

## EVALUATION OF PARTNER VIOLENCE AND DEPRESSION TENDENCY IN MARRIED WOMEN IN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PROCESS

### EVLİ KADINLARDA COVID-19 PANDEMİ SÜRECİNDE PARTNER ŞİDDETİ VE DEPRESYON EĞİLİMİNİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

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#### ABSTRACT

Domestic violence has become widespread in Türkiye as well as all over the world during the COVID-19 process. Home isolation has been recommended as the safest measure to protect against the virus and not infect others during the pandemic period. However, homes, where everyone should feel safe, have become very risky places for women who are exposed to violence. For this reason, this study was conducted to evaluate partner violence and depression tendency in married women in Eskisehir province during the COVID-19 pandemic. This cross-sectional and descriptive study was conducted with 573 married women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Husband Violence against Women Scale and the Beck Depression Inventory were applied to the sample group. The mean age of women was 39.7, the mean length of marriage was 12.7, and the mean age of the spouse was 43.1. Women's age, education level, economic level, alcohol consumption by the partner, how marriage started, the length of the marriage, and the effect of the pandemic on the relationship were found to affect violence scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mean score of participants on the husband violence against women scale was 26.6, and the mean depression score was 9.1. In our study, there was a weak positive relationship between women's mean partner violence scores and their depression levels.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Depression, Pandemic, Violence, Women.

#### ÖZET

Aile içi şiddet, COVID-19 sürecinde tüm dünyada olduğu gibi Türkiye'de de yaygınlaştı. Pandemi döneminde virüsten korunmak ve başkalarına bulaştırmamak için en güvenli önlem olarak evde izolasyon önerildi. Ancak herkesin kendini güvende hissetmesi gereken evler, şiddete maruz kalan kadınlar için oldukça riskli yerler haline geldi. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, Kovid-19 salgını sırasında Eskişehir ilindeki evli kadınlarda partner şiddeti ve depresyon eğilimini değerlendirmek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Kesitsel ve tanımlayıcı tipte olan bu çalışma, COVID-19 salgını sırasında 573 evli kadınla gerçekleştirildi. Örneklem grubuna Kadına Eş Şiddet Ölçeği ve Beck Depresyon Ölçeği uygulandı. Kadınların yaş ortalaması 39,7, ortalama evlilik süresi 12,7, eş yaşı ortalaması ise 43,1 idi. Kadınların yaşı, eğitim düzeyi, ekonomik düzeyi, partnerinin alkol kullanması, evliliğin nasıl başladığı, evlilik süresi ve salgının ilişkiye etkisinin şiddet puanlarını etkilediği belirlendi ( $p < 0,05$ ). Katılımcıların kadına yönelik eş şiddeti ölçeğinden aldıkları puan ortalaması 26,6, depresyon puanı ortalaması ise 9,1'di. Çalışmamızda kadının eşine şiddet puanları ile depresyon arasında anlamlı pozitif ilişki bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** COVID-19, Depresyon, Kadın, Pandemi, Şiddet.

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is an important problem in Türkiye as well as all over the world, and it prevents them from enjoying human rights. Due to violence against women, women's fundamental rights, such as life, security, freedom, dignity, and physical and emotional health are violated or rendered invalid in practice (Woman in Türkiye, 2020). The most common type of violence, which has various forms, is domestic violence against women and children by the husband/partner. It is stated that the psychological status and psychosocial development of people who are exposed to and/or witness partner violence are adversely affected and that partner violence is passed from generation to generation (Incecik et al., 2009). According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 30% of women worldwide experienced physical and/or sexual violence used by individuals with whom they live together or have temporary sexual relationships between 2000 and 2018 in 161 countries and regions (WHO, 2021).

The rates of domestic violence and partner violence that affect almost every country worldwide, lead to serious adverse health, economic, and social effects, and have increased during the current COVID-19 pandemic are highly worrisome (Viero et al., 2021). It is known that the economic instability caused by the pandemic can increase domestic conflicts (Sifat, 2020). It is thought that some conditions, such as having to stay at home, quarantine, social isolation, and travel restrictions during the pandemic, have played a role in the increase in domestic violence (Campbell, 2020; Gebrewahd et al., 2020; Viero et al., 2021). It is emphasized that quarantine with an abusive husband/partner and parent is more dangerous than the pandemic for many women and children (Bouillon-Minois et al., 2020). According to the 2021 report of the Kepenek, 284 women in Türkiye in 2020 and were killed during the pandemic. Most of the murdered women were killed by the men they were married/intimate partners to (65%).

