



Reflections of Childhood Violence on Maternity in Turkey

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Accepted: 5 May 2021 / Published online: 14 May 2021

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of paternal violence experiences of women on their own mothering attitudes and on their relationships with their mothers. The study employed the interpretive phenomenology design. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were used. The study group consisted of four women selected according to the criterion sampling method. The results were grouped under three headings: “perceptions about the mother’s attitudes towards the violence perpetrated by the father,” “attitudes towards children,” and “relationships with the mother.” The present study shows the effects of intergenerational transmission of violence on women’s lives. The obtained results are expected to contribute to the development of therapeutic interventions for women exposed to domestic violence in childhood.

Keywords Domestic violence · Childhood violence · Mothering attitudes · Intergenerational transmission of violence

Violence appears in all areas of life, almost inevitably. We encounter news reports of violence, especially of domestic violence towards women, on television, in newspapers, and on social media almost on a daily basis; we witness the lives of women who are killed, battered, or injured by their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, or even brothers. Studies indicate that across the world, domestic violence is the main cause of death and injuries among women aged 16 to 44. Indeed, this rate is much higher than the rate of those dying of cancer or getting injured in traffic accidents. Moreover, it has been reported that one out of every three women is battered, forced to have sexual intercourse, or exposed to sexual abuse (Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, 2002).

As shown in studies, this widespread domestic violence against women has a large number of consequences, such as not being able to attend school, getting fired because of pregnancy, working in low-status and low-wage jobs, being forced to marry, feelings of worthlessness, shame, and guilt, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harming behaviours,

perpetrating increased violence against their children, injuries, becoming disabled, and even being killed (Altınay & Arat, 2007; Bilican-Gökkaya, 2009; Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007; WHO, 2013). In other words, domestic violence against women harms their health and takes away their rights to live in a safe environment and to make decisions about their own lives (Bahar-Özvarış et al., 2016).

Domestic violence affects not only women but also other family members, especially children, directly or indirectly (Bilican-Gökkaya, 2009). Children often witness domestic violence against their mothers perpetrated by their fathers. Moreover, they are sometimes exposed directly to violence together with their mothers, or they get caught in the middle while trying to intervene (Bahar-Özvarış et al., 2016; Lök et al., 2016; Okutan, 2007). Sometimes, children are exposed to violence by their mothers who are themselves exposed to physical and emotional violence within the family (Güler et al., 2002; Tuna, 2010; Vahip & Doğanavşargil, 2006). In a family environment where there is frequent domestic violence, children are exposed to violence not once but repeatedly, which causes a more permanent and destructive effect on them (Bahar-Özvarış et al., 2016).

The effects of domestic violence against women or children may manifest themselves in a variety of ways at any age. A wide range of effects may be seen in preschool children, such as sleep disorders, problems in the development of basic feelings of trust and empathy, regression in skills (such as toilet habits and speech), and decreased self-esteem. On the other hand, withdrawal, depression, anxiety symptoms,

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decrease in school success, aggression, crime tendency, and post-traumatic stress disorder can be seen in school-aged children. Besides, desensitization to feelings and pain, behavioural disorders, skipping school, substance and alcohol use, increased aggression, and crime tendency can be observed in adolescents (Lök et al., 2016). In addition, women exposed to violence spend all their energy to secure themselves and their children, and as a result of deterioration in their health, they cannot care for their children (Bahar-Özvarış et al., 2016), they support their children's development less (Tuna, 2010), their relationship with their children deteriorates (Vahip & Doğanavşargil, 2006), children may have to take care of a wounded, bruised mother who needs help (Vahip, 2002), and thus the child may have negative and distorted attributions towards the mother (Bahar-Özvarış et al., 2016). Furthermore, the father who cannot fulfil his paternal functions becomes the source of fear and hatred and an unreliable person for the child instead of being a source of love and trust (Vahip, 2002).

Numerous studies (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Gülkanat, 2019; Tuna, 2010) have reported both short-term and long-term effects of domestic violence on children. A study conducted by Nguyen & Larsen (2012) found that children who witnessed domestic violence were more depressive. Pang and Thomas (2020) examined the long-term effects of domestic violence and found that being exposed to domestic violence in adolescence was associated with adult psychological problems, especially depression, anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder, a reduced ability to regulate emotions, and a reduced sense of life satisfaction. In another study (Dursun, 2018), it was found that adults who had been directly or indirectly exposed to domestic violence in childhood had lower levels of self-confidence, could not control their rage and turned it into harmful or aggressive behaviours or verbal attacks.

