



## Original communication

# Analysis and comparison of domestic femicide cases in the cities of Diyarbakir & Tekirdag, Turkey: A preliminary study



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## ABSTRACT

Court decision files from 2007 to 2012 were examined retrospectively in the Criminal High Courts of Diyarbakir and Tekirdag to analyse and compare domestic femicides in Diyarbakir and Tekirdag, Turkey, according to different fundamental characteristics. In total, 58 assailants were convicted of 50 femicides during this period. There were no so-called 'honour killings' in Tekirdag, while 16 (37.2%) of the homicides were honour killings in Diyarbakir. Policies to prevent violence against women, extending the means of access to post-violence services and reinforcing the law, policies and action plans to end this type of violence could be effective in decreasing cases of domestic femicide.

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## 1. Introduction

We encounter a broad spectrum of violence against women almost everywhere in the world, ranging from verbal, emotional and economic abuse to physical or sexual violence and even murder. The global awareness of violence against women emerged after the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> However, it has taken a long time for the world to acknowledge that violence against women is a human rights violation.<sup>2</sup> The patriarchal family structure, economic conditions, rural living and early marriage are high risk factors for violence against women.<sup>3</sup>

At present, the media represent another factor playing a crucial role in shaping society's perception of violence and domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> Violence against women and domestic violence problems are discussed within the scope of gender-based violence on a general level. However, domestic violence against women is the most prevalent among gender-based types of violence. Domestic violence against women, before anything else, is a universal human rights violation problem. Beyond the violation of the right to live, it is a problem which contravenes the right to dignity and honour.<sup>2</sup>

Murder is the gravest form of violence against women. Femicide is defined as killing a woman intentionally because of her sex.<sup>5</sup> However, it also covers every murder of a woman and/or girl in a broader sense. Intimate femicide, that is, the killing of a woman by her intimate partner, is considered the gravest form of this crime, and represents a consequence of intimate partner violence.<sup>6</sup> According to the data from the Ministry of Justice, the number of women killed in Turkey rose to 953 in the first 7 months of 2009 from 66 in 2002. This represents a 1400% increase in femicides in this period.<sup>2</sup> According to the Woman Statistics Report 2011–2012 issued by the Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (KADER), 168 of female honour killings committed in

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Turkey in 2010 were committed domestically, while this figure was 147 in 2011. According to the official records, 83, 128, 317, 663, 1011, and 806 women were murdered in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to a 2011 report issued by the Sub-Commission of Violence Against Women and Family Members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly's Human Rights Commission, there were 12,768 cases brought to the courts in the last seven years related to this issue. The report stated that 5760 of these cases concluded with a conviction, while 6000 were ongoing by the preparation date of the report. These are only the officially recorded figures, and clearly the picture would become much graver if the unrecorded cases were also taken into account.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of 'mores' refers to unwritten rules that regulate the lives, behaviours, habits and moral understandings of the people in a certain society. Thus, mores not only set behavioural patterns, but also impose penal sanctions when rules are disregarded.<sup>8,9</sup> Homicide is the most important of these sanctions. Honour killing related to societal mores can occur when a family and/or husband is perceived to have authority of a woman; a female family member is killed after being accused of, for example, having an unsanctioned illicit relationship which is against the family's traditions or mores, thereby besmirching the family's perceived sense of honour.<sup>10,11</sup> A report issued by the Prime Ministry Human Rights Department in 2008 also stated that honour and customary killings are mostly seen in cities with high population density and which have undergone intensive migration in Turkey, which has 81 major cities; of these, Diyarbakir ranks fourth in terms of honour and customary killings. The most important reasons other than population have been identified as being the intense problems of immigration populations received by these cities and increasing on a yearly basis, as well as insufficient means of accommodation due to immigration, a lack of education, unemployment, poverty, crowded families and so on. It was reported that almost half of those who committed these kinds of murders had origins from the Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia Region, where the traditional paternal family structure is more commonly observed.<sup>12</sup>

Diyarbakir is a city in Turkey's southeast Anatolian region, where rural areas suffer from low economic levels. A conservative social culture is prevalent in these areas, which may come to the fore in circumstances such as underage marriage, sometimes occurring through unlicensed religious rituals, as well as polygamy. Women's rights and gender equality are also issues here. It has been noted in the national press in Turkey that Diyarbakir province may from come under public scrutiny due to customary homicides.