This is a cross-sectional study conducted to evaluate partner violence and depression tendency in married women in Eskisehir province during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive study with a cross-sectional design conducted with women who were aged  $\geq 18$ , married, and literate, agreed to participate in the study, and were living in Eskisehir province between May, 2021 and July, 2021. Data were collected via an online self-report questionnaire created on Google Forms from individuals selected using snowball sampling (chain-referral sampling), which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The online survey link was shared via social media tools (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and e-mail), and individuals were invited to the study.

### Population and Sample of the Study

#### Population of the Study

According to the data of the TUIK 2019 Address Based Population Registration System, the general population of Eskisehir was 887,475 and the female population was 443,840 (50.01%).

#### Sample of the Study

The required sample size for this non-homogeneous universe was calculated as 385 individuals based on a confidence interval of 95% and a sampling error of  $\pm 5\%$ . The study was eventually completed with 573 people.

#### Data Collection

Study data were collected using a descriptive information form, the Husband Violence against Women Scale, and the Beck Depression Inventory.

#### Descriptive information form

This form, which was prepared by the researchers, consists of 14 questions (Okumu et al., 2021; Mugoya et al., 2020; Han et al., 2019; Sen et al., 2017). It includes questions about the socio-demographic and COVID-19-related characteristics of women.

#### The Husband Violence against Women Scale (HVAWS)

Developed by Deniz (2019), the HVAWS consists of 29 items and is used to measure the type of violence experienced by women, their perceptions of social support against violence, and their common beliefs about violence. It is a five-point Likert-type self-assessment tool. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 145, and the lowest is 29.

### The Beck Depression Inventory

This scale was developed by Beck et al. (1978) and adapted into Turkish by Hisli (1989). It is a four-point Likert-type (0-3) scale consisting of 21 items. Scores on the scale show the degree of depression as follows: minimal depression, 0-9 points; mild depression, 10-16 points; moderate depression, 17-29 points; severe depression, 30-63 points.

### Data Evaluation

Data were analyzed on IBM SPSS V23 and IBM SPSS AMOS V24 software packages. Conformity to normal distribution was evaluated by Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between data that were not normally distributed. Path analysis was used to examine the effect of the husband violence against women scale on depression. Analysis results were presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation and median (minimum – maximum) values for quantitative data, and frequency and percentage values for categorical data. Significance level was taken as  $p < 0.050$ .

### Ethical Aspects of the Study

Before the study was initiated, the approval of the Scientific Research Platform of the Ministry of Health was obtained. Then, the approval of the Eskişehir Osmangazi University Non-Interventional Ethics Committee was obtained (date: March 2, 2021; no: E-25403353-050.99-171596; decision number, 27).

## RESULTS

According to the findings, 41% of the participants were university graduates, 82% had children, 59.3% were employed, 35.6% were civil servants, 62% had got married willingly, and 54.3% had less income than their expenses. The mean age of women was 39.7, the mean duration of marriage was 12.7, the mean number of households was 3.5, and the mean age of the partner was 43.1. Descriptive information about other variables is presented in detail in Table 1 as frequency values (percentages).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics

	Frequency (n) / mean. $\pm$ sd	Percentage(%) / median(minimum – maximum)
Education		
Literate	24	4,2
Elementary school	63	11
Middle school	34	5,9
High school	159	27,7
Undergraduate	235	41
Graduate	58	10,1
Having children		
Yes	470	82
No	103	18
Employment status		
Yes	340	59,3
No	233	40,7
Job		
Civil servant	204	35,6
Worker	177	30,9
Housewife	184	32,1
Retired	8	1,4
How marriage started		
Agreement/willingly	355	62
Forced by the family	110	19,2
Arranged	84	14,7
Elopement	24	4,2
Income		
Income<expenses	311	54,3
Income=expenses	200	34,9
Income>expenses	62	10,8

