

SURVIVING MALE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN TURKEY:
WOMEN’S STORIES OF POWERLESSNESS,
EMPOWERMENT, AND RECOVERY

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Büşra Yalçınöz Uçan, certify that

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ABSTRACT

Surviving Male Partner Violence in Turkey:

Women's Stories of Powerlessness, Empowerment, and Recovery

Alternative to the psychopathology-oriented approaches on women's responses to male partner violence, research grounded on strength-based perspectives has contributed significantly to a better conceptualization of women's experiences of coping with and surviving violence. Much research in psychology, however, focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects while neglecting the socio-structural determinants of leaving and empowerment. Integrating a feminist, multidimensional approach, the present study provides a contextualized framework of women's pre- and post-separation processes. As no previous studies in Turkey systematically examined women's leaving and post-separation experiences, this research also aimed to identify the processes shaped by the particular context of the country. The participants included 16 women survivors of male partner violence. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with each woman. The Constructivist Grounded Theory was used for the analysis. The results demonstrated the substantial effect of the degree of women's socio-economic power on their stay/leave decision-making and their experiences after separation, which indicated the complexity of sociocultural and structural factors in Turkey, incumbering women's escape and healing. The narratives also revealed nonlinear, coexistent processes that constituted women's unceasing struggle to survive disempowering circumstances in their lives, both before and after separation. While not reflecting an end to their distress, their efforts to resist violence and powerlessness, as strengthened by the relational and practical support available to them, were shown to evolve into a profound sense of well-being and

empowerment. The results are discussed from the perspective of feminist intersectional approaches, and social/clinical implications in relation to the country context are presented.

ÖZET

Türkiye Bağlamında Erkek Partner Şiddetine Karşı Hayatta Kalma:

Kadınların Güçsüzlük, Güçlenme ve İyileşme Hikayeleri

Erkek şiddeti yaşamış kadınların şiddet karşısındaki tutum ve tepkilerinin psikopatoloji temelli modeller üzerinden kavramsallaştırılmasına alternatif olarak, güç odaklı yaklaşımlara dayanan araştırmalar kadınların şiddetle baş etme ve şiddetten uzaklaşma deneyimlerinin anlaşılmasına dair önemli katkılarda bulunmuştur. Ancak psikoloji alanındaki birçok araştırma ağırlıklı olarak içsel ve ilişkisel süreçlere odaklanmış, şiddet ilişkisinden ayrılma ve kadınların güçlenme süreçlerine dair sosyo-yapısal etmenleri göz ardı etmişlerdir. Bu çalışma ise feminist ve çok boyutlu bir yaklaşıma dayanarak kadınların ayrılık öncesi ve sonrası süreçlerinin bağlamsal bir çerçevede açıklanmasını hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca, daha önce Türkiye’de kadınların şiddetten ayrılma ve ayrılık sonrası deneyimlerini inceleyen herhangi bir çalışma olmadığından, bu araştırma ülkenin kendine özgü koşullarının şekillendirdiği süreçleri de ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Çalışmada şiddet ilişkisinden uzaklaşmış 16 kadınla her biriyle ikişer defa olmak üzere derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler sosyal inşacı temellendirilmiş kuram metoduna dayanarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar öncelikle kadınların sosyoekonomik güç seviyelerinin ayrılığa dair karar verme süreçlerinde ve ayrılık sonrasındaki deneyimlerindeki belirleyici etkisini göstermiştir. Bu bulgu aynı zamanda ülkedeki sosyokültürel ve yapısal faktörlerin kadınların şiddetten kurtulma ve iyileşme süreçleri üzerindeki engelleyici etkisine işaret etmiştir. Bu sonuçların yanı sıra, görüşülen kadınların hikayeleri, kadınların hayatlarındaki güçsüzleştirici durumlara karşı koydukları hem ayrılık öncesinde hem de sonrasında süregiden mücadelelerini oluşturan

döngüsel ve eş zamanlı var olabilen süreçleri ortaya koymuştur. Sıkıntılarının son bulduğu bir aşamaya işaret etmemekle birlikte, kadınların şiddete ve güçsüzleştirilmeye karşı ortaya koydukları mücadelenin, ulaşabildikleri ilişkisel ve pratik desteklerin de katkısıyla, temel bir iyi olma ve güçlenme haline dönüştüğü görülmüştür. Bu sonuçlar feminist kesişimsel yaklaşımlara dayanarak tartışılmış ve ülke bağlamı ile ilişkili değerlendirmelere dayanan sosyal/klinik öneriler sunulmuştur.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women's stay/leave decision-making in violent relationships and their experiences of empowerment and recovery after separation have attracted increasing research attention during the last several decades. Much of the earlier research, based on a question of why women continue to stay in violent relationships, had focused on the traumatic impact of violence on the psychological health of women to explain the emotional processes underlying their stay/leave decisions (see Dobash & Dobash, 1992, for a review). This research focus has contributed substantially to the understanding of the unfavorable emotional outcomes of male partner violence on women and has mainly been utilized by feminist scholars through the 1980s. However, later studies (e.g., Farrell, 1996; Landenburger, 1989; Lempert, 1996; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999), mostly relying on strength-based qualitative research approaches, further expanded the focus from the factors of women's staying decisions in violent relationships to the examination of the processes that women achieve to cope with and escape violence. This new inquiry allows researchers to capture the complexity of the leaving processes more, and to comprehend the agency of battered women by highlighting their resilient power to survive male partner violence (Profitt, 1996; Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Whereas this later strength-based approach has been regarded as much more successful in reflecting the diversities and complexities in women's experiences, mainly because of the primary focus on psychological intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions in both perspectives, they failed to provide an inclusive understanding of the the social and structural bases of women's individual processes (Anderson & Saunders,

2003; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Lloyd, Emery, & Klatt, 2009). Responding to this failure, research from a sociological feminist perspective has placed an emphasis on the consideration of the socio-contextual factors that either facilitate or complicate leaving, recovery, and empowerment (e.g., Burgess & Campbell, 2016; Burgess-Proctor, 2012; Duffy, 2015; Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005; Hayes & Franklin, 2017; Tutty, Ogden, Giurgiu, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2014). This research approach enables a contextually situated understanding of women's individual experiences of male partner violence.

The present small-scale qualitative study aims to provide a strength-based, contextualized, and multidimensional analysis of women's processes of staying in and leaving violent relationships, and their individual experiences of powerlessness, empowerment, and psychological recovery throughout these processes. Considering that there has been no prior research in Turkey with a primary focus on women's stay/leave decision-making or post-separation experiences, this study also intends to fill this research gap.

The following subsections present an overall review of past and current perspectives and research directions in the related literature.

1.1 The language of deficits: Psychopathology-based conceptualizations

The related psychology research until the last few decades has primarily focused on the negative psychological consequences of male partner violence on women and the presumed psychopathological underpinnings of women's vulnerability to violence (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Hamby, 2013). Based on the application of several theoretical models such as psychoanalytic, cognitive behavior or social learning theories,

women's overall experiences in the context of interpersonal violence were examined through a deficit-based perspective of victimization (Burgess-Proctor, 2012). As these models scrutinized the psychopathology-related reasons for women's staying in violent relationships, their 'deficiencies', or 'dysfunctions' were said to eradicate their agency or capacities of self-protection, and thus were accepted as underlying reasons for their vulnerability to violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007; Hamby, 2013; Profitt, 1996).

Before the 1970s, the psychoanalytic notion of female masochism became the predominant perspective (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Accordingly, having masochistic tendencies was conceptualized as the fundamental reason to explain women's assumed unwillingness to leave; as women suffer from guilt, which was claimed to be associated with unresolved childhood conflicts, they were perceived as the victims of their unconscious needs to be punished. However, the psychoanalytic theory of female masochism generally relied on a hypothetical stance rather than research evidence and has been criticized for its intrinsic reliance on victim-blaming assumptions (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Hamby, 2013). As abused women were viewed as inherently dysfunctional individuals who have prior tendencies to initiate victimization in their lives, the model of female masochism has been discredited as a gender-oppressive framework (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

As a result of profound feminist critiques, the subsequent psychology-based theoretical models started to move away from the notion of masochism. These later frameworks emphasized contextualizing women's responses within the dynamics of abusive relationships. In this respect, Lenore Walker's learned helplessness model (1979; 2001) and the traumatic bonding theory of Dutton and Painter (1993) are widely

known as the first influential trauma-informed frameworks applied to male partner violence. Despite the subtle differences between these two theories and their reliance on a clinical mental health research perspective, they initially aimed to provide some diagnostic standards to identify the adverse outcomes of being exposed to prolonged/systemic violence on the psychological well-being of women. The diagnostic classifications were then assumed to offer an overall conceptual explanation for women's perceived inability to set proper boundaries to protect themselves against violence. According to Walker's learned helplessness framework, women's psychological entrapment into violent relationships was conceptualized as a direct consequence of repeated experiences of violence on their emotional well-being and behavioral functioning. In this regard, denial or justification of violence, self-blame, extreme feelings of isolation or helplessness, or impaired sense of control were identified as traumatic symptoms that were produced by the experience of persisting violence of the abusive partner. Walker also suggested that battered women repeatedly put themselves in jeopardized positions by falsely attributing excessive power to their partners' abilities and convincing themselves that other viable options were unavailable. The theory of traumatic bonding similarly identified women's impaired reasoning and inadequate behavioral patterns as the basis of their inability to end their continuing victimization (Dutton & Painter, 1993). It was argued that as violence increasingly creates a power imbalance in the relationship, the victimized partner becomes 'pathologically' attached to her abuser over time and develops an exalted sense of powerlessness, both of which were viewed as the roots of the cyclical pattern of leaving and returning to the abuser.

Many researchers today view the battered women syndrome and the phenomenon of traumatic bonding as the subcategories of a traumatic stress disorder classification, namely post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Dutton, 2009). In that sense, in the last several decades, this conceptual and diagnostic model has become widely acknowledged by many scholars and practitioners as the primary standard for the examination of negative mental health consequences of traumatic experiences (Briere & Jordan, 2004; Pill, Day, & Mildred, 2017). The PTSD classification mainly includes distinct behavioral symptom clusters such as emotional numbing, social or emotional avoidance, hyperarousal (irritability, sleeping problems or difficulties in concentration or attention), or re-experiencing (mainly flashbacks). The empirical research has quite consistently demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between male violence victimization and these core PTSD symptoms, indicating that a high percentage of women with current and/or past experiences of male violence (ranging from 31% to 84%) were found to suffer from adverse traumatic outcomes as described in the diagnostic criteria of PTSD (Pill et al., 2017).

Based on a model of a vicious cycle of mental health problems and violence victimization, it has been suggested that women who suffer heavily from traumatic outcomes of male partner violence (or of any other violence history in their past) would be more prone to re-experience violence at any point in their lives (Pill et al., 2017). Herman (1992) was one of the pioneering trauma research scholars who, in her outline of complex-PTSD framework, deemed victimized women as having difficulties to establish their own safety and protection due to several core reasons such as their impaired capacity of proper judgement of danger, their dissociative/avoidant coping or their excessive submissiveness to the authority. Congruent with the learned helplessness

and traumatic bonding theories, Herman stated that prolonged exposure to interpersonal violence creates a powerful sense of imprisonment in victims, which assumed to increase their vulnerability to recurrent abusive situations.

However, despite the broader acceptance of these inferences by the practitioners and academics working in the field of trauma and abuse, there is a lack of consistent research evidence for the assumed link between PTSD symptomatology and re-victimization (see Kuijpers, van der Knaap, & Lodewijks, 2011, for a meta-analysis). For instance, in a longitudinal research study, Sonis (2008) demonstrated that, after controlling several confounding factors such as available social support, violence characteristics, or use of formal support services, the statistical significance of the association between PTSD and re-victimization disappeared. Moreover, it was reported that, for 40% of women, re-victimization also happened in the absence of trauma symptomatology, mainly predicted by the characteristics of violence (Sonis, 2008). In line with these findings, it has been documented that women's likelihood of staying in violent relationships, or returning after leaving, have been mostly predicted by their lack of financial and/or housing resources rather than the assumed psychological outcomes of trauma such as self-blame, learned helplessness, avoidant coping styles, or impaired reasoning (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Diemer, Humphreys, & Crinall, 2017; Hamby, 2013; Goodman, Smyth, Borges, & Singer, 2009). Furthermore, quite the opposite of the inferences postulated by trauma-informed approaches, several studies demonstrated that PTSD, along with the increased severity and frequency of violence in the last 6 months period, predicted an increase in safety-seeking behaviors of women (Krause, Kaltman, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Lewis et al., 2005). In other words, this finding indicated that, despite the existence of psychological

trauma and the increasingly intimidating nature of violence, women might become able to seek solutions to their predicament. Furthermore, in another study, which aimed to show women's accuracy in predicting the possibility of their future victimization, women who suffered from traumatic outcomes of violence were found to be very accurate in their estimation of re-victimization within one year (Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008). That is, rather than having a flawed judgment about the risks in their lives, women seemed to have a better, precise understanding of the factors which would lead to their re-victimization.

All in all, the trauma-informed frameworks have undeniably contributed to the systematic understanding of the adverse outcomes of male partner violence on women's psychological well-being, and thereby strengthen the public awareness of how and to what extent women suffer from interpersonal violence (Profitt, 1996). Yet, as a result of the overall examination of women's reactions, decisions or actions on a solely psychological/individualistic ground without integrating interdisciplinary lenses and multidimensional/ecological approaches, they remain insufficient to reveal the complexity of women's responses to violence and in fact, the implementation of some unwarranted assumptions in practice often results in an excessive pathologization and stigmatization of women in violent relationships (Burgess-Proctor, 2012; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dunn & Power-Williams, 2007; Hamby, 2013; Profitt, 1996).

1.2 Beyond trauma and victimization: Re-conceptualization of women's responses to violence

One major problematic consequence of the deficiency-oriented profiling of women victims of male partner violence is that as they are viewed as totally entangled by the

traumatic consequences of violence, the diversities and multiplicities in their reactions mostly become invisible. That is, in both research processes and advocacy practices, women's capacity to survive, their agency to decide for themselves and for their loved ones, or their strategic efforts to protect their well-being often disappear under the phenomenon of trauma (Connell, 1997; Hamby, 2013; Lloyd et al., 2009; Profitt, 1996). While the feeling of powerlessness is depicted as their only psychological reality, women's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral strategies of resistance and survival are left unseen and unanalyzed. In this regard, based on a feminist strength-based perspective, the question of what women do to survive violence has been offered as an alternative to the deficit-based models (Profitt, 1996). Accordingly, it has been claimed and demonstrated that women in violent relationships gradually develop various intricate strategies to cope with violence and to ensure their physical and psychological safety (Lloyd et al., 2009). As this change of focus has openly challenged the image of battered women as solely passive or helpless, women's leaving processes from violent relationships have become a particular subject of the qualitative investigation to understand how and in which ways women escape violence (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Leaving has been conceptualized as a long-term process that reflects the continually changing nature of women's emotions, thinking, and actions in response to violence (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhatigan, Street, & Axsom, 2006). These continuous shifts in women's mental states have been identified by several separate stages, pointing out an overall process of transformation from being a victim to developing a survivor identity and agency. Mills (1985) and Landenburger (1989), the first pioneering researchers focusing on women's processes of leaving, suggested that

women's actions in response to violence differed throughout their relationships depending on the changes in their subjective attributions to violence and their meaning-making. Resonating with the inferences of learned helplessness and traumatic bonding approaches, it has been revealed that women started to experience a gradual shift towards being "reflective actors" after being enmeshed in a state of self-loss and submissiveness (Mills, 1985, p. 115). That is, as women became able to reassess violence in their relationships, instead of blaming themselves or trying to justify their partners' abusive behaviors, they were shown as emotionally disengaging from their partners, which eventually enabled them to leave and reconstruct their identities as survivors (Landenburger, 1989; Mills, 1985).

This progress from the state of entrapment/subordination to awareness, growth, and change has been described as occurring through a nonlinear process (Landenburger, 1989). This suggests not only a progressive pattern from one stage to the next but also a pattern of relapsing back to the previous stages, which was considered to explain the commonly observed pattern of leaving and returning. Although returning to the violent partner has been viewed as regressing to victimhood, these cycles have been understood as inevitable in women's processes of exercising agency (Ulrich, 1991). By experiencing each cycle, women were assumed to gradually develop their capacities for observing themselves and monitoring their conditions, and this developing self-observation capacity was suggested to engender a state of awareness and growth that strengthens women's determination to leave (Landenburger, 1989; Mills, 1985).

Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995), in their influential feminist grounded-theory research with rural women in Canada, identified distinct processes to explain women's pathways towards leaving. Their results showed that women initially cultivated

submissive strategies as a way of “counteracting abuse” (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999, p. 110), such as yielding to the demands of their partners or emotionally and cognitively withdrawing themselves. Although these strategies were addressed as escalating women’s feelings of worthlessness, it was also argued that women simultaneously developed a more active stance to defend themselves against violence, including fighting back, making plans to leave, being more cautious, seeking support or involving with work and/or parenting-related activities. These strategies were considered as very effective in enabling women to experience or notice their abilities and psychological strength to “break free” (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999, p. 131) from their violent relationships. In a sense, this defensive stance increasingly became helpful to women in both protecting the self against the attacks of their violent partners and strengthening their determination to move away from violence eventually.

Based on the grounded theory analysis of in-depth interviews with 32 women, Lempert (1996) also demonstrated that women actively harnessed “problem-solving” (p. 273) and “self-preservation” (p. 280) strategies to deal with violence and mitigating its adverse effects on their well-being. Yet, contrary to the previous studies by Landenburger (1989) and Mills (1985) in which women’s submissive strategies were identified as indicative of abolishment of self and agency, Lempert revealed that women’s so-called learned-helplessness responses, such as self-blame, minimization of violence or submissiveness, actually became strategically adaptive to protect themselves from further victimization and to control/ diminish the toxic effects of violence on the self and identity. In parallel, in their longitudinal feminist action research, Campbell and her colleagues (1998) showed that women might intentionally and actively choose to become non-responsive, silent, or submissive under some conditions to maintain a sense

of control over their circumstances. Supporting Lempert's explanations, they demonstrated that, just like calling the police or seeking support from a friend, these strategies of subordination were also preferred through active decision-making processes and enabled women to protect their emotional and physical safety under some situations. Hence, according to their findings, women used many forms of problem-solving strategies depending on what they believed that would help them to ensure their safety most, including seeking help from the police, talking to friends or family, or demanding financial help. Although not always successful, these were revealed as eventually helping women to escape violent relationships. Furthermore, they revealed that the final exit from the relationship occurred through "turning points" (p. 751), which were considered as creating significant gradual changes in women's perception of themselves and their relationships. Escalation of violence, increasing the threat of being seriously injured or killed, gaining financial independence, or realizing the negative effects of violence on children were listed as some of these markers.

Davis (2002) similarly demonstrated that women always consciously tailored numerous strategies throughout their relationships according to their timely needs. Subordinating themselves, not resisting, relying on their spirituality and hopefulness, saving money, developing various safety plans for themselves and their children, or looking for outside resources of support were reported as some of these strategies that provided women a sense of safety and kept them feel psychologically intact. Additionally, she significantly showed that for many women in her study, submissiveness usually functioned as a strategy to hide their intention to leave, which often reduced their risk of further physical harm by their partners. She gave some examples of women who were, on the one hand, trying to protect their physical safety at

home by behaving obediently or not fighting back, but on the other hand, searching for legal support to increase their chance of moving away.

Giles and Curren (2007), in their qualitative research with New Zealand women, defined sequential phases reflecting women's pathways from being abused to getting their lives back. While women in the initial phases of their relationships were described as mostly using self-distraction strategies, such as being involved in spiritual activities or focusing on motherhood, to reduce the adversity of the emotional consequences of violence and to keep themselves psychologically peaceful, they were shown as gradually developing more active coping skills and becoming more involved in active help-seeking behaviors. Brosi and Rolling (2010) also pointed out how some major transitions in women's perceptions significantly contributed to their decision to leave. Having external resources of support, not being able to tolerate violence anymore, or aiming to remove their children from violence were defined as crucially important intertwined factors in strengthening women's motivation and commitment to leave violence. Consistent with the previous findings, it was stated that as women moved away from their previous self-narratives of weakness and victimization, they became able to construct their new narratives of agency and hope.

Several studies have also addressed the issue of how women try to find various ways of negotiation between patriarchal/ traditional discourses of family life and the reality of violence in their relationships. Women's efforts to make their relationships work by sacrificing their needs and safety, and their so-called initial reluctance to consider leaving as an option were often attributed to the influence of internalized patriarchal gender roles on their perceptions and meaning-making processes. Hage's (2006) analysis of the interviews with 10 women showed that while women put their

constant effort in improving their inner and outer resources to increase their chances to leave, they still repeatedly found themselves in a position of entrapment. This was reported as mostly about the sociocultural and religious expectations pressuring them to sacrifice their personal needs and well-being for the sake of their families, and thus creating shame and guilt. Various factors, such as the existence of at least one supportive person around, being actively involved in spiritual practices, were stated as significant in relieving women from these internalized pressures and helping them to break through the cycle of entrapment in their lives.

Similarly, in a more recent study, Baly (2010) showed that cultural discourses around womanhood and gender roles often discouraged women from taking steps towards leaving. Hence, by constructing themselves as loving and caring partners, and peacemakers at home, they were shown as inclined to accept blame for violence or to try finding excuses for their partners' abusive behaviors. However, she argued that, along with these traditional discourses, women also concurrently developed alternative discourses and beliefs, encouraging them to take active steps towards separation. The existence of these alternative discourses, such as developing a belief of the importance of mutual trust and respect in relationships, demanding equality from their partners and having a gradually increasing desire to improve themselves as self-reliant and assertive women in direct opposition to the traditional gender role assignments of being dependent and submissive, was considered as easing women's process of psychological disengagement from their relationships and encouraging them to leave their violent partners.

Given the above, these research efforts illustrated women's diverse and multiple abilities to cope with violence and their power for deciding and acting for themselves to

move towards non-violence in their lives. Rather than denying the adverse psychological consequences of violence in women's lives, this reconceptualization provides a more balanced and holistic framework to understand how and in which ways women respond to violence and reflects the complexity and multiplicity of their ever-existing agency to mitigate the effects of violence and ensure their safety.

1.3 Beyond leaving: Women's processes of healing

As a part of the efforts to explore women's leaving processes, researchers also investigated women's experiences of healing and recovery after violent relationships. Although relationship termination has been understood as a significant indicator of women's claim of their autonomy and self-reliance, and as the initial step of healing, increasingly more studies have emphasized that the final act of leaving should not be assumed as straightforwardly creating a sense of recovery in women's lives (Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Anderson & Saunders, 2003). It has been rather argued that women only become able to regain their psychological well-being by overcoming the traumatic effects of violence after a long and gradual process of working through their past, sustaining their current lives, and planning their future (Anderson, Renner, & Danis, 2012; Flasch, Murray, & Crowe, 2017).

Based on a qualitative examination, Farrell (1996) proposed a non-staged circular process model of women's recovery after violent relationships. She addressed that women's healing occurred as they moved forward to a state of self-awareness and self-fulfillment, which was described by four interrelated dimensional themes, "flexibility", "awakening", "relationship" and "empowerment" (p. 23). The theme of flexibility consisted of several components such as recognizing the effects of the abusive

past on current feelings, thoughts and actions, developing adaptation strategies to the changing necessities of their environment, or being more aware of personal needs, weaknesses, or strengths. Awakening was explained as a benchmark, through which women realized that they had choices and alternatives to build their lives independently. Growing hopefulness, relying on inner peace and spirituality, or building an inner strength for planning the future were revealed as some significant components of this dimension. Having a significant supportive person in their lives and developing a sense of harmony and connectedness with trustful others were also addressed as crucial factors facilitating women's processes of recovery. Lastly, empowerment indicated women's abilities to decide for themselves, to prioritize their own needs and well-being, and to develop a sense of achievement in their lives. Thus, all these dimensions together were pointed out as determining women's psychological well-being and their strength to break free from their violent past.

As the second part of their study in 1995 on leaving, Wuest and Merritt-Gray later published another study in 1999, exploring women's processes of "sustaining the separation" and "reclaiming their self" (p. 110) as they become able to leave violence in the past. In contrast to Farrell's circular non-staged model, they reported that women went through successive stages in their processes of recovering after they separated from their violent partners. "Not going back" (p. 111) was described as the initial stage right after the termination of the relationship, requiring women's constant efforts to claim and protect their emotional and physical autonomy under the highly stressful and challenging life conditions. In this stage, women were reported as continually striving to develop daily-basis strategies to keep themselves and their loved ones safe and secure. "Moving on" (p. 114) was addressed as the next stage of women's healing starting after women

achieved to establish a sense of control and safety by figuring out the practical/ daily issues in their lives. In this regard, this stage was shown as an emotionally demanding one, which necessitated women's focus to re-evaluate their past to find new meanings in the present and establish a new sense of identity beyond being a survivor of abuse. Questioning their past choices and actions, stopping self-blame, or giving up the identity of victimization by defining themselves according to their current roles, relationships, or abilities were addressed as some of the sub-processes of this stage.

Smith (2003) emphasized that women's psychological recovery from the effects of violence started once they decided to leave violent relationships. Still, she stated that, before moving towards the next step of recovery, leaving was followed by a phase of suffering. In contrast to Wuest and Merritt-Gray's (1999) emphasis on the daily-basis practical struggles after separation, Smith focused on the emotional challenges that women needed to figure out to proceed to the healing phase. Experiencing loss and grief, blaming themselves for their choices, feeling overwhelmingly angry, or perceiving themselves as having failed were identified as some of these internal strains. As women became emotionally ready to give up their grief and their vast feeling of remorse, they were reported as becoming able to gain a more positive, caring, and compassionate perception towards themselves. This perception, in turn, was shown instrumental in enabling them to improve their self-confidence and to become self-reliant individuals.

Allen and Wozniak (2010) also described recovery as a progressive process from traumatic suffering and isolation towards peacefulness, relationality, and autonomy. Working through an integration between their identities before the abusive relationships and their current sense of being was elaborated as a very significant aspect of women's recovery, enabling them to make peace with their past, to regain their previous skills and

abilities, and incorporate these past experiences into their newly reclaimed identities.

Similarly, in a more recent study, Hou, Kou and Shu (2012) addressed the importance of the sense of achievement for women in their post-separation processes of redefining and reconstructing their identities. As women were widely demonstrated experiencing many struggles and challenges that often leaving them in a state of low self-esteem with an escalated sense of isolation and deprivation, observing themselves as skilled enough to cope with the daily battles of life, gaining their financial independence, describing themselves as hard-working women and capable parents were pointed out as very central experiences leading to a sense of “mastery” (Hou, Kou, & Shu, 2012, p. 7).

While identifying similar themes of recovery consistent with the findings of the previous research presented above, unlike the phase-based linear models commonly used in these studies, Flasch, Murray and Crowe (2017) articulated that recovery mostly occurred through cyclical, dynamic and intermingled processes. In this sense, rather than systemically ordering women’s experiences, they indicated that women often go back and forth while striving to re-establish themselves and their lives. They gave several examples of that, while women felt confident enough to establish new relationships or sufficiently empowered to assert themselves in social life, due to a wide range of personal or social stressors, they would also find themselves in a position of uncertainty and distrust at the same time. Hence, according to their perspective, recovery often emerges depending on women’s processes of navigation between these positions. Congruent with these findings, D’Amore, Martin, Wood and Brooks (2018) also revealed a nonlinear, intertwined process of women’s healing, pointing out that women’s experiences of recovery or empowerment did not necessarily obviate their experiences of psychological distress and suffering. That is, although positive experiences and

feelings started to prevail in women's lives, this did not eliminate the practical and emotional struggles in their lives. In this regard, they have emphasized women's ongoing state of oscillation between their feelings of isolation, insufficiency, fear or guilt, and their feelings of self-reliance, confidence, hopefulness, connection, or courage.

Despite some of the differences in their perspectives, these research studies on women's post-separation experiences have revealed substantially parallel evidence of women's psychological resourcefulness and their willpower to move on and build their lives.

1.4 Feminist approaches to the conceptualization of women's leaving, empowerment and recovery processes

First feminist theories of gender-based violence primarily defied the privatization of family life, and more generally, the public/ private divide, by acknowledging its problematic and harmful consequences for women (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). It has been argued that this patriarchal notion of sacred family, that has been ideologically endorsed and advocated by many -or every- states around the world, has become a systemic oppressive tool ensuring male control on women, and reinforces male violence in intimate/ family contexts by turning it something untouchable and unpunishable (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Since this formulation reflects an ideological position of refusing to acknowledge violence as a social and political trouble beyond being merely individual; institutional responsibilities in preventing and eliminating violence are largely rejected.

In this regard, the well-known statement of "personal is political" has become a foundational principle in the feminist understanding of women's positions of subjugation

in both private and public spheres (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). It offers a significant corrective perspective in drawing attention to how patriarchal politics, ideologies, and institutional discourses and practices play an essentially constituting role in the individual lives of women. Grounded on this principle, feminist scholars have persistently argued that to understand the complex nature of violence and how it affects the lives of women and their personal experiences of violence should always be situated in the sociocultural and structural contexts of gender inequalities and gender-based oppression (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). In addition, later feminist thinkers, particularly black feminists and feminists of color scholars, have contributed to the feminist thinking by challenging both the notion of gender as the central determinant of women's experiences of social injustices and the presumption of homogeneity among women independent of their intersecting identities (Skoloff & Dupont, 2005). It has been argued and demonstrated that, due to the distinct and diverse challenges co-created by multiple oppressive practices such as racism, ethnocentrism, classism or homophobia, women's lives and their experiences of gender-based violence could highly differ, particularly if they are from socially, economically and/or politically marginalized groups.

Intersectional feminism, which was firstly named by Kimberly Crenshaw who is also a black feminist scholar, offers a useful theoretical framework to analyze sexism and gender inequalities in the context of other intersecting systems of power (race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status or disability, among others). In her ground-breaking article named "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color", Crenshaw (1991) provided an extensive analysis of the differences among women's experiences of violence that were suggested to be shaped by their multiple/ intersecting social locations. She explained that the oppressive

systems of gender, race, and class converge and co-create multilayered/ intersectional subordination practices in the lives of women of color, which further obstruct their alternatives or opportunities to escape interpersonal violence. She also gave significant examples of how frequently black women (and women-of-color generally) encounter the additional/ interconnected structural barriers such as poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, or limited access to support services, because of the intersecting discriminatory systems of race, gender, and class. Instead of a binary conceptualization of static/ dichotomous identity categories, the intersectionality framework particularly reveals the critical role of “relationality” or “interconnectedness” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 27) of people’s multiple social positions and identities in the construction of their experiences of oppression, domination, and disempowerment across structural, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. Therefore, although gender is still considered as a fundamentally relevant category in the analysis of the interpersonal context of oppression, other intersecting dimensions of social positions are argued as mutually shaping woman’s responses to violence and their ways of dealing with it (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016).

In this sense, the intersectionality framework emphasizes the fluid, nonlinear and dynamic nature of power relations, which offers an explanation to understand the ways in which people’s power to resist oppression and to change their situations are continuously constructed within and mediated by the contextual complexities in their lives (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As significantly emphasized by Campbell and Mannell (2016), this nonbinary continuum conceptualization of the power-structure relationship avoids the two most common erroneous viewpoints, overstating the notions of agency and empowerment without closely examining the structural and/or sociocultural

constraints or understating the ways of how power and agency can still be experienced even in the most oppressive and constrained circumstances. Thus, by rejecting a categorical distinction between victimization and agency, this perspective provides a standpoint to examine how and in which ways, and to what degree, people can exercise their agency despite their continuing vulnerabilities. In other words, agency and victimization are viewed as co-constructed and co-existent processes embedded in social and structural power relationships (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2009).

