

Intimate Partner Violence Incidents and Solutions Reported by Turkish Couples in Long-Term Marriages: An Exploratory Qualitative Study

Mehmet A. Balkanlioglu 
Georgetown University, USA

Zeynep Ozinci 
Atlantic Health System & NYC Children's Center, USA

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Abstract: This qualitative study investigates the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and the duration of marriage in the Turkish context and explores spouses' perceptions, experiences, and solutions concerning IPV. Participants were thirty Turkish couples married for twenty or more years. Data collection tools were a semi-structured interview, observation notes taken during the interview, and a socio-demographic questionnaire. Data analysis showed that psychological violence was the most reported type, while sexual and economic violence was not reported in long-term marriages. Only a few instances of physical violence were reported during the first years of marriage. Regarding gender, the perpetrators of physical IPV were all men except for only one case, while both men and women were the perpetrators and victims of psychological violence. Spouses' proposed solutions for IPV were identifying the determinants of IPV, encouraging religious and values education, solving economic problems, building communication and patience, learning respect, responsibility, and love; or getting divorced. The study suggests some implications for professionals.

Dr. Mehmet Ali Balkanlioglu has been teaching at the college level since 2011. He has a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of North Texas. Currently, he is a visiting researcher in ACMCU at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

His research interests are marriage and family (long-term marriage, intermarriage, and divorce), gender, race/ethnicity,

and Alevism—the religious creed and tradition in Turkey. His publications include two books: *And Love Has Won: Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage* and *Code of Marriage: 40 Secrets of Happy and Long-term Marriage*, in addition to several articles in both Turkish and English. Dr. Balkanlioglu's work focuses on theoretical and applied Sociology. His recent research projects are: "Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Turkish-American Intermarriage

in the US” and “An Investigation of Alevi Civic Organizations and Activities as a Type of Social Capital.”

He is an expert for the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST/EU-funded program) and a reviewer for international journals (e.g., *International Sociology*). Dr. Balkanlıoğlu has been an invited speaker by national and international institutions and presented his studies at national and international conferences in the US and Europe (e.g., the American Sociological Association and the European Sociological Association).

email address: mab396@georgetown.edu

Dr. Zeynep Ozinci has been a medical doctor since 2008. She is board certified in General Adult Psychiatry and Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

She worked as a research fellow at New York University, finished her residency training at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, and completed the fellowship training at Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell. Currently, she works as a psychiatrist at Atlantic Health System in New Jersey and NYC Children’s Center in New York.

Her interests include family systems, multiculturalism and diversity, community-based research, public health, resilience, social and emotional development, clinical psychology, trauma, ADHD, ASD, OCD, mood disorders, and anxiety.

Dr. Ozinci has published on different topics in the field of psychiatry, lectured on various mental health topics, and presented her studies at national and international conferences and meetings.

email address: zeynep.ozinci@atlantichhealth.org

Background and Literature Review

Violence is one of the most prevalent and devastating social phenomena worldwide, affecting millions of lives with lifetime consequences (World Health Organization [WHO] 2014; 2021). It can be in different forms, such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence.

IPV is defined as “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship” (WHO n.d.:1). Governments, institutions, and organizations have recognized IPV as a significant social problem since it occurs in all countries among all socio-economic, religious, and cultural groups (WHO 2014; 2021; n.d.; Yang, Poon, and Breckenridge 2019).

Although the term IPV is often interchangeably used with domestic violence, violence against

women, and domestic and family violence, it has conceptual and definitional differences (Yang, Poon, and Breckenridge 2019). For example, domestic violence has a broader definition and is more inclusive than IPV (Krug et al. 2002; WHO n.d.). Domestic violence may include any household members, whereas IPV might be limited only to partners or spouses (Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu [BAAK] 1995; Johnson 2005; WHO, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and South African Medical Research Council 2013; Peterman et al. 2020). IPV is used only for married couples in the current study as it focuses on long-term marriages. The terms *physical*, *sexual*, and *economic violence* were used as in the existing literature and the term *psychological violence* was used instead of verbal and emotional violence though some studies preferred to use them separately (e.g., Seith 1997; Krishnan, Hilbert, and VanLeeuwen 2001).

IPV is one of the significant social problems in Turkey, where this study was situated. Nearly one in two women in Turkey experienced a type of IPV in their lifetime, according to the findings of two research studies conducted in 2008 and 2014 (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı and Hacettepe Üniversitesi [ASPB and HU] 2015; ASPB 2015a; 2015b). Also, IPV is one of the main reasons for divorce in Turkey (Ministry of Family and Social Policies and Hacettepe University [MFSP and HU] 2015). Although the literature on IPV in the Turkish context has been growing (e.g., Akar et al. 2010; Güvenc, Akyüz, and Cesario 2014; Ortabağ et al. 2014; Alan et al. 2016; Demirtaş, Hatipoğlu-Sümer, and Fincham, 2017; Taşkale and Soygüt 2017; Yılmaz 2018; Dildar 2021), the relationship between IPV and the longevity of marriage needs more attention.