Education of the partner		
Literate	6	1
Elementary school	53	9,2
Middle school	33	5,8
High school	156	27,2
Undergraduate	264	46,1
Graduate	61	10,6
Employment of the partner		
Yes	504	88
No	69	12
Partner's job		
Civil servant	118	20,6
Worker	201	35,1
Retired	193	33,7
Other	42	7,3
Tradesman	19	3,3
Alcohol use/substance abuse		
Yes	44	7,7
No	366	63,9
Occasionally	163	28,4
Having been diagnosed with COVID-19		
Yes	180	31,4
No	393	68,6
Partner's COVID-19 diagnosis		
Yes	224	39,1
No	349	60,9
How the relationship was affected on the diagnosis of COVID-19		
No effect	88	36,7
Positively	35	14,6
Negatively	117	48,8
How the relationship with the partner was affected during the pandemic		
No effect	231	40,3
Positively	106	18,5
Negatively	236	41,2
Age	39,7 ± 10,0	39,0 (18,0 - 71,0)
Duration of the marriage	12,7 ± 12,0	10,0 (0,0 - 64,0)
Mean number of households	3,5 ± 1,2	3,0 (1,0 - 10,0)
Age of the partner	43,1 ± 10,7	42,0 (23,0 - 75,0)

The mean score of participants was 26.6 on the partner violence against women, 15.8 on the perception of social support, 6.3 on the common beliefs about violence, and 48.7 on the total husband violence against women scale. The mean depression score of participants was 9.1, the minimum score was 0, and the maximum score was 63.0 (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Scale Scores

	Mean	SD	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Partner violence against women	26,6	12,6	20,0	18,0	89,0
Victims' perception of social support against violence	15,8	4,8	17,0	6,0	30,0
Victims' common beliefs about violence	6,3	3,3	5,0	5,0	25,0
Total score on the husband violence against women scale	48,7	16,8	43,0	29,0	132,0
Depression score	9,1	10,5	6,0	0,0	63,0

There was a statistically significant positive and very weak correlation between the depression score and the scores on the husband violence against women, victims' common beliefs about violence, and total husband violence against women scale ( $p < 0.001$ , 0.013, 0.014, respectively) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Examination of the Relationship between Depression Scores and the Husband Violence against Women Scale Scores

	Depression score	
	r	p
Husband violence against women	0,180	<b>&lt;0,001</b>
Victims' perception of social support against violence	0,034	0,410
Victims' common beliefs about violence	0,103	<b>0,013</b>
Total husband violence against women	0,103	<b>0,014</b>

r: Spearman's rho correlation coefficient

The effect of the variable of the woman's age on the total score of the husband violence against women scale was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.171$ ;  $p = 0.025$ ). As the age increased by one unit, the total score on the HVAWS increased by 0.171 units. The effect of having elementary school education on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant, and the score of women with elementary school education was 13.489 points higher than the score of those who were literate ( $\beta = 13.489$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect of having a partner with middle school education on the total score of the HVAWS was statistically significant, and the score of participants with a partner with middle school education was 7.293 points higher than the score of those who had a literate partner ( $\beta = 7.293$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ). The effect of having a partner with high school education on the total score of the HVAWS was statistically significant, and the score of participants with a partner with high school education was 3.861 points higher than the score of those who had a literate partner ( $\beta = 3.861$ ;  $p = 0.014$ ). The effect of alcohol and substance use on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant, and the score of those who used alcohol and substance was 8.999 points higher than the score of those who sometimes used them ( $\beta = 8.999$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect of negatively affected relationships during the pandemic on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant, and the score of those whose relationship was negatively affected was 14.983 points higher than the score of those whose relationship was not affected ( $\beta = 14.983$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect of the duration of the marriage on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.183$ ;  $p = 0.006$ ). When the duration of marriage increased by one unit, the total score of the HVAWS decreased by 0.183 units. The effect of the start of the marriage (elopement) on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant, and the score of those who eloped was 9.023 points higher than the score of those who got married on agreement/willingly ( $\beta = 9.023$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ). The effect of income (income > expenditure) status on the total score of the HVAWS was found to be statistically significant, and the score of those whose income was more than their expenses was 6.054 points higher than the score of those whose income was less than their expenses ( $\beta = 6.054$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect of the total score of the HVAWS on depression score was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.259$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). When the total score of the HVAWS increased by one unit, the depression score increased by 0.259 units, as well. Other variables did not have a statistically significant effect ( $p > 0.050$ ) (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Results of the Path Analysis