Witnessing or being exposed to domestic violence in childhood hinders learning or internalizing skills, such as the skill of coping with problems, healthy communication methods, and healthy behaviour patterns related to parenthood-spouse roles (Ağacık, 2007). It also causes the internalization of feelings like anger, fear, and depression in the violent environment, which, in turn, lead to lifelong effects on the individual's attitudes and behaviours (Vahip, 2002). In addition, those witnessing domestic violence in childhood tend to regard violent behaviours as normal, accept violence as a part of family relationships, and consider it to be a method of coping with problems (Kahraman & Çokamay, 2016; Lök et al., 2016). In other words, witnessing or becoming a part of violence in childhood causes intergenerational transmission of violence (Bilican-Gökkaya, 2009; Vahip & Doğanavşargil, 2006; Widom, 1989). Indeed, studies on the issue have shown the intergenerational transmission of violence more clearly. The study by Milaniak and Widom (2015) found that adults who had been subjected to maltreatment in childhood became

more involved in acts of criminal violence, child abuse, and intimate partner violence than the control group. The results of a Turkish study conducted with 1520 women by Altınay and Arat (2007) showed that witnessing violence in childhood doubled the probability that a man will resort to violence and a woman will be exposed to violence.

When the effects of the family environment on the acquisition of parental roles are considered (Ensby, 2005; Ülker, 2016), it is possible to say that being exposed to/witnessing domestic violence in childhood affects a woman's relationships with her children as well as her mothering attitudes. A mother with childhood experiences of domestic violence can direct her anger at her children; she can even use violence as a means to educate her children (Bilican-Gökkaya, 2012). Indeed, a great many studies have shown that women exposed to violence in childhood perpetrated violence against their children. For example, Çalışkan et al. (2019) stated that mothers who had been exposed to verbal violence from their husbands and physical violence from their parents in childhood engaged in physical abuse behaviours against their children more frequently. Another study (Tuna, 2010) reported that students whose mothers had childhood experiences of verbal violence were exposed to more inappropriate rules and support than other students.

Given its both short-term and long-term effects on individuals and society, the intergenerational transmission of violence appears a very important field of research. Domestic violence against women is quite common all around the world as well as in Turkey. In 2020 alone, 300 women lost their lives due to male violence (We Will Stop Femicide Platform, 2021). According to the results of Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey (Hacettepe University Directorate of Population Institutes, 2015), 36% of the women stated that they had been exposed to physical violence, 12% sexual violence, 44% emotional violence, 30% economic violence, and 38% physical and/or sexual violence by their spouse or boyfriend. This violence affects both women and children as witnesses and sometimes victims of violence. Hence, a need for a study has arisen in order to prevent this widespread violence and its effects and to understand the dynamics of the intergenerational transmission of violence in our country. The present study examines the effects of paternal violence experiences of women on their own mothering attitudes and on their relationships with their mothers.

Method

Design

This study uses the interpretive phenomenology design, which is one of the phenomenological approaches. In the interpretive phenomenology design, participants tell the

researcher their experiences while the researcher tries to understand and deduce meanings from their experiences. The focus is on experiences that occur as a result of interaction with the environment and on the meanings attributed to these experiences (Sart, 2015).

Study Group

In the phenomenological research design, the most important criterion for forming the study group is that it should consist of individuals who have experienced the examined phenomenon in all aspects (Creswell, 2013). For this purpose, the criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. The criteria for forming the study group were determined as follows: a) having been exposed to or having witnessed paternal violence in childhood, b) being married, c) having children, and d) having participated in a psychodrama group therapy on motherhood-femininity roles. Since talking about experiences of violence carries a risk of re-traumatization for the participants, having attended psychodrama group sessions was chosen as a criterion for the well-being of the participants. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the researcher using the interview technique, which is one of the qualitative data collection methods. Interviews are the most frequently used data collection tool in phenomenology studies (Creswell, 2013). In this study, a semi-structured interview form was used. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to achieve an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). Interview questions were developed based on the results of the pilot study and on experts’ feedback. Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder with participants’ permission. Interviews started with collecting information about the participants’ demographic characteristics (e.g., age, education level, employment status, occupation, income level, marital status, number of children, number of siblings, and birth order). Next, semi-structured interview questions were asked. Some sample questions are as follows: “Have you ever been exposed to or witnessed domestic violence in your childhood? What are your

memories of violence?” “When you think about what happened, could you talk about how it affected your perception of motherhood?” “What would you change if you were your own mother?”

Before the study, the participants participated in a 16-week psychodrama group therapy on motherhood and femininity. Face-to-face interviews conducted with the participants who had been exposed to paternal violence or witnessed domestic violence against their mothers by their fathers took approximately 30 min.

Application and Content of Psychodrama Group Sessions

Before the study, the participants participated in a 16-week psychodrama group therapy. Each session, held once a week, took about three hours. The sessions were attended by nine mothers.

Psychodrama sessions are organized into three stages: the *warm-up stage*, the *action stage*, and the *sharing stage*. In the warm-up stage, group members determine one of their past problems or experiences to reenact on the stage (Özbek & Leutz, 2011). In the action stage, which is based on the principle of “here and now,” they reenact the problem/experience that they have decided in the warm-up stage, with the help of other group members or objects (Altınay, 2003; Özbek & Leutz, 2011). In the sharing stage, those taking part in the re-enactment provide role and identification feedback, and other group members talk about how they relate what they have seen on the stage to their own lives (Altınay, 2003).

