



Domestic violence addressed at int'l conference of JWF Women's Platform

The reasons behind domestic violence and the role of family in the prevalence of violence in society are being discussed during an international conference organized by the Journalists and Writers Foundation's (JWF) Women's Platform in İstanbul.

The conference, titled "Family and Community Violence," kicked off on Friday night with a reception at the Harbiye Congress Center. The conference will run between Nov. 24 and 26 at the center. Thirty academics from 15 countries are expected to attend the three-day event. Sessions will be held under titles including "Family and Violence: International Perspectives," "Domestic Violence and its Legal Aspects," "Violence against Children and its Consequences," "Family and Violence: Religious Perspectives," and "Domestic Violence and its Social Aspects."

The first two sessions were held on Saturday. Before the first session, opening speeches were given by Family and Social Policy Minister Fatma Şahin, GYV Chairman Mustafa Yeşil and Undersecretary at the Ministry of Family and Social Policies Ahmet Zahteroğulları.

During her opening speech, Minister Şahin said "family" and "violence" are two terms that should never be voiced together at all. She also stated that the institution of family is generally associated with love, compassion, respect, confidence and togetherness, adding that it is a great contradiction that violence exists within such an institution.

Stating that people's awareness of the violence issue should be raised before they marry in order to strengthen the family institution, Minister Şahin said that her ministry has recently launched a pilot scheme for marriage counseling centers that will serve people in the province of Burdur. Noting that divorce numbers have been increasing year by year in Turkey and around the world, Şahin said: "The experts from those centers will meet with couples seeking divorce. The experts will talk with the couples and try to find out which problems are pushing them to divorce. If their problems are solvable, the experts will try to help them solve their problems. If the problems



cannot be solved, then the couples will divorce. In Burdur, where the pilot scheme for the project is underway, 25 couples have applied to courts for divorce, but five couples changed their mind thanks to the contributions of experts from marriage counseling centers.”

GYV Chairman Yeşil said during his speech that the international conference will focus mainly on how the ground for violence is laid in the family, and how it spreads to all society. He also stated that academics, representatives from nongovernmental organizations and various intellectuals will try to define reasons behind the prevalence of violence and to determine necessary measures to be taken to prevent violence in the community, primarily in the family.

“An ideal community can be formed with ideal individuals. The first place where a person acquires their personality and values is the family. Think of possible traumas that a child can suffer when he or she experiences violence in her or his family during the period when his or her personality is being developed. Such traumas can cause the person to develop behavior disorders in later periods of life. We should do whatever possible to prevent this; that is why we have gathered here today,” Yeşil said.

Undersecretary Zahteroğulları said that the ministry has prepared comprehensive legislation which aims to prevent violence against women in Turkey and added that prevention of violence against women is not only the responsibility of the ministry, but the responsibility of the society. “This goal cannot be achieved with just the contributions of the ministry, we, the society as a whole, should cooperate to achieve this goal,” Zahteroğulları noted.

Stating that he is very happy to be in Turkey, Professor Laxmi Narsimha Swamy from the Hyderabad-based Osmania University, one of the participators of the conference, told Sunday's Zaman that in almost every nation, women are subject to domestic violence, particularly because of unemployment and unequal income distribution. “In order to solve these kinds of problems, women must be empowered through providing basic education and skills for gaining employment. The government and other relevant organizations should be involved in developing schemes for providing employment in rural areas to women,” Swamy noted.



Another participator of the conference, Professor Christine Kulke from Berlin University of Technology and Science, told Sunday's Zaman that violence occurs in various cultures with diverse cultural norms, religions, education systems and socialization practices. "These differences can be found in practice as well as in terms of subject matter in the discourse [on violence]. Violent actions by diverse actors, in the context of family and among individuals, have obviously not been reduced by processes of modernization, civilization and enlightenment. The argument of stronger tendencies of (especially physical) violence in the past and in pre-modern societies turned out as an often repeated stereotype," she said.

"The complexity of modern societies has a high price, very often the loss of human potential. These processes are described as paradoxes of modernity, which could lead to violent outcomes. So for example [consider] the coincidence of high-tech methods for controlling violence and the high rate of violent acts by prosecuting institutions [using them]. Another example is found in the widespread and extended modern communication system on the one hand and in the psychological situation of intensive social isolation on the other hand," Kulke added.

She went on to say that in this context, social scientists are seeing the loss of social capacities and qualities of modern societies like a decline in equal distribution of wealth and resources. "In addition the modern society is often characterized by decreasing mechanisms of social integration, especially among minorities. These processes can lead to social alienation and to disillusioned social expectations as well as to [social] deprivation, or relative deprivation. All these dimensions could be understood as a framework for emerging violent structures and processes,"Kulke noted.