Dependent variable	Independent variable	$\beta_1$	$\beta_2$	S. Error	Test stat.	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Total Husband Violence Against Women score	<--- Age	0,112	0,171	0,076	2,241	<b>0,025</b>	
	Education(Reference: literate)						
	<--- Elementary school	0,243	13,489	2,184	6,177	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	
	<--- Middle school	0,106	7,293	2,727	2,674	<b>0,007</b>	
	<--- High school	0,107	3,861	1,579	2,445	<b>0,014</b>	
	<--- Children (Reference: No child)	0,004	0,148	1,584	0,093	0,926	
	Alcohol/substance use by the partner (Reference: occasionally)						
	<--- Yes	0,149	8,999	2,199	4,092	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	
	<--- No	0,062	2,129	1,303	1,633	0,102	
	<--- Having been diagnosed with COVID-19 (Reference: No)	0,039	1,344	1,546	0,869	0,385	
	<--- Partner's diagnosis with COVID-19 (Reference: No)	0,063	2,077	1,471	1,412	0,158	
	How the relationship with the partner was affected during the pandemic (Reference: No effect)						
	<--- Positively	0,005	0,188	1,544	0,122	0,903	
	<--- Negatively	0,456	14,983	1,283	11,675	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	0,332
	Partner's education (Reference: literate)						
	<--- Elementary school	-0,068	-3,372	2,316	-1,456	0,146	
	<--- Middle school	0,005	0,334	2,669	0,125	0,901	
	<--- High school	-0,080	-2,915	1,604	-1,818	0,069	
	<--- Undergraduate and above	-0,076	-4,036	2,056	-1,963	0,050	
	<--- Employment status of the partner (Reference: No)	-0,051	-2,531	1,794	-1,411	0,158	
	<--- Duration of the marriage	-0,131	-0,183	0,067	-2,736	<b>0,006</b>	
	How the marriage started (Reference: agreement/willingly)						
	<--- Forced by the family	0,042	1,686	1,761	0,957	0,338	
<--- Arranged marriage	0,038	1,738	1,735	1,002	0,316		
<--- Elopement	0,113	9,023	2,856	3,160	<b>0,002</b>		
Income(Reference: Income<expenses)							
<--- Income=expenses	-0,012	-0,416	1,426	-0,292	0,770		
<--- Income>expenses	0,117	6,054	1,810	3,344	<b>&lt;0,001</b>		
Depression	<--- Total husband violence against women score	0,400	0,259	0,025	10,438	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	0,160

$\beta_1$ : Standardized path coefficient,  $\beta_2$ : Non-standardized path coefficient



The standard and non-standard path coefficients are presented in figure 1 and figure 2.