Throughout the psychodrama group process, the sessions were held as either protagonist-centred or group-centred depending on the purpose of the group and on the needs of the members. Through psychodrama group therapy, the members were provided with insights about their own mothering attitudes and femininity roles; they were given the chance to review their relationships, experience different roles, and develop empathy and healthier behaviours towards others. Following each re-enactment, members’ feedback about their roles were taken, and they were asked to relate the re-enacted experience to their own lives. Participants’ analyses related to the process were summarized in line with the goals of the study, and they are presented in the results section. All the sessions were led by researchers who had received training in psychodrama.

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Age	Level of education	State of employment	Marital status	Number of children	Number of siblings	Birth order
P1	43	University	Teacher/employed	Married	2	4	2
P2	40	University	Graphic designer/ unemployed	Married	1	2	1
P3	50	University	Health researcher/ employed	Married	1	4	1
P4	40	High school	Textile sector/ unemployed	Married	2	6	2

Data Analysis

The audio recordings recorded during the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Also, the stages of interpretive phenomenology analysis were followed during the data analysis process. In the first stage of the analysis, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher, the resulting text was read and re-read, and detailed notes were taken. In the next stage, themes were formed from each participant's interview texts based on the notes taken. Next, themes were categorized and mapped based on their conceptual similarities (Smith et al., 2009; Saldana, 2013). In addition, data triangulation was used, and the results were supported with direct excerpts from the members' process analyses.

Validity and Reliability of Data

Long-term interaction, focused data collection, and data triangulation, which are among the requirements to ensure internal validity, were used in the study. Long-term interaction with the participants was achieved by the researchers conducting the psychodrama sessions. Interviews were carried out by establishing close relationships with the participants, and data triangulation was achieved by process analysis. In order to ensure the external validity of the study, direct excerpts from the interviews are given, and purposeful sampling was used. In the process of internal reliability, codes and themes created independently by the researchers were compared and discussed until a consensus was reached. In order to ensure external reliability, the objectives of the researchers and the place where data were obtained were clearly defined by the process analysis.

The Researcher's Role

Previous study subjects of the researchers and their sensitivity towards woman, violence, and motherhood issues have led them to do this study. During the psychodrama sessions with women, researchers were shocked by the ongoing effects of domestic violence against women. So, they intended to contribute to stopping the violence with the studies to be done in this field. The researchers' subjective study experiences formed a supportive basis for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations

For the study, an ethics committee approval (No 56665618–204.01.07) was received from İstanbul Okan University Ethics Committee. The purpose and scope of the study were explained to the participants. In addition, before the interviews, informed consent was taken from women who agreed to participate in the study. In order to protect the

confidentiality and identity information of the participants, codes (P1, P2, etc.) were assigned to each participant.

Results

Process Analysis of the Participants Regarding Psychodrama Group Therapy

Starting with the first session, the members in the psychodrama group therapy connected with each other quickly. Although the focus of the group was on motherhood and femininity roles, during the process, different aspects of different roles related to being a wife, daughter, sister, niece, and employee were staged by the members. Also, with the re-enactments of past family experiences and motherhood roles, the members experienced various parent, mother, woman, wife, and child roles in the psychodrama stage.

- **P1**, one of the most active members of the group, reenacted her relationship with her father who perpetrated both physical and psychological violence against her and other family members in her childhood. She stated that she had difficulty in maintaining this relationship in which the violence continued psychologically in her adulthood, and she ended her re-enactment by saying that she would determine boundaries in this relationship. With this re-enactment which was very challenging for her, she had the opportunity to face her father and tell him the things she could not before. In the following sessions, she said that the effects of this violence continued all her life and that she was worried about marrying someone like her father. She also added that she was an authoritarian mother and that she was worried that she could explode with anger at her children. In a session in which the intergenerational transmission of mothering roles was discussed, she stated that she thought she was like her solution-oriented mother rather than her angry father. In another session, she stated that she felt worried, anxious, and insecure about her role as a mother.

P1's sharing with the group her childhood experiences of violence also encouraged other members to share similar experiences. After her re-enactment that helped her achieve emotional catharsis, P2, P3, and P4 also revealed that they were, too, exposed to paternal violence and witnessed violence against their mothers by their fathers.

- **P2**, who did not hold back her experiences and feelings during the sessions, shared with the group her own childhood experiences of violence by her father. She expressed her feelings about her father as follows:

“I wouldn’t want my dad to be home at all. We would take a deep breath if dad wasn’t at home. Do I love my father? I pity him but I don’t love him. I’ve always felt ashamed of him. I’ve always wanted to keep him a secret. I didn’t want to introduce him to anyone. He has always been a burden to me.”

In the following session, P2 stated that the traces of her experiences of violence were still visible in her adult life and that she did not want to remember these memories. During the sessions, she also expressed her ambivalent feelings about her mother: she felt that she was neglected by her mother, which made her feel angry with her. However, this feeling of anger, in turn, made her feel guilty. In the last session, she stated that she had a talk with her and that she could now understand her. As a result, the sessions helped her restore her relationships with her mother.