Among the people who will participate in the sessions' discussions are Dr. Selma Acuner, UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Board member; Mahinur Ozdemir, an MP in the Belgian parliament; Zyhdi Dervishi, head of the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tirana University; Dr. Renata Pepicelli from the University of Bologna; Dr. Antonio Jorge Pereira Jr., a member of the Sao Paulo Academy of Law (APLJ) and the Sao Paulo Lawyers Institute (IASP); and Professor Hilal Elver from the University of California Santa Barbara.



Many politicians, intellectuals, academics, journalists and representatives from nongovernmental organizations have been invited to the conference.

Gov't needs to be more active in preventing domestic violence

The government should take a more active role in preventing domestic violence -- which is on the rise across Turkey and the world -- stated the final declaration of the conference on violence and society organized by the Journalists and Writers Foundation's (GYV) Women's Platform between Nov. 24 and 26 in İstanbul

The international conference, titled "Family and Community Violence," was held at the Harbiye Congress Center. Thirty academics from 15 countries attended the three-day conference.

In the final declaration released on Monday, the experts agreed that the government should be more active in the elimination of domestic violence in Turkey, pointing out that just adopting legal measures is not sufficient. The declaration states that the family is the most important institution of society: "The emergence of violence in society threatens the family as well. We believe that the family can be the primary institution to prevent violence, and so it must be supported," and "To protect the structure of the family and in order for the family to carry out its functions, the state must play an active role."

The declaration states that the government should provide mandatory psychological therapy and support to perpetrators of violence, open both public and private therapy and counseling centers, and employ experts (preferably female) on family matters in the police and military police departments, which are often the first places victims of domestic violence are seen.

Speaking during the last session of the conference on Monday, Professor Nilüfer Narlı, chair of the department of sociology at Bahçeşehir University, said that whatever legal measures are adopted in order to prevent domestic violence, it will be impossible to eliminate domestic violence unless traditional social attitudes and beliefs about women change. "Most men are not



aware that violence against women is a serious violation of human rights. I don't think it is very effective to send men who commit acts of domestic violence to three month rehabilitation programs. This kind of education should start at an earlier age to enable men to internalize the fact that committing acts of violence on their wives is a violation of human rights,” Narlı noted.

Sharing some statistics about the extent of domestic violence, Narlı stated that 45.5 percent of women subjected to domestic violence see this as fate, according to 2012 research on values in Turkey conducted by Bahçeşehir University. She further stated that according to the same research, 59 percent of Turkish women believe they have to obey their husbands.

“According to a 2008 report released by the Women's Status General Directorate [KSGM] of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 39 percent of women in Turkey have been exposed to physical violence, while 15 percent of women say they have experienced sexual violence, and 42 percent say they have been exposed to both types of violence at the same time. One out of every four women living in Turkey is injured during a domestic violence incident, and even more alarming, one in 10 women says that she was exposed to domestic violence while pregnant,” Narlı said.

Narlı also highlighted the relationship between domestic violence and the tendency to attempt suicide. The 2008 report also revealed that women in Turkey who are victims of domestic violence are four times more likely to attempt to commit suicide.

‘Drug and alcohol are among primary domestic violence problems’

Speaking at the conference, İlhan Yargıç, a professor from İstanbul University, focused on the adverse impacts of drug and alcohol use on the structure of the family and the community as a whole. Noting that there is substantial research that shows that alcohol and drug use are related to violence and aggression, Yargıç stated: “A 2010 report prepared by a sub-commission of the parliamentary Human Rights Commission showed that smoking, drinking alcohol and drug use caused young people to engage in and be exposed to violence. Research of children in penal institutions revealed the following use of these substances: 40.2 percent smoke cigarettes; 41



percent consume alcohol; 3.3 percent use volatile substances such as thinner, gum and glue; 7.9 percent use narcotics or other pleasure-inducing substances; and 32.3 percent use two or more substances at the same time.”

“In other research, it has been stated that 54 percent of the people who committed a crime after drinking alcohol killed people; 19.5 percent of the people who committed crimes and were taken to Bakırköy Psychiatric Hospital for evaluation have been reported to have alcohol and drug use disorders,” Yargıç said. He added: “Alcohol is one of the primary domestic violence problems. Parents, siblings and children of people who use alcohol and drugs are affected in different ways. There are some studies that have shown that even a small amount of alcohol may affect the fetal development or life of that child. Alcohol abuse may cause violence and there may be sexual and physical harassment in the family. In most cases of paternal incest, the father who harasses his child is an alcohol addict. Alcoholism is four times more likely to be seen in children of alcoholics.