In contrast, Tekirdag is located in the European part of the Marmara Region of western Turkey, where domestic tourism, industrialisation and economic activity are at high levels, and where European-style culture is dominant. Although not high by global standards, the region has covered more ground in terms of women's rights.

The total population of the city of Diyarbakir was 1,635,048 in 2014, and 810,915 (49.6%) of the residents were female. In the same year, the total population of Tekirdag was 906,732, of which 439,776 (48.5%) residents were women.<sup>13</sup> Demographic data for both provinces are presented in Table 1.

The purposes of this study are to analyse and compare cases of domestic femicide in Diyarbakir and Tekirdag, two cities in Turkey with different basic characteristics such as location, economic level and sociocultural structure, and to suggest solutions for this serious problem in Turkey.

## 2. Methods

The case files – and court decision files in cases where the case files could not be accessed – of tried and concluded domestic

femicides in the High Criminal Courts of Diyarbakir and Tekirdag, Turkey, from between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2012 were examined retrospectively. Forty-three cases in Diyarbakir and seven cases in Tekirdag were identified and evaluated.

There were 9961 cases concluded in the High Criminal Courts of Diyarbakir between these dates, of which 54 (0.54%) were femicides. Of these, 43 cases were domestic femicides (79.62%). The 43 cases included in this study constituted 0.43% of the total 9961 cases.

It was found that there were 2343 cases concluded in the High Courts of Tekirdag between the specified dates, of which 7 (0.29%) were femicides. All seven cases (100%) were domestic femicides.

During prosecution in Turkey, the cases in which the decision to commit a murder is made by the family committee are defined as 'customary homicides', while cases in which the murderer's attacker acts individually are defined as 'honour killings'. Considering this, the reasons for the murders were grouped under the titles of *disputing, customary, financial and envy-honour homicide*. The cases in which the court concluded that the murder was committed due to customary moral codes, and for this reason the murderer was given an increased penalty were included under the title 'customary homicide'. Data on 43 female victims and 51 assailants in Diyarbakir and 7 female victims and 7 assailants in Tekirdag were acquired and evaluated statistically using the SPSS 16.0 software programme.

## 3. Results

It was found in relation to the murders committed in Diyarbakir that the victims' ages ranged between 6 months and 76 years, with an average of 31.01 years (standard deviation [sd] = 13.92). Six victims (14%) were 0–18 years of age, and were included in the *underage group*; of these, one case (2.3%) was 6 months old, while two (4.7%) were 15 years old and three (7%) were 17. It was found in the murders committed in Tekirdag that the victims' ages ranged between 16 and 64 years of age, with an average of 43.14 years (sd = 15.73). One (14.3%) of the victims was 16 years old, and was included in the *underage group*. The average age of the victims was calculated to be 32.7 years (sd = 14.6) in both cities.

It was found that in Diyarbakir, the assailants' ages ranged between 14 and 54 years, with an average age of 29.73 years (sd = 9.58). Six assailants (11.8%) were between 14 and 18 years of age, representing the *underage group*; two cases (2.3%) were 14 years old, one (2%) was 15 and three (5.9%) were 16 years old. In the murders committed in Tekirdag, the assailants' ages ranged between 33 and 60 years, with an average age of 46.86 years (sd = 8.36). Here, there were no assailants in the *underage group*.

Five of the cases (11.6%) examined in Diyarbakir included multiple assailants, as follows: three assailants in one case (2.3%), four assailants in one case (2.3%) and two assailants in three cases (7%). Therefore, the total number of assailants in Diyarbakir was 51. The number of assailants in all of the murders committed in Tekirdag was one. It was found that the age group distributions of both victims and assailants differed significantly by city ( $p < 0.05$ ), while there was no significant difference between the age group distributions of the assailants and victims ( $p > 0.05$ ; Tables 2 and 3). Table 4 represents the relationship between the victim and the assailant. No statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) correlation was found between the motives for murder and first- and second-degree blood relations, affinity by marriage and the other degrees of affinity. No significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) could be found in terms of blood relationship and affinity by marriage by city.

As a result of the evaluation of the victims' occupations in Diyarbakir, it was found that one (2.3%) of the victims was an infant, three (7%) were 15-year-old students, 35 (81.4%) were housewives,

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