One of the previous international studies found that “the rate of total couple violence decreases from 18.2% for those married under two years to 2.3% for those married over ten years” (Yllo and Straus 1981:345). Besides, “married couples with a lower risk of violence will tend to accumulate in the married population over time” (Kenney and McLanahan 2006:128).

The effects of IPV on the duration of marriage and divorce can vary according to its type. One of the most prevalent, visible, devastating, and costly forms of IPV—particularly for women—is *physical violence*, such as hitting, slapping, beating, kicking, and stabbing (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF] 2000). It could lead to marital conflict, dissatisfaction, and divorce (DeMaris 2000; Krug et al. 2002) or result in femicide (Weil and Kouta 2017). Physical violence against women in Turkish society has remained almost the same within the last decades since the first Domestic Violence Research in 1993-1994. Respectively, it was 34% in 1993-1994, 35% in 2008, and 36% in 2014 (ASPB and HU 2015). Considering the relation-

ship between physical violence and the durability of marriage, physical violence has been positively correlated with divorce in the world (Kalmuss and Seltzer 1986; Kurz 1996; DeMaris 2000; UNICEF 2000; Whitchurch 2008; Dhar 2014). Similarly, it was among the most important reasons for divorce in Turkey (Arıkan 1992). According to the Family Structure Survey in Turkey, 17.2% of divorced women mentioned physical violence (beating/ill-treatment) as the grounds for divorce in 2006. It was a valid reason for divorce for 12.3% of divorced women and 0.5% of divorced men in 2011 (Ministry of Family and Social Policies [MFSP] 2014). Being a victim of physical violence partly explains why most of the divorce decisions (48.7%) were made by women (Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri [HU] 2014) and how violence threatens the stability of marriage.

Physical violence is accompanied by *sexual violence* in many cases both in Turkey and globally, which comprises “coerced sex through threats, intimidation or physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts or forcing sex with others” (UNICEF 2000:2; Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü [KSGM] 2009). In Turkey, 9.1% of IPV was sexual (coerced sex through threats, intimidation, or physical force)—the lowest type of IPV reported by married women in 1993-1994, and it decreased to 6.3% in 2008. Besides, 30.2% of married women said they were subjected to physical and sexual violence in 2008 (BAAK 1995; KSGM 2009). Concerning the relationship between sexual violence and maintaining the marriage, only 0.6% of the women and none of the men reported sexual violence as a reason for divorce in 2011 (MFSP 2014). Nevertheless, spouses who experience sexual violence might hesitate to talk about it due to cultural reasons (BAAK 1995; KSGM 2009). This situation may explain the reason that almost none of the spouses reported sexual harassment as a cause for divorce in 2011.

Psychological violence, which is sometimes called “emotional” or “verbal” violence, is accompanied by physical violence in some cases both in Turkey and in the world (UNICEF 2000; KSGM 2009). It “includes behavior that is intended to intimidate and persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression, and constant humiliation” (UNICEF 2000:2). According to The Research on Domestic Violence in Turkey (1993-1994) report, 84% of IPV by the husband was verbal, and 29.3% was emotional. It was reported that 44% of women were the victims of psychological violence by their husbands or partners at least once in their lifetime in The Research on Domestic Violence against Women report both in 2008 and 2014. It has been the most common type of IPV in Turkey (BAAK 1995; ASPB and HU 2015) and both divorced women and men mentioned it among the primary reasons for divorce (ASPB 2015b). It was found that 17.4% of the divorced respondents (both women and men) “strongly agree” and 30% of them “agree” with the statement that a “spouse’s jealousy and control of her/him” is a valid reason for divorce; 28.5% of them “strongly agree” and 39.3% of them “agree” with the statement that “apathy/lack of emotional support and sharing” is a valid reason for divorce. Besides, 21% of the respondents “strongly agree,” and 26.5% of divorced respondents “agree,” with the statement that “trivializing, verbal aggression, and constant humiliation” is a valid reason for divorce. Finally, 28.8% of the respondents “strongly agree,” and 36.6% of the respondents “agree,” with the statement that “ending the communication with blaming and fighting” is a valid reason for divorce (ASPB 2015a:98).

