in response to their abusers' attacks, motivations of such homicides are not regarded as a *mitigating cause* at courts.

Underlying Reasons for Female Prisoners' Violent Crimes

As my study's target group is composed only of female prisoners, I did not have chance to compare the motivations and contexts of female violent crimes with male violent crimes. However, through the interviews with 22 female prisoners, I could get detailed data regarding the motivations and context of female prisoners' crimes. Besides, although I do not have any clue about the motivations of male violent crimes against women, for Turkey, it can be assumed through the media news and statistical data that male

abusers often commit violent crimes against their (ex) wives in motivations of jealousy, non-acceptance of losing control over women, or restoring their honor.

During the in-depth interviews, 16 out of 19 married prisoners reported that they were exposed to various types of violence by their husbands. Besides, 3 out of 6 married and 7 out of 10 divorced female offenders reported that they killed/injured their abusive husbands and one prisoner killed her business partner due to his sexual harassment and another prisoner killed her brother due to his sexual abuse. Other offenses are including robbery, injury of friend, killing child of her husband's sexual partner in retaliation of adultery, and murder of her son's friend.

These findings indicate that more than half of female prisoners convicted of violent crimes are prisoned due to killing/injuring their abusive (ex) partners. As *Informant A* explains, there was no other way out for her.

After I divorced from my abusive husband, he did not let me to see my children and he continuously bothered and threatened me after I left him. Besides, he prevented all my attempts to work. Although I obtained protection order against him, one night he broke into my house and raped me again and again. One day, during my struggles to see my children, he prevented me again and at the event of our fought on the street, he took out a knife and while I was trying to protect myself, I had to injure him with his knife...

In another murder case, *Informant B* reported, "...After I left my husband, he hired a guy to follow me and because the hired guy bothered me everywhere, I had to kill him at the end..." Three female prisoners also said that they had to kill their abusive husbands due to having difficulties to divorce their husbands and they had nowhere to go in order to escape from their abusers. *Informant C* explained her situation as follows:

I could not stand for my husband's sexual attacks; he always forced me to anal sex. I could not share sexual aspect of his attacks with my family as I was feeling ashamed. However, I said my mother that I wanted to divorce from my husband due to his physical attacks. My parents have refused my demand and they said me that if I left my husband I could not turn back to their home. I was feeling helpless as I had nowhere to go apart from my family's home. I wanted to kill him but I could not attempt the murder, as I was very afraid of killing a person. I shared my difficulty with my cousin; he could understand my bad situation. He wanted to help me and he hired two men to kill my husband. Now I'm prisoned together with my cousin due to killing my husband.

Informant D was prisoned due to killing her abusive brother because of his sexual attacks. She explained her experience as follows:

I had to leave my family's home at one night due to my brother's sexual attacks. When I left home, I came upon my father's friend on the street at that night. He asked me why I was outside late at night and I shared my difficulty with him crying. He offered me to go his home until I find a safe place to stay and as I did not another alternative, I had to accept his offer. When we arrived at his home, he immediately raped me and after that event, he locked me in his home for a while. He brought different guys to the home at every night and pushed me to have sexual intercourse with those men. After a while, I achieved to escape from him but I had to work as a sex worker to earn my life. I started to live in my aunt's home, she supported me at that time but in the meanwhile, my brother learnt from my aunt where I was living. One day, when my aunt was outside, my brother came home and attacked me again. When I was trying to prevent his attacks, I had to kill him.

Informant E also explained how she had to kill her abusive business partner as follows:

My relationship with my business partner was not going well then and I initiated a legal action against him to end my business partnership with him by getting my investment back. One day he called me and said that he wanted to meet with me to come to an agreement without legal ways. I accepted his offer and went to meet with him. When I got in his car, he abducted me. I tried to get out the car but I could not achieve. He attacked and raped me in the car. The following day, he came to our shared office and damaged everything at the office. He came with his knife and started to attack me. At the time of fought, I had to kill him to survive.