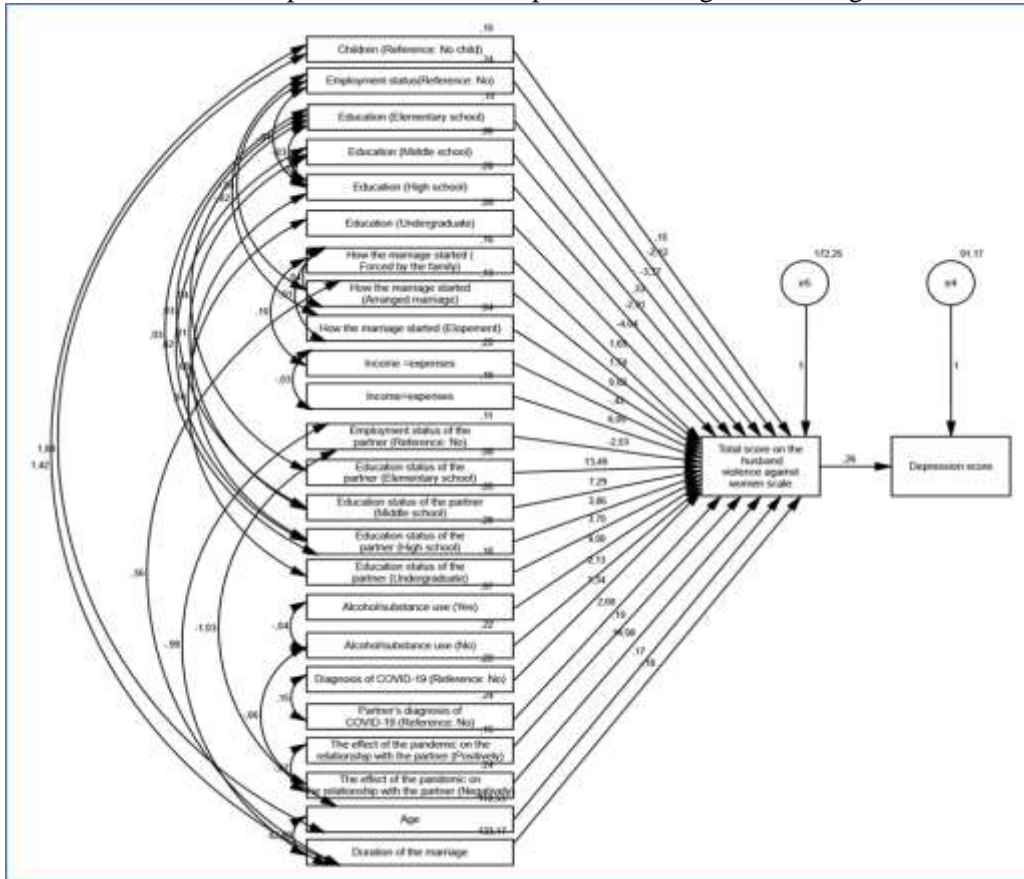


Figure 1. Non-standardized path coefficients

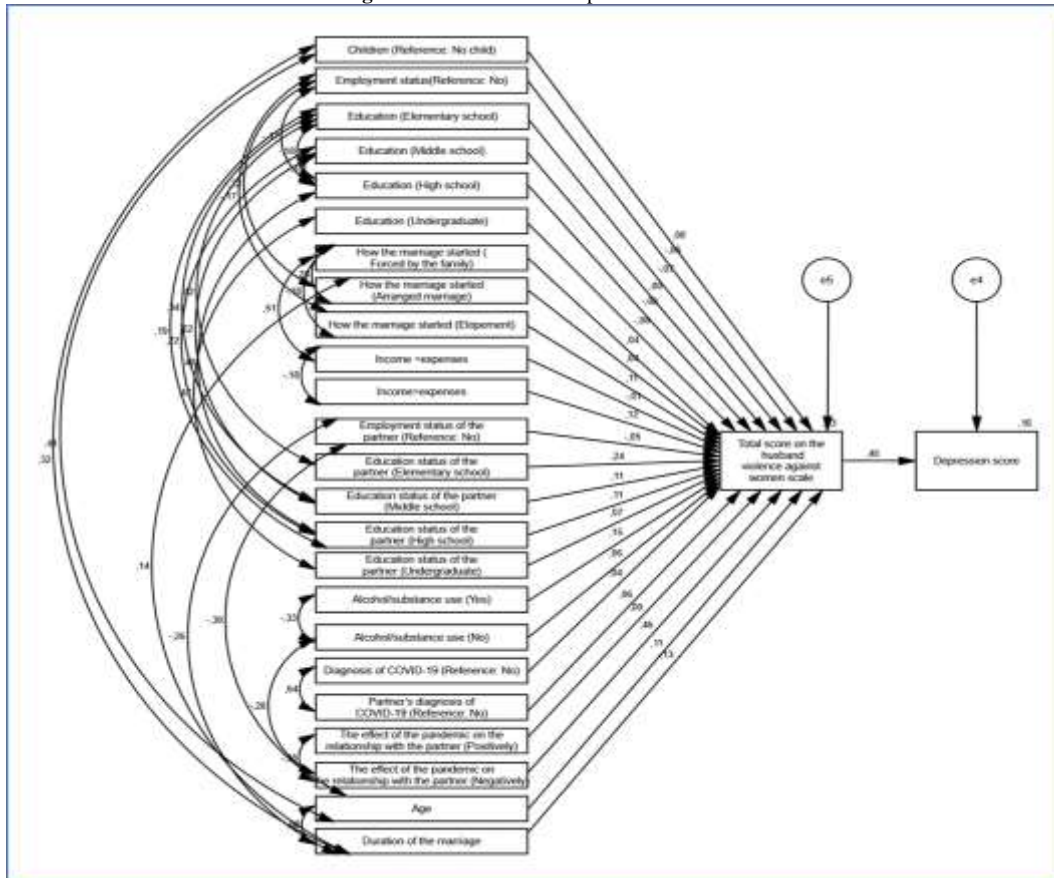


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients

## DISCUSSION

Partner violence is a serious, highly prevalent but preventable public health problem worldwide. COVID-19 has radically changed the lives of all individuals. During the lockdowns and quarantines in the pandemic, the home has become a perilous place for victims of domestic violence. The increase in domestic violence cases in 2020 has been reported in various studies. Compared to last year, domestic violence, for example, was reported to increase by 90% in China, 30-36% in France, 40-50% in Brazil, 25% in Argentina, 33% in Singapore, and 10-35% in different states of the USA (John et al., 2020; Ergoren et al., 2020)