Last but not least, *economic/financial violence* is the other type of IPV that “includes acts such as the denial

of funds, refusal to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care, employment, etc.” (UNICEF 2000:2). According to the Domestic Violence Research in Turkey report, there was a negative correlation between the likelihood of IPV and the level of socio-economic status (BAAK 1995; ASPB and HU 2015). In other words, the possibility of IPV decreases when income and social status increase. Correspondingly, it was stated that the probability of violence was lower in a family where the wife works compared to a non-worker wife (BAAK 1995; Aizer 2010). Economic violence against married women by the husband was 17.5% in 1993-1994 and 30% in 2014 (BAAK 1995; ASPB and HU 2015). It also threatens marriage stability as one of the significant reasons for opening a divorce case that resulted in divorce in Turkey (ASPB 2015b).

Addressing and preventing IPV is not an easy task and requires serious efforts by individuals, societies, institutions, and governments. Some of the proposals to avoid it are identifying the determinants of IPV (Arthur and Clark 2009), counseling and therapy (Stith, McCollum, and Rosen 2011), interpersonal communication, patience (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1995; Taylor and Sorenson 2005; Gnilka 2007), self-protective actions for victims (Taylor and Sorenson 2005), religious education and getting support from religious institutions and leaderships against IPV (Ellison and Anderson 2001; Ellison et al. 2007; Issahaku 2016; Nason-Clark et al. 2018), solving financial problems (BAAK 1995; Aizer 2010), and developing respect, love, and responsibility (Fields 1983; Gnilka 2007). Additionally, raising awareness of violence, educating the society, considering the family structure, teaching women about their rights and status (Guvenc et al. 2014), and increasing the number of state agencies, shelters, and counseling services (Alan et al. 2016) were among the proposed solutions

in the Turkish context. Finally, governmental efforts to prevent and stop IPV are essential. The Turkish government set some measures to prevent IPV and declared a “National Action Plan on Violence against Women” (KSGM 2016), but the actions do not seem satisfactory. Furthermore, the Turkish government recently declared to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Thus, the “UN women’s rights committee urged Turkey to reconsider withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention as the decision takes effect” (United Nations [UN] 2021:1).

In conclusion, it is evident that IPV undermines marriage, and further studies should be conducted to examine the relationship between IPV and the endurance of marriage. Most of the literature on intimate partner and domestic violence focused on and addressed the victims of violence (that is, primarily women) and the perpetrators of violence (that is, primarily men) concerning social and psychological factors and personal control (Umberson et al. 1998). Additionally, research on IPV mostly has relied on “quantitative methodologies that lack the detailed and contextual information required for complex understandings of IPV” (Corbally, Hughes, and Delay 2016:1009). However, this paper provides a deep and broad understanding of the relationship between IPV and the duration of marriage in the Turkish context by exploring spouses’ perceptions, experiences, and proposed solutions regarding IPV in long-term marriages. It examines the answers to the following questions qualitatively:

- Is there any relationship between IPV and long-term marriage? If so, how?
- How do women and men in a long-term marriage perceive and experience IPV?

- What kind of solutions are suggested by spouses in a long-term marriage to prevent and stop IPV?

Methodology

Sampling

Qualitative research techniques were preferred in this cross-sectional study. Thirty Turkish couples (sixty participants) in long-term marriages in Istanbul were selected using purposive and snowball sampling methods. The sample inclusion criteria were volunteering for participation, having the physical and cognitive ability to understand the questions and provide coherent and relevant answers, and being married to the first spouse for at least twenty years. Potential study participants who were married less than twenty years, divorced from the first marriage, lacked physical and cognitive abilities, and were unreachable were excluded.

In this study, snowball sampling means asking the contacted couples for referrals to recruit other couples married at least for twenty years. First, to recruit eligible study participants, the researcher reached the potential eligible couples via phone calls, introduced the research topic, the relationship between long-term marriage and IPV, and asked for voluntary participation. Second, the couples who accepted to participate were visited at their houses, and interviews were conducted. Third, the researcher asked them to refer other eligible couples for the study. Overall, the sampling process started with the researcher’s contacts with the eligible couples and included the other referred couples until the saturation point was satisfied (Neuman 2006; Babbie 2010).