In line with these arguments, the concept of empowerment is described as a multidimensional, cyclical, and nonlinear process of change toward equality and social justice (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). Rather than moving toward a particular predetermined aim, it is defined as including many sub-processes and multiple aims that transform women's experiences of subordination both in their private and public lives. In that sense, the agency is viewed as a core dimension in empowerment processes; as a woman's sense of agency grows over time, her social and personal power to act on her choices and her efforts to seek justice and equality strengthen (Kabeer, 2005; Kabeer, 2011). Hence, empowerment processes include an actual increase in power, which implies the increased transformative capacity of the person to end her position of subordination in a specific context. Yet, as Cattaneo and Chapman argued (2010), although a positive shift in power in one aspect of life may also positively affect the person's status of power in other areas, it still does not mean that ending the position of subjugation in a particular context would create an automatic change in the other contexts of personal or social life.

Cattaneo and Goodman (2015) defined empowerment as a "bridge concept" which "crosses the boundary between self and the social world" (p. 87), pointing to a

reciprocal interaction between the psychological and social domains of experience. That is, in the context of male partner violence, for instance, a woman can increase her social and relational power by finding a job, reporting violence or improving her social or economic resources which further enhances her psychological sense of agency and self-confidence, and consequently this increased sense of ability and power in the psychological domain can create crucial transformations in her way of interaction with people and institutions. However, as cautioned by many scholars, entirely focusing on increases in individual power can divert attention from hard-to-change structural inequalities and social injustices (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Leisenring, 2006; Sprague & Hayes, 2000). Although individuals have varying degrees of power to influence and change social structural norms and mechanisms, as oppressive systems and practices are often very resistant to change, bottom-to-top processes of transformation mostly remain very restricted, particularly in the lack of collective action (Harding, 2004). Hence, for a woman experiencing violence of her partner, even if she can increase her relational power against her husband by enlarging her financial resources, her actions may not create any changes in terms of the gender-based inequalities in the job market or may not decrease her vulnerabilities regarding these structural inequalities.

Related with these discussions, within the framework of the power-structure continuum as proposed by the intersectionality perspective, empowerment is also recognized as a process closely interconnected with and shaped by contextual circumstances (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Sprague & Hayes, 2000). Due to the unequal distribution of social power, some groups or individuals have been considered as having a lesser chance of achieving empowerment

than others. In other words, as cited by Cattaneo and Chapman (2010), “the process of empowerment takes place in a context where power is unequally distributed and where structures exist to perpetuate the advantages of some over others” (p. 647). Therefore, the more social and economic disadvantages exist in a woman’s life, the fewer opportunities she has for achieving control and empowerment to change the circumstances in her life (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Goodman et al., 2009; Sprague & Hayes, 2000).

In view of these theoretical discussions, the next two subsections include the examination of the related research on contextual determinants of women’s leaving processes and their post-separation experiences.

1.4.1 Contextual determinants of women’s decision-making processes

One crucial critique towards trauma-centered frameworks and leaving process studies that have been raised by feminist scholars is that as interpersonal violence is mistakenly viewed in the majority of the studies as the only form of oppression women experience, their responses to partner violence have often been commonly investigated in isolation by paying no attention to the other possible sources of oppression and victimization in their lives (Goodman et al., 2009; Hamby, 2013; Skoloff & Dupont, 2005). In this regard, while the social structural and cultural realities influencing women’s decision-making in violent relationships have been fairly acknowledged in some of the research studies cited above (e.g., Campbell et al., 1998; Davis, 2002; Meritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Flasch et al. 2017), many of them lack a contextual understanding of women’s experiences. Relying on individualistic and non-situated frameworks, leaving has been viewed and studied as mostly related to the transitions in women’s subjective

understanding of their interpersonal environment (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). This means, women's choices and actions in the context of male partner violence are generally framed as mostly depending on their intrapersonal cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes. Therefore, without a critical consideration of the structural/ institutional factors shaping women's subjectivities and experiences, women's 'achievement' to disengage themselves from violent relationships was regarded as predominantly associated with their personal/ individual abilities to develop and change themselves, and their internal motivation to end their violent relationships (Hamby, 2013; Leisenring, 2006; Profitt, 1996).

In line with these criticisms, there are an increasing number of recent studies showing that women's processes of decision-making are also associated with their assessment of the pros and cons of staying in or leaving, rather than being entirely based on their psychological processes such as psychological awareness, self-development or emotional growth (e.g., Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Rhatigan et al., 2006; Tutty, et al., 2014; van Schalkwyk, Boonzaier, & Madikizela, 2014). A major critique elaborated in these studies mainly targets the underlying assumption of that leaving automatically provides women conditions of safety, security, and non-violence. In other words, as leaving is assumed as the only indicator of the healthy functioning of a woman, it is construed as the most accountable and prudent decision, and the safest one, that would be taken in the case of violence (Hamby, 2013). However, it has been shown that due to the variety of risks associated with leaving that women were well aware of, many of them did not consider separation as a possible and safe solution for a long time during their struggle to protect themselves and their loved ones (Campbell & Mannell, 2016;

Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003; Goodman et al., 2009; Lacey, 2010; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothair, & Barg, 2010; Vil, Sabri, Nwokolo, Alexander, & Campbell, 2017).

The fear of retaliation by ex-partners, the anticipated difficulties of finding affordable housing, the risk of homelessness, child-related issues, employment difficulties, and poverty have been shown as the critical intersecting, mutually constitutive factors shaping women's decision-making (Burgess & Campbell, 2016; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Goodman et al., 2009; Logie & Daniel, 2016; Pells, Wilson, & Thi Thu Hang, 2016; Schuler & Islam, 2008; Mannell, Jackson, & Umutoni, 2016; Vil et al., 2017). Particularly in the systemic contexts of inadequate, inefficient, inaccessible, or absent institutional/ structural responses against male violence, these constraints have been found to be significantly shaping women's stay/leave decisions and their safety-seeking behaviors (Burgess & Campbell, 2016; Childress, Gioiab, & Campbell, 2017; Rowan, Mumford, & Clark, 2015). That means, in the contexts where legislation, social policies, institutional practices and an established welfare system to protect and support women are lacking or insufficient, women were shown as less likely to consider separation as a viable option, and thus less likely to seek help from formal agencies such as police or social service agencies. While a lack of awareness of the existent supportive mechanisms due to the limited access to knowledge and information has been documented as one of the reasons of this finding, women were reported as able to realistically assess the dysfunctionalities in the system and the social and structural barriers that may increase their risk of harm in the conditions of disclosing violence or leaving (Childress, 2013; Goodman et al., 2009; Mannell et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Zakar, Zakar, & Kramer, 2012).

Correspondingly, in a study with Haitian women, it was demonstrated that as reporting violence to police and/or leaving often escalates women's risk of further violence, poverty, homelessness and/or social isolation due to the unreliable legal and social support mechanisms in the country, formal help-seeking or leaving were not considered as feasible or even helpful options by many women (Logie & Daniel, 2016). Similarly, in their study with Bangladeshi women, Schuler, Bates, Maselko and Islam (2008) illustrated how women's experiences of male partner violence were entangled with the lack of social and economic resources in their lives. Their findings showed that leaving never became an option for many women, mostly resulting from the financial impossibilities restricting their lives and their awareness of the limitations of institutional support and resources.

In a recent study by Horn, Puffer, Roesch and Lehmann (2016) with women in Sierra Leone and Liberia, financial independence was found as the most important criterion for women that contributed to their well-being and their sense of agency, even in the conditions of continuing violence. Their findings strikingly showed that some women who became able to earn their own money still chose to stay with their violent partners because of the actual risks of leaving for their socioeconomic well-being (the possibility of losing their jobs due to forced displacement and their low chance of finding affordable housing). Hence, they were reported as trying to increase their power of bargaining with their husbands by sustaining their economic independence. In line with these findings, several studies have also shown that for many women -particularly for mothers and/or marginalized women such as immigrants, ethnic minorities or low-SES women-, violence became a secondary and more manageable problem in comparison to the risk of homelessness and poverty (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Hynes,

Sterk, Hennink, Patel, Depadill, & Young, 2016; Goodman et al., 2009; Meyer, 2016; Pells et al., 2016; Turan, Hatcher, Romito, Mangone, Durojaiye, Odero et al., 2016). As cited by Campbell and Mannell (2016), for women living under disadvantageous conditions, “. . . the risks of violence were easier to manage than the risk of poor housing alternatives” (p. 11).

All these worrying issues of finance, housing, or post-separation violence have also been demonstrated as closely related to the presence of children. Although a significant number of studies have shown that child-related issues mostly increase women’s inclination to leave -especially when they observe the adverse effects of violence on their children-, other studies have pointed out that children also become a significant main reason of women’s choice of staying in violent relationships (Amanor-Boadu, Messing, Stith, Anderson, O’Sullivan, & Campbell, 2012; Kelly, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010; Vatnar & Bjørkly, 2010; Bach, Weinzimmer, & Bhandari, 2013). In fact, as shown in these studies, the responsibilities of motherhood escalate women’s worries regarding the risks of leaving. It was emphasized that particularly for marginalized women, but still for many others, motherhood creates “multiple double binds” (Kelly, 2009, p. 11), producing a constant emotional struggle for women between many contradictory options. For instance, in her study with Latino immigrant women, Kelly (2009) showed that, despite having an awareness of the negative impact of ongoing violence on their children’s well-being, a wide range of factors such as economic insufficiencies, intensive worries regarding maintaining the safety of their children in the case of leaving, the fear of losing custody of children and/ or having no stable childcare support complicated women decision-making processes.

The choice of leaving, on the other hand, in these conditions of risks and barriers, has been documented as related with a shift in women's assessment of their circumstances, that is, when they start to see that the costs of staying override the risks of leaving, it becomes the essential triggering point of their decision to leave (Duffy, 2015; Meyer, 2016; Thomas, Goodman, & Putnins, 2015). Despite the anticipated risks of separation in the circumstances of social and structural barriers, the escalation of violence in frequency and intensity, and so increasing fear of the possibility of being killed or seriously injured, and increasingly observing the harmful effects of violence on children in the conditions of prolonged and escalated violence have been largely documented as significant reasons to start seeking formal help and taking the decision of leaving (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Kelly, 2009; Lacey, 2010; Meyer, 2016; Bach et al., 2013). In addition, having a sufficient and stable income to sustain their lives independently and/ or having community resources to provide emotional, social and even economic support have been indicated as the most accurate predictors of women's decision to leave (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Goodman et al., 2009; Hayes & Franklin, 2017; Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra, & Weintraub, 2005). However, it has been argued that the determinative impact of these individual-level variables should not be analyzed in isolation without considering the systemic and societal-level responses (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Jungar & Oinas, 2011). In the absence of appropriate, efficient and accessible systemic actions to support women, their individual resources such as having a steady financial income or relational support from family/ friends were reported as not automatically leading women to take decision to leave, or the act of leaving does not automatically create a shift in their positions from disempowerment to empowerment (Horn et al., 2016; Schuler et al., 2008).

As shown by these research studies, women often plan their actions by a careful and strategic consideration and assessment of their conditions, aiming to minimize the possibility of being harmed further, regardless of their choice of staying, leaving, or going back to the violent partners. In this sense, in the context of risks and structural barriers, the choice of not leaving seems to mostly point out women's efforts to keep themselves and their children safe. Hence, these studies demonstrate that women's individual processes of decision-making, their feelings of helplessness and agency, their escalated sense of isolation, or their difficulties to emotionally disengage themselves from their partners are embedded within the wider oppressive social-structural processes.

1.4.2 Contextualizing post-separation processes

Similar to the studies examining women's stay/leave decisions, it is very often that the post-separation processes have been generally conceptualized without a critical and central understanding of the mutual interaction between women's psychological processes and the contextual realities in their lives (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; van Schalkwyk et al., 2014). As leaving has been assumed as an act removing "the external threat" (Farell, 1996, p. 31), healing and empowerment after relationship termination has generally been represented as entirely based on women's internal/ emotional processes. However, although the decision to leave is itself a very crucial positive individual step for women, as evidenced by research, it hardly results in a transformation of oppressive and disempowering conditions in women's lives (Bell, 2003; Ford-Gilboe, Wuest, & Merritt-Gray, 2005; Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005; Horn et al., 2016; Leisenring, 2006; Safadi, Swigart, Hamdan-Mansour, Banimustafa, & Constantino,

2013). In fact, considering the ever-existent structural and societal roots of subjugation, it has been argued that the act of leaving alone never predicts or guarantees an increase in the social-relational power of women.

First of all, as research evidence clearly shows, for many women, post-separation violence becomes a predominating reality. Humphreys and Thiara (2003), for instance, documented that 76% of their representative sample of women in the UK experienced violence of their former partners after leaving. Similarly, Davies, Ford-Gilboe and Hammerton (2009) reported that only a small percentage of women (11.5%) in their study did not have any experience of continued ex-partner violence after separation. A relatively recent national study from Canada showed that 40% of women who had ended their relationships continued to suffer from violence by their former partners for at least 6 months period after separation, and furthermore, 49% of these women reported that the intensity and severity of abuse escalated after separation (Statistics Canada [STATCAN], 2016). Another recent national statistical study from the UK also revealed that approximately three-quarters of femicide victims (77%) had been killed by their ex-partners within the first year after separation (Brennan, 2017).

However, there are a limited number of studies investigating the possible effects of post-separation violence on women's well-being in terms of how and in which ways they react to and cope with the continuing threat coming from their ex-partners. Only a few recent studies, for instance, by focusing on the link between post-separation violence and child-related issues, have shown that the continuing harassment of ex-partners regularly targeted the mother-child relationship -mainly through the child contact arrangements with fathers (Holt, 2015; Morrison, 2015; Thiara & Humphreys, 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). These studies revealed that the ongoing presence of violent

fathers, as forced by the family law in many countries, mostly obstructed women's efforts to establish a secure and safe living environment for themselves and their children, and furthermore it had usually deleterious impact on mother-child relationships in the post-separation period.

Linked with post-separation violence, the difficulties anticipated by women before leaving, such as lack of housing options or insufficient economic resources, were revealed as determining women's experiences after separation (Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2009; Duffy, 2015; Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Thomas et al. 2015). Research generally showed that even years after separation -and despite women's efforts to put their lives into balance, regain their emotional well-being and increase their social/economic power, it is very often that women continue to experience substantial vulnerabilities complicating their processes of empowerment and psychological recovery. Thomas et al. (2015), for instance, demonstrated that, besides the escalation of threat from their ex-partners, inadequate housing, loss of contact and communication with their communities, and also feeling overwhelmed by the emotional and financial responsibilities of single motherhood were described as the substantial "trade-offs of seeking safety" (p. 176) from male partner violence, which put women in a prolonged sense of physical and emotional insecurity after separation. Based on her community-based research, Duffy (2015) similarly revealed that when asked about their dreams and hopes for the future, women primarily emphasized their basic living needs -particularly having a stable housing, accessible transportation, achieving physical and emotional safety, accessible childcare support, stable employment, and reliable community support.

The difficulty of finding a safe, affordable, and stable housing has been argued as a central problem that women face after separation (Goodman et al., 2009). While women may have opportunities to reside in shelters or to find temporary housing solutions, it was stated that they usually become obliged to change their locations regularly either to guarantee their safety from ex-partners' continuing violence or because of their difficulties in sustaining their economic stability (Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Tutty et al., 2014). Baker et al. (2003) found that more than half of their participants experienced housing problems after they had left violent partners and nearly one-third of them was reported as having experiences of homelessness. In a more recent study, Tutty et al. (2014), based on their in-depth interviews with 62 women from marginalized groups (Indigenous women or women from other ethnic, cultural groups), similarly demonstrated the close link between lack of housing and male partner violence. It was reported that all women in their study had current and/or past experiences of housing instability and homelessness, after separation. In another recent study by Woodhall and her colleagues (Woodhall-Melnik, Hamilton-Wright, Daoud, Matheson, Dunn & O'Campo, 2017), investigating the relationship between women's experiences of housing (in)stability and their psychosocial empowerment after separation, it was found that housing instability (living in shelters or being unable to remain in one place for a long period of time) produced a sense of social alienation, lack of belongingness and insecurity. They reported that each woman in their study emphasized housing as the foundational aspect of their lives, in the sense that achievement of stable housing after leaving was perceived and experienced as the benchmark of feeling free, safe, and empowered to plan their future. Furthermore, they pointed out that stable housing also

increased women's opportunities to establish connections with a community and create a supportive social network system.

Overall, these studies provide a contextual understanding of the women's post-separation experiences and significantly contribute to the knowledge of social determinants of women's psychological well-being after leaving violent relationships. As women's actions, or particularly their decision to leave, do not result in abolishment and transformation of social structural inequalities and injustices, they continue to encounter many challenges that seemingly complicate and obstruct their recovery and empowerment processes. Therefore, to acquire a complete depiction of women's experiences after separation, their challenging struggle for safety, healing, transformation, and empowerment should be situated in the social structural conditions framing their lives.

1.5 Reflections on women's status in Turkey

The prevailing societal and cultural norms in Turkey have its roots in the patriarchal, traditional, and conservatively religious history of the Ottoman Empire. Particularly when it comes to women's status during the Ottoman period, as the Empire had been governed by Islamic laws, men had privileged social positions with superior legal rights, as opposed to women's social and legal subordination (Arat, 2008; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001; Tekeli, 2006). The legality of male polygamy, unequal property/ inheritance rights, or male prerogative in divorce were considered as some critical examples reflecting the scope of the patriarchal order in that era (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). However, against these oppressive practices, for a near half-century before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, women have collectively raised their voices

to demand equal rights and opportunities in both the public and private domains of their lives (Arat, 2008; Diner & Toktaş, 2013; Tekeli, 2006). As these efforts had been accompanied by extensive political, social, cultural, and economic reforms undertaken during the early Republican times, aimed to restructure the country as a secular, democratic and progressive nation-state, women began to acquire a series of essential legal and social rights. The abandonment of the religious legislation of the Ottoman period to create new laws based on secular Western ideology became a very significant positive step towards gender equality (Arat, 2008; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). As the new Civil Code was accepted by the parliament in 1926, the practice of polygamy was banned, the rights of women in marriages and divorce processes partially improved, and most importantly, women gained the right to vote and to be elected (Arat, 2008; Tekeli, 2006). Furthermore, the secularization of the education system and public institutions has also provided women new opportunities to attain educational degrees and employment in the public sector (Arat, 2008; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001).

Following these early reforms, the large-scale sociodemographic changes in the country towards urbanization and industrialization have further contributed to the enhancement of women's status in the society (Arat, 2008; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). The growth of the urban population due to increased migration from rural to urban regions after the 50s, and consequently improved levels of education and income have created significant opportunities of social mobility for families and individuals, which have resulted in increasing prevalence of middle-class, urban nuclear families (Sunar & Fişek, 2005; Ataca & Sunar, 2005). In women's lives, having greater access to education, employment, and a variety of institutional services such as health or

childcare, has been documented as a major positive consequence of these sociodemographic transformations (Erman, 1998).

In the context these positive changes, with the impact of collective feminist movements in the country starting from the 1980s, and due to the European Union negotiations accelerated in the last several decades, some significant transformations in the legal system have also been enacted for the benefit of women (Arat, 2008; Tekeli, 2006). In 2001, for instance, the Civil Law reform had brought equal legal status and equal prosperity rights to women in their marriages, in contrast to the continuing male supremacy defined in the previous legislation (Tekeli, 2006). Similarly, as a result of a robust collaborative feminist campaigning, a series of oppressive and discriminatory articles existing in the previous Penal Code have been eliminated in the new version adopted in 2004 (Arat, 2008). To give some examples of these amendments, sexual violence in marriages and in workplace settings have been criminalized in the new law, and domestic violence penalties have also been increased. Subsequent to these adjustments in legislation, in 2011, Turkey became a signatory of Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), which is a legally-binding international document for the signatory countries to implement particular policies and actions to combat male violence against women.

As a result of these social and legislative developments achieved during the country's history, women's status has gradually strengthened. However, as emphasized by many scholars, this does not mean that the societal and institutional barriers that impede women's empowerment are eliminated (Akyüz & Sayan- Cengiz, 2016; Kandiyoti, 1987; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). On the contrary, the persistent discourses of

male superiority and the cultural justification of patriarchal hierarchy between men and women, have been argued to result in a powerful resistance towards change in gender discourses and practices in everyday life. Both at societal and family levels, interconnected with the economic disempowerment of women, the traditional gender roles and gender hierarchies seem to transform only marginally and partially (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). Except for a relatively limited number of middle-to-high class women living in the Western urban areas who benefited from gender-equality norms and practices, the majority of women continue to encounter gender-based restrictions and barriers in their daily lives, which mostly hamper their exercise of autonomy and agency in decision-making processes (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016; Kandiyoti, 1987; Yılmaz, 2018). Under the culturally legitimized male authority, women continue to be subordinate members of the family and the society at large, with their predominantly emphasized domestic roles (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2011).

The widespread underrepresentation of women in the labor market and politics has been mostly conceptualized as a major indicator of the persevering influence of deeply rooted patriarchal norms, ideologies, and practices in the country. According to the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, based on a comparative benchmark analysis on four different categories, namely “economic participation and opportunity”, “educational attainment”, “health and survival, and political empowerment”, Turkey is ranked 131st among 144 countries, indicating the sociocultural, economic and political conditions of disempowerment for women. Similarly, the 2017 data report, provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK] regarding women’s education and employment statuses, illustrated the strikingly low levels of women’s paid labor force participation, which was found as more than two

times lower than male participation (31% versus 72%). The report also reveals that women who are mainly involved in unpaid household work constituted about 50% of the unemployed population in the country (15 years and over), as the other half included retired people, people with disabilities, and students. Besides, nearly half of the employed women were found to be working as unregistered employees in low-paid informal jobs (including both agricultural and non-agricultural jobs) lacking social security benefits. Another study also showed that although rural-to-urban migration generally eased women's access to education and occupation, particularly for the first-generation migrant women who had limited education, low-wage employment became the only available option (Erman, Kalaycioglu, & Rittersberger-Tilic, 2002). Thus, when considering the high percentage of women working in underpaid unstable jobs mostly with no benefits, it becomes particularly important to highlight the fact that having an income does not usually guarantee economic independence for many women. Relatedly, even in the conditions of paid-employment outside the home, whereas contributing to the family income afforded women a relative power to negotiate and bargain over family labor (Bolak, 1997; Erman, 1998), for women living in poor households, their working status was not found to significantly transform the gender stereotypical roles in the family, and to challenge the male authority at home (Erman, Kalaycioglu, & Rittersberger-Tiliç, 2002).

Furthermore, although these depictions regarding the social structure of gender relations represents general conditions in the country, mainly due to the regional and class-based fragmentation of the society in Turkey, it would be fair to state that some women suffer from gender-based oppression and inequalities more than others, particularly if they are from less advantageous segments of the society. In a recent

national population-based survey study, women in rural areas, women from poor families and/or women living in Central and Eastern regions were demonstrated as more prone to various intersecting discriminatory practices, particularly early/ underage and/or forced marriages, and denial of their educational and occupational rights (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü [KSGM], 2015). Similarly, Çakmak (2009) showed that how underage forced marriages, and also religious weddings without civil marriage, are normalized or justified in the southeastern region of the country as a result of the patriarchal and religious norms highly predominant in the traditional context of the province, and how these norms intersect with the economic realities of the families as most of these marriages occurred with monetary exchange. However, while the varieties in women's lives shaped by their class and region have been mostly linked with the level of religiousness and/or conservativeness of the communities/ families they belong to, there is a general lack of research investigating the institutional roots of these diversities, that is, how state mechanisms such as the laws forbidding child marriages or ensuring educational rights of women become insufficient to prevent these ongoing gender-oppressive practices (Kocacıoğlu, 2004).

Currently, in contrast to the apparent transformations in laws and policies, the political direction of the present regime seems to further endorse these already existing patriarchal societal norms and practices in the country, rather than working on the elimination of gender inequities (Akyüz & Sayan- Cengiz, 2016; Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2011; Cindoğlu & Ünal, 2017). Political abandonment of a gender equality model along with the claim of its inaptness to the religious-cultural norms in the country, increasing discriminatory political statements supporting gender hierarchies and traditional gender roles in family life, and relatedly invoked arguments by the state authorities

discouraging women to have roles outside the home, increasing lobbying efforts to limit the existing abortion rights, reopening discussions in support of child marriages, backlash efforts to restrict women's financial rights in divorce, or condemning the advocacy efforts of women's organizations to combat male violence as a threat to family integrity and male rights are some examples of discourses and actions representing the conservative gender ideology in current politics. In this regard, as ruled by a religiously conservative neoliberal government approximately for the last two decades, political and public discourses, practices and actions regarding gender roles and women's rights have increasingly become very conservative, and consequently, the societal and institutional constraints on women's processes of achieving empowerment and exercising their agency appear to consolidate more (Akyüz & Sayan- Cengiz, 2016). Hence, as it has always been throughout the history of the country, gender equality struggle is still at the center of women's lives in contemporary Turkey.

1.6 Situating the problem: Male violence against women in Turkey

The ongoing nationwide problem of male violence against women is a major indicator of widespread patriarchal norms and practices in the country and the dysfunctionalities of the institutional mechanisms in violence prevention. According to the last population-based prevalence study (KSGM, 2015), four-in-ten among ever partnered women (38%) reported having at least one instance of physical and/or sexual violence by their male partners. Additionally, 77% of women who had experiences of physical violence by their partners were revealed being repeatedly exposed to the moderate-to-severe type of violence, pointing out the systemic use of violence by male partners. Furthermore, indicating the link between marriage and increased risk of

physical violence, the rate of physical violence was found five times higher among married women in comparison to single ones (7% vs. 36%). In addition, the physical and/or sexual violence rates among divorced women or women living separately from their partners were found approximately two times higher than the rates among the general female population (74% vs. 36%). Also, women who married before the age of 18 (26% among all married women) have been reported as suffering from physical and/or sexual violence significantly more than women married after 18 (50% vs. 33%). As another indicator of the range of the problem of male violence against women, 2018 report of an online feminist advocacy platform (We will Stop Femicide Platform) collecting femicide data around the country revealed that 440 women were killed for gender-related reasons mostly either by male partners or male relatives. Among these murdered women, although the alleged reasons could not be identified for 60% of the cases, 31% were reported as being killed as they wanted to make decisions for themselves, particularly decisions related to the relationship status. Furthermore, while 88% of the cases remained unidentified, 9% of murdered women were found to have state protection (protection or restraining orders) at the time of their killings.

As implied by these numbers, preventive and protective political and legal measures to strengthen societal, cultural and institutional strategies and mechanisms to provide adequate, efficient, and accessible support for women are strongly required. However, mostly due to the strengthening of conservative politics in recent years, the implementation of existing violence prevention laws and policies largely remains incomplete and uneven (Diner & Toktaş, 2013; Kabasakal, 2018). For instance, even though the new law to prevent violence against women, which was dated in 2012, provides extensive measures to ensure the immediate and long-term safety of women

from male violence -such as prison terms up to 6 months in the case of breaching restraining orders, the authorization of the police officers to immediately issue protection orders, or the legal ratification of the responsibilities of civil authorities in providing shelter services and financial, psychological, professional assistance upon women's request- , the reports released by various women's organizations and several research-based studies revealed the failings of state institutions to follow these provisions properly (Kabasakal, 2018; Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation, 2014; Sakallı, Doğan, Günel, & Güreli, 2017; Uçan et al., 2016). In a survey study by Kaya, Ekici and Inankul (2014) on police's attitudes in combatting violence against women, it was demonstrated that nearly 70% of the police did not view domestic violence intervention as one of their main duties. Supporting this finding, the national survey study (KSGM, 2015) showed that although the police was the primary institutional source for battered women to seek help, in only 19% of the cases, the legal statement of the victim was taken and the required steps to ensure the protection of the women from further violence, such as guiding women to a shelter or taking the husband into custody, were followed.

The limited number of women's shelters is also considered as another critical example of incomplete implementation of violence prevention laws. Although the Municipality Law, which was issued in 2005, brings a requirement for each municipality with a population above 50.000 to open women's shelters, that would indicate approximately 1400 shelters around the country (Diner & Toktaş, 2013), it was reported that there are currently 137 women's shelters, mostly in the urban, densely populated areas in the western regions of the country (Ekal, 2017). Diner and Toktaş (2013), in their qualitative research with the representatives from various state agencies and

nongovernmental organizations working in the field of violence against women, concluded that the shelter problem in Turkey was primarily related with the reluctance of administrators and policymakers to allocate financial and organizational resources to open more shelters or sustaining the current ones. Based on their interview data, in line with the predominant political and sociocultural discourses in the country, the strong inclination of protecting family integrity, rather than prioritizing the protection of women from violence, was illustrated as the main cause of this reluctance to improve shelter system.

The institutional unwillingness to support women in their efforts of safety-seeking has also been revealed to manifest itself in the long and laborious bureaucratic processes in the formal help-seeking processes (Akyüz et al., 2014; Ekal, 2011; 2014; Sallan-Gül, 2013; Uçan et al., 2016; Sakallı et al., 2017). The women seeking admission to shelters in Turkey cannot directly contact shelters, but they are required to apply to the police for being placed in a shelter, or referrals from health-care or legal practitioners are needed (Ekal, 2011). Furthermore, until being located in shelters, women are often referred to the state-run transitional guest houses for a temporary time (from two weeks to one month), which are typically overcrowded places that fail to provide the initial crisis support to women (Sakallı et al., 2017; Ucan et al., 2016). Based on field observations in municipality shelters, Ekal (2011) concluded that as these bureaucratic structures are also coupled with the practitioners' uninformed, biased, and discriminative attitudes, seeking formal help becomes a very constrained and challenging process, which requires women to be highly assertive and courageous. However, paradoxically, being assertive was also reported to cause additional barriers for women as it became damaging to the 'credibility' of their stories in the eyes of practitioners (Akyüz et al.,

2014; Ekal, 2011). Related to this, women's access to various resources and services were often found to be dependent on their 'ability' to convince practitioners by providing persuasive 'evidence' of their victimization (Akyüz et al., 2014; Ekal, 2011; 2014). Thus, rather than the provision of systemic welfare assistance, it was demonstrated that the support was given in the form of practitioners' paternalistic acts of "benevolence" (Ekal, 2011, p. 9) which resulted in the reproduction of gendered dynamics of power and secondary victimization of women by the state institutions. Based on a qualitative examination on women's experiences within the legal system, Akyüz et al. (2014) reported that for many women, encountering these male-biased attitudes and related difficulties in accessing the support they demanded was experienced as a continuation of their partners' violence, which overlapped with and further bolstered their sense of powerlessness, helplessness, and humiliation they experienced in their interpersonal relationship context.