In our study, the total score of participants on the HVAWS was 48.7. Although our result is close to the lower limit, it reveals the existence of violence against women. This score in our study may be due to the differences in the sample and the method studied. In addition, as in many societies, violence against women is perceived as acceptable behavior in Türkiye, seen as a normal part of marriage, and considered a special problem that needs to be resolved within the family.

Similar to previous research results, our study indicated that violence increased as the age of women increased (Abu-Elenin et al., 2022; Ipek et al., 2019; Sen et al., 2017). This result is consistent with previous studies showing a greater risk of violence as age increases.

It was found that as the level of education increased, the exposure of women to violence decreased. This can be explained by the fact that women with higher levels of education show less tolerance and more resilience in the face of domestic violence, impose more responsibilities on their spouses, and show strong attitudes in reporting violence. Similar to our study, Abu-Elenin et al. (2022) in their study during the pandemic with 2068 women, found that women with low education levels were exposed to more violence by their partners. Okumu et al. (2021), in their study on 7536 women aged 15-49 in Uganda, concluded that low education levels increased the vulnerability of women to partner violence

In previous studies, it was concluded that alcohol/substance use had an effect on domestic violence against women (Abu-Elenin et al., 2022; Seid et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2020; Tekkas et al., 2018)). In addition, due to lockdowns under pandemic conditions, it is thought that alcohol consumption at home increased violence (Ahmed et al., 2020). Excessive alcohol use can lead to domestic violence by causing an unhappy and conflicted marriage environment. Similar to the literature, it was found in our study that partners who used alcohol used more violence.

Family members who had to stay at home due to lockdown did not have enough personal space and were forced to be close to each other, which made partner violence worse than it was (Brown et al., 2020). In our study, similar to the results of previous studies, the violence score of women who thought that their relationship with their partner was negatively affected during the pandemic process was found to be higher.

According to the findings of our study, there was a significant relationship between the duration of the marriage and domestic violence. The increase in the amount of time that women spent with their partners and their experiences may have increased the risk of having negative experiences during this period. From this point of view, it is consistent that as the duration of the relationship increases, the use of violence and exposure to violence also increases.

In Türkiye, women who get married without the consent of their families and who, in other words, elope are exposed to various pressures. In our study, the violence scores of the women who eloped because their families did not approve of their marriage were found to be significantly higher. The women who elope lose their social support, they are left alone, and they cannot get enough attention and support from their families. The limiting effect of environmental and social support causes the continuance of the victimization of women who are subjected to violence.

Many studies have emphasized that there is a relationship between domestic violence and low levels of income. However, in our study, violence scores of women with a high income were found to be higher. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is known that the social, cultural, and economic life of many people has changed with the pandemic. The couples had to spend more time at home than ever. It is thought that this necessity created great problems, especially for couples who were actively involved in working life. Thus, it is thought that even though the income level was high, couples had problems due to spending more time together at home because of the pandemic conditions and that these problems turned into violence.



Due to the low status of women, lack of economic freedom, traditions and the patriarchal structure of society, and gender roles, women continue their marriages even though they are exposed to violence at the expense of being unhappy. This state of unhappiness and all the variables that create it also support women's depression levels negatively. When the findings of our study on depression levels of participants were evaluated within this framework, they were found to support the literature (Mugoya et al., 2020; Han Van et al., 2019; Van Deinse et al., 2018)

## CONCLUSIONS

In our study, there was a weak positive correlation between women's mean partner violence scores and their depression levels. Findings that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased all kinds of violence against women draw attention to a different aspect of the pandemic. It is very difficult to obtain objective information about violence rates in countries like Türkiye, where the attitude towards keeping domestic violence cases confidential is dominant. It is necessary to conduct more comprehensive studies on this subject, evaluate it in a multidimensional manner, and examine various psychiatric disorders caused by violence against women with different variables. Establishing policies to protect women from partner violence and helping them access assistance services should be among the priority goals.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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## Author Contributions

All authors contributed in the conceptual foundation of the study in terms of its rationale, design, data collection, analyses, discussion, and interpretation. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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