Measures for a long-term marriage are controversial in the existing literature. In the context of a long-

term marriage, different conditions, such as duration of marriage, culture, marriage period, togetherness, spouses' ages, and status of happiness, have been proposed (Gnilka 2007). Among them, scholars who considered the duration of the marriage as the criteria for long-term marriage used different time intervals such as ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, or more years (Swensen and Trahaug 1985; Weishaus and Field 1988; Robinson 1994; Glenn 1998; Weigel and Ballard-Reisch 1999; Rogers and Amato 2000; Bachand and Caron 2001; Fincham, Paleari, and Regalia 2002; Miller et al. 2003; Hawkins and Booth 2005; Mroczek and Spiro 2005; Gnilka 2007). This research study accepts twenty years as the lowest limit for a long-term marriage. The logical basis is that a couple needs to stay married at least for twenty years to raise a child to adulthood together. Twenty years include one year for pregnancy, eighteen years for raising a child to adulthood, and one year for any risk.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection instruments were face-to-face semi-structured interviews, observation notes based on the observations at the time of the interviews, and a socio-demographic questionnaire.

The interviews were held at the participants' houses to provide a comfortable environment during the interview. The idea was that the best place to explore the feelings and attitudes of spouses would be their houses, where their marital life essentially existed. To obtain in-depth data, it was also necessary to create a safe environment where they could freely express themselves, especially women, while talking about different types of IPV experiences. Therefore, the researcher interviewed each spouse individually since the presence of the other spouse

could impact the answers. The other spouse either left home or stayed in another room not to see or hear the interview.

The researcher and participants signed the "informed consent form" before each interview, and then the participants filled out the socio-demographic questionnaire. After the completion of the form and the questionnaire, the researcher started the interview and took observation notes when necessary. Each interview was tape-recorded with the explicit permission of the spouses.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted the data analysis following different stages using Atlas.ti software for qualitative data analysis in an integrated and complementary manner. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed by using open, axial, and selective coding steps, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested. Because "data collection and analysis are interrelated processes" in the grounded theory method (Corbin and Strauss 1990:6), the data analysis was started after the first interview and continued until the end of the research. An identification number was given to each interview, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Identifying information, like the names of the study participants, was removed, and pseudonyms were used to assure anonymity. The researcher used memos during the data analysis, as well as the data collection period.

In the open coding step, "data [were] broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss and Corbin 1998:102). In the second step, axial coding, categories were linked to their subcategories by using the results of open coding. In the last step,

selective coding was operated to integrate and refine the categories considering the open and axial coding results. At the end of the analyzing procedure, coding revealed two major categories with the subcategories:

1. The notion of violence in long-term marriages and spouses' perceptions and experiences of IPV: Long-term marriages with physical violence, long-term marriages without physical violence, and long-term marriages with psychological violence.
2. Spouses' proposed solutions for preventing and stopping IPV in long-term marriages: Identifying the determinants of IPV, encouraging religious and values education, solving financial problems, building communication and patience, learning respect, responsibility, and love, or getting divorced.

While presenting the findings, excerpts were selected by general references to similar ideas representing common themes. Corrections were made to excerpts by excluding unnecessary parts and keeping the authenticity and integrity of the quotes. Both spouses' answers to some of the questions were compared to understand the dynamics and the discrepancies during the interviews. Diagrams were created to integrate the categories. The data obtained from observation notes were triangulated with the interview data. Descriptive analysis of gender, duration of the marriage, and related aspects were performed by analyzing socio-demographic questionnaires using the SPSS software.

Findings

Findings are presented mainly in six parts. The first part starts with the description of the sample. The second part focuses on the notion of IPV in long-term

marriages and spouses' perceptions of IPV. The following parts present findings regarding the prevalence of IPV in long-term marriages with and without physical violence and long-term marriages with psychological violence. The final part demonstrates solutions suggested by spouses in a long-term marriage to prevent and stop IPV.

Description of the Sample

This section presents the quantitative data obtained from the socio-demographic questionnaire. The average age of the thirty men and thirty women was just over 52 (mean: 52.13). The couples had been married for an average of just over 30 years (mean: 30.23). The vast majority of couples, twenty-four couples, had two children, three couples had one child, one couple had four children, and two couples had no children. Nineteen participants were elementary school graduates, nine middle-school graduates, sixteen high school graduates, fourteen university graduates, and two with a graduate school degree.

The Notion of IPV in Long-Term Marriages and Spouses' Perceptions of IPV

To explore the notion of violence in long-term marriages, the participants were asked the following questions: a) Has your partner ever been violent towards you? b) Have you ever been violent towards your partner? c) What are your thoughts about how to prevent and stop IPV?

Wives and husbands were pleasant, friendly, and talkative during the interviews. By including both wives and husbands, spousal and gendered views were investigated and compared to reveal how each spouse individually perceived IPV within the same marriage. It was found that spouses' perceptions of

violence were initially limited to physical violence and did not include psychological (verbal and emotional), sexual, or economic violence. Therefore, a few of them reported only physical violence. In contrast, most of them did not report any type of IPV until the researcher asked follow-up questions to clarify participants' perceptions and experiences of violence. Then, spouses made statements about the psychological violence, mostly while smiling, because they did not recognize it as IPV. They had the impression that it was an inevitable and common part of marriage. A few spouses did not report physical violence, although their partners reported it. All participants denied sexual and economic violence.