As it can be seen from their stories, my research shows that women had been gone similar gendered violence coming from their husbands, fathers or brothers and these findings point out women's limited choice in this gender regime of Turkey. In addition to these experiences, half of 12 female prisoners, who killed/injured their abusers, reported that after they left home to escape from their abusers, they had to work as a sex worker since they could not find a job due to their low level of education and insufficient job experience. Besides, two out of six sex workers reported that they have been hold in prison, as they had to kill their abusive sexual partners. According to a research conducted with 138 female sex workers working in brothels in Ankara, 62.9 % of the women were divorced and 45.2 % came from families with a low socio-economic status. Furthermore, 48.5 % of the women were exposed to physical abuse and 13% of the women had been exposed to sexual abuse in their childhood. This study shows that the mean age of first sexual intercourse for women in Ankara brothels was 16.3 years, of whom 34.6 % had their first sexual intercourse before the age of 15 and 60.1 % had their first intercourse unwillingly (Odabaşı et. al, 2012).

In addition to above findings from the in-depth interviews, during the focus group discussion with eight female prisoners, who received heavy life sentence, it is seen that four out of five married female

prisoners have been held in prison as they killed their abusive husbands. Besides, during the focus group study the main reason for women's committing violent crimes in general was asked female prisoners. Six women think that the only men, in fact male violence, lead women to commit crime and female prisoners believe that women are not criminal but actually victims as men leave women no choice but resort violence to survive. From the general picture from the focus group study, female offenders are in tendency to relate female violent crimes with their violence experiences by their male abusers.

Both interview and focus group study results show the importance of analyzing the underlying reasons for women's use of violence in analysis of especially intimate partner violence against women.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on understanding the main reason *why women engage in violent crimes*. In analyzing underlying reasons for women's violent crimes this study is grounded on the feminist argument claiming a meaningful relation between *female violent crimes* and their *violence experiences*. Therefore, their violence experiences are explored to see if there is a link between their imprisonment and their history of violence.

It is explored that nearly 80 % of 118 female prisoners in Sincan prison witnessed or were exposed to various types of violence by their parents during their childhood and by their husbands during their marriage. Apart from physical and psychological violence, it is found that many female prisoners were exposed to sexual violence by their intimate partners, but in addition to partner's sexual abuse, it is explored that some prisoners were exposed to incest rapes. Even worse, during the in-depth interviews with 22 female prisoners convicted of violent crimes and focus group discussion with eight female prisoners with heavy life sentence, it is explored that 16 female prisoners out of 30 offenders are imprisoned due to killing their abusers.

However, as mentioned in the previous part, to support this study's argument, asserting the relation between women's violent crimes and their violence experiences, getting information about motivation, context, and victims of all violent crimes committed by female prisoners was impossible due to the lack of such data in the database of prison system in Turkey. Therefore qualitative research is important to explore the unknown data. Lack of such a system to provide information about underlying reasons for women's violent crimes prevents us from recognizing the reality and does not call scholars' attention to this important issue. Furthermore, due to this lack of knowledge, specific rehabilitation programs and legal regulations for such female prisoners are not seen as necessities to be developed. Accordingly, it is concluded that development of a national information system providing data about motives, context, and victims of female prisoners' violent crimes is a social policy requirement to indicate the significance of this social problem and to take measures for these female prisoners as actual victims.

Furthermore, during the field study, it is explored that although many female prisoners were imprisoned due to killing their abusers, they received heavy penalties. For instance, during the focus group studies, it is seen that four out of five ever-married female prisoners have received heavy life sentence due to killing their abusive husbands, although they do not have any criminal record. Compared to male perpetrators of so-called honor killings, who usually benefit penalty reduction due to 'severe provocation', it is not fair to impose harsher penalties on women, who had to kill or injure their abusers in a 'self-defense' manner. Therefore, it can be argued that new legal regulations should be arranged and penalty reductions should be imposed on women, who saw killing their abuser as a last way out to protect themselves.

However, in the meanwhile, to prevent women survivors of male violence from committing violent crimes against their abusers safer ways, to which they can apply to protect themselves from violence, such as help lines, shelters, legal ways, etc. should be announced through further public service announcements and active studies. Besides, considering the limited women's shelters and limited financial resources allocated for female victims of violence, in order to protect many helpless women in the long term, the government should allocate much more fund for this important concern and the number of women shelters should be increased to protect female victims of violence.

Above all, this study supports the argument that although female prisoners stand against violence, many of them are imprisoned due to violent crimes. This means that women are committing violent crimes against their abusive partners not because they are violent but because they saw killing their partner as a last way out to protect themselves. Therefore it can be argued that female violence is different from male violence and can be considered rather defensive instead of aggressive violence.

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