At the intersection of institutional and cultural constraints, the number of women in Turkey who sought formal institutional support from state authorities was generally found to be very low (Ekal, 2011). According to the last nationwide survey study in 2015, only 11 percent of women reported that they sought assistance from the police and/or family courts (KSGM, 2015). Additionally, the representative survey studies conducted in the last 10 years commonly revealed that nearly half of the women having suffered from male partner violence had not disclosed violence to anybody before the time of the survey interviews (Akadlı-Ergöçmen, Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, & Jansen, 2013; Arat & Altınay, 2007; KSGM, 2015). It was illustrated that women often decided to disclose violence in the conditions of its escalation; otherwise, in the cases of low-to-moderate levels of violence, women were shown to prefer not to seek outside help,

either informal or formal (Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al., 2013). The anticipated risk of further violence, fear of being blamed by their families/ communities, feeling ashamed to disclose violence, having various worries about children, not knowing from where and how to seek support, the lack of institutions in nearby areas or distrusting the institutions were documented as other reasons of not seeking assistance (Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al., 2013; KSGM, 2015).

Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al.'s study (2013) also illustrated that having a higher level of education, being from wealthier households, being younger and living in urban areas increased women's likelihood of seeking both informal and formal assistance. On the contrary, women living in the Eastern/ rural regions of the country and/or women from poor households were found less likely to seek help either from state institutions or from their communities. Additionally, in the cases of seeking support from families, friends or neighbors, the regional differences along with education and wealth level were found to determine whether women were given the support they needed or not (KSGM, 2015). While 62 percent of women from the Northwestern region reported that they could not get help from the people in their close environment, this rate was found two times lower in the Northeastern regions (32%). Similarly, the rates of not getting help were illustrated to differ based on women's education level; 41% for women who had a primary level of education vs. 25% for others who had a high-school degree or above. These diversities were generally interpreted as related with the differences in the women's level of empowerment; that is, more educated, younger and middle-class urban women living in the Western part of the country were identified as having more opportunities and chances to access institutional support systems and/ or to get informal support from their social environment when compared to women living in

underprivileged conditions lacking stable and accessible informal and/or formal support systems (Akadlı- Ergöçmen et al., 2013).

Supporting these findings, based on a nationwide research study on 24 women's shelters located in 10 different provinces in the country, Sallan-Gül (2013) revealed how regional, economic and social disadvantages shaped women's experiences of violence. Reflecting the interconnected contextual disadvantages that impede women's social and economic empowerment, which also further aggravate the problem of partner violence in their lives, a vast majority of women staying in shelters was reported as coming from rural areas or small towns in Central or Eastern regions, and 74% of them were reported as having only primary school degree or no formal education at all. It was also shown that 53% of women had either arranged or forced marriages without their consent, some with bride price, and it was found that 38% of women had only a religious marriage without legal status. Additionally, 86% of them were demonstrated as having no previous employment history and no current income except short-term financial childcare support. A small percentage of women who were found to be currently working at the time of interviews (5.8%) were reported as employed in mostly underpaid jobs in domestic service sectors, such as housekeeping, cleaning or babysitting. According to Sallan-Gül, as also shown by her qualitative examination of women's narratives living in shelters, women's poverty, and so their economic dependence and low social power became major factors in constructing their experiences of powerlessness and suffering in violent marriages. Consistent with these findings indicating the cycle between poverty and violence, another study also revealed that, besides child-related reasons, not having any income or having an income below the minimum wage and having no housing alternatives were reported by women as the most

fundamental reasons for staying in violent marriages (Alan, Dereli-Yılmaz, Filiz, & Arıoz, 2016). Hence, for many women in Turkey living in poverty at the intersection of various oppressive practices, along with their limited power to reach institutional support mechanisms, the problem of violence in their marriages was mostly experienced as an “unsolvable” problem (Sallan-Gül, 2013, p. 115).

In general, despite being limited in number, these research studies successfully address how the patriarchal and gendered norms and structures in the country, as embodied in the common societal, cultural and institutional practices, lessen women’s social and economic power, and relatedly, increase their vulnerability to male partner violence. As patriarchal practices become more dominant and restraining in women’s lives, they have consequently less chance and opportunity to move away from violence in their relationships. Therefore, all these oppressive contextual factors, alongside the intimidating nature of partner violence, interfere with women’s processes of agency and empowerment.

In that sense, considering the wide societal and institutional gender inequities in the country, the question of how and in which ways women in violent relationships exercise their agency and empowerment becomes a crucial one. However, although the existing studies have provided significant insights on women’s stay/leave decision-making processes and their safety-seeking behaviors (Akyüz et al., 2014; Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al., 2013; Arat & Altınay, 2007; Ekal, 2011; Sallan-Gül, 2013; KSGM, 2015, Ülkümen, 2011), there are no research studies primarily focusing on women’s post-separation experiences, and only a few ones on women’s empowerment and agency processes in violent relationships. As one of those, Ülkümen’s (2011) qualitative examination demonstrated that despite the subjugation and powerlessness that women

predominantly experienced as a result of their partners' coercive control, they also consciously employed various, mostly veiled agentic strategies to deal with the overwhelmingly negative impact of violence on their identities. As she concluded, under the severe conditions of domination and control, these acts of resistance seemingly enabled women to have a sense of relative control over their lives. In addition, women's working experiences were illustrated as closely linked with their sense of empowerment in a way that it provided them a positive and encouraging relational environment in contrast to the degrading experiences of violence at home, lessening their feeling of isolation and supporting their self-worth and confidence (Ülkümen, 2011).

A few studies also pointed out the critical role of institutional mechanisms in the empowerment of women, particularly in terms of providing women efficient and accessible support that strengthen their sense of control and competence while struggling with partner violence (Akyüz et al., 2014; Arat & Altınay, 2007). Arat and Altınay (2007), in their analysis of the advocacy and solidarity work done by a large-scale feminist nongovernmental organization (KAMER), primarily in the Eastern provinces of the country, revealed how community-level awareness-raising efforts regarding the issues of gender-based violence, gender equality, and women's rights would create tangible positive impacts on women's lives by challenging the patriarchal norms and practices. Furthermore, as a result of the organizational efforts to create accessible and sustainable local job opportunities for women and to develop strategies to advance women's entrepreneurship, the disempowering conditions in women's lives were shown to be significantly reduced (Arat & Altınay, 2007). Similarly, Akyüz et al. (2014) provided essential examples of how the equality and solidarity-based feminist

structuring of organizations would enable women to feel safe, supported, and encouraged in their processes of seeking safety.

1.7 The present study

To the researcher's knowledge, this research will be the first in Turkey to provide a qualitative examination of women's leaving processes and their post-separation experiences. No previous studies in Turkey systemically examined women's experiences of escape from male partner violence and their processes of empowerment and healing. Considering the overwhelming range of cultural, societal and institutional barriers in Turkey that hinder women's escape from male partner violence and their efforts of seeking safety, the examination of women's processes of staying in and leaving violent relationships in the specific context of the country is regarded to be highly beneficial in terms of developing a systemic understanding of how women's experiences of male partner violence are constantly shaped under these socio-structural barriers and inadequacies, and how they navigate and change their position of powerlessness and subjugation to have more control and freedom in their lives. Moreover, as the prior research in Turkey has demonstrated the significant impact of the regional and class-based diversities on women's experiences of subjugation (e.g., Akadlı-Ergöçmen, 2013; KSGM, 2015, Sallan-Gül, 2013), the current study also aims to capture and reflect the complexities of women's realities and the divergences between their experiences. In this regard, integrating a feminist intersectionality framework into this psychology-based research project is considered as a necessity for building a socially, culturally, and structurally situated analysis of women's intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of violence.

With these notions at work, this study has three focal research goals: 1) To investigate the processes and factors that shape women's stay/leave decision-making processes, 2) To examine women's experiences both before and after separation to demonstrate the challenges and struggles they encountered and the processes underlying their empowerment and recovery, 3) To provide a contextual understanding of women's individual processes on the basis of these two questions, beyond an examination of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of their experiences.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

2.1 Participants and recruitment process

Participants of the current research included 16 women who were recruited based on the strategy of purposive convenience sampling. To be included in the study, the following eligibility criteria were required: 1) Women who are at least twenty years old 2) Women who were exposed to male partner violence (physical, sexual, psychological, and/or economic; either in marital or non-marital relationship) 3) Women who have been separated from their abusive partners for at least two months before the interview arrangement. The demographic characteristics of the sample and related information about the experiences of violence are presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used for each participant.

None of the participants was an acquaintance of the researcher, and all were enrolled in the study via third parties. Nine of them were recruited among those who have utilized support services from a non-governmental feminist shelter organization. Another two women who previously stayed in a government-run shelter were enlisted by their social service practitioner. These women were firstly contacted on the phone by their current/ or former social service practitioners, and they were given information about the research. After they agreed to participate, the researcher herself contacted the participants by phone with the aims of providing more detailed information about the research and to make necessary practical arrangements for the interviews. The remaining 5 participants were drawn from the researcher's personal contacts, and the same procedures were also followed in the recruitment of these participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Name	Age	Education / Occupation	Child Age/Sex	Age at marriage	Years exposed to violence	Time after separation	Shelter experience
Arzu	36	Primary School / Manicurist- pedicurist	17 (F), 15 (M)	15	16	2	None
Aysel	49	Primary School / Cook in a restaurant	16 (M)	24	15	8	Feminist shelter
Canan	44	Primary School / Recently lost her job	22 (F), 16(F), 11(M)	20	20	4	Public shelters (3 different stays)
Esra	20	High School / Part-time salesperson at a store	2 (F)	17	1,5	10 months	Feminist shelter
Feride	39	Primary School / Pollster	20 (M), 16 (F)	18	10	11	Public shelters (2 different stays)
Harika	40	University / Not working currently	5(M), 4(F)	28	7	4	None
Hayat	50	Primary School / Cleaning person in a hotel	24,22, 20, 10 (F)	23	26	1	Public shelter
Lale	29	High School / Cleaning person in a daycare center	10 (F), 7.5 (M)	18	10	10 months	Public shelters (2 different stays)
Melek	42	Primary School / Cleaning person in a private office	19 (F), 21 (M)	19	17	5	Feminist shelter (2 different stays)
Nermin	42	Primary School / Housekeeper	21 (F), 14 (M)	15	23	3	None
Oya	47	Primary School / Worker at a textile company	19 (F), 14 (M)	14 (1st) - 22 (2nd)	4 (1st) - 9 (2nd)	11	Feminist shelter
Pervin	41	High School / Worker at a textile company	5 (M)	34	2	5	None
Reyhan	43	Primary School / Housekeeper	17 (F), 17 (F), 15(M), 25(M)	14 (1st) - 24 (2nd)	8 (1st)- 11 (2nd)	6	Feminist shelter
Safiye	45	High School / Recently lost her job	2 (M)	Unmarried	4	2	Feminist shelter
Yeliz	38	High School / Security officer in a private company	17(F), 9(M)	20	16	2	None
Zeynep	28	University student / Not working currently	None	Unmarried	3	9 months	None

2.2 Interview procedures

The stories were collected in two separate in-depth, open-ended, and face-to-face interviews with each woman. All interviews were carried by the researcher herself, and each lasted from two to four hours. While much of the interviews were conducted in the women's homes as preferred by them, some chose to meet at the places that had been offered by the researcher (in the private office room of the researcher or a private meeting room of a feminist center). Only with one participant, due to her concerns of security and safety, the interviews were done online. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

There are several reasons for the preference of conducting two interviews with each woman instead of one. One reason is that because this study aimed to gather in-depth information about women's experiences both before and after separation, it was considered that elaborating on all these experiences in one long interview would be emotionally overwhelming for women. Besides, as this study utilized a life narrative approach, the first interview started with some general questions about their current lives and their context of upbringing rather than directly focusing on the experiences of violence, which helped the researcher to contextualize women's narratives into their personal life histories. Hence, as aimed, the first interviews mostly covered their stories from their childhood to marriage, information on their daily lives, their experiences of male partner violence, and partly their stay/leave decision-making processes. The second interviews addressed the diverse issues of how women's lives changed and evolved before and after separation and their subjective experiences of recovery and empowerment.

However, beyond these practical reasons, the second interview was also suggested as a methodological approach to expand the voices of the participants and the representation of their stories in data analysis process (Allen, 2011). One aspect of this was that meeting for a second time provided women opportunities to reflect on their narratives, to make comments and to elaborate more on what they told in the first interviews, to share their insights, to add some extra details or to re-emphasize some issues. In this sense, as actively probed by the researcher, the second interviews started with the thoughts, feelings, feedback and/or questions of the participants regarding the first meetings, and descriptive short summaries of the narratives that women shared in their first interviews were also presented to the participants, as to be discussed with and/or corrected by them. Moreover, it was also utilized as a theoretical sampling method; that is, the use of the second interview allowed the researcher to address and clarify gaps and questions in the emerging examination of the first interviews (Charmaz, 2016; Allen, 2011). Lastly, linked with all these motives listed above, this sustained short-term contact also facilitated the establishment of working alliance and trust between the researcher and the participants.

Even though short, tentative guidelines for both interviews were used to probe necessary dimensions in women's stories related to the research aims, which are presented in both Turkish and English in Appendix A, the interviews mostly proceeded in an informal and non-directive way. Besides enabling the researcher to establish a more flexible and emphatic contact with the participants, which consequently strengthened their emotional and cognitive involvement into the research process, it was also used as a strategy to counteract the hierarchically dominant position of the researcher in the data gathering process (Allen, 2011; Charmaz, 2016; 2017b). As this

enables women to build and share their stories without feeling disrupted by the presence of the researcher, it also facilitates the active listening capacity of the researcher; both of which were stated as essential to obtain an accurate and abundant data (Charmaz, 2016; 2017b).

Before starting to the first interviews, all women were informed about the ethical guidelines of the research and an informed-consent letter was signed by both parties, which included explanations about the goals of the study, anonymity and confidentiality issues, approximate duration and procedures of the interviews, their absolute rights to decline their participation in the study or to leave a question unanswered without providing any reasons. The same information was also told prior to the beginning of the second interviews.

The interviews were carried out in Turkish, and the citations used in the results section were translated by the researcher from Turkish to English. The quotations in Turkish are listed in Appendix B.

2.3 Data analysis

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), conceptually developed by Charmaz (2006; 2016), was chosen as the methodological framework for the qualitative data analysis. As the epistemological and theoretical background of this research study relies on feminist perspectives, CGT was regarded as a compatible methodology in terms of the main underlying principles of feminist critical inquiry (Allen, 2011; Charmaz, 2017a). Feminist research processes primarily prioritize the inductive exploration of the private, personal, and subjective life histories and experiences of marginalized people, with an underlying goal of providing a contextually situated knowledge to highlight inequalities

and injustices affecting women's lives, and to use this knowledge for social justice and equity aims (Collins, 2004; Harding, 2004). Similarly, Charmaz (2017a) defined CGT as an emergent and open-ended qualitative methodology that offers interpretive and reflexive strategies for a critical understanding of how and in which contexts current meanings in the data have been emerging. She noted that "By providing analytic tools to probe how events, processes, and outcomes are constructed, the method provides a means of studying power, inequality, and marginality" (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 39). In this regard, rather than relying on an individual level of analysis with a very limited consideration of contextual embeddedness of individual experiences, as congruent with feminist frameworks, CGT has been argued to foster a comprehensive evaluation of the implications of the processes described in the data in terms of power relations and structural realities of the sociopolitical environment (Allen, 2011; Charmaz, 2017a).

Furthermore, aligned with more recent feminist approaches and based on the theory of social interactionism, CGT also focuses on multiple, diverse, and shifting subjective meanings developed by ever-changing social processes and interactions. That is, in quite the opposite of intended aims of traditional positivist perspectives to enable mostly objective, static, and universal knowledge production, feminist-informed CGT research projects emphasize "positionalities, partialities, instabilities and situatedness" (Allen, 2011, p. 26). Correspondingly, while the present study intends to reveal an interpretive, contextually situated framework regarding women's stay/leave decision-making processes and their experiences of recovery and empowerment, utilizing a feminist intersectionality approach, it also aims to illustrate the multiplicities, diversities, and fluctuations of women's subjectivities across these processes.

Relying on these epistemological grounds, CGT offers an organized and systematic practical strategy to examine the data, including three distinct steps of analysis, namely initial, focused, and theoretical coding, and memo-writing throughout the whole analytic process (Charmaz, 2016). In this current study, before moving to a systematic way of coding as suggested by CGT, the analysis of the interviews began with several readings of the narratives. During these readings, memo-writing became a way for the researcher to reflect on the stories spontaneously and personally to understand how her attitudes, emotions, beliefs, theoretical knowledge and orientation, and past or current experiences were intertwining with her process of understanding the emergent meanings in the stories. This informal step which had been mostly carried out throughout the data gathering phase helped the researcher to interact with the narratives more reflexively; thereby enabled her to examine her constitutive influence on the research process.

The three formal, structured steps as identified by the CGT approach were followed in the later analysis period (Charmaz, 2016). In the initial coding phase, as the first step of CGT data analysis method, the stories of the participants were sorted out into meaningful fragments (line-by-line, incident-to-incident, and/or sentence-by-sentence) and initial, mostly tentative, and descriptive code names were created for each of these fragments. This step, which is considered as forming the base of a more abstract level of analysis, requires the researcher to focus on implied meanings and actions in the narratives. A large number of initial code names such as “having no place to go”, “being discouraged by the police”, “attempting to escape”, “being proud of oneself” or “avoiding negative feelings” were created in this phase.

The second step of the analysis was focused coding, which has been mainly suggested as enabling the researcher to shape theoretical directions of the emergent initial analysis (Charmaz, 2016). It involves a process of merging the initial codes based on their intensities and frequencies and requires making constant comparisons between the narratives, codes, or specific actions and processes to reveal commonalities and divergences in the data. Based on these systematic processes, various abstract code categories need to be developed to explain the generated meanings in the data conceptually. In the current study, eight focal codes were constructed in this phase, illustrating the essential processes and patterns in the data. These codes were “recognizing helplessness as a reality”, “struggling with relational dependency”, “transforming disappointments”, “resolving ambivalence”, “re-emerging state of self-doubt”, “emerging feelings of unfairness, deprivation and loss”, “healing and empowerment via relational resources” and “healing and empowerment via prioritizing autonomy”. Each of these broader categories also involved several interconnected sublevel codes as the key explanatory dimensions.

As the focused coding phase prepared the data for the final stage of analysis, throughout the last step of qualitative examination, which is called theoretical coding, data analysis reaches a more comprehensive and coherent level. With the primary aim of explaining the narratives inclusively and holistically, theoretical coding is mainly utilized to demonstrate the essential core processes in the stories of women and to elaborate the network of relationships between these core processes. Four fundamental theoretical codes were generated in the current study, which were “doubting the possibility of getting out, experiences of helplessness and confusion”, “crossing thresholds, striving for change and exerting agency”, “losing the frame, being in a state

of loss and uncertainty”, “growing through struggles, transforming the self towards healing and empowerment”.

Memo-writing should be regarded as an essential aspect of the research process in the present study as it was practiced both throughout the data gathering phase and along the course of data analysis. As discussed above, one of the central functions of memo-writing was to enable the researcher to improve and sustain her reflexive interaction with the data. In other words, memo-writing systematically facilitated the process of developing “methodological self-consciousness” that allows the researcher to realize and work through her positionality across the research process (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 39). Moreover, in a more practical sense, memo-writing was used to elaborate and improve the evolving tentative conceptual insights about the stories; thereby contributed to the establishment of broader theoretical codes.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

3.1 Contextualizing the narratives: Pathways from childhood to marriage

Every woman has her unique story of the past that frames her current experiences of surviving violence. While women recounted their experiences of upbringing, they referred to the key dynamics of their family lives that engendered their diverse pathways to marriage. Hence, this section aims to reflect both the uniqueness and commonalities of the stories about women's past family relationships. This effort to contextualize their current experiences within their life histories is believed to produce a more in-depth perspective for analyzing and interpreting women's decision-making processes that shaped their journey of disengagement and recovery.

3.1.1 Growing-up in a culture of control

The most common family structure described by most women is rural-origin, traditional-religious, and extended. The majority (12 out of 16) were born into low-income and underprivileged families and described their childhood and adolescence years as economically, socially, and/or emotionally challenging. Most women referred to the economic struggle of their families as a defining aspect of their childhood and adolescence years as a factor that restricted the social and emotional resources of the families and negatively influenced the family relationship dynamics. Some disclosed family violence (physical and/or psychological) as a major consequence of economic deprivations -which was perceived as increasing the physical and emotional burden on parents and consequently producing violence. Some others stated economic deprivations

along with the conservative and oppressive environment they were living in as factors that limited their options for continuing their education -access to education was forbidden by families in many examples (nine out of twelve)- and in turn, restricted their contact with and their knowledge of the outside world.

In fact, having a limited education, being subjected to intense restrictions and experiencing physical violence by their parents, brothers or extended families (grandparents or uncles) were reported as the foremost aspects of their upbringing that shaped their life trajectories by increasing their vulnerabilities, constraining their agency and putting them in a situation of “powerlessness”. They emphasized that they had no right and no power to choose for themselves or to resist their families’ decisions; resistance always led to physical violence and sometimes the only way to resist was revealed as attempting suicide. Along with these feelings of vulnerability and dependency, due to their restricted knowledge and experience of the world outside their close communities, they identified themselves as “ignorant” and “naïve”: “I was like a farm chicken, have never been out of the cage, never seen the sky” (Canan) (Appendix B, 1). “Not knowing enough” and “lacking experience” were predominant discourses in their narratives and indicated as one root of their position of inferiority and helplessness shaping their pathways from childhood to marriage.

Many women also remarked on the negative influence of their parents’ gender discriminatory practices, mainly indicating the pattern of favoring the sons in the family, investing in them more -both financially and emotionally- and depriving the daughters. It seems that parents generally prioritized the well-being of sons by allowing them to use the financial and social resources of the family, making them feel more privileged when compared to daughters and expecting submissive attitudes towards the brothers. These

were addressed as family patterns caused them to feel less valuable and worthless, damaged their self-esteem and produced an intense feeling of unfairness and frustration: “You are a girl, you need to step back, you need to be obedient. He is a boy, he has rights, but you do not have . . . Feelings of inferiority, weakness. I grew up with these feelings” (Lale) (Appendix B, 2).

Besides struggling with all these disempowering dynamics of their family culture, loss of a parent figure was pointed out by four women (Nermin, Arzu, Reyhan and Oya) as a crucial turning point in their life trajectories, escalated their suffering and despair. It seemed that especially losing the father amplified the gender-based violence and oppression they were already exposed to. When the father disappeared, the family’s honor became at stake since losing the father figure meant losing the authority in the family who was perceived as responsible for protecting the honor of the family. Therefore, in the cases of three women who lost their fathers (Nermin, Arzu and Oya), the remaining family members (especially brothers and sometimes uncles and/or grandparents) started to be much more controlling and oppressive. Facing neglectful and unsupportive attitudes of the remaining family members and/or the extended families was also expressed by each of four women as another significant consequence of the parental loss shaping their profound, long-lasting feelings of isolation, being abandoned.

In contrast to the majority, four women (Harika, Esra, Safiye and Zeynep) grew up in economically more privileged families. Zeynep’s story notably diverged when compared to other women’s stories. She was the only child of a middle-class, urban and educated family, and she depicted her parents’ attitudes towards her as “democratic”, “respectful”, and “loving”. In parallel, she did not give any account of being exposed to violence or gender-based restrictions in her childhood. Similar to Zeynep, Safiye

portrayed a relatively different past family life in comparison to the other participants. Her parents were of rural-origin, traditional parents who migrated to Istanbul from a small village, and she described her father as an authoritarian man, but she also recalled how all family members were emotionally close and respectful to each other, and how both of her parents cared for and valued her. However, despite their middle-class urban upbringing, Harika and Esra acknowledged that they had highly frustrating and unloving parent-child relationships and suffered from restrictive and occasionally violent attitudes of their parents. Harika, for instance, stressed that she always found herself vacillating between the unrestrictive modern environment in her university and the oppressive environment of her family, “For me, it was even hard to get permission to go to a café . . . I still remember how I had become so surprised when I saw that some girls were staying with their boyfriends without hiding it from their parents” (Harika) (Appendix B, 3).

3.1.2 Stepping into marriage

Listening to the women’s stories of how they got into intimate relationships and marriages and exploring correspondences and divergences in their paths were considered as indispensable in terms of understanding their ongoing meaning-making processes regarding their marriages and separation. Four patterns were identified; being forced to marry, marrying to escape, marrying by arrangement, and marrying for love.

Four women (Nermin, Arzu, Reyhan, and Oya) were forcefully married between the ages of 14 and 16 with the demand of their families. Having a parental loss was enunciated as closely associated with the reasoning behind this decision of the remaining family members. Although they all underscored their efforts against this decision to get

them forcefully married, they were forced to yield and comply due to their position of powerlessness and subjugation within the restrictive and oppressive dynamics of their families: “He [referring to her brother] was beating me every day because I was constantly opposing him, I even attempted suicide . . . But in the end, I accepted, he forced me to accept, I could not endure his violence anymore” (Oya) (Appendix B, 4).

Reyhan and Oya, after they had escaped from their forced marriages, got married a second time with the men they chose. Reyhan underlined her motivation to escape her hometown and her extended family as the reason for making her second marriage. After years of running away from her family due to the threat of being killed by her brother, Oya stated that she wanted to show her family that she built up an “honorable” life by marrying a “decent” man: “I wanted to be forgiven. I thought that seeing me married with children might convince them that I did not do anything shameful” (Oya) (Appendix B, 5).

Escaping from the distressing nature of their family environments - mostly caused by physical and/or psychological violence, intense behavioral restrictions and relational conflicts with parents- was recounted as the impetus for getting married by four women (Yeliz, Canan, Lale, and Melek). They all married between the ages of 17 and 21 by running away without getting their families’ permission in a short time after they had first met with their partners. Even though feeling love was articulated as essential in shaping their relational connection with their partners, a retrospective look at their sudden and impulsive decision to get married suggested that ongoing troubles within their families triggered their immediate decision as an act of escaping. Canan, who had been exposed to severe physical violence of her mother throughout her childhood and adolescence, said: “I fell in love because he was living in another city

[laughing]. I was rushing to get married because I guess I wished to run away from my mother” (Canan) (Appendix B, 6).

Three women (Hayat, Feride and Aysel) were married by the arrangement of their families while they were young adults, between the ages of 19 and 24. In Feride’s case, accepting her father’s demand without showing any resistance was acknowledged as a consequence of her wish to escape from her step-mother and sisters: “I thought that I could leave this man sooner or later, it was not a matter for me with whom I was marrying, the only important thing was to escape from those women” (Feride) (Appendix B, 7). The converging point in the stories of two other women, Hayat and Aysel, was that they withdrew their wish to marry the men they loved to protect their families’ honor and not to disappoint their fathers by disobeying their requests: “He [the man she loved] asked me to run away with him, but I refused. I did not want to dishonor my family, my father” (Hayat) (Appendix B, 8).

There are three participants (Harika, Esra, and Pervin) who indicated feeling love and intimacy as the primary underlying reasons for their decision to marry. After long-time dating relationships (except Esra), they willingly married their partners. In Esra’s case, although love was emphasized as the central determinant of her decision to marry, her strong desire to move away from her family was also stated as another vital aspect of her decision. Love and intimacy were also found as predominant in the narratives of the other two women (Zeynep and Safiye) who were in committed unmarried relationships.

3.2 Exploring pathways of surviving male partner violence

This exhaustive exploration of women’s life histories intends to illustrate their burdensome but eventually promising and inspirational journeys of surviving male

partner violence and building a secure and peaceful life for themselves. Their experiences of disentanglement from partner violence, healing and empowerment evolved through four diverse processes; each reflects the transitions in the women's sense-of-being and indicates how these changes shaped and were shaped by their decision-making processes and actions. While the first two processes explain women's lived experiences in the pre-separation period, the last two reveal their post-separation experiences:

1. Doubting the possibility of getting out: Experiences of helplessness and confusion
2. Crossing thresholds: Striving for change and exerting agency
3. Losing the frame: Being in a state of loss and uncertainty
4. Growing through struggles: Transforming the self towards healing and empowerment

On the one hand, each of these processes emerged as predominantly representing women's self-states at certain times of their lives, and they were conceptualized as progressively changing. On the other hand, a pattern of constant shifting between these processes, and even simultaneous coexistence of them as multiple states of being was also observed as prevalent in the narratives. Although the process of transformation that every woman went through in this study seemed to evolve into a reassuring and relieving one, when considering their current lives, women's accounts still showed continuing strains and struggles regarding various aspects of their experiences. Figure 1 depicts the picture of women's overall processes of survival, healing, and empowerment.

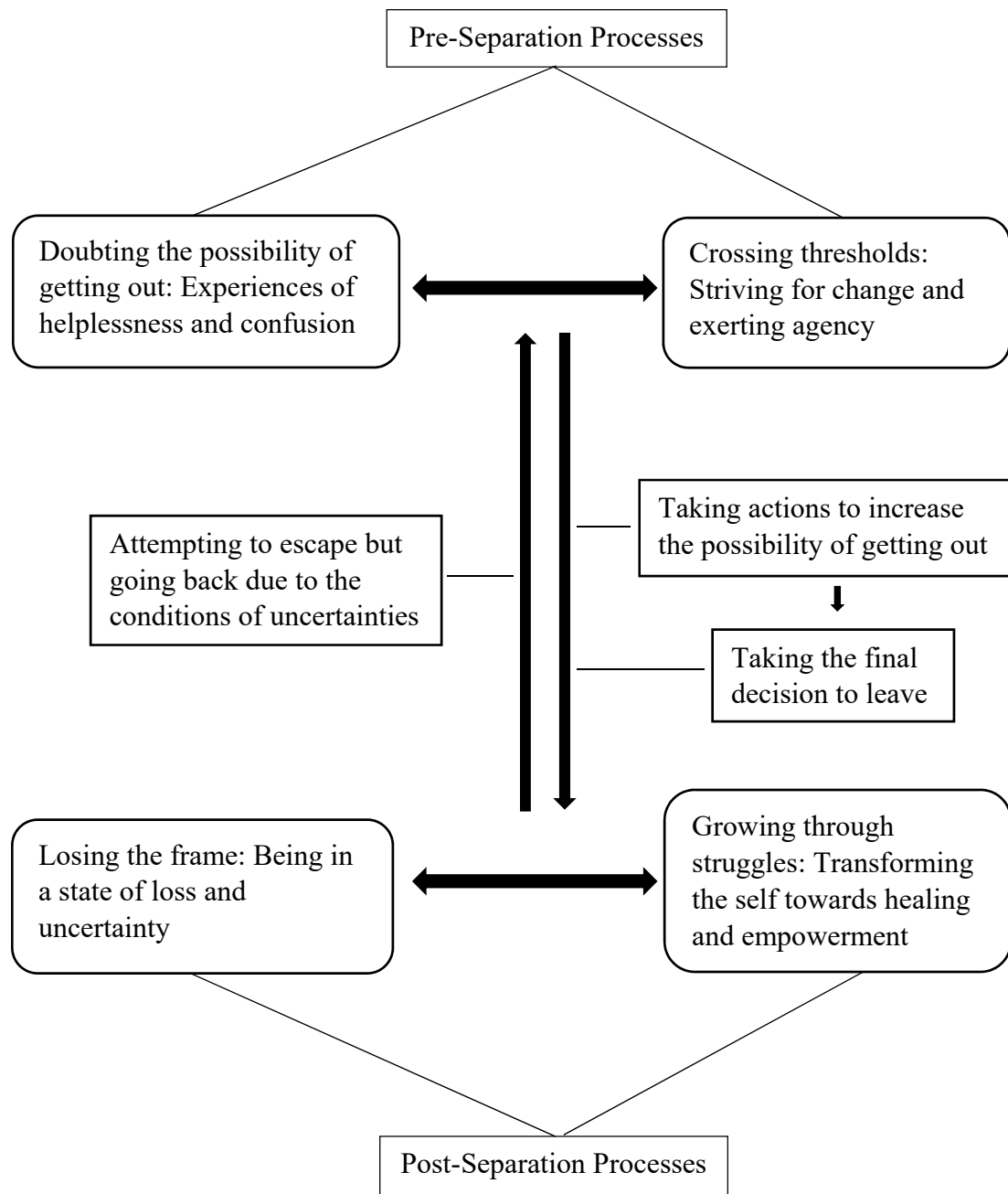


Figure 1. The overall processes of survival, healing, and empowerment

3.2.1 Pre-separation processes

Pre-separation processes elucidated the transitions in women's subjective experiences including their thoughts, perceptions, emotions, expectations, decisions, and behaviors from the very first moments when the idea of leaving emerged in their minds, to the final act of separation. These encumbering processes included multiple/ intersecting challenges and struggles that women needed to embrace and overcome. One essential aspect of their experiences involved their efforts of coping with the overwhelming psychological, social, economic, and physical adversities instigated by their suffering from male partner violence. Tackling their ongoing conflictual/ burdensome relationships with their own families that dated back to their childhoods, facing their families' indifferent and/or rejecting attitudes towards their need of support, encountering unsupportive, and most of the time discouraging and humiliating attitudes of the authorities -particularly police- and feeling engulfed by the lack of economic and social opportunities were identified as crucial determinants of their experiences. However, while all these overlapping battles produced a state of doubt consisting of feelings of helplessness, confusion, and compliance, being in a position of confronting all these difficulties engendered a sense of agency and strength at the same time. From the process of doubting to the process of striving for change, women were observed as gradually relinquishing their anxieties, ambiguities, and ambivalences by primarily observing their capacities to endure and cope with the degrading and oppressing challenges in their lives; thereby, the prevailing position of doubt began to be replaced by a state of active resistance to escape and build a life of their own.