Finally, when the length of marriage was considered, it was explored that there was a relationship between the lack of certain types of IPV and the duration of the marriage. Table 1 shows the prevalence of IPV and the spouses' perceptions of IPV.

Table 1. Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in Long-Term Marriages

Type of IPV	Gender of Perpetrator	Prevalence	Spouses' Perceptions of IPV
Physical Violence	All men except for one woman	One or a few times in the first years of marriage	Not acceptable
Psychological Violence (Verbal or Emotional)	Both men and women	Prevalent	Acceptable
Sexual Violence	Not reported	-	-
Economic Violence	Not reported	-	-

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

Long-Term Marriages with Physical IPV

Physical violence was reported in eight out of thirty marriages. Spouses stated that it happened only once or a few times in the early years of the marriage with no repetition during the rest of the marriage. It occurred as hitting a spouse or throwing an object; however, none of the study participants reported any injuries. Regarding gender, it was always men who perpetrated physical violence except for one woman. In two cases, husbands reported physical violence while their wives did not report it. For example, one of the perpetrators of IPV, Hüseyin (husband, married for twenty-six years), said the following: "Violence against my wife? Well, we passed through such a period when we had physical violence. That was the only time that I beat my wife; other than that, I do not remember another incident."

Although Hüseyin reported physical violence in his marriage, his wife, Sevda, did not share it and only reported psychological violence by stating: "When it comes to physical violence, no, it did not happen. My husband is an angry man. Of course, psychological violence happened sometimes, but not any other kind of violence!"

One wife reported physical violence towards herself, whereas her husband did not report it. Melek (wife, married for twenty years) said that her husband used violence: "He did once. He just hit my leg; that was it. It was during an argument about our house." Her husband, Yusuf, reported a different story when he was asked about violence: "Yes, it happened during the first year of our marriage, but it was not violence towards her. I only broke a plate! I threw it towards a wall. Verbal, maybe, but I did not [use physical violence]."

As the excerpts above indicate, spouses did not talk about the incidents the way their husbands/wives did. Therefore, this finding implies that spouses may report IPV differently as personality, gender, and culture can play a significant role in the way in which husbands and wives experience and interpret IPV.

It was also discovered that the husband's immediate family members encouraged him to perpetrate physical violence. This finding shows how IPV by men is not only acceptable but also encouraged in some families. For example, Fatih (husband, married for twenty-three years) mentioned that he once used violence against his wife under the influence of his parents during the first years of the marriage. Similarly, Feride (wife, married for forty years) stated that her husband used violence against her as a result of provocations from her mother-in-law in the early years of their marriage: "We argued many times! I mean, if we are angry, either I shut up and go to the kitchen, or he takes his coat and goes out... But, well, when we were young, he used physical violence against me because of his mother's provocative remarks."

Another case is Seda (wife, married for thirty-six years), who mentioned the following:

I swear he did not [use violence]! Thank Allah, there were minor problems; we were young at that time. My mother-in-law and her friends used to visit us. They advised my husband to "discipline" me. "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree!" One day, he hit me once for no reason!

As a final statement regarding how immediate family members can cause IPV, Adil (husband, married for thirty-nine years) stated that he used violence towards his wife once because of his brother's manip-

ulation: "It was something private, it was because of misunderstanding, as my brother misinformed me about my wife!" However, his wife, Nazan, the other example of a victim who did not report physical violence, said: "It has never happened!"

As an exception, in only one case, the wife was the perpetrator. Murat (husband, married for twenty-five years) stated: "When she was angry, she used to throw objects towards me."

Excerpts above imply that physical IPV might occur in the first years of long-term marriages; however, husbands and wives may describe IPV differently. It might be self-motivated or encouraged by immediate family members. Extended family members can influence spousal relationships in a patriarchal culture, contributing to IPV. In certain situations, extended family members can also play a role in preventing and stopping IPV; however, it was not reported by the participants in this research study.

Long-Term Marriages without Physical IPV

On the contrary to the above examples, twenty-two out of thirty couples did not report any types of physical violence in this study. Statements of wives and husbands regarding the lack of physical IPV in their marriages were consistent with each other. Also, the attitudes of these couples were more positive during the interviews. For example, Nezihe (wife, married for twenty-three years) responded to the questions about violence as follows: "No, no! If he does, I will do the same!" while smiling. Her husband, Cemil, had a humorous approach and said: "No, of course, there should be a limit to it. For example, I have a fatty liver syndrome, so my wife does not cook red meat for me! I think this is also violence [laughs]."