- **P3**, one of the most sociable and active members of the group, shared a memory of the violence her father perpetrated against her mother:

“One day, and I can never forget that day, I wanted to take revenge on my dad. My mother was folding socks; he came and shouted at my mother for laughing in the teachers’ room. My mother did not respond. She continued to fold the socks, but she was crying. I can never forget that moment. I couldn’t do anything. I sat next to her. Normally, I wouldn’t want her to see me crying. I don’t forgive him... I attended a boarding school to get rid of those things.”

P3 was one of the members who emphasized that she had to undertake the responsibilities of being a daughter, a mother, and a sister. She said that when her parents started to quarrel, she tried to prevent her siblings from witnessing her father’s violence against her mother by taking them to another room. In the session in which the intergenerational transmission of mothering roles was discussed, she stated that she was not passive like her mother or her grandmother who were exposed to pressure from their husbands.

- **P4**, one of the members who reenacted past traumatic experiences most courageously, shared the effects of her experiences of violence as follows:

“Both my mum, me, and my siblings were exposed to too much violence. We would be sleeping when he came home... But sometimes, he would wake and batter us.

He died at a young age. I mean, we were freed. I feel lucky. I say fortunately he is dead. People find this odd. One day before his death, he had beaten mum and on that day I prayed a lot, I wished him dead a thousand times, a hundred million times. And he died the next day. Sometimes I blame myself for his death. I’ve never felt his absence. I grew up with a lack of self-confidence because of him. Sometimes I have difficulty in expressing myself. I feel ashamed. I could not attend school.”

Despite all her experiences of violence, in the photo action from the past, P4 created a picture of a “happy and beautiful family with her father”, which she said she never had. In the following sessions, she realized that expressing her feelings, in her own words, sharing her “wreckage,” made her strong. During the process, she discovered the truth about her depression and stated that she was planning to receive individual therapy to deal with her depression.

At the end of the process, group members stated that P1’s re-enactment was one of the most touching, which shows that the group members shared feelings about each other’s experiences. To quote P4, getting to know others who, like themselves, were exposed to childhood violence gave them strength.

Semi-Structured Interview Findings

Following main themes emerged from the interviews with the participants: “perceptions about the mother’s attitudes towards the violence perpetrated by the father,” “attitudes towards children,” and “relationships with the mother.” The details of the main themes and sub-themes are included in this section. Table 2 shows the findings.

Perceptions about the Mother’s Attitudes towards the Violence Perpetrated by the Father

To the question, “What would you change if you were your own mother?” some participants justified their mothers’ attitudes, saying they did everything they could. On the other hand, some participants thought that their mothers failed to adequately respond to violence. The participants who supported their mothers’ attitudes stated that their mothers did their best considering the social conditions at that time, but they were not supported by their social circle and did not have any other options to turn to as they did not have economic independence. On the other hand, those who did not support their mothers’ attitudes stated that if they were in their mother’s shoes, they would stand up to violence and would never allow their children to be a victim of physical abuse. According to them, thinking of leaving the husband to live with parents was not an effective solution because eventually, one has to reunite with the husband because of social

Table 2 Findings

Main themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Participants	A representative quotation for the theme
Perceptions about the Mother's attitudes towards the violence perpetrated by the father	Supporting the mother's attitude	Social conditions, Economic concerns, Trying to protect children	P1, P4	P2: "For example, I know right now. I know that violence is something that you can stop when it comes first. If you don't stop it the moment it comes, it continues by increasing..."
	Finding the mother's reaction to violence insufficient	Protecting oneself, Protecting children, Struggling, Building a new life	P1, P2, P3	
Attitudes towards children	Protecting the child from any acts of violence	Not letting children go through the same experiences, Protection, Fear	P1, P2, P4	P2: "I wanted my daughter not to be like that. I wanted her to grow differently... For example, I was so scared that P would go through something like that, for example that she would experience violence in her choices. How my situation affects her while making her choices. I thought a lot about these."
	Establishing control over children	Imposing pressure, Psychological violence, Making decisions on behalf of children	P2, P3	
	Imposing one's views on their children	Wanting the child to attend school, Wanting children to achieve what they could not	P4, P3	
	Justifying the form of violence perpetrated	Being strict towards the child due to the burden of household chores and of being the only responsible for the care of the child, Having difficulty in tolerating the child's misbehaviours, Getting angry with the child, Not being supported by the spouse, Inconsistent parenting attitudes	P2, P3, P4	
Relationships with the mother	Similarities with the mother	Making decisions on behalf of the child, Passing on what they learned from their mothers to their children	P1, P2, P3	P4: "We can look from a broader perspective, mum would look from a narrower perspective...My mother is more open now, in the past for example, she would say what will other people say, she fettered us a lot for this. She always said what will people say, what will your uncle, your grandma say. For example, we used to wear strapped clothes and she would say your aunt will say what's the difference between showing your intimate areas..."
	Differences with the mother	Considering the mother insufficient, Defending oneself	P1, P2, P3, P4	

conditions: instead, they should have struggled to build a life for themselves and their children. Leaving the husband, struggling, and showing the courage to build a new life emerged as some important components. Violence was considered an act that can be stopped. From the theme of "perceptions about the mother's attitudes towards the violence perpetrated by the father," two sub-themes emerged: "supporting the mother's attitudes" and "finding the mother's reaction to violence insufficient."