3.2.1.1 Doubting the possibility of getting out: Experiences of helplessness and confusion

Most women were continuously exposed to life-threatening physical violence and severe psychological, economic, and sexual violence of their partners from the first days of their relationships to the end. Two women (Zeynep and Safiye) recounted that after the first few years of experiencing psychological violence in their relationships, physical violence started when they began to show more resistance and opposition towards their partners. Two other women (Canan and Yeliz) reported no instances of physical violence throughout their relationships, but they described years of being exposed to economic and psychological violence.

All women -for some starting from the first days and for others later in their relationships- stated that the desire to escape from violence began to unceasingly permeate their thoughts, feelings, and actions long before the final act of separation. Most women, especially the ones who had experiences of physical violence early in their relationships, portrayed their first and predominant responses to physical violence as intensely shocking, and thus it was stressed that the idea of leaving arose in their minds immediately after these first instances of physical violence. In the narratives of women who had been mainly exposed to economic and/or psychological abuse rather than physical violence, and particularly if they predominantly described their emotional attachment to the partner, an urge for separation was depicted as gradually emerging and becoming concrete over time instead of being described as an initial reaction to violence. However, at the same time, a state of confusion and helplessness was also markedly observed in the narratives mitigating against women's efforts of escaping violence.

Diverse and multiple dimensions constituting this position of doubtfulness were determined for each woman to illustrate both commonalities and differences in their stories. This analysis showed that women followed either one of two divergent patterns in their processes, namely recognizing helplessness as a reality- struggling with structural dependency and when there is love- struggling with relational dependency. As many of them got married without loving their partners, intimacy or emotional closeness was not pointed out by the majority as a factor influencing their state of doubt. For these women, a sense of dependency emerged as a central experience constructing their meaning-making processes and actions, but rather than being produced by an emotional commitment to the partners or referring to any hopes and desires of establishing and/ or maintaining an intimate relationship with their husbands, it referred to a structural dependency generated by the contextual adversities in their lives such as economic difficulties, lack of a supportive environment or systemic barriers. On the other hand, for a small group of women, the ones who had relatively privileged economic, social and educational backgrounds, a feeling of relational dependency on the partners and the expectations of intimacy were identified as the major dynamics that had been shaping their pathways of doubt. Figure 2 depicts the schematic view of these early pre-separation processes.

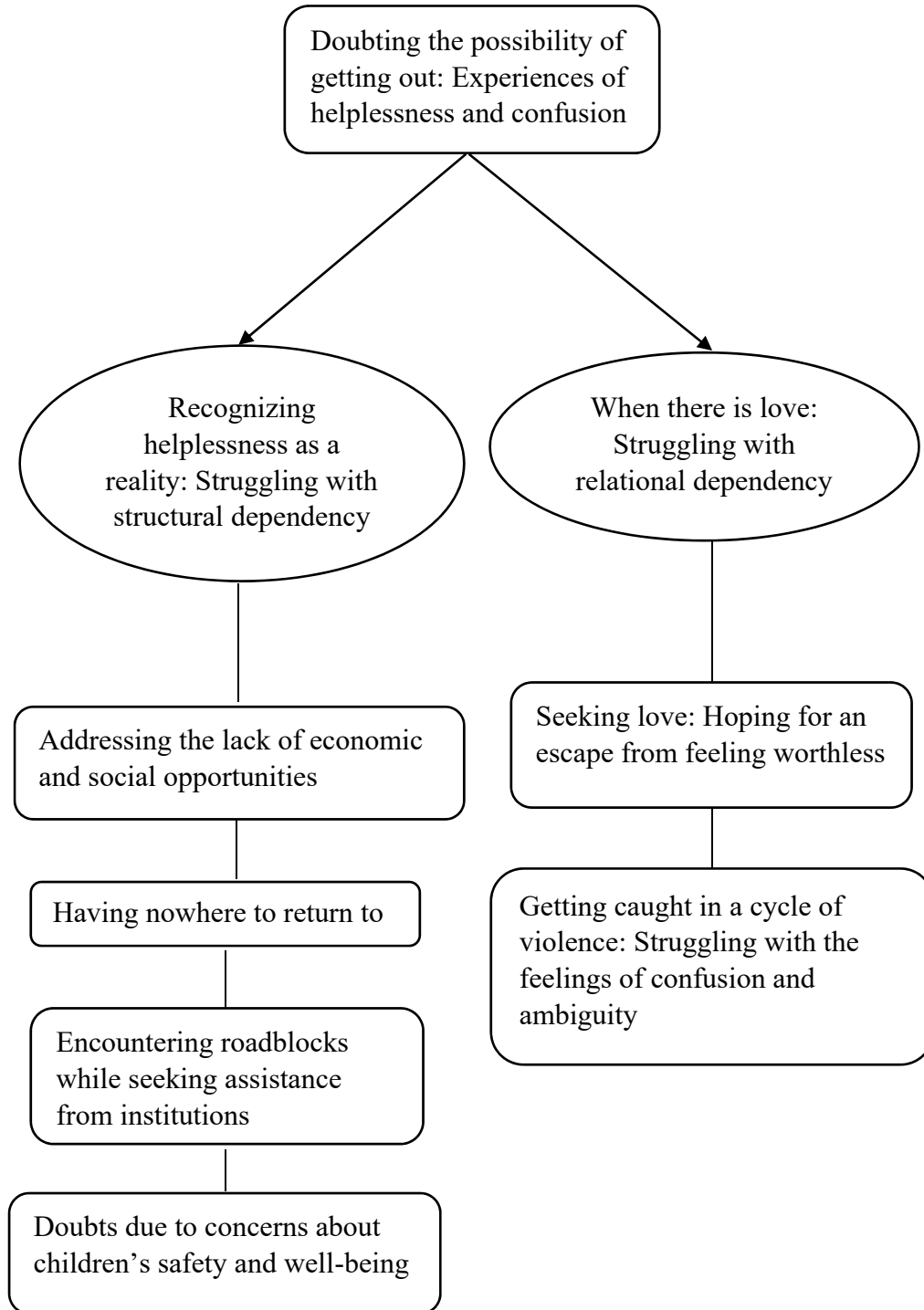


Figure 2. Doubting the possibility of getting out: Experiences of helplessness and confusion

3.2.1.1.1 Recognizing helplessness as a reality: Struggling with structural dependency

R: You must have felt so helpless.

N: I did not feel helpless, I was helpless, it was the reality, not a feeling.
[expressing in anger] (Nermin) (Appendix B, 9)

While reflecting on her first years of marriage and talking about the reasons for not being able to leave her violent husband despite her strong wish to do so, Nermin, a woman who was forcefully married when she was 15 years old and stayed married for 23 years, firmly emphasized that helplessness was not an internal reality but a situation created by the external adversities in her life. This particular experience of helplessness, or powerlessness, was recited by women as a primary reason that intensified their doubts regarding their chances of leaving. Several diverse but intersecting aspects underlying this prevailing discourse of helplessness and dependency emerged from the narratives.

3.2.1.1.1.1 Addressing the lack of economic and social opportunities

Having limited economic resources was addressed by many women as an essential dimension shaped their position of vulnerability in their relationships, and as a central reason for their ambivalence in their decision-making processes. Due to their lack of occupational skills/ experiences and their low level of education, most of them viewed their likelihood of finding a job as highly limited. The following was articulated by Canan, whose educational rights were restricted by her mother: “Leaving him was one thing, but so what then? How will you pay your rent, how will you provide for your kids? No job, no education, no skills, so no money” (Canan) (Appendix B, 10).

Likewise, in the majority of cases, not being able to earn money (or, for some, earning very little in low-skilled underpaid jobs) was discussed as an important factor that hindered their perception of themselves as capable of leaving and building an

independent life. In addition, the issue of finding affordable housing, which was also closely related with their financial worries, commonly emerged in the narratives as a major obstacle in their processes of separation. This was elaborated in the following report by Melek who was working in an unstable low-paying job: “I had always thought that, for years, ‘At least I am not paying the rent’. Finding a house, paying the deposit, paying the rent . . . These were impossible to afford. This ties your hands” (Melek) (Appendix B, 11).

For many, and particularly for the ones who had limited educational opportunities and restricted social contact outside their close communities throughout their upbringing, being “undereducated” and “inexperienced” were highlighted as two interconnected shortcomings impeding their process of imagining themselves as self-sufficient individuals outside their marriages. This was illustrated in the following statement by Hayat, a fifty-year-old woman who grew up in an urban city: “I was a home bird, I was going everywhere with my mother, wash the dishes, clean the house. I had not had any experience outside my home. So, I did not have any courage, or possibility to stand by myself” (Hayat) (Appendix B, 12). Another woman, Aysel, who grew up in a small rural town and then moved to an urban center after being married to her husband, similarly reflected on her position of incompetence and lack of knowledge as a fundamental reason for her disbelief in the possibility of leaving: “Imagine that you do not even know how to use a debit card. I was just like that [laughing]. How can you think about leaving your husband?” (Aysel) (Appendix B, 13).

Thus, intermingling with their financial limitations, women indicated their restricted educational/ social knowledge and experiences as fundamental dynamics creating their sense of incompetency and self-doubt.

3.2.1.1.1.2 Having nowhere to return to

Interconnected with all the contextual disadvantages underlined in the narratives, women predominantly enunciated the absence or insufficiency of family support to explain their hesitancy to leave and as a primary source of their sense of isolation and hopelessness. Interconnected with their pragmatic worries regarding financial issues and housing, the majority considered the family support as their only chance to escape. As articulated by Nermin in the following report, having no support from families mostly resulted in feelings of abandonment and powerlessness: “When you do not have a family supporting you, you have no choice but to stay” (Nermin) (Appendix B, 14). Arzu, who was forcefully married at 15 by her mother, similarly stated how being rejected by her family obstructed her further efforts to seek escape from violence: “I begged my mother. ‘Please take me back’ . . . I ran away, went to my mother to get help. They [referring to her mother and brother] sent me back. My own family did not accept me, so I stayed” (Arzu) (Appendix B, 15). Hayat’s report, as another example, hinted at her resentment for not being protected by her family and exemplified how the discouraging attitudes of the families could deepen women’s experiences of isolation readily created by their abusive husbands:

Nobody has ever said to him, ‘You cannot forbid our sister, our daughter, from seeing us, how dare you’. Instead, they [referring to her mother and brothers] said, ‘If your husband does not want, there is nothing to do’ . . . Nobody cared what I went through. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 16)

Women’s accounts generally indicated that they perceived their families’ unsupportive and/or negligent attitudes as caused by both unwillingness of the families to get involved in a conflict with the husbands and the husbands’ families, and the cultural/moral standpoint of the families prioritizing the continuation of marriages at all

costs. Discursive claims normalizing men's violence in marriage and discouraging women from acting in noncomplying and resisting ways by inducing shame and guilt - such as "marriage is just like that, accept it as it is", "there is nothing to do, men are inherently violent", "if you leave him, you will disgrace your family", "you went as a bride, you can only come back in a coffin"- were disclosed by many women as typical responses of their families when they sought help from them. Repeatedly encountering such statements was recalled as disappointing and frustrating, but at the same time shaped women's early decision-making processes, as noted by Reyhan who was forcefully married at 15 to her cousin and lived in a small rural village:

It is not right for a woman to live by herself alone. We learned this. 'Look at this woman, she destroyed her family, she will end up in a whorehouse' . . . As everybody around speaks like that, you start to believe. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 17)

Thus, the internalization of these common cultural discourses that women were frequently exposed to in their daily lives seemed to restrict their resolve and actions by intensifying their fears and worries.

For women married without the family permission, these cultural discourses were revealed as much more of an impediment. Lale, for instance, described how her guilt shaped her experiences in the first few years of her abusive marriage: "I told myself 'You once disgraced your family by running away, so you cannot do the same thing again by divorcing'. I preached to myself over and over again, 'This is your punishment, you have to endure'" (Lale) (Appendix B, 18). Pervin got married after 9 years of a dating relationship even though her family did not approve of her partner. In the following, she reflected on her initial reactions after the first instance of physical violence on their wedding night: "I told him 'No matter how much time will pass, I will

certainly leave you when I find a way'. While saying this, I was asking myself, 'How can you explain this to your family?'" (Pervin) (Appendix B, 19). Throughout her narrative, she often underscored her fear of disappointing and disgracing her family as the underlying source of her uncertainty and doubt about leaving.

Still, many women acknowledged that despite their hesitations, worries, and shame, they actively sought help from their families several times during their marriages, especially within the first few years. While a majority of families seemed to reject supporting their daughters openly, several of them showed ambivalent/contradictory attitudes. In the case of Lale, for example, cited in the paragraph above, when she decided to seek help from her family, her father accepted her back into the family house, but she recalled how much she was offended by her fathers' insults and decided to go back: "He was complaining to my mother. 'How am I going to live with this shame? I cannot go anywhere, I cannot talk to anybody because of her'. How can I stay there then?" (Lale) (Appendix B, 20). Another woman, Melek, reported that after several months of living with her parents, she could not endure his father's abusiveness towards both herself and her daughter and eventually felt obliged to go back to her partner: "My father accepted helping me but how? 'You are a divorced woman. You cannot go outside alone' . . . I also realized that he was treating my daughter terribly. So, I felt no option but to go back" (Melek) (Appendix B, 21). In these cases, and in many similar ones in the stories of other women, it was observed that women's active help-seeking efforts lessened as a result of the frustrating experiences with the families.

3.2.1.1.1.3 Doubts due to concerns about children's safety and well-being.

The rhetorical expression of “I stayed because of my children” was frequently identified in the narratives, indicating the diverse sets of reasoning in women's minds. One burdensome aspect of the responsibility of motherhood was discussed as closely interconnected with the economic limitations in their lives. Economic worries seemed to shape their reasoning when they evaluated how to ensure their children's well-being and how to provide a sufficient enough living environment for them. In fact, having children was considered as a factor increasing their economic insecurities and reducing their options. Arzu, for instance, speculated on how her life would have been different if she had not had children: “I would have been able to run away much earlier. I did try even with them. Without thinking about whether my money would be enough to take care of them, my life would certainly have been easier” (Arzu) (Appendix B, 22). In this sense, because of their worries for their children, they discussed the prospective financial burdens as major obstacles in their leaving process.

Moreover, most women underscored the absence of child-care support, particularly when children were below school age, as a crucial factor in limiting their employment opportunities. This was demonstrated in the following quote by Harika, a highly educated woman with previous work experience:

Neither your education nor your work experience . . . It doesn't matter if you have two small babies to take care of. You cannot work by leaving them at home alone. They are dependent on you, so you are dependent on your husband.
(Harika) (Appendix B, 23)

Still, as many of them experienced economic violence of their husbands, they had to work to supply the basic daily needs of their children. A few of them said that they had to leave their children alone at home while they were working. Others said they barely

persuaded their own families or their family-in-laws to take care of their children, but this usually ended up by women quitting their jobs after realizing that the kids were abused and/or neglected by their grandparents.

Furthermore, having children was elaborated as another underlying reason for the rejecting attitudes of their families. In some cases, families volunteered to help women only if they would leave their children with their fathers. Yeliz, for instance, told about how pain and guilt were intolerable when she moved to her family home by taking her son with her:

My father openly said, ‘Don’t bring his son’ . . . I left my son behind, but I could not sleep for days. I was so unsettled. The worst thing in life is helplessness [crying]. I forgot about myself, I returned for the sake of my son. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 24)

Oya, who lost her father at 11 and then was forcefully married by her brother when she was 16, said that her mother’s rejection to take care of her children became the major cause for her to stay with her husband: “I begged her, ‘Live with me, look after my children, I will work’ . . . She did not want, she refused. If she had accepted, I would have escaped from this man so much earlier” (Oya) (Appendix B, 25). Hence, once again, the absence of support from families was emphasized as very troublesome and frustrating, escalating their distress linked with their parental responsibilities.

Women also recited their worries regarding the possible psychological consequences of separation for children. Besides the fear of being accused by their children, they also seemed to have questions about whether living without a father would be the best option for them. The following report by Nermin indicated both:

I know the pain of losing parents [crying]. I think I did not want to cause them to feel this . . . My son was very connected to his father. I feared to hear him saying, ‘You broke up our family, we lost our father because of you, because you were not patient enough’. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 26)

Besides, as articulated by Aysel in the following, several women also expressed their doubts about how to discipline and control their children by themselves: “You even think about your son’s adolescence. How can I control him by myself? A son needs a father” (Aysel) (Appendix B, 26). In other words, women viewed father presence in children’s lives as important and necessary and thus were worried about the emotional ramifications of father absence. These reservations were also triggered by the guilt-inducing comments of others that underlyingly blamed women for failing their roles of self-sacrifice:

You have to stay for your children, you have to endure for the sake of children . . . You will ruin their lives, they will be lost, your daughters will be prostitutes. You get scared when you hear such things. These come to your mind, and you hold yourself back. (Canan) (Appendix B, 28)

3.2.1.1.1.4 Encountering roadblocks while seeking assistance from institutions

Many women, and particularly the ones who were continually exposed to the severe/life-threatening physical violence of their husbands, reported their efforts to access external help, especially by calling the police in conditions of emergency. While women perceived the police as the primary source of getting help, their narratives showed that the negative reactions by the police were experienced as highly discouraging, often causing them to retreat. Framing husbands’ violence as a private family matter, refusing to intervene, ignoring the seriousness of the threat coming from husbands, reminding women of their roles as mothers and wives, advising them to stay in their marriages, frightening women by emphasizing the difficulties of living in shelters or not informing them about shelters at all and behaving in morally degrading ways were identified in the narratives as reflecting the police’s reactions to women. Aysel, for instance, noted how

facing the police's negligent and humiliating attitudes weakened her trust in authorities and escalated her feeling of desperation:

They tried to smooth over the situation, 'This is your husband, nothing to do'. Then, you think, 'Police are not helping, but who will help me if he tries to kill me' . . . Once, I went to the hospital to take a report for my injuries; police officer there called me, in front of everyone, 'Woman who was beaten up by her husband, come' . . . You understand that men are the same everywhere. Your husband is a man, the police are men. You feel that there is nothing more to do. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 29)

These experiences seemed to increase women's worries and fears about relying on outside help and became the key experiences of discouragement intensifying their doubts about the possibility of escape.

Several women also stated that they considered shelters as not safe places for "well-mannered" women, as illustrated by Arzu: "I heard about women's shelters on TV, but I said that these places could not be good for normal women . . . I thought that these places are full of prostitutes" (Arzu) (Appendix B, 30). These beliefs were considered as related to the prevalent stereotypical discourses about shelters to which they were exposed in their daily lives, reported in the following quote by Lale: "I was afraid of shelters. I think, somehow, I heard this everywhere, shelters are bad, not safe. I thought I could protect neither myself nor my children there" (Lale) (Appendix B, 31). These negative biases about shelters were sometimes prompted by the authorities themselves, particularly by the police. Melek, for instance, reported the troublesome attitudes held by the police when she went to a police station in her neighborhood to get consultation about women's shelters: "They said, 'Do you know how shelters are? Very very bad places, you cannot raise your daughter there, no bed to sleep, no couch to sit'

. . . You go there to get help, but you return even in a more desperate situation” (Melek) (Appendix 32). And when she finally found an emergency shelter line offering help, it became difficult for her to overcome her worries about the safety of shelters:

The man on the phone was very assuring, informed me well about my rights and gave me the instructions about what to do. Just the night before the day I was planning to leave, my daughter said to me, ‘What if it is a bad place, what if it is worse than here?’. I was afraid too, I decided not to go. I mean you know about the police, you know how bad they treated you, you think ‘Is there a guarantee that this place will be good for you and your kids?’. No. (Melek) (Appendix B, 33)

As another major handicap, Hayat, for instance, the mother of 4 daughters, underlined her efforts to get help from various shelters, but ending up being disappointed and angry when she heard that her children needed to stay in social services: “They said there was not enough space for all of my children. I would bring one, but others should go to social services. Can you believe this nonsense? So, it means saying ‘Stay silent and stay where you are’” (Hayat) (Appendix B, 34). When Reyhan was told that her adolescent son could not stay in the shelter, she reacted in similarly and emphasized how she felt resentful over not being protected, a parallel feeling that she had toward her family:

I said them that I would prefer to live with this monster rather than leaving my son . . . Your family, your government, should protect you, but they throw you into the fire. My father also said this ‘You can come but not your bastard’. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 35)

As each woman in this study had been exposed to the constant threats of their partners (threats of being killed, harming children, being separated from children, harming/ killing close family members, disgracing/ blaming them in their communities with false accusations, etc.), the insufficient and unsupportive responses of the state authorities appeared to further reinforce their position of powerlessness within the context of their

husbands' coercive control: "Neither your government nor your family. So, you say that 'This is my destiny'. This is an impossible thing to accept, but you accept it" (Nermin) (Appendix B, 36).

3.2.1.1.2 When there is love: Struggling with relational dependency

I had always been thinking that 'What will happen if you leave him? Can you emotionally detach yourself from him? Can you overcome your dependency?' I do not know, love, I guess. Whatever he did, somehow, I felt that I could not live without him. It was not normal. (Esra) (Appendix B, 37)

Esra, a 21-year-old woman, recalled many moments of ambivalence in her thoughts, feelings, and actions experienced throughout her decision-making process and emphasized that her journey of separation involved a time of emotional struggle to overcome the "abnormal" and sometimes "unexplainable" feeling of emotional commitment to her partner. This particular depiction of emotional dependency regarding stay-or-leave decisions was recounted by a smaller number of women (Esra, Harika, Zeynep, and Safiye) whose stories included a central discourse of romantic love.

3.2.1.1.2.1 Seeking love: Hoping for an escape from feeling worthless

Feeling deprived of parental love and care were highlighted by two women (Harika and Esra) as significant factors generating and nourishing the burdensome and perplexing feeling of relational dependency. The narratives of these women implied an inner sense of vulnerability encompassing their feelings of worthlessness and belittlement, which they tried to compensate in their spousal relationships. Thus, the abusiveness of their original family relationships appeared as a factor escalated their dependency. In the following quote, for instance, Harika expressed how she felt emotionally needy for

affection and care in her relationship, and then she associated this position with the lack of feeling valued in her past:

I was so stupid that I became a slave to him to deserve his love and appreciation. It was like I needed to prove it to myself that I can be a loveable person . . . [a long pause] When you do not experience this in your family, it does not become so easy to give up searching for it. (Harika) (Appendix B, 38)

In addition, these two women seemed to perceive their marriages as a way of getting physical and psychological distance from their families with the hope of escaping from their parents' vicious and intrusive attitudes and healing their wounded selves. In this sense, especially in the beginning of their relationships, they described themselves as having a vast emotional investment in their partners. As addressed in the following report by Esra, despite her awareness of violence, protecting her sense of attachment became a priority in the earlier phase of her relationship: "I realized that I had been distracting myself, cleaning, cooking . . . You are aware that he hurts you and you should end it, but you try to make him happy. You want to make him love you" (Esra) (Appendix B, 39). After indicating this ambivalence between protecting her relational commitment versus protecting herself from violence, Esra continued her narrative by emphasizing that the decision of staying or leaving also became choosing one challenge over another, the challenge of living with the violent husband or living with the intrusive/ violent family: "The place where I could return was no better than the place where I was living. So, I had always said to myself, 'Do you want to go back to the family you escaped?'" (Esra) (Appendix B, 40). Thus, women considered their problematic family relationships as underlying their doubts and ambivalence regarding the choice of leaving.

Women also talked about gendered upbringing and traditional ideals around womanhood in the society, both of which shaped their thinking about intimate relationships and female roles and responsibilities. Zeynep, for instance, although she described a relatively less gendered environment in her past family life, gave her account of how the gender norms influenced her feelings, thoughts, and actions during her relationship:

It was good to be in this relationship in the sense that it helped me to understand that my mind is not free from those gender norms in our society. My family always tried to teach me equality, and they tried to help me to be a capable woman, but all things about being a sacrificing woman, being understanding, being humble and soft. These can also be good, but when you encountered such a man, you automatically say to yourself ‘Okay, wait, do whatever necessary to understand him, to relieve him, a woman should sustain her relationship’. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 41)

Harika similarly told that her efforts to make her relationship work were related to the societal norms and discourses around womanhood:

It became like a betting competition, it was like I was so ambitious to make this work. As if I will prove myself and others that I am a woman, ‘Look I am still his wife, my homemade bread and my homemade yogurt, look, he still loves me’. It is not surprising because you were thought that a woman could only be reputable if she has a husband. I was the senior director of the company X, but I was proud of myself when I resigned to look after my children. It was that kind of stupid thing. (Harika) (Appendix B, 42)

As exemplified in these narratives, trying to sustain their relationships despite violence seemed to be perceived as a consequence of the internalized gender norms and ideals.

Making sacrifices, being patient and emphatic, continuing to fulfill their roles as spouses and/or mothers were told as belonging to their gender identity, and obstructed them to seek escape from violence.

3.2.1.1.2.2 Getting caught in a cycle of violence

Men's behaviors were not always described as violent and uncaring; as a part of their strategies of control, they occasionally seemed to behave in very caring and intimate ways, especially right after women showed signs of emotional and physical disengagement from the relationships. These periods of intimacy and relational satisfaction were revealed to result in more confusion and ambiguity in women's mind, in the sense that they began to experience two contradictory realities in their relationships without any stability and consistency. Referring to this unpredictable and puzzling nature of their relationships, they retrospectively identified their decision-making processes and their responses to violence as "unhealthy" and "troublesome" (as pointed out by all participants in this pattern). Zeynep, for instance, a politically active feminist woman, addressed the vacillating nature of her emotions and thought processes in her long-time dating relationship and indicated how she felt emotionally confused:

It is not about deciding something and going in that way, no matter who you are and what you believe. You always find yourself in-between. I do not remember one night of relief, one night of sleeping without feeling bad about myself, without feeling frustrated and upset. But still, there were many passionate times and times of satisfaction. I was not psychologically healthy; my feelings were unstable [a long pause]. At certain times you say to yourself, 'This relationship should end' and then you become resistant and angry. But at other times you become compliant, passive. You tend to accept it as it is. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 43)

Repeated experiences of this frustrating cycle of wavering and finding themselves unable to find a way of getting out of it seemed to drain these women's sense of confidence and self-worth gradually, thereby further escalate their sense of dependency and vulnerability. In the following quote, and as similarly observed in the narratives of the other three women, Safiye reflected on how observing herself as

“unable” to leave her partner caused her to feel psychologically disempowered and vulnerable:

I was a very active, powerful woman . . . My emotional vulnerability to him, like he was the only man in the world, destroyed me . . . It became impossible to respect myself, to believe in myself because I decided to leave him many times, but I could not. I became anxious, hesitant about everything. (Safiye) (Appendix B, 44)

Their partners also seemed to manipulate these feelings. Consequently, as Harika reported in the following quote, the feelings of guilt, indignity, and self-blame were observed as inhibiting women’s self-protective attitudes and sometimes preventing them from perceiving the reality of violence:

He was saying, ‘When I close my eyes, I see you making love with your ex-husband’. I am not saying, ‘Are you a lunatic?’. Instead, I was feeling sorry for him . . . Instead of leaving him, I became more and more dependent on him. As he had always said to me, I felt that he was my only and last chance. Who wants a woman divorced twice? (Harika) (Appendix B, 45)

Drifting into isolation and withdrawal from their social environment and being criticized by their friends for not being “powerful enough” to leave their abusive partners were elaborated as essential aspects of their experiences that reinforced their relational vulnerabilities. While they were already feeling shameful for continuing to be involved in an abusive relationship by blaming themselves as incapable of taking any action, encountering marginalizing and/or pressuring attitudes of the people close to them seemed to aggravate their emotional insecurity and isolation further. Safiye, for instance, talked about how her close friends had gradually distanced themselves from her and how this made her feel relationally more dependent on her partner, thereby impeding her process of separation: “My friends began to get angry with me . . . Maybe I would have responded in the same way if I were in their position but breaking up becomes harder and harder when he becomes the only person in your life” (Safiye)

(Appendix B, 46). Similarly, the following quote by Zeynep showed how feeling accused by her friends shattered her self-confidence more and weakened her feeling of belongingness, which consequently resulted in her social withdrawal:

You're a feminist, how can you continue to be in this relationship?'. It was not what I needed to hear. This only intensifies your guilt and your anger towards yourself. I did not want to talk to my friends then. I did not want to see them. I remember that I began to say to myself, 'Maybe he is right, nobody is there for me, only him'. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 47)

Hence, for these two women, being unsupported by the people in their close social circle seemed to intensify the impact of psychological violence of their partners and strengthen emotional dependency.

3.2.1.2 Crossing thresholds: Striving for change and exerting agency

The experiences of doubt and powerlessness centrally shaped women's narratives of staying. Concurrent with these feelings, women also underlined their unceasing efforts to escape violence by pointing out their actions of resistance and opposition accumulating over a long-time process in their relationships. While, at specific periods, the experiences of helplessness and self-doubts were dominating their decision-making, gradually through these transformative actions, women gained a sense of empowerment that enabled them to leave their partners permanently. Thus, one part of this process of change included continuous vacillations between vulnerability and resistance; yet at the same time, it occurred as a progressive transition from a state of self-doubting to one of agency.