Sinan (husband, married for twenty years) had a humorous approach, too, and said: "Every morning, I beat her softly for five minutes. I am just kidding! Thank Allah, it has never happened so far." Eda (wife, married for thirty-six years) said: "No, he never did!" and Sümeyye (wife, married for twenty years) said: "No, Allah bless! Alhamdulillah, Allah bless! I am small [laughs]. Allah forbids!" Yasemin (wife, married for thirty-two years) replied hilariously to the question of IPV: "No, no! He better not; otherwise, I would have beaten him more [laughs]. There is no such thing, no, no, never! My husband is against violence! Thank Allah! Nothing like that happened; otherwise, I would say it." Similarly, Elif (wife, married for twenty-four years) mentioned that her husband has never used any type of physical violence: "No, no! He is angry, macho, but there is no violence against our children or me!"

In conclusion, overlapping responses of the spouses demonstrated the lack of physical IPV in their marriages. Their disapproval of violence was identified as a significant contributing factor to the longevity of their happy marriage. Some of the spouses referred to Allah since violence is against the ethical teachings of Islam.

Long-Term Marriages with Psychological IPV

The most common type of violence reported in this study was *psychological* violence. When gender is considered, it was found that both men and women were the perpetrators and victims of it. For example, Betül (wife, married for twenty years) responded interestingly by generalizing and normalizing the psychological violence as follows: "There is no slapping! But, of course, we had hurtful arguments at times. It happens in all marriages!" Fatma (wife, married for forty-five years) shared her experience as follows: "No,

he did not beat me! There were so many times that he scolded me, but never laid a finger on me!" As an answer to the same question, her husband, Ahmet, said almost the same thing: "No, I have never used violence against my wife. I might have said bad words, but never laid a finger on her in forty-five years!"

As another example, Müjgan (wife, married for forty-three years) laughed and said: "That might have happened when we were angry with each other!" Similarly, Erol (husband, married for thirty-two years) stated that neither he nor his wife used physical violence, but mentioned that they used to yell at each other. Beyza (wife, married for twenty years) also reported psychological violence: "Of course, it happened. I am telling you, since we have been working together. It would not have happened if we had not worked together. We managed since we loved each other so much. In that sense, there has been psychological violence!" Finally, Hüseyin (husband, married for twenty-six years) is an example of a husband who beat his wife once and perpetrated psychological violence: "It happened, but it was not an abnormal situation! Shouting, calling names, something like that happened; when I get angry, I shout at her!"

As the above findings showed, spouses did not perceive psychological violence as IPV. Spouses commonly choose to rationalize their behavior to justify their actions. It has reoccurred during the marriage and has been recognized as part of communication and an unavoidable part of marriage. It has been the most acceptable and normalized type of IPV in Turkish culture.

Spouses' Proposed Solutions for Preventing and Stopping IPV

During the interviews, spouses were asked how to prevent and stop IPV to maintain a happy marriage.

It was found that they developed different suggestions for the solution. The most prominent of these proposed solutions are presented below with specific examples.

Identifying the Determinants of IPV

In response to the question, "How do you think IPV could be prevented and stopped," some of the spouses suggested investigating the causes of violence and developing solutions accordingly. One of the husbands, Erol (married for thirty-two years), said: "Intimate partner violence, it should be investigated, the underlying reasons should be investigated, the background should be investigated, and the sources should be investigated to understand the causes of violence." Similarly, Hüseyin (husband, married for twenty-six years) also reported that the causes of IPV should be examined first, then the solutions: "Underlying reasons of the violence should be explored so that the solutions could be explored!"

Encouraging Religious and Values Education

Some spouses emphasized the importance and the role of religion and values in preventing and stopping IPV. For example, Adil (husband, married for thirty-nine years) suggested: "Through Islamic practice! If you apply Islamic rules, then there is no way for violence. Because it is women who give birth and educate children, the mothers' status is unique, and they are certainly sultans!" Yusuf (husband, married for twenty years) also said that violence could be prevented with the help of religious education: "My suggestion, of course, would be valid for highly conscious people!...The Quran and the life of Prophet Mohammad are the keys. Solutions for everyone could be found there. I believe our Prophet's

life is the solution for marital problems" (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014:F13).