Supporting the Mother's Attitudes This sub-theme included codes such as "social conditions," "economic concerns," and "trying to protect children." The participants who approved of their mother's attitudes evaluated them based on social norms. They underlined the importance of women's economic independence as well as mentioned the challenges of life after divorce. As an example, P1 describes these challenges as follows.

- P1: "For example, my mum left dad to live with grandma. My grandma said 'Such things don't happen in our family, go back to your home.' Back then; living on your own was something that required courage, it was not considered appropriate in our society. Maybe I would do the same thing. But she had to go back to a vicious circle. She did not have the economic independence."

It is seen that mothers try to protect their children by acting as a shield against the violence used by the father. Such behaviours are perceived as protecting children from violence. It is accepted that due to social norms, mothers do not have any other option but to tolerate violence from their husbands to protect their children. The mother's intervention to protect her children, despite the risk of herself being exposed to violence, is defined as self-sacrifice. P4 describes this experience as follows.

- P4: *“Mum was very self-sacrificing when we were exposed to violence. She would try to stop dad. But dad would direct his anger at her. She was patient and self-sacrificing. But we had lots of economic difficulties...”*

Finding the Mother’s Reaction to Violence Insufficient This sub-theme included codes such as “protecting oneself,” “protecting children,” “struggling,” “building a new life.” Some participants emphasized that their mothers could have left their husbands to start a new life. Some stated that their mothers did not want to leave their husbands to live with their parents thinking that they could face other problems when living with them; instead, they chose not to leave the house in which they were exposed to violence. However, some said that going back to their parents’ house was not the only option: they could have found a job and started a new life for themselves and their children. According to them, their mothers should have left their dad to prevent their children from being exposed to violence. P3 stated her thoughts about how her mother had struggled to start a new life as follows.

- P3: *“I would have struggled had I been in mum’s shoes. I mean I wouldn’t have lived with dad. I would have taken my children and looked for other options. I mean, I wouldn’t have thought, ‘If I go back to my parents’ home, I will have different problems with them, instead of having problems with them, let me put up with this man and not raise my children without a father.’ I would have considered raising my children more healthily. Maybe she could have found other options had she searched. I wouldn’t have put up with this.”*

Some participants said that they could never tolerate any violence against their children; so, their mothers, too, should have stood to violence by their fathers. Some participants recalled their thoughts of standing up to violence by fighting back and even stabbing their fathers. P1 describes her feelings as follows.

- P1: *“(If I were mum), I would have fought back him. I would have hit him. The way he battered me, I would... because we went through extreme things, both my mother, my siblings, and me. Maybe I would have done that at that moment... The stabbing... I am not sure if I would regret it. Maybe I would do. Because we have children together. I could do that. I could tolerate violence but I wouldn’t want my children to live this. Because the way he battered us was not normal. He would throw us from wall to wall. Maybe I would not stand seeing this. Maybe I would do something like this.”*

Some participants thought that their mothers did not react enough to stop the violence. For example, P2 stated the following:

- P2: *“For once, I think I would say no... I would stop it, I think. Or, I would leave him, I would definitely leave him.”*

Attitudes towards Children

Some participants voiced their concerns about their children going through the same experiences as they did. They said that they wanted to protect their children from the whole world, from their relatives, and from even their husbands. They also expressed their concerns about the effects of their own childhood experiences of domestic violence on their children. However, it was seen that some participants, who reported adopting authoritative parenting styles, tried to justify this with their own childhood experiences of domestic violence. They take the child’s life under control and not give them a chance to create a space for themselves. It can be seen that mothers who could not attend school force their children to be successful at school; they want them to achieve what they could not and they have a desire to recreate themselves in their children. It is stated that verbal and psychological violence against children is caused by past experiences. Some participants expressed their concerns that their children would be like their father; so, they frequently accused them and forced them to be successful at school and to have a good career in the future. On the other hand, some reported adopting conflicting parenting styles such as being too permissive or too strict. As the reasons for being too strict towards their children, some participants mentioned the burden of household chores and of being the only one responsible for the care of the child. From the theme of “Attitudes towards Children,” four sub-themes emerged: “protecting the child from any acts of violence,” “establishing control over children,” “imposing one’s views on their children,” and “justifying the form of violence perpetrated.”

Protecting the Child from any Acts of Violence This sub-theme included codes such as “not letting children go through the same experiences,” “protection,” and “fear.” Some participants said that they would try to protect their children from any acts of violence coming from anyone. For example, P1 and P4 said the following.

- P1: *“...I took care to prevent any physical or psychological violence coming to my children... Let’s not raise our voices at our children... and I tried not to make them go through what I’ve been through.”*

- P4: *“I hugged my children more... There is no point in creating fear or anxiety in your children... I want to protect them... to protect them from everyone.”*

Establishing Control over Children This sub-theme included codes such as “imposing pressure,” “psychological violence,” and “making decisions on behalf of children.” Some participants said that they made decisions on behalf of their children and they were aware of this. P3 stated that even though she was aware that it was wrong, she could not help but make decisions on behalf of her son:

- P3: *“No matter how hard I try to stop myself; I am over-protective of my son. I am a control freak. I make decisions on behalf of him. I don’t let him make decisions.”*

According to some participants, their childhood experiences affected negatively their relationships with their children. P2 indicated that despite her efforts to have a good relationship with her daughter, she had an oppressive attitude due to her negative childhood experiences.