Numerous dimensions were determined to explain the factors underlying the changes in women's processes. As in the previous one, two different but intersecting patterns emerged from the narratives reflecting the differences between two groups of

women regarding their stories of transition. Women in the structural dependency group seemed to go through a process that lessened their sense of powerlessness. The second group defined their experiences based on a decreasing sense of emotional attachment to their partners. While for most women in the first group, these transformative processes were revealed as occurring in a quite long period of time (from 10 years to 24 years), for the second group and for a few of them from the first group leaving became possible over a relatively shorter period (from one-and-a-half to seven years). However, for all women, the idea of leaving evolved into a more explicit and definite one within the last periods of their relationships before they left. Figure 3 presents the schematic view of women's processes of change.

3.2.1.2.1 Transforming disappointments: Observing the self as capable and sufficient

I was beaten, my bones were broken, but I was not defeated. I did not give up. I always reminded myself that I needed to do something. I said, 'If you are able to endure his violence, you can cope with everything in the world' . . . It is odd to say, but I guess he made me resistant like this [laughing]. (Feride) (Appendix B, 48)

After Feride was asked about her responses to the violence of her husband during their 11 years of marriage, besides underscoring her overwhelming experiences of helplessness, isolation, and belittlement, she also addressed her power to endure the degrading and oppressing effects of violence, and her unyielding desire to escape. As hinted in the narrative above, reassessing themselves as resilient individuals and having the capacity of survival even in such conditions of oppression encouraged them to take further steps to move away from violence. Several intersecting dimensions were identified in the narratives underlying the processes of change that women experienced in their pre-separation period.

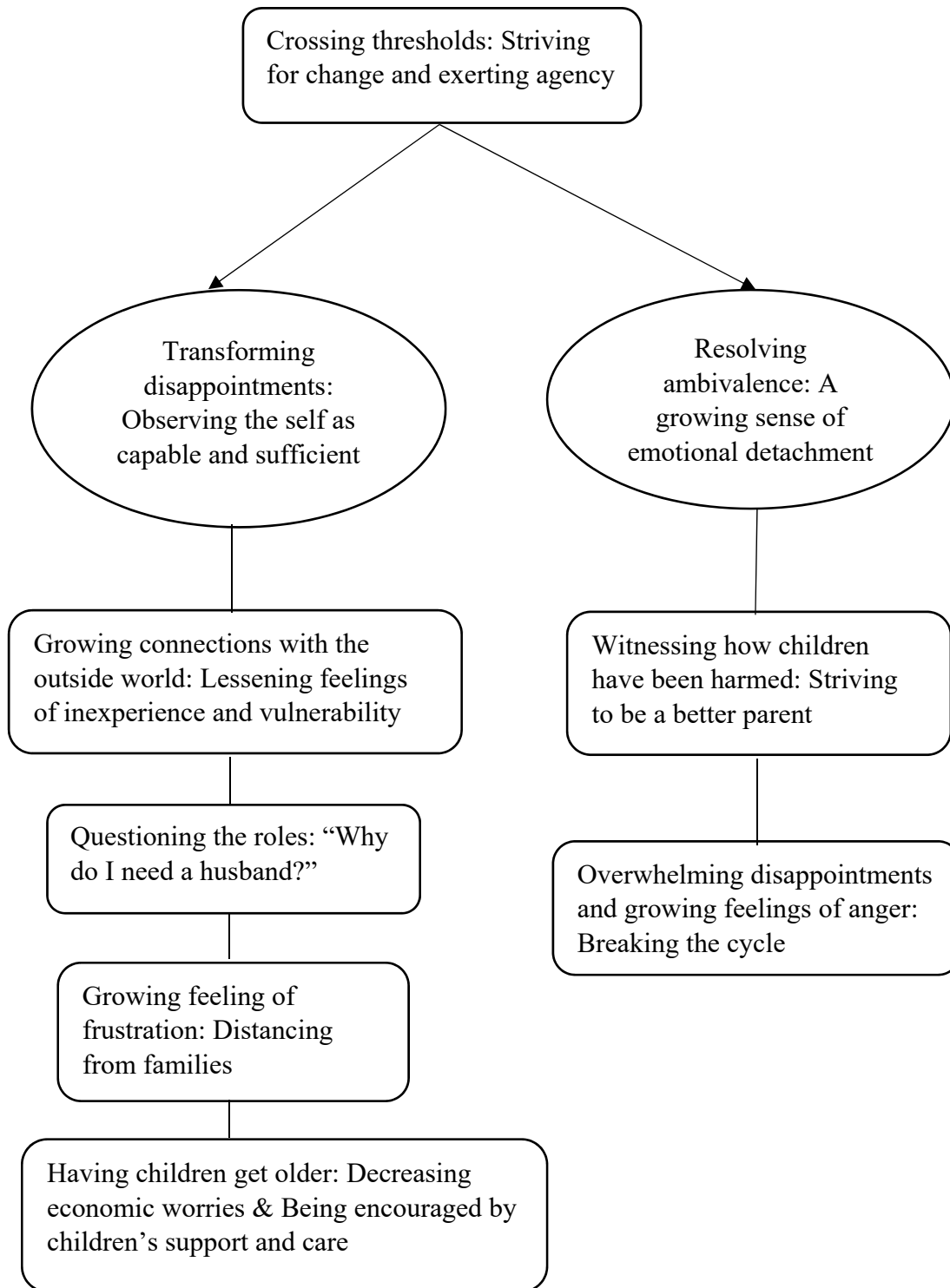


Figure 3. Crossing thresholds: Striving for change and exerting agency

3.2.1.2.1.1 Growing connections with the outside world

One transformative aspect of women's experiences in the pre-separation period was considered as their increasing knowledge of and experience in the social world. While many of them described themselves as "inexperienced" due to the socially restrictive environment of their upbringing and their lack of education, their increasing involvement in everyday social practices and their growing interaction with the social environment outside their close communities transformed their negative experiences of powerlessness. As they increasingly felt that they had the knowledge, experience, and ability to maintain their lives without depending on their husbands or their families, it strengthened their sense of control over their lives. The following report by Aysel, illustrated how this process of change occurred from the disempowering experience of being subdued to the empowering one of having control:

Aysel learned how to withdraw money from ATM, she had her smart phone, she had her credit card [laughing]. I changed the password of my bank card, so he could not use it anymore. I got quite beaten up because of it but nothing to do. I became smarter, my eyes opened through the years. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 49)

As hinted in the quote, she perceived this improvement in her state of self-confidence as almost being a different person who is more empowered, competent, and assertive.

This process of transformation seemed to be triggered and accelerated by their experiences of employment. Having a job and earning money were recited by many women as a milestone in their process of separation that helped them build up their power and ability to govern their own lives and resist against their husbands' control. Arzu stated that after her family (her mother and brother) refused to support her in her first attempt to escape in the second year of her marriage, she started to look for jobs as advised by one of her neighbors. Although her state of powerlessness predominated her

experiences for a long time during her relationship, she addressed a sense of resilience concurrently growing through the positive experiences at work:

Once I started to work, I began to feel good about myself. I became successful. My customers appreciated me because I do my job perfectly. This was why, although he beat me every night, I did not give up and went to work. I resisted, and I won. It did not happen in one night, but it made me stronger throughout the years. I have always known that working was my ticket to escape. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 50)

Regarding her story of starting to work, she also commented on how interacting with other people in her work environment slowly changed her self-perception: “I was feeling respected at work, everybody appreciated me. Then I began to think, ‘Why does my husband treat me like I am nothing?’” (Arzu) (Appendix B, 51). Thus, as appeared in the narratives, establishing positive relationships with their colleagues or employers enhanced their self-confidence and self-respect, which also initiated questions regarding their experiences of powerlessness and isolation. Hayat, similarly, reported her experience of change after she started to do volunteer work in a political party:

I begged him for his permission [to start working]. I do not know how it happened, but he allowed me. But then something changed. I stopped to ask his permission to do things. I began to say ‘I am doing this’ without asking him. You spend all your days there, you’re working hard and start to achieve something. People respect you, they listen what you say. These things increase your self-confidence. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 52)

As these narratives show, the working environment became both an autonomous and relational space for women to re-appraise themselves regarding their skills and actions. Developing a feeling of belongingness and experiencing the self as competent and valuable enabled women to believe in their ability to change their state of vulnerability and encouraged them to be more assertive in taking actions against their husbands.

3.2.1.2.1.2 Questioning their roles: “Why do I need a husband?”

Women highlighted a growing sense of righteous anger towards their husbands’ disrespectful, deceitful, and irresponsible attitudes, which caused them to contest the gender role dynamics in their marriages. This state of questioning became especially evident while they were talking about the economic violence (husbands’ purposeful withholding of money, being forced into begging for money, spending women’s money without their consent, exploiting women’s income). Providing for the family was recognized as men’s primary responsibility; so being trapped in economic deprivation and exploitation in their marriages was discussed as intolerable and unacceptable, as much as being exposed to physical violence. For instance, by comparing her husband to her father, Yeliz expressed how her disappointment gradually intensified within years by her husband’s recklessness, and produced many questions in her mind regarding the value of her efforts to maintain her marriage:

My father was very rigid, authoritarian man. He was even occasionally beating my mother. But, I do not remember any time that he made my mother in need of anyone. He always gave all the money he earned to my mother. So, imagine a man, he does not work, he spends his wife’s income in gambling while his children are starving at home. I worked day and night for my children. But after a while, you are asking to yourself ‘What for?’, ‘For whom?’, ‘Why am I killing myself like this?’. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 53)

These ongoing frustrations, along with a feeling of unfairness, turned into an impelling force in women’s minds to change their conditions. For several women, improvements in their economic well-being also escalated a sense of intolerance about their husbands’ financial exploitation. Nermin, for instance, commented on how her thoughts emerged in the last few years of her marriage after she found a relatively well-paid job:

He entirely stopped giving money, he did not buy a single piece of bread. Everything started to rely on me . . . I am the person paying bills, doing the grocery, giving kids' pocket money. So then why do I need a husband? (Nermin) (Appendix B, 54)

Oya discussed how the power dynamics in her marriage changed throughout the last several years of her marriage due to her increasing sense of self-capacity to maintain her life independently: "I turned into a man. Work, earn money, take care of the household . . . So then, why should I keep him as a husband? Is it for him to spend my money more, to beat me more?" (Oya) (Appendix B, 55).

The narratives of some women in the first pattern also indicated that they tried to maintain gender-appropriate roles with an underlying expectation of being respected and appreciated for their sacrifices, devotedness, and faithfulness. Yet, as they were repeatedly disappointed by their husbands, it appeared that they began to show their opposition more explicitly by putting aside the position of self-sacrifice and compliance (sometimes by disregarding the threat of violence). Hayat reported that, instead of continuing to behave in gender-proper ways, she began to be more defiant and self-protective in the last few years of her marriage -which is corresponding to the times after she started working: "Everyone, even people in his family, was saying to me, 'What a good wife you are!' . . . I began to withdraw myself. I quit being good. Despite my fear of being killed, I began to say no" (Hayat) (Appendix B, 56). Canan also emphasized how being repeatedly frustrated by her husband eventually created a transformation in her attitudes of self-sacrifice and submissiveness:

When he asked for it, I gave all the money I had to him . . . This is what a marriage should be, right? You will help each other, sacrifice for each other. But, instead of appreciating me, he deceived me, many times. 'If you are not a good husband, I won't be a good wife anymore'. I said this to him one year before I left home. He had not talked to me for 7 months after that, he did not even bring a piece of bread to the house during these months. (Canan) (Appendix B, 57)

3.2.1.2.1.3 Growing feeling of frustration: Distancing from families

A majority of women sought help from their families and asked for their protection. Linked with their conservative upbringing and due to their economic and social vulnerabilities, a sense of dependence on the families was revealed in their narratives. However, recurring experiences of disappointment and frustration in their interactions with the families, which often discouraged women in their efforts to escape, resulted in a state of questioning regarding the role of their families in their lives and gradually produced a practical and emotional need to distance themselves. The lessened sense of powerlessness, as previously addressed in relation to their increasing knowledge and experience of the social world, was also considered as concurrently strengthening this need. Melek, who tried to run away from her abusive husband several times by relying on her family, explained why she eventually decided to leave them out of her process of separation:

You go there [referring to her parents], you wish to find a shelter, but you feel that they do not want you there. But every time, you hope that something will be different, this time they will understand and accept you. Who would help you if they do not? I eventually figured it out that this would not work . . . I said that I needed to take care of myself and my children. (Melek) (Appendix B, 58)

Her report showed how she found herself trapped in a cycle of hope and disappointment. However, after a while, she stopped expecting anything from her family and started to search for individual solutions. In her last attempt to escape, she said that she got help from one of her friends and then from a shelter rather than asking for help from her family. Hayat, similarly, expressed that she preferred to restrict her contact with her mother: “I began to withdraw myself. There was no reason to ask for their help because I knew what would happen . . . I expect nothing from them as long as they do not disrupt my life” (Hayat) (Appendix B, 59). At the end of 8 years of her marriage, Reyhan, a

child bride who was forcefully married to her cousin while she was 15, decided to run away with a married man in their community who expressed that he wanted to help her in escaping violence. Although this could be perceived as a precarious and imprudent choice, being able to take this action also carried a meaning of revolting against the control of her family and announcing her autonomy:

My grandfather, my aunt, my father... They all refused to help me, so, after a while, I took the plunge. What could I do more? They were all shocked when I did this. I said to them before 'If you are not helping I will run away with this man'. They did not believe that I could do this. I did, can you believe it? [laughing]. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 60)

These narratives indicated a transformation from dependence on the families for their help and protection towards autonomy and self-determination.

Correspondingly, some women appeared to start questioning their sense of shame and guilt towards their families. Lale described how her shame and guilt turned into anger: "My father told me, 'This is your punishment'. I began to feel angry. I made a wrong choice by running away. I have already accepted it. Still was it my fault to be exposed to his torture for years?" (Lale) (Appendix B, 61). She further noted that although her father wanted to help her after a while, she preferred not to rely on his support: "He apologized . . . He finally understood . . . But still, I did not want to go back to my parents' house. I wanted to overcome this by myself. Maybe because of my anger towards them" (Lale) (Appendix B, 62). The following report by Pervin also implied similar experiences:

My brother came to my house and said to me "Take all your belongings, we're leaving". I refused. It's like without listening, without asking me, he commanded me to do something. They were angry with me. I did not want to feel guilty anymore. I said to him 'I will leave but not because of that you or my father want me to leave. I will leave whenever I'm ready'. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 63)

Thus, rather than being dependent on her family with an overburdening feeling of guilt, she wanted to be in control of her own choices and refused to be further oppressed by them.

3.2.1.2.1.4 Having children get older

Many women reported that having children became emotionally and economically less demanding after their children reached a certain age. As their children grew older, their doubts and worries lessened, and thus they felt more confident to take actions against violence. Melek, the mother of two children, commented: “How could you think about both working and taking care of them when they were small? My son became 16, my daughter became 14. Then, you know that they can take care of themselves. They will not die from hunger” (Melek) (Appendix B, 64). Similarly, Nermin discussed how she felt less hesitant in her decisions and actions after her children grew older:

I thought that if I die today, they will take care of each other, they would protect each other . . . I reached a point of thinking ‘Whatever happens, I will do this’. But 10 years ago, they were too small. Taking risks was more difficult back then. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 65)

Having the support of their children was also discussed as a significant aspect of their process of transition. Accordingly, as their children got older, they increasingly felt the care and support -even sometimes protection- coming from them. Hayat, the mother of four daughters, indicated how her children’s ongoing support gradually became more reassuring for her to believe the possibility of change:

My brilliant children helped me. ‘Mom, we will survive, do not be hopeless, do not be sad, we are together in this’. They gave me courage. We planned everything together. Before making a decision, we always talked to each other. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 66)

As implied in her report, having a close, affectionate, and rewarding relationship with children was recognized as a source of emotional comfort that helped her to initiate actions for change. Besides, even when their children were still small, experiencing the supportiveness of children and realizing their level of maturity seemed to inspire them a lot. Arzu's following statement exemplifies this:

My daughter was always saying to me, 'Mom, you do not need him. Please run away from this man' . . . Can you imagine this? She was only 13 years old. Seeing her insistence, seeing her maturity made me powerful bit by bit. At last, I could say 'Whatever happens, I am leaving this man'. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 67)

These inspiring experiences with children produced significant changes in women's stories, revealed as key moments in their pathways of escaping. Lale, for instance, highlighted her daughter's essential role in the night she finally left her abusive husband:

We locked ourselves into a room. We were all trembling. My son asked me: 'Mom, how are we going to live without our belongings? He [referring to his father] broke everything'. Without waiting for me to answer, my daughter told him: 'Do not get worried my brother. Our mom will buy everything we need, she will work, and she will buy a new television, new couch, new toys...'. We might have been killed that night but... [pause-crying] after that I hold onto them more tightly. Hearing her talking like that reassured me. I said to myself 'Your children trust you, you have them. We will escape, we will be safe'. (Lale) (Appendix B, 68)

In this moment of emergency, realizing that her daughter perceived her as a capable mother fortified her confidence and courage to escape. Thus, while having children - particularly when they were small- was construed as a factor intensifying their worries and restricting their autonomy, the positive qualities in their mother-child relationships also triggered their motivation to take a step further from their experiences of powerlessness and caused them to be more assertive in taking actions.

3.2.1.2.2 Resolving ambivalence: A growing sense of emotional detachment

Like in that song's lyrics: 'Your heart is always on your side, it protects you at the sacrifice of your love'. You can sacrifice yourself for a long time, but then your heart starts to be defiant; it says 'enough'. I lost my light, and my heart said to me 'What are you doing Harika? You do not belong here, you do not belong to him. Nothing for you here'. (Harika) (Appendix B, 69)

Throughout her narrative, Harika underscored how she struggled with and suffered from her emotional dependence on her husband, in other words, how she strived a lot, usually at the sacrifice of her own physical and emotional well-being, to deserve her husband's love and appreciation. As she addressed in her report above, a profound process of change occurred in her sense of self, from self-sacrifice to self-care and self-prioritization. This emerged as a common process across the stories of all four women (Harika, Esra, Zeynep and Safiye) in this pattern; when being asked about their subjective experiences of change regarding their relational dependence on their partners and their self-sacrificing/ compliant attitudes, they all recalled several underpinning memories through which their expectations and hopes about their relationships gradually ended, and they relationally withdrew themselves from their partners.

3.2.1.2.2.1 Overwhelming disappointments and growing feelings of anger

All women in this pattern highlighted the inconsistencies in their partners' attitudes as the essential reason for their ambiguity and confusion. These inconsistencies seemed to increase their emotional vulnerabilities by embroiling them in an ambivalent cycle of hope and despair. Still, they underlined that through the repeated disappointments and frustrations, and due to the increasing intensity of their partners' abusive behaviors (both physical and psychological), this ambivalent cycle began to dissolve. Hence, it was revealed that they felt less ambivalent towards their partners and less confused in terms

of their perception of violence; thus, they increasingly felt less eager to maintain their relationships.

While looking back on their stories, women recollected particular instances that reinforced a strong will to escape their entrapment in abuse. Their reflections usually showed that these transitional moments caused them to view the reality of violence in more concrete and absolute ways. Zeynep, for instance, recounted what she experienced and how she felt after such a critical incidence with her partner:

I went to his house, I yelled at him, he was not alone, but I did not care . . . He did nothing, he just tried to control the situation. He played the cool guy because his friend was there. And I became the emotional, hysteric woman . . . I remember that he was like a serial murderer. No sign of anger or anything else, his calm voice, he was just sitting. This was an example for me. I said to myself, ‘Stop and think Zeynep, all his behaviors are so strategic, so manipulative’.
(Zeynep) (Appendix B, 70)

She emphasized that this incidence became a significant shifting experience in her story and strengthened her process of emotional disengagement and lessened her ambivalence towards her partner. As she noted further: “After that night, I was quite convinced that nothing good was there for me. No trust no love no freedom no power” (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 71). Likewise, Safiye commented on how her perception about her partner changed after a severe incidence of physical assault perpetrated by him:

He was insulting me, restricting me. Okay. While these things are happening, you can say to yourself, ‘You need him, you love him’. But trying to throw me down the stairs, punching my belly, yelling at me, ‘I want both of you to die’ [the first instance of physical violence in her relationship- she was in the earlier period in her pregnancy]. He was like a monster, this was not normal . . . Seeing him like that. This lifted the veil. (Safiye) (Appendix B, 72)

It seems that, for Safiye, being physically assaulted by her partner made the overwhelming emotional consequences of the psychological violence more visible and intolerable.

As these critical moments were pointed out as initiating their process of emotional detachment, each woman in this pattern highlighted that they gradually felt less anxious and more emotionally stable over time, which helped them to feel more empowered and independent. Harika reflected on her process of feeling emotionally liberated from her partner's abuse:

It did not occur in one day. First, I liberated my soul, my mind. I needed to feel like myself again, not a thing that belonged to him. When you feel free again, it is so easy to get out of that door, not looking back. I even left my children with him for a few weeks because I felt I needed to take my time off alone. It was the end. Everything was clear in my mind when I left him. (Harika) (Appendix B, 73)

For her, the process of surviving occurred through achieving a sense of emotional autonomy and learning self-prioritization. This emerging need for self-care and feeling emotionally distanced generated a state of clarity in her mind -free from doubts and perplexities. Esra also recounted how it was vital for her to feel free from her emotional commitment towards her husband before taking action to leave:

I knew that the day was coming [referring to the separation], no future for this relationship, but I always said to myself, 'After you get out of this door, you should not look back. You should not feel any regret or any longing'. Nothing remained for him within me, no good feelings. And then I realized how my feelings to him were burdening me, I realized that I was carrying a very heavy rock on my back. After throwing it away, everything became easier. It became easier to walk away. I realized that I am powerful enough to do something good for myself and my daughter. (Esra) (Appendix B, 74)

As can be observed in her report, becoming free from the burdening and baffling feeling of relational entrapment increased her sense of self-sufficiency and confidence, and also produced a comforting feeling of emotional relief.

3.2.1.2.2.2 Witnessing how children have been harmed: Striving to be a better parent

Two women in this pattern (Esra and Harika) underlined that witnessing the children's pain resulting from the violence at home, feeling unable to provide appropriate protection for them, and realizing how their emotional burden was limiting their capacities to do "good" mothering became critical initiating factors in their process of separation. As the role of motherhood was described as a very crucial part of their identities, finding themselves as increasingly feeling unable to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as mothers was appeared in the narratives as creating a robust inner conflict for women. Harika commented on this struggle in the following report: "Witnessing father violence was one thing, and having a depressed, confused, emotionally collapsed mother was another thing. You try to do your best, but how can you be a good mother when you feel yourself so vulnerable weak?" (Harika) (Appendix B, 75). Esra, similarly, elaborated how she experienced this contradictory position and how it influenced her decision-making:

My daughter is the most important person in my life. My motherhood instinct somehow is too strong. I have always wanted to be a mother, to have a child. But, when you are in such a relationship, you cannot be a good mother . . . I realized that I could not be a mother as I wanted. So, in the end, I asked, I had to ask, 'Your love or your daughter?'. (Esra) (Appendix B, 76)

Hence, for these two women, witnessing the suffering of their children, but, most importantly, feeling responsible from this suffering were articulated as critical experiences in their decision-making, as shown in the following narratives:

While he was yelling at me and beating me, I saw my son for a second hiding at the corner of the room with his hands on his ears, he was repeating the same sentence repeatedly, 'My God, please stop them please stop them, I cannot protect my mother please you protect her'. He was just 4 years old [a long pause- crying]. Always the same question, 'Why are you doing this? You are hurting your children by staying here. You should stop this. Your children deserve better'. (Harika) (Appendix B, 77)

It was terrifying to hear her screams [crying]. A one-year-old baby. ‘How can you sacrifice your daughter for him?’ I thought that ‘If you want to provide a good future to your daughter, it should be over’. (Esra) (Appendix B, 78)

Thus, for both women, these overwhelming experiences weakened their emotional commitment to their marriages and strengthened their motivation to escape and build a safe and secure environment for their children.

3.2.2 Post-separation processes

This exploration of women’s subjective experiences after separation aimed to reflect the processes regarding the question of how they re-constructed their lives after leaving. The narratives indicated that this period included many challenges for women that hindered their psychological and social adjustment. However, despite their continuing vulnerabilities and doubts, many of them also reported that they gradually felt more secure and comfortable in their daily lives, and when relating to others, they seemed to achieve a more enjoyable/assuring sense of autonomy. In this sense, although the ongoing hardships such as post-separation violence, economic insecurities, limited support or relational difficulties continued to encumber their processes of recovery and empowerment, every woman in the study also emphasized their sense of strength and capacity to grow through these difficulties.

The differences between the two groups of women (structural dependency vs. relational dependency) revealed in their pre-separation processes did not emerge after separation. Thus, the two patterns that previously differentiated women’s experiences seemed to merge in their post-separation processes.

3.2.2.1 Losing the frame: Being in a state of loss and uncertainty

Rather than feeling relieved and safe, women mostly recounted their distress due to the uncertainties in their lives. Linked with several intersecting factors such as post-separation violence, the difficulties in the resettlement processes, the experiences of structural injustices or child-related problems, the doubts and worries that shaped women's experiences prior to leaving also persisted after they left their violent partners. Intertwined with these challenges, a prevailing sense of “starting over” was identified in each narrative, coupled with profound feelings of loss, unfairness, and frustration in women’s minds. Figure 4 illustrates the related dimensions of these initial post-separation processes.

3.2.2.1.1 Re-emerging state of self-doubt: Worrying about the future

Police asked: ‘Are you going to be able to protect your children?’. I said: ‘I have to’. But my mind was full of worries. You are 50 years old, you are not healthy. How do you find a job? How do you find a house? Your husband can find you. You have fears for the future of your children. You are a single mother with four daughters. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 79)

Hayat ended 26 years of marriage after a night of crisis when her husband tried to kill both her and her daughters. Although this would be recounted as an instant decision to escape, she described a lengthy process of decision-making until that night. While she emphasized her growing sense of self-confidence and autonomy for several years before she took the final step of leaving, separation generated a re-emerged state of self-doubt. As commonly observed in the stories of most participants, these feelings of vulnerability and insecurity were revealed as primarily related to four main interrelated factors; the uncertainties in the resettlement processes, post-separation violence, child-related difficulties, and negative shelter experiences.

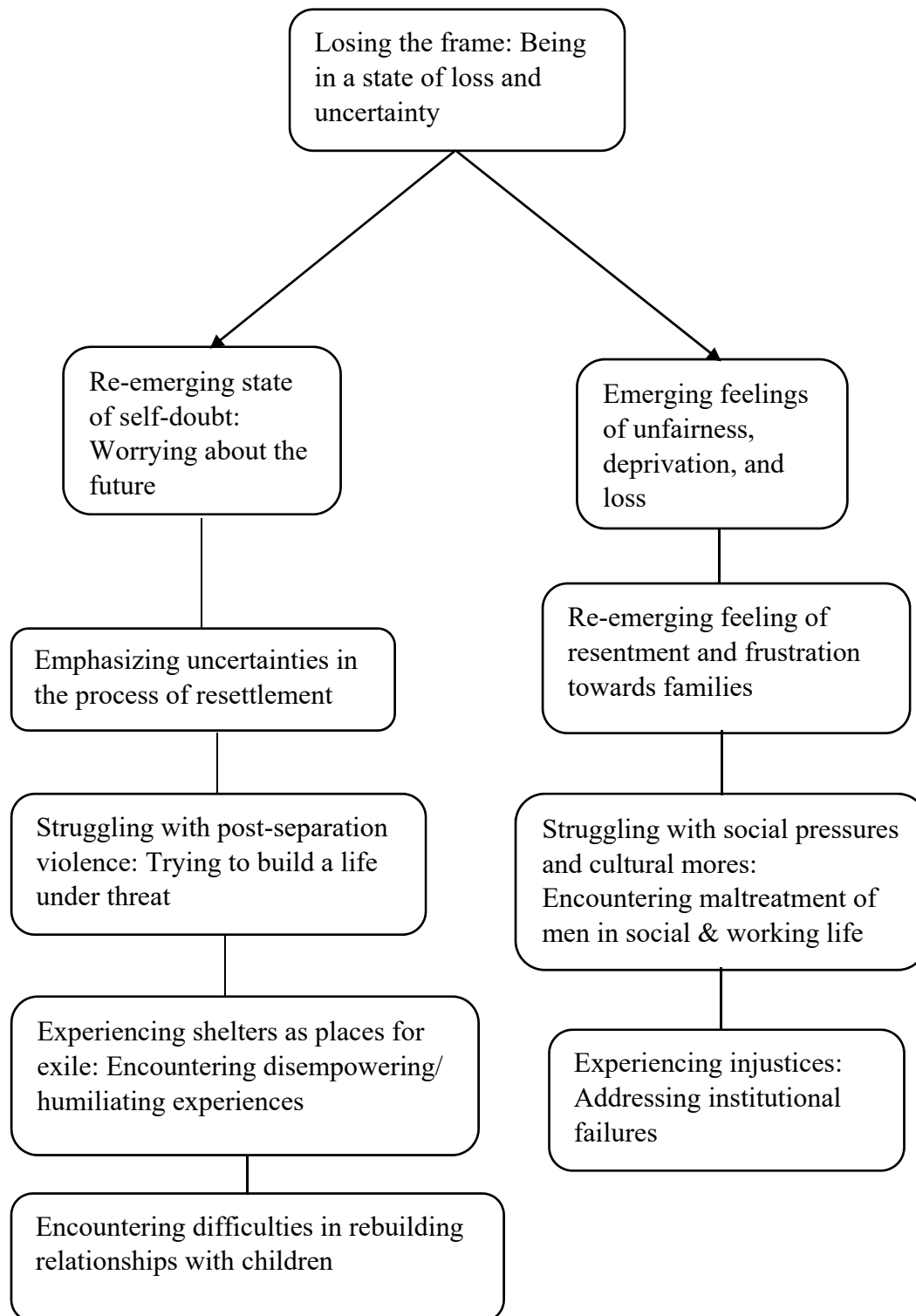


Figure 4. Losing the frame: Being in a state of loss and uncertainty

3.2.2.1.1.1 Emphasizing uncertainties in the process of resettlement

For many women, the separation made their lives highly unclear and unforeseeable.

Melek shared her subjective experience of the moment right after she left home: “I run away with my children, then we sat on a bench, and tried to think, with fear, by praying to God to show us the way” (Melek) (Appendix B, 80). Hayat reflected on her feelings while she was at the police station with her daughters waiting to be placed in a shelter: “We were going somewhere without knowing where we were going, as like we had no words no power to express ourselves” (Hayat) (Appendix B, 81). As addressed in these statements, being unable to foresee their near future, having no place to go and limited resources to lean on emerged as their very immediate experiences after leaving. In this sense, these uncertainties in their resettlement processes, as especially linked with the question of whether they would be able to find an affordable house and a decent, sustainable employment, were identified as significantly stressful factors constituting their post-separation experiences.