Melek, Yusuf's wife, also thought that religious education could prevent violence:

We can solve this problem by increasing the emotion of mercy. This can only be achieved by teaching religion to children, by teaching religious duties, and the importance of showing mercy to others. When a man marries a woman, if we could see women as gifts from Allah, nobody can lay a finger on them! A person who fears Allah and has faith in Allah would not lay a finger on his wife or children!

Another spouse believed that IPV could be prevented by religious and moral education. Sümeyye (wife, married for twenty years) stated that educating people about religion and values could be the solution: "Whoever, men or women, when they were young, it is the family where we can teach these values. Otherwise, it is not an easy problem to solve. Also, religious education is important, but a proper religious education!"

Solving Financial Problems

Some of the spouses in this research considered financial problems as the primary source of IPV and recommended that spouses should solve their economic issues first. In that sense, Seda (wife, married for thirty-six years) said the following: "It is all related to financial problems! Instead of using violence, let's work harder!...Everybody should work!... Whatever [the problem is,] they should talk. There is nothing that could not be shared. We share everything, including our earnings!" (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014:F13). Sinan (husband, married for twenty years) also believes that the financial prob-

lems cause IPV and could be stopped by overcoming the economic difficulties: "If financial problems are solved; the issues can be solved."

Communication and Patience

Some of the participants believed that IPV could be prevented and stopped through communication and patience. For example, Salih (husband, married for thirty-six years) stated that IPV could be solved: "By reaching an agreement! I am against domestic violence! If there is violence, then there is no peace! There is no trust! No trust between a husband and a wife!" Serap (wife, married for twenty-eight years) mentioned that spouses should not use violence and they "should correct the behavior by communicating to each other."

Sevda (wife, married for twenty-six years) suggested being patient: "If one side is angry, I think the other side should be quiet and wait until the other person calms down!" Similarly, Beyza (wife, married for twenty years) believed that being patient could solve the problems: "Well, I cannot suggest people leave it [marriage]; I would advise being patient and praying that it gets better!"

Learning Respect, Responsibility, and Love

Some spouses believed that IPV could be prevented and stopped when couples learn respect, responsibility, and love. Nazan (wife, married for thirty-nine years), for instance, stated that violence could be solved through establishing respect: "Spouses need to learn their responsibilities and duties! Being a spouse to each other, not a slave, not an owner! I am not the owner of my husband, and he is not the owner of me! If they show that respect, violence can be prevented!" (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014:F13).

Akif (husband, married for twenty-eight years) also suggested developing respect and love between spouses and families as a solution to IPV: "I think [the solution is] love and respect! There should be love between spouses and also families!"

Getting Divorced

Some spouses believed that IPV could not be solved; therefore, they—implicitly or explicitly—proposed divorcing. Among them, Nezihe (wife, married for twenty-three years) stated: "Once it starts, there is no solution, in my opinion. So, if a person gets used to it, he becomes a shameless bully! Therefore, if there are such things, I do not think he will change, impossible."

Müjgan (wife, married for forty-three years) pointed out the difficulty of solving IPV: "If a person is a psychopath and uses violence, then, I think, it is difficult to solve it!" Levent (husband, married for twenty-four years) also said: "If someone is prone to violence, then he does not have moral values; you cannot do anything for him!" Finally, Feride (wife, married for forty years) had the same opinion and offered divorce as a solution to IPV: "If there is too much violence, then it can be solved by getting divorced. Divorce can be the solution. If there is violence, you cannot stay there!"

In conclusion, spouses in this study suggested various solutions to prevent and stop IPV. Their recommendations—except divorce—include only the individual efforts of the couples rather than seeking institutional, professional, or community support. This approach is well-suited to the Turkish traditional family structure, which sees violence as a private family issue. It has not been easy for women in Turkey to report IPV until recent decades

due to the economic and cultural factors and lack of socio-psychological assistance and legal support services. Another finding is that most spouses who believed that IPV could not be solved meant physical violence.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore IPV in long-term marriages, how spouses perceive and experience IPV, and offer solutions to address it. The most common type of violence was psychological violence (verbal and emotional) that has reoccurred during the marriage, as also reported in the national (BAAK 1995; ASPB and HU 2015; Dildar 2021) and international context (e.g., Mezey, Post, and Maxwell 2002). As opposed to physical violence, spouses in this study have not considered psychological violence a significant threat to the continuation of the marriage, but a common and inevitable part of the marriage. It was also more acceptable by Turkish couples since it has been interpreted as part of the communication (BAAK 1995; Hortaçsu, Kalaycıoğlu, and Rittersberger-Tiliç 2003; MFSP and HU 2014; ASPB and HU 2015).