- P2: *“It’s like I kind of became authoritarian. But I tried to build something egalitarian and participative. You know, you cannot free yourself from the effects of some things. In her childhood, there were times when I shouted at P. But I never did something physical. But I imposed pressure on her many times.”*

Imposing One’s Views on their Children This sub-theme included codes such as “wanting children to attend school” and “wanting children to achieve what they could not.” Some participants thought the only way to protect their children was to make them strong, so they imposed their views on their children. For example, P4 and P3 said the following.

- P4: *“...I want him to attend school and to need no one. I want him to stand on his own feet. It backfired when I imposed pressure... But I want him to stand on his own feet. I want him not to need anyone.”*

P4 and P3 stated that their children reacted negatively when they put pressure on them and that they were criticised by their social environment, but they could not help but pressurize their children.

- P3: *“...In terms of lessons and social life, I want her to succeed in everything that I could not... People around me criticise me for this... They say, ‘You are oppressing the child.’ Yes, I sometimes ‘suffocate’ my child but I can’t*

stop this. Even if I say OK to myself today, I do the same things again tomorrow.”

Justifying the Form of Violence Perpetrated This sub-theme included codes such as “being strict towards the child due to the burden of household chores and of being the only one responsible for the care of the child,” “having difficulty in tolerating the child’s misbehaviours,” “getting easily angry with the child,” “not being supported by the spouse,” and “inconsistent parenting attitudes.” Some participants said that, while trying to protect their children from any act of violence that may come from their environment, they imposed pressure on their children and tried to control them. It was observed that they even tried to justify the psychological violence they perpetrated against their children. P2, for example, emphasized that she oppressed her child, but never used physical violence. For her, the reason for this pressure was the burden of being the only one responsible for the care of the child as a working woman. Hence, it can be said that she was caught in between her career and her roles as a mother and that she lacked her husband’s support.

- P2: *“In her childhood, there were times when I shouted at P. But I never did anything physical. But I put pressure on her many times... Because I was alone. Her father was irresponsible. And I had to think about everything and do everything. And I had just become a manager. It was just the times P was growing up and I was having such a difficult time... I had no one to help me. Besides, I was trying to prove myself in the office. And I was trying to be a good mother.”*

For P4, her negative childhood experiences were the reason for her anger, intolerance for her children, and inconsistent parenting attitudes. Nevertheless, it was observed that she was trying to stop using violence against her children and that she had intense feelings of regret.

- P4: *“But I can’t have a good time on the other hand. I get bored very quickly. I feel short of breath immediately. I get overwhelmed when I push. I think it is because of my childhood... I get disturbed; immediately I say enough, I get angry but I don’t resort to violence, I just get angry. When they insist, I shout at them, I say enough. I hit my son with two fingers and the whole family are still talking about me. I am so soft-hearted that I sat and cried for hitting my child. For example, my son threw my phone from the balcony. I said, ‘It’s OK son, I will go and get it. Don’t be sad, don’t cry...’”*

P3, on the other hand, expressed her concerns that her son might be like her husband. She said that she applied intense

pressure on him so that he could be successful at school but she missed the fact that her son was only eight years old.

- P3: *“I don’t use physical violence against my son, but I sometimes raise my voice and shout at him. I say, ‘Why are you doing like this, don’t do that.’ I think negatively even about the smallest thing. He failed one of his exams. He took the exam without studying. I said to him, ‘If you go on like this, the result is obvious. You won’t be able to get what you want. You won’t have a good job. Having a good job means being strong.’ I know this is wrong but a part of me is always worried that he may be unemployed in the future.”*
- R: *“Just like your dad.”*
- P3: *“Yes.”*

Relationships with the Mother

Some participants said that they tried to pass on the skills (cooking, etc.) they learned from their mothers to their children; however, it was observed that they passed on their skills to their daughters because of the gender roles in society. Some participants said that they treated their children in the same way their controlling mothers used to treat them. On the other hand, some participants, for fear of becoming a mother like their own mother, said they developed different mothering attitudes and learned how to say “no.” Some considered their own mothers insufficient. From the theme of “relationships of the participants with the mother,” two sub-themes emerged: “similarities with the mother” and “differences from the mother.”

Similarities with the Mother This sub-theme included codes such as “making decisions on behalf of the child” and “passing on what they learned from their mothers to their children.” It was found that just like their mothers did, they, too, passed on gender roles to their children. Some said that they made decisions on behalf of their children. For example, P1 and P2 said the following.

- P2: *“Mum used to teach me a lot of things. I mean, skills, parenting... I taught my son these kinds of things, things that can make his life easier.”*

P1 indicated that despite being exposed to domestic violence, her mother struggled to maintain order at home and she did this for her children. For her, her mother was a “struggling” mother:

- P1: *“...Except that, my mum was a practical woman, she took care of the house even in those difficult times. My aunts would say to mum, ‘If I were you, I wouldn’t be able*

to do even one-tenth of what you have done. You are still struggling.’ And she would say ‘What can I do, I have my children. I would fight for my children.’”