Within the first few weeks after they left, some women started to live in women’s shelters, some of them returned to their parents’ houses, and very few became able to move into their own rental houses. Still, for most, the sustainability of their conditions remained as a worrying question in their minds. Aysel reported how this instability in the external conditions of her life shaped a constant sense of uneasiness:

They [referring to her employers] were always saying ‘Women solidarity, women solidarity!’. But they kicked me out because of their fear of my husband. So, no job, no money, no solidarity! [laughing] For months, I searched for a job. We were safe in the shelter, but they cannot let you stay there forever. So, you always live on your nerves, a feeling of never-ending nervousness. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 82)

Likewise, Canan elaborated on how the precariousness of her living conditions made the first few years after separation very rough and frustrating:

When I left my husband, I had trusted myself somehow. You know I felt powerful because I did it, I succeeded to run away, me, a woman who had never taken a step alone. But this continued only one day or even shorter [laughing]. Because I was 40 years old, a woman in the streets after 40, a woman without a house, without a job . . . Well, I found a shelter, but I could not find a decent job to rent a house. It was harder than I expected. At least two years had passed by moving from one shelter to another because you're not allowed to live in a shelter over than six months . . . I lost my hope to take my children back because I did not have a house, I did not have a job. (Canan) (Appendix B, 83).

Her narrative demonstrated that her struggle consisted of many intersecting dimensions; being over-aged to find a proper job, being away from children and feeling hopeless about taking them back, the sense of being homeless and the financial reality of being incapable of renting a house. Oya, who ran away from her forced marriage after 5 years, shared similar experiences:

Well, I run away from being killed. I knew that either my husband's family or my brother were going to kill me. Still, it was an escape from one danger to another. I run away without knowing what to do, where to stay. I was just 21. It was like... Think about the people who have to run away from their homes, like Syrian people. They are living in the streets here. I know how they feel because I felt the same . . . I know what it is like to be homeless. I had nothing and no one to trust. (Oya) (Appendix B, 84)

Several years after her escape, Oya married again hoping to be forgiven by her family, but she was exposed to violence in her second marriage too. When she shared her story of escape from her second marriage, although her conditions were much better than her conditions in the past, and even though she felt more powerful and capable, she still expressed that her worries and the conditions shaping her sense of unsettlement were very parallel:

I had to leave my two young children at home when I was working because I needed to work. One day, a fire happened because my daughter forgot to turn the stove off. I was nearly losing them [crying]. They were too small, they should not have stayed at home alone. But when you have no choice... Starting over and over again... Oya started over when she was 21, she had nothing and now the same when she was 40. This became my life story. The only thing I wanted was to see my future a little more and to keep my children safe, but it did not happen for a long time. There were so many moments that I said nothing further after this. (Oya) (Appendix B, 85)

Several women also underlined their feeling of exhaustion as it made all the obscurities in their lives even more challenging to cope with. Pervin left her abusive husband in the second year of their marriage when her son was one and a half years old. Her narrative below showed how her emotional fatigue and the difficulties in her living conditions became two major interconnected factors and put her in a very precarious position:

I collapsed emotionally. I was not healthy. It was even difficult to talk, to express myself. I was drained economically. I had no power to search for a job. I was taking daily money from my father, only for the needs of my son, to buy diapers, to buy baby food. My family took advantage of my situation. They tried to dominate me, they tried to punish me. My father explicitly said, 'You have to follow my rules from now on, you do not have a right to behave as you wish'. I could not say anything, I could not defend myself. I could not search other ways because I was not feeling well, I have no energy to move. I even thought about killing myself because I could not see a way out. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 86)

Associated with her state of powerlessness, standing up for herself, protecting her rights against her family's control and searching for alternative solutions were apparently impossible for Pervin. Similarly, Feride recalled how her emotional difficulties interrupted her adjustment and re-settlement processes:

I am sure that people were thinking that I was crazy. Totally normal, they were right [laughing]. I was stuttering when trying to ask something or to talk with somebody. Can you imagine it? The simple ability to talk. I lost it. So, finding a job? Going to a job interview? I was feeling happy when I was able to talk with the teacher of my daughter [laughing]. (Feride) (Appendix B, 87)

3.2.2.1.1.2 Struggling with post-separation violence

Men's harassment and assaults continued for a long time after women left their marriages. They tried to control women's daily lives by putting them in financially difficult situations, threatening them with violence, using children or the legal system as to hurt and manipulate women. Encountering these violent acts, along with the uncertainties in their resettlement and the emotional exhaustion they had been feeling, was articulated as very disruptive for their efforts to feel safe in their new environments, have control over their lives and gain their sense of autonomy and agency. Lale elaborated on her own experiences of post-separation violence to show how her self-confidence shattered because of the threat of further violence:

Everything was already difficult . . . But, within time, you become able to pull yourself together . . . I had just begun to feel better. I was telling myself, 'You can work now, you're ready to move on'. Then, he found us. All fears and bad feelings came back, and another 7 months in a different shelter. (Lale) (Appendix B, 88)

Yeliz, similarly, emphasized the damaging impact of her ex-husband's violence on her recovery:

He emailed all my colleagues, my friends, my family. He manipulated my daughter to do this. 'My mom is not a good mother, a mom who left her children cannot be a mom, she preferred to be with another man instead of us' . . . I wanted to die. You tell yourself 'It will be better, you're good, you're powerful', then this happens, you want to disappear forever. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 89)

The ongoing manipulation of children was revealed as a common strategy employed by men to continue their coercive control on women's lives. Such violence appeared as one of the most challenging experiences in terms of their adjustment; significantly intensifying their anxieties and reinforcing their sense of powerlessness. The following quotations by Harika and Feride provide striking examples of the disruptive effects of

the continuing/ deliberate violence on their mother-child relationships. Feeling powerless to change this situation became intolerable and extremely agonizing in their lives after separation:

My son was saying, 'I do not want you, you are a bad mother, you are a whore'. This makes me speechless . . . He does something very bad to your son and you cannot stop it [a long pause]. Well, start to live your own life by still going through all these (!) Sometimes you think that it might be possible, only if he dies. (Harika) (Appendix B, 90)

He provoked my son against me. He did this. My son did not talk to me for two years. Fear of losing him . . . What can you do? I could not do anything because he was not even answering my phone calls. It was so painful . . . You can live with a broken bone but not with this pain. I became afraid of losing my mind. (Feride) (Appendix B, 91)

Under the constant threat of being killed or injured by their former husbands, for these women, moving forward with their lives became a struggle engendering vast feelings of fear and anxiety. Melek reflected on her experiences:

Every time I felt good about something, he was coming to my mind, like having a knife on my neck. 'He is going to kill me someday, but when?' I was asking this question when I put my head on my pillow every night . . . I was trying to be happy, to feel free. But knowing that he would kill me if he has a chance... How can a person be happy while living under this fear? (Melek) (Appendix B, 92)

Reyhan's narrative below demonstrated how this threat restricted her behavioral freedom, and thereby interrupted her process of resettlement:

The only thing I wanted was living safely in a home with my children, giving them food to eat, a bed to sleep. To achieve this, I was supposed to search for a job . . . But, I could not get out of the shelter's door for at least 4 months. Because of my fear from him. He found me before, he stabbed me. So, I had nothing to trust. I was living on a knife-edge. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 93)

Hence, as shown in both narratives, men's continuing threats produced many adverse consequences in women's lives and prevented them from achieving a basic sense of emotional, social, and economic safety.

3.2.2.1.1.3 Experiencing shelters as places for exile

A large number of women reported that they lived at various state and/or municipality shelters (temporary stays ranged from 6 months to 2 years). When they were asked about the quality of their experiences in the shelters, their descriptions primarily included disempowering and humiliating experiences throughout their stays. The first encounters with the shelter system occurred through the transition centers -which provide short-term stays (from 2 days to 1 month) before being placed to a women's shelter. All women who stayed in these centers compared them to "prisons" and underscored their feeling of insecurity during their stays. Especially when considered together with their previous doubts and worries about women's shelters, women were further daunted by these negative experiences. Hayat stayed in one of these transition houses with her four daughters, and she reflected on their reactions, feelings, and thoughts regarding the first several days of their stay:

We were already like walking dead. We had many fears. Where are we going? Is it going to be okay or what if it will be worse? They [the police] took us to this giant building, a prison... Big fences, guards, police everywhere . . . My smallest daughter began to cry 'Mom, where are we?'. I feared for my daughters . . . We were there only for 3 days, but it was like 3 years. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 94)

Pervin disclosed similar experiences about her stay in a transition center and reported that she decided to go back to her parents' house after staying one night there:

It was so scary when I got to there . . . It was so chaotic. In the same room, there were 9 beds. No space even for standing . . . There are so many children, my son is very small, some children want to play with him, but he is fearful, sad, he is sitting beside me looking at me. They took our phones everything, nothing left with us. I could not stay there. I returned to my family's home. I could not feel safe there. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 95)

While they needed to be in reassuring, supportive, and safe places in this critical period of separation, these first encounters seemed to be highly discouraging and worrying for them.

Several women also revealed numerous experiences of oppressive and degrading practices in the shelters that they described as adversely affecting their adjustment. They highlighted their need for supportive and trustful relationships to build their emotional strength. However, their experiences included many negative interactions with the practitioners, caused them to feel despised and underestimated. Canan, for instance, recalled particular instances that she was treated as an “untrustworthy” person, and reported how the confining practices and rules of the shelter became traumatic for her:

Every woman there experienced very difficult things and went there to get help. I went there because I needed support. But before these, you need to be respected as a human being, right? I mean basic human rights, privacy, protection, etc. But we were potential liars for them [referring to the practitioners in the shelter]. No respect! On top of it, they took all my personal belongings, my phone, my hairdryer, even my toothbrush. Why? Because I can commit suicide. For God’s sake, I am not a mentally ill person . . . I am not allowed to talk with my children, you cannot talk privately. My social worker did not allow me. She thought that I would give the address of the shelter. Why would I do such a thing? She was a professional. She was supposed to help me. Staying there became another trauma in my life. Well, now, I can say that it was better than staying in the streets but just that, nothing more. (Canan) (Appendix B, 96)

Hence, for Canan, the shelter she stayed in became only a place keeping her out of the streets, but beyond this, the treatment she witnessed there caused suffering. Aysel shared similar experiences of not being respected:

You try hard to achieve something, but they think that you will stay there a few months and go back to your husband. I heard this from the people there: ‘We know women like you, you will eventually go back to your husband’. Why are there such places if they do not believe women? If you know that somebody believes you, you may at least say to yourself ‘She believes me, I need to work harder’, right? (Aysel) (Appendix B, 97)

As another example, Feride noted on her experience when she was accused of telling lies by her social worker and explained how this undermined her trust and caused her not to seek help again:

She said, ‘I do not understand you, these things you talked about seem very unreal to me’. It was a big shock . . . I did not go there again. I could not believe that she said such things to me. This still makes me sad. A person who knows nothing about violence would say such things but an educated person like her, a person with knowledge... I do not know. (Feride) (Appendix B, 98)

These reports implied how being disbelieved, disregarded, and undermined by the shelter practitioners can become hurtful for women and create long-lasting feelings of betrayal and marginalization.

3.2.2.1.1.4 Encountering difficulties in rebuilding relationships with children

Although the women generally described positive relationships with their children, the early processes in the post-separation period were reported as consisting of many newly emerged conflictual dynamics in the mother-child relationships. For the ones, whose children were small at the time of separation, these conflicts were mostly associated with the effects of post-separation violence on children. For several others, whose children were in the adolescence/ young adulthood period, the conflicts usually emerged as a result of power struggles. However, for all, dealing with these conflicts and trying to rebuild trust in the mother-child relationships were revealed as a stressful and worrying task, especially while they were feeling overwhelmed by the financial and emotional stressors in their lives. The following quote by Harika showed how several compounded factors in her post-separation process undermined her motherhood and caused her to feel incompetent and frustrated:

Each time after they came back from their father's home, I had to deal with two kids who hated me. Two kids who had emotional breakdowns, who was saying that I am a horrible person. Struggling to make them love me again, trying to tell them I am not a slut. And this was not the only battle I was in. I had many financial difficulties. And I was not emotionally healthy. I was aggressive, anxious, intolerant . . . My kids were the most important things in my life, but I regretted, regretted having them at those times. (Harika) (Appendix B, 99)

While she was in an unceasing struggle in many areas in her life, being in another tough battle in her relationships with her children and finding herself as constantly failing as a mother seemed to be experienced as highly stressful and exhausting. Esra, who is a young mother in her early 20s, also remarked on how “being traumatized” and feeling overwhelmed and “distracted” by many other struggles in her life negatively influenced her relationship with her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter:

I still cannot believe it but there were times I yelled at her. She was too small, and she was everything to me. But I could understand only later that I was not very well. So, she was not, too. I think we were both traumatized. You escaped from a very bad thing. The effects of it are still haunting you. And you are in a shelter room. I am thinking now, it was also very difficult for her, no enough space to move, many unfamiliar people around her, everything was unfamiliar. And a mother occupied by so many things in her mind, distracted. (Esra) (Appendix B, 100)

Hence, as explained by her, escaping from an abusive relationship, trying to cope with the ongoing emotional, social, and economic consequences of it restricted her capacity to establish a positive relationship with her daughter. Lale noted that witnessing her children's aggression became the most negative/worrying aspect of her relationship with them:

The most difficult thing is to cope with aggressive behaviors. It was not only me, they also went through many horrible things while they were very little. So, it is normal, I know, but whenever they hit me, yelled at me, or hurt each other, I become fearful that they will be like their father. I usually try to calm them down, I have my methods and it often works, but sometimes it becomes very grueling. (Lale) (Appendix B, 101)

Although she described herself as able to contain and regulate her children's aggressive behaviors, the emotional effort to achieve this was apparently experienced as emotionally consuming.

A small number of women also talked about emerging relational difficulties with their older children, especially with their sons. In the following narrative, Melek commented on the long-lasting conflicts with her 18-year-old-son and how she was affected by these:

I felt while we escaped from one man's tyranny but got caught in another. My son, I do not know, he was also confused, and maybe he coped with his difficulties by taking the role of man of the house, but it was very troubling for me. I realized that I began to be afraid of my son . . . He started to say, 'You cannot do anything without asking my permission'. I found myself trembling in front of him while trying to explain something . . . This was like the pain of being a woman, no escape. (Melek) (Appendix B, 102)

She experienced her son's controlling behaviors as the continuation of the violence of her former partner. Although she showed an effort to understand the reasons underlying his attitudes, she seemed to have similar experiences of powerlessness as she had in her marriage. Yeliz also reflected on her feelings of disappointment and frustration about her 17-year-old-son's behaviors:

I endured this marriage for them . . . My daughter was small, but my son witnessed everything. He refused to talk with me after I left home. He insulted me, 'You are a slut, you are not my mother anymore'. He was old enough to realize what was happening. So then, you say to yourself, 'Why did I sacrifice my life? For this? To hear such things?'. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 103)

Experiencing that her efforts as a mother were belittled and remained unrecognized by her son was underlined as very hurtful and emotionally unbearable.

3.2.2.1.2 Emerging feelings of unfairness, deprivation, and loss

I still feel so angry because I think that this relationship costed me many things, but he did not experience the fear of losing anything. After all, I gave up my position there [referring her role in the political organization where her violent partner continued to work]. Well, on the one hand, this was my choice. On the other hand, I could not see any other option to protect myself. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 104)

For Zeynep, nearly two years after leaving her partner, thinking about the inequities in her process of separation and remembering the valuable things she had to give away to keep herself safe still seemed to generate a strong sense of rage and disappointment. In all narratives, these disturbing emotions were identified in different degrees, as linked with various compounding factors in their lives. For some, resentment towards the absence of family support re-emerged and resulted in feelings of unfairness and deprivation. For almost all women, witnessing the dysfunctionality of the legal system, being exposed to injustices, and feeling unprotected by the legal authorities were considered as critical issues in their post-separation period. Moreover, several women also underscored the social stereotypes and prejudices regarding being divorced and the abuse/ maltreatment of men in their social lives as other primary sources of their frustration.

3.2.2.1.2.1 Re-emerging feeling of resentment and frustration towards families

Although many women recounted that they strived to put a distance into their relationships with their families, some of them emphasized that while they were trying to rebuild their lives as with the overwhelming challenges of the post-separation period, experiencing the absence of family support and being ill-treated by them continued to be upsetting after they left, just as it was in the pre-separation period. They seemed to

experience the same feelings of anger and frustration of being unprotected, unsupported, and maltreated by their families. Nermin, for instance, conveyed her feeling of rage towards his brother's impassivity and self-indulgence:

My brother called to invite me to the wedding of his daughter . . . I said 'Do you have any idea about what I am going through now? Did you call me once to ask me if I need anything?' He said, 'I can come to get you if you do not have money for traveling'. It was like a joke. Why did you not come before then to help me? I am working all day and night for a mere pittance [emphasizing loudly]. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 105)

Oya also articulated similar experiences regarding her mother's recklessness and lack of care:

I said 'I need you, I am your daughter, help me [referring to her mother] . . . I need to work, my children are small . . . Stay with me, I just want you to look after my kids'. But no! I could not persuade her. It was like I was not her daughter. I was nearly losing my children in that fire [referring to the fire happened when her daughter forgot to turn the stove off]. I am blaming my mother because it would not have happened if she had been there with my kids. My anger is still the same. She is not my mother anymore. (Oya) (Appendix B, 106)

For both Nermin and Oya, who were forced to marry before 18, being left alone by their families all through their struggles before and after separation, and repeatedly experiencing their families' indifference in response to their suffering and needs continued to be foremost overwhelming issues in their lives. As another example, Melek, who purposefully restricted her communication with her family several years before she left her husband, reflected on an instance, through which she realized her unceasing need for her family's presence and support in her life:

I rented the house, paid the deposit, just 200 TL are lacking, it is for transporting our belongings. Along two days, I cried because of this. I felt so alone, I felt like there was nobody to ask for help [a short pause]. I know this is contradictory. In fact, I have so many people around me but when something happens like this, I feel so lonely, I say I do not have anybody to help me. I had a friend from the shelter, I called her, we talked, she gave me the money. It was

so simple, she got angry about why I cried for two days. Now, I think that you feel alone and helpless when your family is not there for you. (Melek) (Appendix B, 107)

Thus, even though she knew that there would be no support from her family, her underlying expectations from her parents, maybe her understandable unwillingness to accept her parents' absence, produced a re-emerged sense of powerlessness and isolation despite to the supportive environment she was involved in.

Some other women also recalled significant instances of encountering their families' damaging attitudes towards themselves, which further complicated their processes of separation and increased their risk of being harmed by their ex-partners. In her narrative below, Yeliz exemplified how she experienced her family's unsupportive and discouraging interventions while she was trying to seek help and protection:

He came to my door, tried to break it, threatened to kill me. What should I do? Of course, I called the police and made a complaint against him . . . Then, my brother calls me, I assume that he will support me, but instead of supporting me he is saying, 'What are you trying to do? Shame on you! Divorce was not enough, and you reported the father of your children to the police?'. It is not important for him whether I am okay, I get injured or not . . . You can die, you have no value, but family honor should always be protected. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 108)

As her brother disregarded her safety, a profound sense of unfairness emerged. Pervin also commented on her experiences of being blamed and verbally assaulted by her family:

My brother said 'You will live with this shame. We will not allow you to forget. We are always going to fling this shame up in your face'. It is like I murdered somebody. I made a wrong marriage and then tried to escape. They did not appreciate my efforts to build my own life, to rescue my son from a violent father. They always saw what they wanted to see. If you do not want to help, leave me alone, but they wanted to hurt me further. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 109)

While she stressed out that she felt guilty and shameful towards her family before leaving, during the post-separation processes, these feelings were apparently replaced by a sense of righteousness, and, at the same time, anger and resentment regarding the unfair treatment of them. Overall, although women achieved some sense of distance from their families and did not feel primarily dependent on their support, as all these narratives indicated, the ongoing family conflicts were still experienced as another area of challenge in the post separation period, aggravating their already-difficult processes of adjustment and recovery.

3.2.2.1.2.2 Experiencing injustices: Addressing institutional failures

Systemic state responses, indicated women's interactions with the police, lawyers, and/or other state authorities during their divorce proceedings, were perceived as unfair and ineffective, even sometimes derogatory. Women mostly highlighted that while they were trying to protect themselves from the damages of post-separation violence, the system itself caused further harm and isolation in their lives and intensified their sense of distrust to the institutions. Their narratives included many examples of unhelpful/undermining reactions by the police and the gender discriminatory practices of the legal system itself. In the following quote, by giving a striking example, Harika underlined that these unfair and biased practices were much more unexpected and unbearable for her than the continuing violence of her ex-husband:

He accused me of being a drug addict, schizophrenic and prostitute, and to disprove all these, unfortunately, they [referring to the state] always say 'We are supporting women', lies, stories... I gave a DNA sample to prove that I was not a drug addict, accompanied by the police, like a criminal. To prove that I was not schizophrenic, I went to a mental health hospital for four months, twice a month. No way to prove that I am not a prostitute . . . This is how we are

protected. The judge cannot simply say, ‘There is evidence that you abused this woman, so you do not have a right to make such ridiculous claims’ [crying- a short pause]. Well, you know that this man is a psychopath and you expect him to do such things, but when these happen, it always hurts you more, you cannot believe it. (Harika) (Appendix B, 110)

Hence, instead of being protected and supported as she hoped, she obviously felt like being tortured by the failures of the system. In the next report, a young woman with two children, Lale, also talked about her confusion and frustration regarding the unjust verdict of the judge about the child-contact arrangement:

This man threatened me to kill my children. His violence was not only towards me, my children were also repeatedly abused by their fathers. I had evidence regarding all these, my children gave their testimonies. Still, the judge decided that my children need a father and this man has a right to see them twice in a month. How can this happen? My children are terrified, they were traumatized, they do not want to see him. This decision harmed them further. It is enough for us to live under the threat of this man. I do not even want to think about this, but what if he kills them just to punish me? . . . I am angry . . . I do not know what to do, whom to trust. (Lale) (Appendix B, 111)

As can be understood from both narratives, these are still ongoing challenges in their lives that have been hindering their recovery, and, most importantly, severely compromising their safety. Nermin also commented on her experiences of divorce proceedings and recalled how she became emotionally drained and stunned in each court trial:

Some animals freeze when they feel danger, you know, right? I was just like that in the courtroom. He was lying, over and over again . . . There is a bridge in front of the court house . . . I remember that one time I just collapsed in the middle of that bridge because I could not walk anymore, people thought that I passed out . . . Why did the judge allow him to talk so much? I was not allowed to talk like him, I could only talk if the judge asked me something. Woman has no name. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 112)

She explicitly pointed out her experience of being unheard and unseen within the legal system in contrast to the overrepresented presence of her ex-husband. Thus, as can be

observed in these narratives, divorce proceedings were usually identified as highly stressful and emotionally burdening. Also, as implied, these discriminatory responses were revealed as closely related to the identity of being a woman.

Women also talked about many instances of the police's ill-treatment when they sought help from them. The following instance provided by Melek demonstrated how the police underestimated and trivialized the threat of violence in women's lives by minimizing it as a "family matter", and by ignoring the law:

He got into the house forcefully, he found out where we were staying. I saw the knife in his hand and tried to run away, but then he started to cut himself. I was just so shocked. My daughter called the police. When they came, a police officer said, 'Nothing to do, this is a family matter'. I had a nervous breakdown there, I was pissed off with them so bad, I began to yell at them, 'What kind of people are you, from whom will I seek help, should I be dead for you to do something, should my children be dead?' There was a protection order against him . . . Look, even now, I begin to tremble while I am talking about it [showing her hands trembling]. (Melek) (Appendix B, 113)

She expressed her furious reaction with the police for not being taken seriously, being disregarded, and therefore not being provided proper protection by them. Pervin, correspondingly, articulated her own frustrating experiences with the police:

Every time he did something, I called the police. He always played the 'good guy'. He does all these because he misses his son (!) . . . 'You need to make peace, he is a good man, you have a child. I am like your brother, your father. I want both of you to be good'. Like they were trying to help me, but, they endangered my son and me by doing nothing, by choosing to listen to him instead of me . . . Only thing they said, 'Past is past, you should forgive him'. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 114)

Hence, as articulated in these reports, all these institutional failures including highly challenging divorce proceedings and the negative police responses further jeopardized women's safety, overburdened them emotionally and intensified their doubts towards the system.

3.2.2.1.2.3 Struggling with social pressures and cultural mores

The narratives of several women demonstrated that after leaving their abusive partners, they were subjected to further harassment and exploitation in their social and working environments. Women explicitly associated these experiences with the dominant societal culture of gender-based oppression and underlined how these became overly restrictive factors in their lives, limiting their agency and power. Canan elaborated on her feelings and thoughts regarding her experiences of being a single/divorced woman:

I was so naïve, so well-intentioned. I did not think that my employer would abuse me sexually, but life teaches you. Your employer can do this, your landowner can do this. When he realizes that you're divorced and you're living alone... The man who is working in the grocery store in your neighborhood can do this because you are smiling at him, you are trying to be polite by saying hello . . . Sometimes I just want to lock my door and never go out again . . . This is the world for men. And if you are a woman, they always inhibit you . . . You always become the one who loses. (Canan) (Appendix B, 115)

As discussed in her narrative, living under the constant threat of gender-based exploitation constrained her behavioral freedom, and caused her to lose her trust and confidence when relating to men. Harika correspondingly expressed her frustration and distress due to the dishonoring attitude of a man she was involved with:

He texts me 'Sorry honey, you are divorced, I cannot be with you'. Are you all lunatics? What am I, a monster? Why does it become my fault to be divorced? These men... It is their right to humiliate you like that. And you also think about the man who turned your life into a living hell [crying- a short pause]. Nothing happens to him . . . He enjoys his life. (Harika) (Appendix B, 116)

Thus, these discriminatory cultural norms, as embodied in men's attitudes and behaviors, seemingly caused further marginalization and alienation in their lives, and triggered a profound sense of injustice as well.

The workplace harassment was also discussed as a significant factor negatively influencing women's adjustment, particularly in terms of its adverse effects on their

employment stability. In the following, Feride addressed how being repeatedly exposed to workplace sexual harassment became extra challenging in her life because of the direct negative financial consequences of these experiences:

Men think that if you are divorced, you are open to all kind of relationships, they feel entitled to exploit you . . . I was 27 when I divorced, I was very young, and it was very difficult to deal with all the abuse occurring everywhere but especially at work. I had to constantly flee away from one job to the other because of this. Even if you find a job, you cannot be sure because you know that something unpleasant would happen anytime, because men are everywhere [laughing]. (Feride) (Appendix B, 117)

Similarly, based on her own experiences, Safiye also argued how male employers try to further subjugate women by manipulating them over their economic vulnerabilities:

Your boss knows that you are single, you have a child, you need money. So, he tries to exploit your labor. He thinks that you have not got any chance to quit the job, he starts to treat you like you are a slave. This is the reason I change jobs so frequently . . . This also happens because when you reject improper offers of the boss, he either kicks you out or tries to punish you by making your conditions worse. (Safiye) (Appendix B, 118)

Thus, being single seemed to put women at an increased risk of experiencing systemic abuse and coercion by the men who have hierarchically powerful positions.

3.2.2.2 Growing through struggles: Transforming the self towards healing and empowerment

Despite the quite challenging nature of their processes both before and after separation, the narratives comprised a gradually emerging and expanding sense of empowerment. Every experience in their never-ending journeys of hardships that caused such feelings of helplessness, despair, frustration, anger, or injustice also reflected as simultaneously inciting and amplifying their will to withstand and thrive. Thus, this persistent state of

self-preservation gradually engendered a satisfactory sense of achievement and a profound feeling of being proud of themselves and their stories.

Even though the external struggles in women's lives such as financial difficulties or post separation violence were identified as continuing to influence them negatively, all women underscored the fact that they also started to feel themselves as more capable of standing strong and as having more internal and external resources to fight against the troubles that they experienced in their daily lives. Along with the relational resources they trusted and relied on, observing their competence while trying to deal with these difficulties appeared to help them build a sense of confidence and hope for a better future.

Two major reciprocally related pathways were identified in the narratives to explain women's processes of recovery and transformation, namely healing with relational resources and healing by prioritizing autonomy. These two pathways were designated to reflect how the negotiated positions of relationality and autonomy mutually contributed to the efforts of each woman to build up their sense of well-being and empowerment. Figure 5 demonstrates the schematic view of the process of empowerment and recovery.

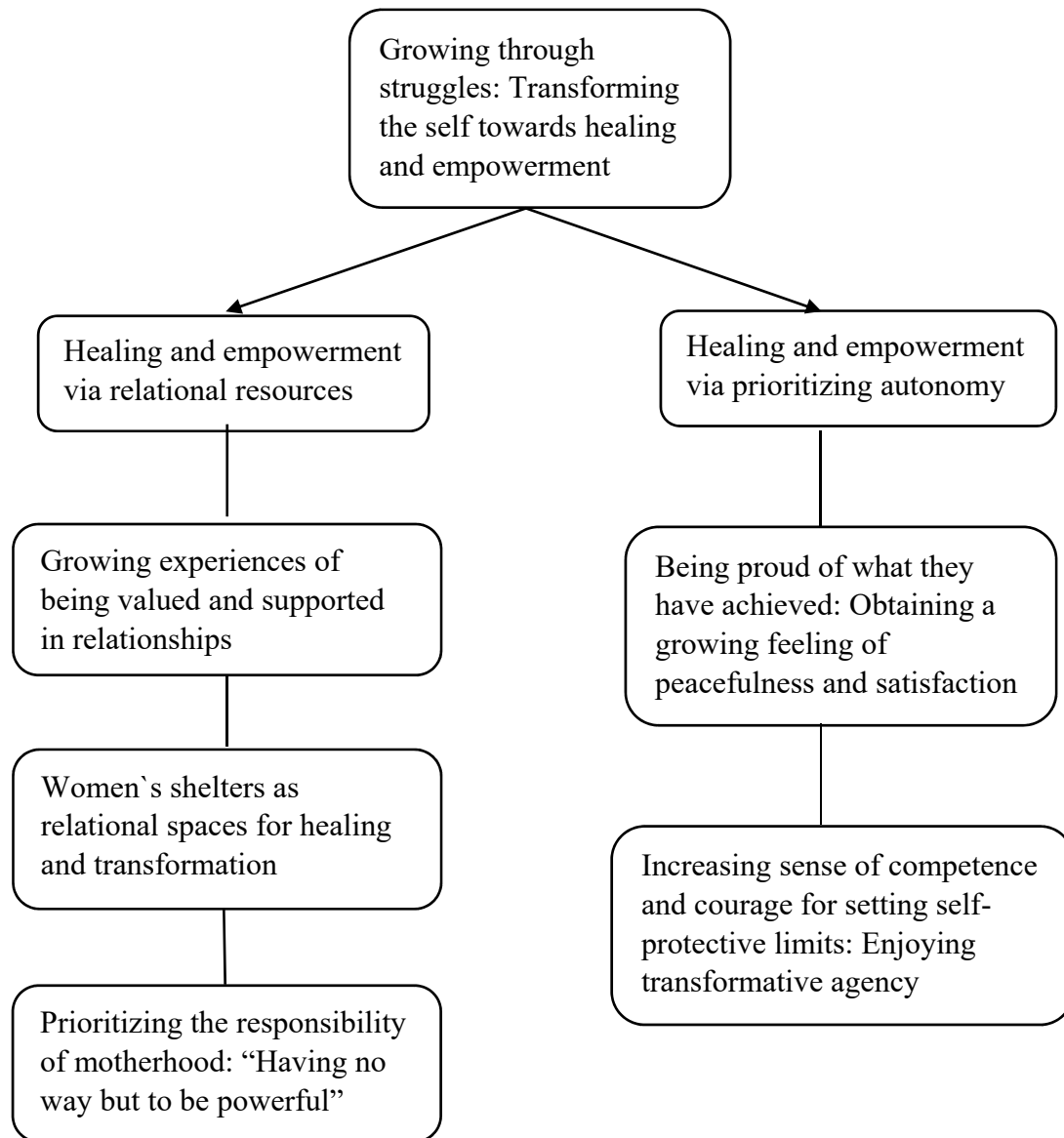


Figure 5. Growing through struggles: Transforming the self towards healing and empowerment

3.2.2.2.1 Healing and empowerment via relational resources

I could not share my problems with my family because they did not want to accept my choices . . . But, now, when I look back, so many good people entered my life. When I looked around, I started to find somebody to stand with me every time . . . There were many times that I did not want to talk to anybody. My friends were calling me, and I was hanging up the phone on them. But they never got angry, they never criticized me. When I called them back, they only said, ‘We missed you, we worried about you’. In this way, you began to feel better, you feel alive again. (Melek) (Appendix B, 119)

Although her need and longing for being cared for, protected and accepted by her family continued to persist to a certain extent, throughout her narrative, Melek highlighted the irreplaceable role of having supportive and encouraging relationships in her processes of recovery and empowerment. Getting the help that she needed, being respected, appreciated, and valued enabled her to reconstruct herself as a deserving and worthy woman. Likewise, in all other narratives, having safe, reliable, and supportive relational connections was identified as crucially important in their stories, enabling them to perceive and appreciate their value.