Moreover, the findings suggest that while psychological violence was inevitable, spouses' conscious attitudes and efforts to increase the quality of their relationship reduce the devastating effects of that type of violence (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014). Otherwise, the long-term effects of psychological violence could be more devastating than other types of violence and may result in a divorce.

No physical IPV was reported in the vast majority of long-term marriages in this study. This finding suggests that the absence of physical violence could be considered one of the vital prerequisites for the

longevity of marriage. Data of this study also indicated that rare occurrences of physical violence took place only in the first years of the marriage; and were caused by either the spouses' self-motivation or their immediate family members' provocative remarks in the context of socio-cultural factors, such as patriarchal family structure, culture, and gender roles (BAAK 1995; Krug et al. 2002; KSGM 2009; ASPB and HU 2015; Yılmaz 2018). The finding regarding the role of immediate family members on IPV was consistent with the results of other studies conducted in Turkey (KSGM 2009; Yılmaz 2018).

Sexual and economic violence was not reported in this study, whereas it is a fact that both types of violence were reported in the previous studies on IPV in Turkey (BAAK 1995; KSGM 2009; Akar et al. 2010; ASPB and HU 2015; Dildar 2021). First, it is probable that long-term married couples, especially those who have not reported any physical violence, did not experience any sexual violence during their marriages. Second, because financial and especially sexual issues have been considered private in Turkish society (BAAK 1995; KSGM 2009), spouses, particularly wives, may be hesitant to talk about them. Third, some couples may have normalized certain types of violence by adopting the traditional family approach, as in the case of psychological violence. Fourth, there could be other factors such as self-blame, concern for family and children, societal expectations, and religious values that reinforced the silencing of women (Pokharel et al. 2020). It was concluded that the absence of sexual, economic, and physical violence could be a crucial factor contributing to the longevity of marriage.

Considering gender, all those who committed physical violence were men (except for one case),

whereas both men and women were the committer and victims of psychological violence, as parallel to the findings of the previous studies (BAAK 1995; Hortaçsu et al. 2003; KSGM 2009; Dildar 2021).

Couples participating in this study proposed various solutions for addressing IPV, which were also reported in other studies: identifying the determinants of IPV (Arthur and Clark 2009; Guvenc et al. 2014), encouraging religious and values education (Ellison and Anderson 2001; Ellison et al. 2007; Balkanlioglu 2014; Issahaku 2016), solving financial problems (BAAK 1995; Aizer 2010), building communication and patience (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1995; Gnilka 2007), and learning respect, responsibility, and love (Fields 1983; Gnilka 2007). Contrary to these recommendations, a few spouses thought that IPV was unsolvable and suggested divorce, as stated in the existing literature (BAAK 1995; Bowlus and Seitz 2006; MFSP 2014).

The recommendations of the couples are precious because they have been happily married for many years (mean: 30.23). None of them experienced sexual or economic violence, and the majority of them had no physical violence in their marriages. Interestingly, spouses' recommendations—except for getting divorced—included only individual efforts, but did not involve any professional, societal, or governmental actions. The reason could be that spouses still consider IPV a personal and private family issue, which should not be shared with other people and institutions and should be solved within the family by the family members. The majority of the participating “couples worked at increasing the quality of their relationship and believed that positive solutions were possible” (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014:F13). This approach contributes to the longevity of marriage as

it lowers the risk of disruption of marriage (DeMaris 2000).

The findings of this study have some implications for professionals. In addition to couples' proposed solutions to IPV, we suggest that the professionals (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, counselors, and social workers) seriously consider the relationship between the duration of marriage and couples' perceptions and experiences of IPV in the context of their backgrounds, family structures, values, religions, and norms. Professionals should closely examine couples' IPV experiences, personality characteristics, decision-making and problem-solving approaches, adaptation and coping strategies, motivational factors, privacy concerns, the influence of intimate family members on family dynamics, and socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, we strongly recommend emphasizing “the importance of communication by talking out issues in a non-threatening or non-violent way” (Balkanlioglu and Seward 2014:F14) to maintain happy and healthy relationships. It is also crucial to understand the challenges and limitations of the couples who have frequent IPV issues and address their needs on improving interpersonal and communication skills.

This study has some limitations. First of all, the results cannot be generalized to all married couples due to the small sample size, including only long-term married couples. Second, couples with ongoing violence were probably less likely to volunteer to participate in the research. Thus, the results of the current study do not represent their situation. Third, reactivity might be another limitation. Some spouses might have responded differently instead of reporting their actual attitudes since the partici-

pants knew that the issue of violence would be discussed in this research study. To fully explore the relationship between long-term marriage and IPV, qualitative and quantitative longitudinal studies that include a representative sample of divorced couples and married couples with different years of marital experience are needed.

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