It is observed that their mothers’ protective attitudes due to domestic violence affected the participants as well. P3, for example, said she made decisions on behalf of her child to protect him and she did not support his autonomy.

- P3: *“Mum was overprotective, and I am overprotective, too. Mum also used to explain things with too many words. I explain things with a lot of words, too. I make decisions on behalf of him. I don’t let him make decisions. I’m like my mum in this respect.”*

Differences from the Mother This sub-theme included codes such as “considering the mother insufficient” and “defending oneself.” Some participants emphasized that they were different from their mothers in that they would not let themselves be exposed to violence. According to P1, she is luckier than her mother as she is not exposed to domestic violence:

- P1: *“In fact, I am a comfortable mother right now. I am not exposed to violence... I feel luckier... Mum is still the same. For example, there was a quarrel between them again yesterday, she was exposed to psychological violence again. Maybe there is no physical violence but she can still be subject to dad’s insults. I feel luckier than her.”*

P2 stated that she developed new attitudes to protect herself, stood up to violence, and took action to stop it. Her mother was, according to her, afraid to express herself, and she also emphasized that the biggest difference between her and her mother was that she can protect and express herself. Hence, she was able to rewrite her traumatic story thanks to her ability to stop violence, unlike her mother.

- P2: *“...When I think like that, I developed methods so that no one can keep me under pressure and I would not end up like her... For once, mum cannot express herself well enough. Apart from this, she is very coward... I was once exposed to violence by P’s dad, and after that day, physical violence never occurred. I both protected myself and gave him the message that I would leave him and never return. It never happened again.”*

Similarly, P3 stated that she could oppose her husband and this made her stronger than her mother.

- P3: *“I am stronger than mum. Mum was weaker. She could not defend herself. Mum would just obey. For example, I can say no to my husband.”*

Discussion

Domestic violence has direct effects on children who witness or experience it (Gülkanat, 2019). Emotional or developmental scars left by domestic violence on children may continue throughout adulthood (Widom, 1989). Such childhood experiences of violence may have long-term effects such as violent behaviours in adulthood, in other words, it leads to the intergenerational transmission of violence and a cycle of violence (Milaniak & Widom, 2015; Widom, 1989; Widom, 2017; Widom & Maxfield, 2001). Intergenerational transmission of violence is an important field of study due to the legacy of contamination and destruction (Anderson & Bang, 2012). This study aims to show the effects of childhood experiences of domestic violence on women's mothering attitudes and adult life. The study does so by examining the psychosocial functions of women who witnessed or were exposed to paternal domestic violence in childhood. It also investigates participating women's views about their mothers' attitudes towards domestic experience. Thus, the study seeks to present a broader perspective for the development of further psychosocial interventions.

In the study, the first theme was "perceptions about the mother's attitudes towards the violence perpetrated by the father." From this theme, two sub-themes emerged: "supporting the mother's attitudes" and "finding the mother's reaction to violence insufficient." It can be seen that women who find the reactions of their mothers against violence insufficient are determined to stand up to domestic violence and find ways to prevent it. In addition, some participants specifically underlined their complete opposition against violence. Similar to this finding, in their study conducted with 12 women who witnessed violence perpetrated by their fathers against their mothers, Anderson and Danis (2006) found that these women could resist the pressure of the person who perpetrated violence and that they improved their resilience. Anderson and Bang (2012) claimed that despite the extremely negative effects of childhood experiences of domestic violence, adult resistance was possible and that an adult's struggle for recovery could lead to a positive transformation in some aspects. In the present study, participants who gave partial support to their mothers' reactions emphasized that their mothers did not have economic independence and social pressure restricted them from taking certain steps. It is another well-known issue that despite domestic violence, women have difficulty in getting a divorce or leaving their husband due to social attitudes (Günindi-Ersöz, 2011).

In the study, the second theme was "attitudes towards children." From this theme, four sub-themes emerged: "protecting the child from any acts of violence," "establishing control over children," "imposing one's views on their children," and "justifying the form of violence perpetrated." Domestic violence causes serious problems in children's development; moreover,