3.2.2.2.1.1 Growing experiences of being valued and supported in relationships

Women’s narratives showed that connecting with others and a consequent sense of relational belongingness helped them to feel more resourceful while they were struggling to deal with the hardships in their lives. In this sense, feeling embraced by these relationships and experiencing the encouragement and support coming from the people outside of their family circles created a feeling of emotional safety which enabled them to enjoy their current lives and to build a sense of hopefulness for the future. Developing positive relationships at work, re-establishing broken connections with old

friends, or building new relationships were described as transforming their injured sense-of-self and resulting in a sense of healing.

Although several women talked about highly negative experiences in their work environments, the supportiveness of relationships in the workplaces was identified by others as a significant resource for them to overcome the challenges of the post-separation period. Arzu, for instance, addressed how the material support she got from the people in her work became emotionally reassuring for her:

I first came here [referring to the rental house she has been living in], broken doors, broken floors, bugs everywhere, dirty... I said, 'My God, help me, how am I going to bring my children here, how are we going to live here?'. The next day at work, everybody already knew that I left my husband, and they realized that I was so sad. Then, like a miracle, my God, everybody tried to help me, my coworkers, my clients. Somebody renewed the doors, somebody brought the furniture, somebody did grocery shopping . . . You need that kind of support, it became a re-assurance . . . You need people around you. Now, I always feel that maybe I do not have a mother to help me but there is a big family who can support me, I am like their daughter, their sister. I am saying myself, 'Do not be afraid, Arzu, you have so many people willing to help you if you need it. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 120)

This report illustrates that seeing people's eagerness to provide support and observing their sensitivity to her pain and needs became psychologically comforting and empowering for her. Establishing a sense of being surrounded by caring and helpful people seemingly lessened her feelings of loneliness and deprivation and encouraged her to be more hopeful and confident about her future. Also, she further noted that being valued and respected was vital for her to heal her wounded self-worth, and she became proud of herself for deserving the trust and care of these people:

Why? Why are they so helpful? Because they trust me, I earned their trust, I earned their respect with my decency, conscientiousness, skillfulness. They appreciate me . . . You cannot imagine how much this is important to me. I was so little, so broken. My God knows that I worked so hard, and they rewarded me. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 121)

Considering her history of forced marriage and her resulting sense of abandonment by her mother, her emphasis on the role of these relational resources in her process of recovery seemed to gain much more significance. Another woman, Yeliz, also underscored the positive and relieving impact of experiencing the earnestness and solicitousness of her coworkers to help her to feel better and worthy:

I learned that he had sent this email to everybody [an email accusing her of being a bad/ neglectful mother] . . . I was so ashamed . . . But it was not what I expected. Everybody tried to help me. They were so careful not to make me feel humiliated again. They said, ‘You do not deserve being treated like this, no woman deserves this. If you need legal assistance, we can help you. If you want to see a psychologist, we can help you. You can always talk to us’. You know, I was a simple worker there. They did not have any obligation or responsibility to care about me, they could just read the email and forget about it, but, instead, they gave me their support. My family or the people I knew as friends did not do this . . . This showed how much I am valued and how people can be so respectful and understanding of each other. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 122)

This was noted as an experience of change that generated new relational meanings in her mind. These new meanings included genuineness, mutual respect, understanding, and supportiveness in contrast to the humiliating, abusive, and negligent nature of relationships she experienced before. Melek also shared a similar significant relational experience with her employers where she felt trusted, accepted, and valued by them:

My job was cleaning the place and serving tea, coffee, but my hands were shaking [due to the physical injuries caused by her husband’s violence]. They have clients, I am serving them coffee, half of it on the plate under the cup [laughing]. I was feeling so ashamed, I could not tolerate it anymore and decided to talk with my bosses. I said, ‘If you want to fire me, I can understand you’. They both said ‘. . . we trust you, and you will continue to work here, you are valuable for us as much as our clients are’. I could not believe what I heard. Your father, your husband does not treat you like this. (Melek) (Appendix B, 123)

Thus, as can be observed in the narratives above, these positive relational experiences made them realize and embrace their self-value and worthiness.

Besides the workplace relationships, several women also highlighted the significance of their friendships in easing their transition processes in the post-separation period. Harika stated that rebuilding her connections with her old friends helped her to better cope with the challenges in her life and to regain her sense of well-being and contentment:

Some of my best friends were on the edge of finishing their friendships with me . . . But after I left, I tried really hard to earn their trust again. And I did. Regaining my friends, regaining my social life back, it was so good, so important for me. I cried a lot, I suffered a lot, but when I met with them, it became like therapy. It made me remember what kind of person I was before this marriage, how much I was enjoying my life. I am still carrying so many wounds, but at least my friends taught me how to laugh again. Feeling like myself, not being afraid of behaving like myself. I rehabilitated myself within their presence. (Harika) (Appendix B, 124)

These friendships seemed to provide a satisfactory relational space to escape pain and suffering; thereby enabled her to experience and enjoy her previous sense of self. In the following report, Feride shared her profound feeling of belongingness to the small community in her neighborhood and noted how the reciprocity of support and understanding between people compensated her long-lasting sense of isolation:

I work for long hours, most of the time, I feel exhausted. My physical health is not very good, thanks to my ex-husband . . . There is a coffeehouse in my street. I always go there after work. It's a place to relax. Everyone knows each other, everyone looks after each other . . . Everyone there has a wound; one lost his brother, one's husband is in prison due to political reasons... We understand each other . . . For years and years, I talked to the walls, I was all by myself, I was alone, I dealt with everything by myself . . . I needed this. Now, I am lucky to have these people. (Feride) (Appendix B, 125)

Feeling as a respected, valued member of this community and experiencing solidarity among people were considered as a very significant aspect of her process of recovery.

While some women explicitly articulated that they did not have any intention and desire to build intimate relationships with men, several women talked about their current

intimate partners and highlighted the positive effect of these relationships on their healing processes. Aysel expressed that her experiences in her current intimate relationship enabled her to feel better about herself, to escape from the pain of her previous abusive marriage and to be more hopeful about the future:

He is a good person. It was nearly impossible for me to trust another man, but he passed all the tests [laughing]. Still, you cannot know what is going to happen in the future, but, for now, he makes me feel loved . . . You never felt like this before, you thought that these romantic relationships only occurred in movies [laughing]. I forget my past while I am with him, I feel better, I feel young, I am less fearful about the future. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 126)

Melek explained that despite all the ongoing struggles in her life, her new intimate relationship became emotionally comforting for her:

My mind is always full of necessities and things that I am supposed to deal with. You are inclined to think that you are struggling with life so there is no place for a relationship, for a man. But now, my life became more colorful. He calls me frequently, just to ask how I am. He invites me to do something together, to go somewhere . . . We argued last week . . . Then he came with flowers in his hands. His existence gives me more energy. The struggles are the same, but I feel less exhausted. (Melek) (Appendix B, 127)

Experiencing the tranquility of the relationship and observing the care, love, and compassion of her partner seemed to lessen her emotional burden and distress. Arzu also underlined that being treated respectfully by her partner, observing his ability to regulate his anger, and experiencing his genuine love transformed her self-perception and her perception of men and intimate relationships positively:

He knows how to talk without yelling. When we argue about something, no yelling, no aggression. He can control his anger, he knows how to behave respectfully. Then, I understand that someone can be in my life, not all men are like my ex-husband, it is possible to talk without fighting. And, you know, he makes me feel like a woman. I am a woman. A man can love me . . . Love! Love is healing. I started to enjoy my life. I saw that life is not only about working and struggling. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 128)

Thus, for these three women, as implied in their reports, establishing mutual intimacy and trust in their relationships created an empowering ground for them to enjoy themselves and their lives more.

3.2.2.2.1.2 Women's shelters as relational spaces for healing

Even though the women who stayed in the transition houses for a short period or in the various state shelters recalled many adversities, others who stayed in an independent feminist shelter house recounted relationally nurturing and emancipating experiences engendered a positive/ empowering transition in their sense-of-self. Also, two women who stayed in a state shelter emphasized the significance of the relational support they received during their stays.

The majority of women emphasized that the emotionally supportive relational environment of the shelters significantly contributed to their efforts to construct their confidence and agency. Reyhan expressed how her experiences in the shelter made her feel protected and cared for, which in turn strengthened her self-sufficiency:

I was so exhausted . . . There was an intense fear of being found by him. They always said, 'We will deal with this together, we will help you to protect yourself' . . . They placed us into a circle of protection. They always said, 'You are strong, you will overcome all these difficulties . . . We are here to support you'. Now, life is not difficult for me as it was before. They altered my perspective . . . Now, if they fire me from this job, I do not have to beg them, I can always find something else, I can find a solution. So, they changed my life, they helped me, guided me to gain my self-confidence. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 129)

Her narrative showed that being valued and supported by the shelter personnel boosted her belief in her abilities and power to overcome the struggles she encountered, and thus lessened her worries, emotional exhaustion, and her sense of vulnerability. Canan also

underlined the significant empowering role of her positive interactions with the shelter workers:

They are my angels without wings . . . Listening to and supporting without criticizing and judging. They guided me for everything. They hold my hands and guided me. This was so critical for my survival. They do not do something for you, but they show you the way, they explain to you the options you have. They are people who value you and who try to empower you without criticizing your behaviors. (Canan) (Appendix B, 130)

Experiencing a nonjudgmental and non-hierarchical way of communication, being actively guided on practical issues, and being accepted and valued appeared to have irreplaceable importance in her story of achieving her well-being, owning her value and improving her skills to survive.

Correspondingly, Aysel underscored the profound transition in her sense-of-self, which she experienced during her stay in the shelter, and the empowering influence of her relationship with her social worker on this transition:

I learned many things from her. I made lots of mistakes, but she always guided me . . . She did not decide anything on behalf of me, she always encouraged me to make my own decisions and my own responsibility. I'm thankful to her . . . I realized that I was living my life in the direction of others, first my father, mother, and then my husband and his family. But, there, I was like a teenage girl trying to discover life. And she was my mentor. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 131)

Her close communication with her social worker and the feeling of trust and reassurance established in this relationship seemed to enable her to test her boundaries and to make discoveries about herself. In the following quotation, Melek also reflected on her experiences in the shelter and stated how her sense of freedom, self-worth, and autonomy gradually strengthened as she felt being valued, respected, and encouraged by her social worker:

They wanted to make us feel better, relieved. Step by step, I started to feel free . . . We were going out, and nobody was asking us anything, I was feeling weird, like guilty. I thought like I was supposed to get their permission to go out. Imagine that, for all your life, you ask others to do something, your father, your mother, your husband . . . The voice of my social worker is still in my ears: 'You do not have to endure this, live your own life, you can achieve this'. I never heard anything like this before, from nobody. 'You are a beautiful woman, you are valuable'. I am looking into the mirror, asking myself 'Am I?'. 'Yes, I'm beautiful, I'm deserving better'. (Melek) (Appendix B, 132)

Repeatedly encountering these supportive and inspiring responses was highly precious for women, especially when it is considered how they were treated by their families and their husbands.

Some of them also discussed their experiences with other women in the shelters. Even though some narratives indicated conflicts and struggles, they generally claimed that their experiences with other women positively contributed to their recovery processes. Some emphasized the encouragement they felt by listening to the stories of other women. Esra, who was the youngest woman in the shelter at the time of her stay, recounted how she was relieved and inspired by others in the shelter:

I said to myself that 'Look, they succeeded, their conditions were even worse than yours, but they did succeed. So why are you feeling so hopeless, calm down, you will write your own story'. Still, when I feel upset or somehow hopeless, I try to remember those women I met there, what they told me about themselves, how they dealt with very difficult things . . . They inspired me a lot. (Esra) (Appendix B, 133)

Her relationships with the women in the shelter became a significant source of learning, encouragement, and coping. Hayat, as the oldest woman in the shelter house, also discussed the healing nature of her interaction with the other women:

Every woman there became a remedy to each other because we all shared the same pain. Being there, listening to their pain made me grow up more. I was the oldest one and they respected me a lot. I became their mother, they trusted me, they asked my advice when they needed it. All of them were like my daughters. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 134)

For these women, the shelters they stayed seemed to provide a safe and trustworthy ground helping them to establish a sense of companionship through listening to, sharing, and learning.

3.2.2.2.1.3 Prioritizing the responsibility of motherhood: “Having no way but to be powerful”

Looking after their children, supporting and protecting them appeared in the narratives as women’s foremost priorities in their lives. While this prioritized responsibility of motherhood was discussed as an aspect constantly contributing to their concerns and worries, it was also highlighted as a significant source of well-being and empowerment. Many women articulated that their profound sense of commitment to provide a prosperous future for their children strengthened their motivation to fight against the struggles, and once when they started to observe the positive consequences of their efforts in their children’s lives, they became immensely proud of themselves. In the following narrative, Aysel commented on the two-sidedness of being a mother when she was asked about her resources of coping with all the difficulties in the post-separation period:

My son. He is the one who breaks me down and also who keeps me alive [laughing]. A piece of bread would be enough for me at least for a week, but all my efforts are for him . . . I always flutter like a wounded bird, not to fall. I am trying so hard for him. He is the one giving me this power to withstand but also making me weak. (Aysel) (Appendix B, 135)

Oya similarly attributed her robust feeling of ambition to her unyielding sense of responsibility and commitment for her children:

I do not like to sit and cry when I face difficulties. I need to deal with them. Above all, I have two children. They made me so determined. I have no way but to be powerful for them . . . I am working for them, I am living for them. I always say to myself, each time when something happens ‘You have no choice but to fight, you’ll fight for them’ . . . I said that, I promised that I would build a peaceful family for my children. I worked to achieve this. And I did . . . I did not give up. I continue to be happy and strong for my children, I have to because I do not have any other option. What would they do if I do not support them? (Oya) (Appendix B, 136)

She underlined her identity of motherhood as primarily shaping her agency and persistence in dealing with the challenges in her life. Hence, her children became the leading source of her determination to maintain her psychological stability and well-being.

Additionally, as implied in Oya’s report above, striving to keep themselves away from ruminating on negative memories and suspending their emotional suffering for the sake of their children’s well-being were correspondingly identified in many narratives. Pervin, for instance, revealed that the reason why she tries to suppress any painful and distressing memories was her son:

I do not want to remember anything about my marriage, about him, about what I experienced because I want to move forward, I want to look ahead. When I feel bad, I immediately try to escape from that mood, I do not let myself feel in that way. Because I have a kid. If I get stuck in the past, I am sure that this will not be good for my son. I need to be strong and healthy to make him happy. I am responsible for him, I am obliged to strive for his well-being. There is no other way. I have to fight, this is my life from now on. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 137)

Thus, the negative feelings were perceived as distractions while they were struggling to survive with their children. Feride similarly articulated that she did not allow herself to feel overwhelmed and depressed due to her ongoing sense of responsibility for her children:

We need to be pragmatic, women need to be pragmatic. We know what is going to happen if we let ourselves to be weak. When I feel sad, when I cry, I'm getting angry at myself because I will gain nothing if I continue to feel like that. I'm the only one who needs to overcome these struggles. I started to say this to myself when I first became a mother at 19. Still saying the same thing. You do not have any luxury to be depressed because you are a mother, you need to take care of yourself, you need to stand strong. Because they need you. If you yield to struggles in your life, they will also suffer . . . I suffered a lot, yes, but nothing to do, crying does not solve anything. We must look ahead. We need to be pragmatic. (Feride) (Appendix B, 138)

To look after their children, they appeared to feel compelled to disregard or inhibit any emotional unsteadiness they felt.

Building a sense of trust and confidence in their relationships with the children and seeing how they grow resilient were described as generating a significant sense of fulfillment and accomplishment in their lives. In the narrative below, Harika reported that supporting her son to get through the difficulties he had and witnessing the positive changes in his behaviors have become very rewarding and empowering for her:

It became my motto. I can delay my sadness, I can cry after they sleep, but these are not going to inhibit my relationship with my children, I'm going to be happy, playful. Smiling brings me more happiness. When I smile more, they also smile more. We get over a very difficult process. My son was very aggressive, he was full of hatred . . . He was insulting other children, he was biting and hitting them, he was so uneasy . . . I have met with the school counselor a while ago. She said, 'Your son is trying to soothe his friends when they got angry'. I cannot tell you how this is important for me [crying]. This is what I achieved, he is not a boy full of hatred and hostility anymore. He becomes a caring and gentle child. You feel more powerful when these happen more. (Harika) (Appendix B, 139)

Nermin's statement below also showed how witnessing the maturity and generosity in her children's attitudes became a source of resistance and pride in her life:

Having children makes a mother more resistant to difficulties . . . They are very important for a person to endure. I am proud of them. They become very responsible, well-mannered, and thoughtful youngsters. Let me tell you something. My daughter's friends sometimes invite her to have a coffee outside. Once, I heard her talking on the phone 'Come here, I will make coffee for you at home, it is at least 5 liras in coffeehouses, I do not want to waste my mother's

money like this'. So, this is how they are . . . I taught them to be hardworking, strong . . . I cleaned toilets, but I achieved bringing up my children like this. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 140)

Both Nermin and Harika appreciated their role and efforts in raising their children in a supportive and encouraging environment. This self-appreciation, in turn, appeared to strengthen their sense of confidence.

3.2.2.2.2 Healing and empowerment via prioritizing autonomy

Achieving a sense of independence is the most crucial thing I want now. This is a process of liberation . . . Cilem Dogan [a woman survivor of male partner violence] said that the most challenging part of her process was the conflicts with her family, to fight against their control. I think my process is not different from hers or any other woman. I am trying to escape from their control [referring the political organization she was involved in] . . . I am rebuilding the bridge by only relying on my values and feelings . . . This is the real life, I feel like what I lived before was an illusion. Now, I am on my own, I am deciding by myself, without asking anything to anybody. I am walking by myself, and I enjoy this a lot. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 141)

When she separated from her partner, Zeynep seemed to step into a process of identity construction to achieve her sense of agency and autonomy. This was described as a process not only surviving her partner's violence but also as one of surviving and liberating herself from the oppressive practices in her community to re-establish herself as an independent and self-governing woman. Hence, her efforts to claim her individuality were considered as predominantly significant for her emotional recovery. The narratives of other women also indicated a similar process of change from defining oneself with the feelings of vulnerability and helplessness to prioritizing self-sufficiency and autonomy. In this process, women seemingly achieved an increasing sense of competency and self-fulfillment in establishing and maintaining their lives alone as single mothers.

3.2.2.2.2.1 Being proud of what they have achieved

Women's reflections on their current lives pointed out their growing feelings of accomplishment, individuality, and self-respect. Despite the ongoing contextual difficulties in their lives (especially problems related to their economic conditions and post-separation violence), they recounted that their experiences gradually became more gratifying through time and they began to feel themselves more in control of their own lives. Reaching this state of self-reliance was discussed as the most rewarding and precious aspect of their stories.

Many women described self-reliance based on their economic independence. Sustaining their lives by not relying on anybody was emphasized as a significant priority in their post-separation period, which also indicated as giving them the courage and confidence to defend and pursue their behavioral freedom. Yeliz stated that maintaining the stability of her financial conditions over time significantly contributed to her sense of fulfillment and pride:

I am paying my rent alone, I am paying my bills alone. Thank goodness, I get support from no one. I am paying my debts. I even afforded to buy furniture for my house. This is not a very big issue for many people. A bed, a sofa and a dinner table, but being able to do these is very important for me. I can say to myself, 'Thank goodness, you can afford your own life without being indebted to somebody'. I realized that a woman could only live her life as she wants if only she stops expecting from others. Neither from my family nor my husband or any other men. There is only me now. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 142)

As implied in her narrative, being economically independent and maintaining her life without expecting any support from others empowered her to exercise her agency and freedom. Melek similarly shared what it meant for her to be economically independent and how it gave her the power to assert herself more:

Being dependent on a man is not imaginable for me anymore. I do not want it. A while ago, he [referring her current partner] offered me some financial support. I immediately said that I did not want his money. He can stand with me, he can hold my hand, but I will never be dependent on him economically . . . I feel tired because of my health problems, and some days we even do not have enough money to buy a piece of bread. But still, I am free. We have our home, my children with me. It is okay if we do not eat enough one day a week if we go to sleep half hungry. The only thing important is not to be dependent on anyone's money, we do not need pity of others. (Melek) (Appendix B, 143)

Having economic freedom appeared to create a position of entitlement in women's lives to protect their rights and interests. This position of entitlement also enhanced their emotional recovery. Hayat reflected on her sense of freedom and her happiness as closely linked with her achievement of financial independence:

I am earning my own money and I am spending my own money. If I am in debt, it belongs to me. I do not have to explain anything to anybody. I do not need to be thankful to anyone anymore. Nobody can ask me, 'Why are you doing this?'. My life, my decisions, right or wrong, it is nobody's business. I know I am free. I am not looking back now, I feel good about myself . . . People say that, 'You cannot buy your freedom, your happiness with money' but actually you can. Because if you have money, this means that you do not need anybody to maintain your life, you can be both free and happy. (Hayat) (Appendix B, 144)

Pervin also underlined her genuine sense of self-pride engendered by her determination to rebuild her life and to claim her autonomy despite the efforts of her family to subjugate her:

I achieved [crying]. It has been nearly four years, it was too difficult, it's still difficult but better. I achieved. I am so proud of myself. I feel more powerful by working. Do you know how it is difficult to work as a mother of two-year-old? Especially if you do not have anybody to rely on. But I did. I did not give up. I bought a small house. Hopefully, we will move soon when I find a job there. But, do you know that my father did not want me to work? Even my brother did not want it. Because they knew that if I work, I will not feel dependent on them, and they cannot control my life. My father was insulting me every time he wanted, he kicked me out many times. But, after I bought my house without their support, they stopped doing this. Because they know that I am not dependent on them anymore. I'm working, and I have a house. Everything was very difficult, but I know that I achieved it. I am free and strong. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 145)

She felt that she gained her emotional and behavioral freedom by financially liberating herself from her family. Having a house, despite her ongoing financial difficulties, made her feel more confident and comfortable in her current position.

In parallel, when women reflected on their stories from their childhood until currently, they proudly underlined how they perceived themselves as thriving, empowered, independent, and valuable women who succeeded in surviving and building their own lives. The following statement by Arzu demonstrated the significant transition in her sense-of-being from the wretched years of her childhood to the recent days in her life:

No man can stand beside me! Look what I achieved, where I am now. I was 14 years old [her age when she got married], I was just a little child. I was poor and miserable. Now, I am a successful woman. Now, everybody respects me. I bought two flats with my own money. Nobody, neither my mother nor my brother, gave me a penny to succeed this. Those houses will be my children's in the future. I am strong, I am very strong [emphasizing loudly by hitting the arm of the chair]. (Arzu) (Appendix B, 146)

As a result of her achievements, she depicted her current self as a determined, assertive, and competent woman in comparison to her previously predominating feelings of helplessness, abandonment, and inferiority. Nermin's narrative below also illustrated how she perceived herself superior, stronger, and more respected than her husband (or any other man):

Men are superior, men are powerful, hah! This gentleman [referring to her husband] is drinking tea all day in a coffeehouse. I am the one who is working from morning till evening, I am the one who is providing for my children. I am more powerful, I am superior. (Nermin) (Appendix B, 147)

As explicitly indicated in the narratives above, women proclaimed their capability of exerting their power and agency in preserving their lives without feeling dependent and

vulnerable. Hence, self-sufficiency, autonomy, and assertiveness seemed to become central for their newly reclaimed identities.

In this regard, women described their experiences from a positive angle by emphasizing how they became more resilient after they went through all these difficulties and how their experiences of hardships generated growth and expansion in their sense of being. Feride's report below demonstrated her robust sense of self-appreciation:

I have a friend, she is in depression. She is always unhappy, always. Yet, she does not have any financial difficulties, her husband is so good. Sometimes I compare myself with her, and I say to myself, 'I prefer to be like me rather than like her' [laughing]. The things I experienced were very bad, nobody should go through what I experienced, but I did what should be done. I did everything to survive with my tiny body. I dealt with everything by myself. Sometimes I stumbled and fell hard, but I never gave up. Depression for 3 days, and then I got to my feet again [laughing]. When I look at myself now, I become really proud of myself. (Feride) (Appendix B, 148)

Having a strong will to resist difficulties and survive and getting empowered through these experiences seemingly prompted her feeling of confidence and self-respect. The following narrative by Esra also showed her efforts to embrace her own experiences by escaping the shame induced by others:

A woman from my workplace asked me why I separated, whether there was violence or not. In my mind, I said, 'Yes', but I could not say it aloud. I was still ashamed, I was afraid of that they would say, 'What a pity, she's too young, she was exposed to violence, she's miserable now with her baby'. But this is not a thing to be shameful. I am now eager to express myself, to speak about the story of my life. In fact, this was why I wanted to participate in this study. To say 'I was exposed to violence, but I escaped, I survived, now I am here. This makes me proud of myself. I am standing alone, I did not accept violence, I resisted it, I fought against it, and I achieved, there is nothing to be ashamed of' . . . All these experiences made me stronger, made me who I am now. (Esra) (Appendix B, 149)

She achieved to replace her shame with a sense of accomplishment, empowerment, and pride. Also, sharing her story with others by highlighting her sense of resilience became a way of embracing her life as it is. Correspondingly, Melek, in her second interview, expressed her emerging feelings after the first interview:

After we talked, I feel a little sorrowful, I do not know, talking about all these again . . . I sat on a bench, started to cry. It was about, you know, after you put a great effort to achieve something, and then when you see that you achieved it, you feel relief, happiness. And I realized that I achieved lots of things, impossible things. I said to myself no need to be sad, no need, you succeeded. (Melek) (Appendix B, 150)

Reflecting on her experiences and sharing her life history seemed to help her to recognize and appreciate her power, competence, and achievements.

3.2.2.2.2 Increasing sense of competence and courage for setting self-protective limits

While women started to feel financially, and thus psychologically, more self-reliant and autonomous, their narratives illustrated that their will and confidence to achieve control over their own lives also increased. In their daily lives, women appeared to prioritize their well-being by not allowing anyone to interfere with their decisions and actions.

For some women, gradually starting to perceive themselves as able to ensure their self-protection from the post-separation violence was emphasized as a crucial step in their processes of achieving a sense of control over their own lives. Harika's following report exemplified how it became liberating for her to start believing her power to deal with the violence of her ex-husband:

I achieved a lot. Imagine this, even after I left, I was still organizing my whole life according to him because I was very fearful. If I say something, if I do something, he can use this in the court against me. He can steal my children from me. Let's say I meet with my friends at night, what if he sees me? I'm walking in the street, what if he tries to hurt me? I got rid of all these. Now, I am meeting

my friends, I am coming home late at night without feeling afraid . . . These are big steps for me. There is still fear, he still tries to hurt me, but I feel more powerful to deal with all these. (Harika) (Appendix B, 151)

Rather than organizing her daily life decisions and actions by trying to eliminate the threats coming from her ex-husband, feeling confident to take actions to make her life more satisfactory and enjoyable seemed to be very reassuring and empowering for her. Pervin also emphasized her persistent efforts to overcome her ex-husband's repeated violence after separation:

I did everything that I could do. Now, he is afraid of me [laughing]. Previously, he was kicking the door of my flat, now he waits at the corner of the street for me to bring my son to him [laughing]. Because I never gave up. You call the police, and they are saying 'Oh, you again! Enough, we are tired of you!'. Every time the police comes, all the neighbors are at the windows, watching us like they are watching a movie . . . But nothing is more important than protecting myself and my son. I'm calling the police, if they do not come within 5 minutes, I call them again, 'I called you 5 minutes ago, why are you not here yet?' [laughing]. (Pervin) (Appendix B, 152)

The following report by Canan demonstrated that observing her ability to keep herself safe became emotionally relieving for her and created a sense of consolation in her mind:

I have many wounds, maybe it is impossible to heal them. But still I feel very proud of myself, because I did not surrender to anybody, I did not accept the rules of others. He tried to play cat and mouse, but I did not allow him. I learned my rights, I defended myself. I was brave enough to claim my rights. I became the cat, and then he stopped to play [laughing]. At least, these became consoling for me. (Canan) (Appendix B, 153)

Thus, as stated in both previous reports, starting to feel rightful and competent enough to take required steps to protect themselves from post-separation violence and eventually achieving a state of assertiveness and firmness to stand for their safety were revealed as crucial in their processes of recovery and empowerment.

Many women highlighted that learning to value themselves by increasing their efforts to prioritize their well-being and setting proper boundaries to people became fundamentally critical for them while they were trying to rebuild their relationships with others. Zeynep shared how her perception of relationships changed within time after separation:

It is so interesting. After I escaped from him, I also started to feel free in my other relationships. I realized that I am not actually very comfortable with some of my friends. People treat you in many ways that can be hurtful or offensive for you, sometimes intentionally, sometimes only because of their ignorance. I realized that although their attitudes caused me to feel bad, I was forcing myself to sustain these relationships. I now understand that this is a waste of emotional labor. I will not consume myself anymore by continuing to invest in these relationships. (Zeynep) (Appendix B, 154)

Her process of separation seemed to create a total change in her view of the “healthy” ways of relating to others. She depicted setting boundaries and limiting the “emotional labor” she performed for others as vital for her to ensure her peace and comfort. Safiye similarly stated that she needed to re-establish her priorities in her relationships by focusing on her feelings and interests:

After experiencing such horrible things, you need to rethink your priorities. My priority was pleasing others . . . Others were more important than me. Now, if I do not want something, I do not want. I’m living my life for myself and for my son. (Safiye) (Appendix B, 155)

Thus, as can be observed in both of these reports, during their processes of separation, they started to feel empowered and entitled to prioritize their well-being instead of orienting and accommodating themselves to others as it was in their previous relationships.