it can also be transmitted from generation to generation (Asen & Tomson, 1993; Vahip & Doğanavşargil, 2006). According to Roediger (2009), individuals who have been exposed to any type of violence consider other people to be having the potential to hurt them and they perceive themselves as helpless. Also, witnessing the father's violence against the mother in childhood is a risk for the emergence of emotional and behavioural problems and violent behaviours (Cater, 2007). Similarly, as most of the participants stated, childhood experiences of domestic violence have lifelong effects, which manifest themselves sometimes as fear or sometimes as the concern over children's protection from acts of violence. Other effects of domestic violence on the participants were the feeling that the world is not a safe place and the fear that violence may occur at any moment. Hence, to make their children stronger, the participants tried to impose their own views and put pressure on their children. When the literature is reviewed (Bulut, 1996; Duffy et al., 1999; Dursun, 2018; Güler et al., 2002; Yıldırım, 1998), it can be seen that women who are exposed to violence are usually more likely to mistreat their own children. In their study examining the intergenerational transmission of violence over three generations, Badenes-Ribera et al. (2020) found that being exposed to childhood maltreatment led to the intergenerational transmission of violence. Based on these findings, they suggested that those who were exposed to emotional abuse during childhood were more likely to use physical punishment or to adopt harsh parenting attitudes. In the present study, some participants reported that they had difficulties in tolerating their children's misbehaviours, that they frequently used psychological violence against them, and that they tried to impose their unfulfilled dreams onto them. Some participants even said that in the face of failure, they made their children feel guilty. Vahip (2002) emphasized that with the violence experienced in childhood, feelings such as fear and anger are also passed on. This present study shows that those experiencing domestic violence internalize fear and anger, thus they are more alert to possible dangers against them or their children.

The third and final theme of the study was "relationships of the participants with the mother." From this theme, two sub-themes emerged: "similarities with the mother" and "differences from the mother." Asen and Tomson (1993) stated that people usually learned about parenting styles from their own parents. The learned behaviour pattern can occur either as having the same attitude with the parents or building a new attitude by avoiding the mistakes of the parents. Similarly, in the present study, it was found that participants passed the information they learned from their mothers onto their children and in addition to this, they tried to stop domestic violence to exhibit different mothering attitudes than their mothers did. Those who thought that their mothers failed to stand up to domestic violence tried to fix and change this pattern in their lives. Many studies that confirmed the cycle

of violence emphasized that not every individual who was exposed to childhood maltreatment used violence in adulthood (Widom, 1989; Widom & Wilson, 2015). A study with women who witnessed domestic violence against their mothers showed that participants sought ways to understand their experiences and to heal from their negative childhood experiences while they matured into adulthood (Humphreys, 2001).

In the present study, a limited number of women participated in psychodrama group therapy. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate the perceptions of women who witnessed or were exposed to childhood domestic violence about their own mothers and their attitudes towards their children. The study also offers some precious insights into the long-term effects of paternal violence on women's adult lives. It was found that the participants were quite careful about protecting their children from violence. However, some participants also reported perpetrating emotional violence against their children. This emotional violence is expressed by them as over-controlling their children, as putting pressure to make them stronger individuals, and as efforts to prevent them from being exposed to violence. Besides, some participants found their mothers' reactions to domestic violence insufficient, and some believed that various strategies could be developed to stop domestic violence. When the findings are evaluated altogether, it can be said that witnessing or suffering from domestic violence in childhood negatively affects parenting attitudes in adulthood. However, it is clearly seen that women who grew up in a violent environment show resistance and struggle to break this cycle of violence.

Based on this study, which examines the perceptions of women who experienced domestic violence in their childhood, it is thought that women's perceptions about their fathers and their husband's roles as a father should also be examined in future studies. Doing so will help researchers to develop further insights into the effects of intergenerational transmission of violence on spouse roles and parenting roles. One of the limitations of this study is that we could not achieve participant validation, which is one of the requirements of the phenomenological approach, due to the risk of re-traumatization. Also, the study was conducted with a limited number of people to better monitor their progress during 16-week sessions, to make it easier for them to share their feelings, and to make group support more available for every member when dealing with mental problems caused by recalling childhood experiences of domestic violence. The participants had different income levels and cultural backgrounds. It is recommended to increase the generalizability of the study with more homogeneous groups or with groups consisting of participants from different backgrounds.

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of social service programs/therapeutic interventions for women with childhood experiences of domestic

violence. It is argued that interventions with individuals who witnessed or were exposed to domestic violence in childhood can offer an opportunity to prevent the transmission of domestic violence (Widom & Wilson, 2015). Indeed, relevant studies have reported that as a result of various group therapy methods, children and adolescents with experiences of domestic violence have fewer behavioural problems and symptoms of depression, lower levels of aggression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, and improved self-esteem (Lacasa et al., 2018; Tyndall-Lind et al., 2001). Evaluated together with the literature, the results of this study reveal that it is very important to develop and implement social service programs to recognize the signs of domestic violence at an earlier stage, especially in countries like Turkey where violence against women is widespread. As our findings have revealed, individuals who grow up in a violent family environment may themselves use violence, albeit different forms of it, in adulthood, despite their desire to avoid such behaviours. In therapy processes with children and adults who have been exposed to/witnessed violence, addressing the intergenerational transmission of violence and its effects on interpersonal relationships, as well as studying its reflections especially on parenting attitudes, can contribute significantly to breaking the cycle of violence.

Acknowledgements We would like to thank all of the participants who participated in this study for their support.

Author Contributions All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Simel Parlak and Güliz Gülçin Çamaş. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Simel Parlak and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Declarations

Ethical Consideration All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. For the study, 56,665,618–204.01.07 numbered Ethical Board approval was taken from İstanbul Okan University Ethical Board. The purpose and scope of the research was explained to the participants. In addition, informed consent was taken from the participants who agreed to participate in the study before starting the interview.

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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