Some women also revealed that setting limits against the control of their own families became a central challenge in their lives after separation. They emphasized that

they openly defy any act by their families that would make them feel oppressed or controlled. Reyhan expressed her profound sense of powerfulness and confidence in assertively defending herself against the violent behaviors of her uncle:

My uncle tried to slap me in the face. I said, ‘Stop, you cannot do this’. He is a big man, everybody gets scared of him. But I said ‘No! I did not do anything wrong . . . I am standing on my feet, I am taking care of my children. You do not have a right to blame me’. Everybody stopped dead in their tracks, I was not able to defend myself like this, but now nobody can poke his nose into my life. (Reyhan) (Appendix B, 156)

When she compared her current sense of being with how she was in the past in her childhood and marriage years, she disclosed a significant transition in herself from the state of vulnerability to the state of self-assertiveness and self-agency. Thus, as also exemplified in the narrative below by Hayat, women started to feel more confident and empowered to confront and challenge their families when they felt any discomfort caused by their behaviors:

They [referring to her family] were all like stunned, they were surprised. They could not accept the fact that I left him. Not only I left him but also, I stayed at a shelter, I restricted my communication with them . . . We were talking on the phone, they were still in touch with him [referring to her ex-husband]. They hoped that I would return . . . One day, I said to my mother “Mom, I’m calling you every once in a while, if I learn that you contact him again, be sure that you will never hear my voice again”. She took me seriously and stopped to see him then . . . It was enough! (Hayat) (Appendix 157)

Hayat defined her mother as a very authoritarian person, and she stated that she always behaved very cautiously not to offend her through her childhood and her marriage years. Therefore, being able to oppose her by taking the risk of losing contact with her mother implied a crucial change in her sense of self, which meant that rather than giving priority to the others’ needs and sacrificing her well-being, she seemed to prioritize her protection and interests. Esra similarly talked about her efforts to rebuild her

relationships with her family (especially with her father) by setting the boundaries to ensure her well-being:

I am trying to control their behaviors towards me. When they say something about my life, for example, when I come home late, or I was wearing a headscarf, but a while ago I chose not to wear it anymore, I am overtly insisting that they do not have any right to say something to me about these. My mother is a religious woman, and I am not anymore. So, that is it. She has nothing to do with it. And my father. Violence is systematic, I learned that a violent person is very aware of his actions and its consequences. So, my father is not violent as he used to be, at least he is like that when I am around. Because he knows that I'm going to leave home immediately if he does something bad, I have zero tolerance. (Esra) (Appendix B, 158)

After she left home, she stayed at a shelter for 8 months, and she disclosed that gaining knowledge about violence dynamics and gender-oppression during her stay helped her to enhance her strategies to deal with violence. Hence, she started to reconstruct her relationship with the parents to maintain her control over her choices and actions.

A small number of narratives showed that women also experienced this struggle for setting boundaries in their mother-child relationships. Melek expressed how she became able to resist her son's efforts to restrict her life:

You are afraid of your son. Is not that weird? He should be afraid of you [laughing] . . . One day, after thinking a lot, I took my courage in my hands and decided to talk to him . . . I said, 'I am the one who is your mother, you have no right to treat me like that. I am sick of your father's violence, and I do not want any uneasiness in our home. When you yell at me, I see him in your eyes, and I do not like it. You are hurting me by behaving like that. You are the most important, most valuable people in my life, you and your sister. But you can treat neither your sister nor me like this. I cannot allow this. I won't. So, you need to pull yourself together. I will not ask for your permission, but you will ask my permission because I am your mother'. We talked for several hours, but the message was that. And it worked [laughing]. (Melek) (Appendix B, 159)

Showing her firmness and determination to draw her boundaries and not to allow anybody to interfere with her individual decisions and behaviors pointed out her growing sense of courage and strength to reclaim her independence and agency.

Correspondingly, Correspondingly, Yeliz shared how her feelings and thoughts changed regarding her son's rejection of her:

You are supposed to sacrifice your life, being a woman requires this. Suffering is in our nature. But I felt very tired of suffering, very tired of sacrificing. What happened when I sacrificed for my son? When he was very little, I stayed at home for him. I did not want him to suffer. But then, now he is sixteen, and he is calling me a slut. This is still hurting, yes, but it is enough. I want to live my life for myself. This is his choice. I tried a lot to explain myself to him, but now it is over. I do not want to suffer anymore. I want to show this to my daughter. You can be free, you do not have to suffer, you do not have to think about others so much. By being like this, I want to give her a message. (Yeliz) (Appendix B, 160)

She emphasized her desire to reconstruct her womanhood/ motherhood in a way that would enable her to enjoy her individuality without feeling guilty and suffering. By doing this, she also hoped to be a healthier and better role model for her daughter.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

“How then can we walk that careful line wherein context is acknowledged and yet “woman” is not so deconstructed as to lack the capacity to act?” (Lloyd et al., 2009, p. 268)

Failing to endorse a critical recognition of the systemic, collective and institutional constituents of gendered violence, particularly when it comes to an understanding of women’s responses in terms of how and in which ways they react to and deal with it, women’s subjectivities are often depicted in a decontextualized, non-historical way, framed solely based on the intrapersonal and interpersonal psychological dynamics of violence (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Skoloff & Dupont, 2005). The current study, to escape this one-dimensional psychological reductionist approach, employs a contextually situated framework to explore women’s experiences of staying in and leaving the violent relationships. While this perspective reveals the significant effects of the sociocultural and structural context of oppression and disempowerment on women’s individual experiences of male partner violence, it does not refer to a deterministic framework discounting individuals’ strategic power to show resistance and create change; rather, it offers a theoretical explanation to understand how this agency/ power can be limited in certain contexts and still how individuals can find alternative ways to resist and gain more power (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Connell, 1997). Thus, on the one hand, the findings of this study provide significant insights into how women’s experiences of surviving violence, involving the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of their experiences, are situated in and constructed by the contextual circumstances in

their lives; particularly how their sense of powerlessness and decision-making processes in violent relationships, also their processes of agency, empowerment, and recovery, are shaped by the social and structural constraints surrounding them. However, at the same time, the examination of women's narratives also reveals how and in which ways they withstand and thrive within these intimidating circumstances of violence, oppression, and exploitation; in other words, how they create and follow their individual pathways of resistance and recovery.

4.1 Pre-separation narratives

The findings of the current study on women's pre-separation processes suggested the critical importance of a multilayered and contextualized perspective on developing a proper understanding of women's subjective experiences of violence and their decision-making. Consistent with the previous research in Turkey which has demonstrated the diverse patterns of women's safety-seeking behaviors depending on regional and class-based differences (Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al., 2013; Sallan-Gül, 2013; KSGM, 2015), the current study revealed how women's experiences of staying in and leaving the relationships, and their processes of meaning-making and agency, differed based on their social positions -which revolves around the sociocultural and economic characteristic of the families that women grew up with, as well as their current social, educational, and economic status. For most women in this study (12 out of 16), economic dependence, educational disadvantages, and social restrictions were revealed as interlocking aspects of their experiences of interpersonal violence. These women, mostly undereducated, unemployed, or working in low-paid unsecured jobs, and living in poor and highly

conservative neighborhoods with their husbands' families, emphasized the overlapping contextual constraints in their lives as the main determinants of their sense of powerlessness and dependency, limiting their chances and opportunities to escape violence. In contrast to the emphasis on the contextual constraints in the narratives of the first group, a smaller number of women, having more privileged social and educational backgrounds, mostly focused on the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains of their experiences to explain their responses to violence. As all came from relatively prosperous middle-class urban families, none have been deprived of their educational rights, and all had more social opportunities to experience their autonomy and individuality. Consistent with these background characteristics, at the time when their relationships started, all described economically and socially stable conditions, and, although three of them had later financial losses as a direct consequence of violence, none addressed economic concerns in relation to their decision-making processes.

Related with the diversities in women's social and economic conditions, the presence or the absence of a love discourse in the narratives also appeared as an essential aspect of these differences. In this sense, to the author's knowledge, this study is the first one to demonstrate the determinative effect of marriage patterns (love marriages vs. involuntary/forced or arranged marriages where love or emotional intimacy are not predominant characteristics of the relationships) on women's experiences of violence and leaving. As couple relationships in Western cultures have been generally assumed to be established based on romantic involvement and emotional intimacy between partners, in many conceptual models, women's hardships to emotionally disengage themselves from their violent partners have been suggested as an underlying crucial factor that

shapes women's responses to violence (Lempert, 1996; Childress, 2013; Kearney, 2001). However, in the common cultural context of Turkey, rather than being defined by love or intimacy, marriage has been considered as more of a "family affair" (Özdalga, 2003, p. 3). Whereas this does not emerge as a practice that totally excludes emotional intimacy in marital relationships and individual choice in decision-making processes, the anticipated compatibility of families has been regarded as more primary than the relational values and individual decisions (Bolak, 1997; Özdalga, 2003; Sunar & Fişek, 2005). Thereby, particularly in traditional extended family structures, where generational and gender hierarchies are highly predominant, couple relationships have been described with the instrumental roles of each partner with very little emphasis on emotional closeness (Kandiyoti, 1997; Sunar & Fişek, 2005). Correspondingly, most women in the current study, who either were forcibly married by their families under the age of 18 or got married with their own consent by the arrangement of the parents (not necessarily implying their autonomous choice but mostly women's loyalty to their families), highlighted that they became the domestic 'servants' in the extended households of the husbands with no, or limited, emotional contact with them. In this regard, all women in the first group, even the ones who continued to live in the same small towns with their communities, experienced severe isolation, and the absence of family/community support; in a sense, they became the 'property' of the families into which they married (Özdalga, 2003). Thus, unsurprisingly, none of them, including those who reported that they willingly married their partners without their families' involvement, defined their marriages in terms of relational closeness and intimacy.

However, particularly for urban middle-class nuclear families, these marriage practices have been identified as becoming less common (Sunar, 2002; Sunar & Fişek, 2005). Although the socioeconomic and cultural match between families is still considered as a crucial factor in marriage decisions, current young couples have more individual freedom in their partner choices, and consequently, romantic involvement and emotional closeness have become more central aspects of spousal relationships. Congruently, women in the second group emphasized the primary importance of love, romance, intimacy, and emotional reciprocity in their relationships. Thereby, their narratives included the detailed accounts of their relational expectations and related disappointments, and their struggle to detach themselves from their violent partners emotionally.

The following subsections, namely the narratives of powerlessness and the narratives of romantic love, include discussions on women's pre-separation processes, respectively, for the first and second groups of women.

4.1.1 The narratives of powerlessness

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, the experiences and processes that hindered women's escape from violence are discussed. In the second part, the focus is to discuss women's experiences of change and transformation that enabled them to move beyond violence.

4.1.1.1 Why is leaving unlikely?

Research on women's experiences of violence regarding their stay/leave decisions have largely documented that for many women, living under disadvantageous conditions, and thereby having fewer options to access social and structural resources that would enable them to escape violence, leaving is less likely to become a viable option (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Duffy, 2015; Goodman et al., 2009; Hamby, 2013; Tutty et al., 2014). In this study, consistently with these studies, women in the first pattern, while elaborating their experiences of violence in terms of their reactions and responses to it, mostly underlined intersecting social and structural barriers in their lives (financial insecurities, social isolation, lack of housing alternatives, limited or no support from families, absent or restricted working experience, inefficient institutional support systems, under-education, inexperience) as the main determinative factors of their sense of powerlessness and doubtfulness. Feeling overwhelmed and pressured by these contextual disadvantages restraining their individual power, along with the fear and intimidation created by their husbands' violence, women viewed their opportunities and chances to escape violence as highly limited.

However, based on strength-based approaches, it has been illustrated that women living under disempowering and intimidating conditions of violence and oppression still do show a striving agency to deal with these circumstances (Hynes et al., 2016; Turan et al., 2016; Lloyd et al., 2009). Correspondingly, despite the constraints and vulnerabilities in their lives, women's pre-separation narratives in the current study did involve not only their experiences of powerlessness but also their constant efforts to change their circumstances and end the violence in their lives. Most women reported

that even as of the beginning of their relationships, they continuously sought help from others and tried to find resources and opportunities to increase their chance of escape. Still, as every effort resulted in further disappointment and discouragement, especially when their families refused to help, and when the institutional mechanisms failed to provide the assistance they demanded (negative and unhelpful interactions with the police and inaccessibility of shelter services), they seemed to repeatedly find themselves in a position of increasing powerlessness, isolation and hopelessness. Considering the economic insufficiencies in their lives as many of them lacked a stable/ sufficient income and/or professional skills/ qualifications to have better chances in the labor market, the absence of practical and social support was experienced as being more detrimental, severely limiting women's options outside of their marriages. In addition, linked with these pragmatic worries, having concerns about children's safety and well-being was also revealed as a fundamental barrier limiting women's control and autonomy in their decision-making processes. As previously demonstrated by several studies (Amanor-Boadu et al., 2012; Kelly, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010), despite their awareness of the adverse impact of ongoing violence in children's lives, women seemed to view such negative consequences as more manageable when compared to the possible hazardous outcomes of leaving (particularly further poverty, isolation, and the fear of losing custody of the children).

An important finding to discuss is that although women reported that they sought assistance from formal institutions (especially the police, but also shelter lines and hospitals), many of them seemed to view family support as more primary and necessary for their survival. One crucial reason would be related to the patriarchal honor

culture of the families. Previous research demonstrated that in the patriarchal cultural contexts where women's decision-making power and behavioral freedom are highly restricted, formal help-seeking is viewed as a socially and culturally inappropriate strategy as it means to expose private family problems to public scrutiny; and would result in women losing reputation and status within their close communities (Childress et al., 2017; Logie & Daniel, 2016; Schuler et al., 2008). Similarly, in the context of Turkey, according to the cultural codes, wherein men are accepted as social representatives of their families, any "inappropriate" behavior of their mothers, daughters, sisters, or wives becomes a shameful assault on their honor, ruining male authority, and risking the reputation of the family they represent (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). Women's behaviors, particularly their sexuality, are viewed as needing to be controlled by male members in the family, thereby, a woman living by herself without male control is considered not acceptable. In that sense, divorce, even as a response to the conditions of violence, is often viewed as an unacceptable act, bringing dishonor to the woman herself, her family, her husband and her husband's family (Childress et al., 2017). In the current study, while this was revealed as an underlying reason of why women's families were reluctant to support their daughters, it also seemed to explain why getting the consent of their families, being accepted back to living with the parents again became essential preconditions for women to guarantee their survival and well-being outside of marriage. Hence, encountering their families' discouraging and stigmatizing responses each time they attempted to seek assistance appeared to result in a sense of wrongdoing and often caused them to retreat from their efforts to escape violence.

Besides the importance of these cultural norms and values in shaping women's primary dependence on the families and their individual strategies of help-seeking, women's narratives also indicated other intertwined factors. First of all, women directly addressed the financial shortcomings in their lives as the main reason for their dependence on family support in fleeing violence. In this regard, not having a steady and sufficient income to afford both their daily living expenses and housing costs by themselves, and the absence of institutional/ affordable childcare support were reported as the most basic causes of why they needed the help and protection of their families. Relatedly, as addressed in the relevant literature (Horn et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Schuler et al., 2018), limited or no access to institutional sources of help (particularly for women who had lived in small towns/ villages), limited information about formal support mechanisms, and/or lack of trust in institutional support (questions about safety, security, and sustainability) were identified as additional intersecting barriers to help-seeking. Furthermore, as with their families, encountering negative institutional responses -mostly referring to women's interactions with the police- appeared in the narratives of the majority as one of the most discouraging experiences in their search for safety, escalating their doubts and disbeliefs about the possibility of leaving. These findings lend support to previous studies demonstrating how seeking formal assistance can be a highly arduous process for women, especially in the contexts where the individual power of a woman is limited due to financial, social, and cultural restrictions and where the structural and institutional resources are inadequate or inaccessible (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Ekal, 2011; Goodman et al., 2009).

An important theoretical implication of these results is to demonstrate the insufficiency of the psychological models in their examination of women's "failure" to terminate violent relationships as it is mainly based on the psychological concepts of trauma and helplessness. Although women undeniably suffer from the psychological impacts of violence, feminist scholars have underlined that as male partner violence occurs within a broader oppressive economic, cultural and institutional system, any attempt to explain women's experiences of disempowerment and vulnerability in the context of male partner violence by solely relying on the concepts of trauma has been argued as insufficient to reveal women's practical realities (Goodman et al., 2009; Skoloff & Dupont, 2005). Supporting this argument, most women in the current study positioned their experiences of powerlessness within the larger contextual and historical realities in their lives. Struggling within a disempowering cycle of cultural constraints, financial/social dependence, limited resources, and male partner violence, women generally defined themselves as lacking self-confidence, practical experiences, and skills that they perceived as essential to moving away from violence. In this sense, their accounts of the reasons to stay mostly involved explanations about how their constant efforts to protect themselves and to escape were contextually constrained, and how they were constantly left disempowered, both practically and emotionally, by the oppressive circumstances dominating their lives.

In sum, consistent with previous research, women's stay/leave decisions mostly indicated processes in which women evaluated the likelihood of their survival outside of their marriages; that is, whether they had enough resources to protect themselves and their children from the risks of leaving and maintain their lives independently. In the

circumstances of social structural barriers and scarce resources, due to the “trade-offs” (Thomas et al., 2015, p. 176) associated with leaving, the possibility of getting out and building a safe life for themselves and their children seemed to remain very unlikely in the minds of women. Thus, rather than reflecting a state of denial or normalization of violence, women’s decisions of staying, or returning to the partners were revealed as mostly connected with their awareness of the practical limitations. In the context of violence, where their constant struggle of having control over their lives repeatedly failed, women seemed to focus on daily survival by enduring violence and staying strong to be able to take care of their children.

4.1.1.2 How does leaving become possible?

Although women recounted times that their prevailing feelings of despair and isolation overpowered them, lending support to previous studies (Baly, 2010; Campbell et al., 1998; Davis, 2002; Hage, 2006; Kim & Gray, 2008), this state was not observed as completely eliminating women’s willful efforts to change their circumstances and to escape violence eventually. In a circular but progressive pattern, women in the first group were observed to take their final decision to leave by going through a series of transformative actions and processes. Consistent with the concept of turning points (Campbell et al., 1998; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), these experiences included long-term cumulative reciprocal changes in women’s meaning-making processes and their external circumstances. As their ongoing struggle to endure and survive in the context of multiple sources of oppression evolved into meaningful, tangible improvements in their daily lives, women seemed to view themselves as more empowered. Still, this did not indicate

that the constraining circumstances previously underlying women's powerlessness were eliminated entirely, or that women started to feel as fully capable of managing these difficulties. Rather, as shown in the literature (Kelly, 2009; Meyer, 2016; Thomas et al., 2015), along with an increased sense of resourcefulness, they seemed to cross a threshold where they felt that the risks of staying surpassed the anticipated hazardous outcomes of leaving.

Consistent with the experiences of many women in the current study, having employment has been demonstrated in previous studies as an outstanding factor facilitating women's processes of leaving (Beecham, 2014; Hayes & Franklin, 2017; Rothman, Hathaway, Stidsen, & de Vries, 2007). However, although much research has generally focused on economic empowerment as causally linked with women's decisions to leave (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Goodman et al., 2009), in the current study, as most women worked in unstable, low-wage jobs, only for a few of them employment corresponded to increased financial resources, and thus increased feeling of economic security. Instead, as also shown by Ülkumen (2011), they mostly emphasized the indirect, long-term positive impact of employment in their lives. First of all, even in the conditions of limited economic gains and adverse working conditions, being able to work and earning money became a critical aspect of their processes giving them a sense of privilege and autonomy. In a sense, working outside the home, regardless of the quality of the jobs they had, seemed to provide opportunities for them to experience their individuality and independence to a certain extent. Relatedly, women articulated that employment enabled them to establish relational connections with supportive others and to gain more social/ practical daily life skills (from learning how to withdraw money to

how to use public transportation effectively). Contradicting the disappointing, restrictive, and degrading experiences with their husbands and families, these positive experiences seemed to gradually transform their position of vulnerability and self-doubting to a position of confidence and assertiveness.

The critical positive impact of having relational resources on women's decision-making has been illustrated by much previous work (Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Brosi & Roling, 2010; Flasch et al., 2017; Hayes & Franklin, 2017). In the current study, as most women had lived in the isolated conditions of their close community circles, and as their families repeatedly denied providing support, they underscored the lack of consistent, supportive contacts with the significant others in their lives. Yet, nearly all women in the first pattern recalled significant transformative experiences with encouraging and supportive people outside of their family circles. While only a few of them defined ongoing long-term relationships (usually with neighbors and coworkers), most emphasized the importance of some instances of short-term encounters with others (an employer giving a valuable advice, a teacher from the school of their children informing them about possible alternatives that they can follow, or an acquaintance providing short-term help in some moments of crisis). Women identified these interactions as the significant benchmarks in their decision-making processes.

Besides the crucial role of the positive interactions with others outside the home, women described their relationships with the children as the primary emotional resource in their lives, strengthening their endurance and resistance. Although the relevant literature has generally documented that increasing realization of the negative impact of violence on children becomes a major triggering factor for women to eventually

terminate their relationships (Kelly, 2009; Thiara & Humphreys, 2014), there are no studies examining how the quality of mother-child relationships in the context of violence influences women's decision-making processes. In that sense, as articulated by Thiara and Humphreys (2014), the extensive research focus on the damaging effects of male partner violence on mother-child interaction often results in the underrepresentation of resilient and positive features of these relationships. In the current study, as a unique contribution to the relevant literature, despite the negative impact of violence on mother-child relationships, women seemed to protect their strong emotional connection with their children. This persistent positive quality of the mother-child relationships then became a significant psychological resource for women empowering them to cope with the limitations and challenges in their lives.

Another crucial process of change was identified as occurring in women's relationships with their families. As discussed in the previous section, both because of the cultural norms and values and as closely linked with practical daily life needs, women viewed the family presence in their lives as requisites for their survival and well-being. However, as they were repeatedly failed by their families each time they sought help, and also along with their increased sense of autonomy and resourcefulness based on their positive experiences outside their families, their sense of dependence seemed to turn into the feelings of disappointment, frustration, and anger, which then engendered a process of distancing themselves from their families. Through this process, women appeared to start feeling less reliant on their families' consent, assistance, and resources to survive, experiencing themselves as more empowered to make their own choices and behaving more assertive in their search for alternative resources.

A similar process of transition also happened in women's construction of their gender roles. Previous studies illustrated that while the endorsement of traditional gender norms discourages women in their efforts to escape, developing alternative gender role discourses based on equality and mutuality plays a crucial role that further reinforces women's move away from violence (Baly, 2010; Hage, 2006). Similarly, in the current study, it was revealed that women's basic expectations from marriage and their husbands had been shaped according to the prescribed gender roles that define men as authoritarian breadwinners and protectors of their families and women as self-sacrificing, submissive, nurturing, domestic partners. However, a variety of factors seemed to create major conflicts for women about these gender roles.

Although having employment by itself partially changed how women viewed themselves, this was not identified as the only factor that created women's dissatisfaction and defiance. Bolak's study (1997) with women providers in working-class households in Turkey showed that conflicts and dissatisfaction regarding family roles intensify in the cases where men's behaviors are perceived as "irresponsible" and thus where women feel that their sacrifices are not "being reciprocated" (p. 426).

Correspondingly, in this study, men's failure to fulfill their responsibility of providing and protecting, but beyond that, their deliberate acts that aimed to deprive women economically seemed to deconstruct the normative ideals of marriage in women's minds. In the context of economic exploitation and physical violence, distancing themselves from the traditional feminine ideals of dependence, subordination and self-sacrifice, women (particularly the ones who became the main providers of their family) experienced themselves as replacing their husbands' roles in the household, and became

more assertive and \ confrontative towards their husbands: “If you are not a good husband, I won’t be a good wife anymore” (Canan).

Lastly, Ekal (2011), based on her study on women’s shelters in Turkey, concluded that due to a variety of structural barriers, seeking assistance often requires women to be highly persistent, courageous, and assertive in their efforts. Confirming this conclusion, many women in this study underscored the challenges and constraints in their process of attaining institutional support. Some, for instance, after repeated disappointing experiences with the police, emphasized how they behaved so insistently to force the police to take proper legal measures and direct them to shelters in their last attempt to leave permanently. Other women recalled how they determinedly fought to find a shelter willing to accept their teenage sons as well. Some others highlighted their meticulous and persistent planning to go to a shelter miles away from their hometown. These examples, among others, indicated how it was difficult and demanding for women to obtain the help they needed, but also pointed out women’s resourcefulness and determination to struggle against these barriers.

In sum, this subsection involves a detailed discussion on the intersecting, mutually constitutive transformative experiences and processes that were revealed as reducing their sense of powerlessness and increasing their likelihood of escaping violence. However, whereas women described certain progressive transitions in their experiences from powerlessness and subjugation to increasing control and assertiveness, still, their narratives showed that concerns about possible negative consequences of leaving remained as the main sources of distress for women. In this sense, while most of them felt themselves as relatively more powerful, experienced and resourceful enough to

afford the risks of leaving, in the conditions of continuing constraints, rather than being regarded as an indicator of their absolute power or their utter belief in their capabilities, women addressed their choice of leaving as a courageous but risky act of resistance, simultaneously reflecting their position of vulnerability and agency.

4.1.2 The narratives of romantic love

Similar to the previous one, this section is divided into two for discussing the pre-separation processes of women in the second pattern. While the first subsection is about the processes that inhibited their escape, the second part involves their experience of change and leaving.

4.1.2.1 Why is leaving unlikely?

Different from the emphasis on external constraints and structural sources of powerlessness as emerged in the narratives of the first group of women, the second group of women, as they entered their relationships with expectations of love and romance, defined their processes of staying in and leaving as constructed by the intrapersonal and interpersonal cyclical dynamics of affection, emotional commitment, and violence. While discussing their decision-making processes, they focused on their “individual/ psychological” vulnerabilities and the traumatic impact of violence in their lives. Similar to the women in first pattern, throughout their relationships, they recounted that they used both active (leaving their partners occasionally, reporting violence to the police, seeking alternative sources of help such as calling a shelter line for help, fighting against and confronting their partners, asking for friends’ help) and

passive strategies (distracting themselves, showing compliance) to deal with violence. However, different from the women in the first pattern, these women identified their “failure” to escape violence as closely related to their “unhealthy” feeling of emotional dependence on their partners.

There are an extensive number of studies showing how the concepts of romantic love and relational commitment are built upon gender-stereotypical sociocultural values and expectations that highly prizes women’s self-sacrifices, devotedness, and submissiveness (e.g., Burgess- Proctor, 2012; Hage, 2006; Baly, 2010; Kearney, 2003; Lempert, 1996; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). In that sense, rather than adhering to the ideals of mutual respect, mutual care, and spousal equality, it has been illustrated that the culturally endorsed narratives of love are shaped by and legitimize male domination and patriarchal values in relationships. In terms of male partner violence, these normative love discourses, as internalized by women, were demonstrated to be significant in constituting women’s experiences and perceptions of violence, and relatedly, their actions in response to violence (Baly, 2010; Kearney, 2003). Studies generally illustrated that, when women encounter male partner violence, gendered norms of love (legitimized male control and female dependence/ subordination) become tools of meaning-making, by which women seek some reasonable explanations regarding the occurrence of violence (Towns & Adams, 2000). Correspondingly, in the current study, the narratives of women in the second pattern demonstrated how and in which ways these norms and values were embodied in their experiences of violence. Women described the beginning of their relationships as quite peaceful with profound feelings of intimacy and reciprocity. When they experienced

their partners' controlling, exploitative and/or physically violent behaviors for the first time, they revealed that along with the emerging sense of intense distress and disappointment, their early responses primarily included their efforts to find some plausible reasons for the change in their partners' behaviors. These efforts initially resulted in women blaming themselves and rationalizing men's violence by relying on specific cultural scripts; violence became the fault of women in fulfilling their role of nurturing, giving, and caring properly, and thus men were partially excused for their violent acts.

These women placed their powerful feelings of emotional commitment and the related expectations of being loved, cared for and respected by their partners at the center of their narratives. In this sense, particularly in the early stages of their relationships, they recalled that they tried to disregard their intense disappointment with their partners, to distract themselves from the suffering they constantly experienced and to ensure their partners' satisfaction. Women described these processes as linked with how they felt emotionally dependent on their partners, which was pointed out by women themselves as an "unhealthy" feeling of dependence, and they attributed their self-defined "inability" to move away from violence to their emotional "unreadiness" to abandon their expectations from and commitment to their partners. While two women (Harika & Esra) partly associated this state of unreadiness with their childhood histories of abuse and neglect, it also seemed to be related with the cultural ideals of womanhood and romantic love that primarily describe women as valuable and deserving only if they have enough power to keep their relationships together -most of the time to the extent of sacrificing personal well-being.

Previous research revealed that there are multiple, sometimes contradicting cultural discourses about women who are exposed to male violence in their romantic love relationships (Kearney, 2003; Towns & Adams, 2009; Wood, 2001). As discussed above, women are mostly expected to be loyal, submissive, and sacrificing partners prioritizing their relational commitment over their well-being. A parallel narrative is that violence mostly occurs as a result of women's failure to achieve these gender-appropriate roles. Thus, women are required to be patient and endure suffering, which is believed to be the only way to keep peace at home. However, inconsistent with these narratives, women also become targets of blame for not being able to resist and move away from violence. In a sense, their liability as 'victims' of violence begins to be questioned when they continue to stay in their relationships (Dunn, 2005; Pells et al., 2016; Towns & Adams, 2009; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999). The narratives of women in the second pattern correspondingly demonstrated how these conflicting discourses caused them to be caught in a double bind that impeded their decision-making processes. While they were struggling to maintain their commitment despite the suffering they experienced -which otherwise would refer to their individual failure/ blame to "achieve" the relationship, their narratives also revealed the feelings of guilt and self-blame overburdened them because they viewed themselves as lacking the "ability" and "courage" to leave.

Women also recounted how these internal dynamics were reinforced by the power and control tactics employed by their partners. Women's accounts mainly involved how their partners legitimized and normalized their behaviors of violence, by blaming women for triggering their anger and/or by rationalizing their controlling/

violent behaviors as caused by the love they felt for the women. Besides, women reported that there had always been a circular pattern of change between intimacy and violence, rather than an unceasing pattern. In line with the cycle of violence conceptualization by Walker (2001), it was recited that the “positive” times made it harder for them to take steps towards leaving because these intimate moments partially reinforced a sense of hopefulness that the violence would stop, and their relationships would work as they wished. However, along with this sense of hopefulness, they also emphasized that they increasingly suffered in this isolating, intimidating, and disempowering cyclical pattern of violence with a state of emotional instability and mental confusion.

As shown by these results, the psychological dimensions of violence became more visible in the narratives of these 4 women. However, this emphasis on internal and interpersonal dynamics does not refer to their being invulnerable to the external/ structural constraints, but it indicates their advantageous backgrounds and personal privileges that increase their chances to overcome barriers and create change in their lives. For instance, while it was a long and challenging process for women in the first pattern to access available help, for women in the second group, it was revealed as less complicated and much easier to access relevant information and to establish necessary contact with the right persons. Besides, having no significant concerns regarding their economic or housing conditions was revealed as another distinguishing factor in their narratives. Hence, it seems that in a condition where they felt that leaving was an affordable decision despite certain risks, not being able to take this step was described as an “individual failure”. As they perceived themselves as being primarily responsible for

not leaving the relationship, self-blame for their “inability” to leave became a predominant theme in their narratives. Thereby, this feeling of self-blame and their sense “unreadiness” to relinquish their emotional commitment were identified as the central conflicts in their stories that shaped their decision-making.

4.1.2.2 How does leaving become possible?

None of the processes described above refers to the women’s complete surrender to their partners. Throughout their narratives, despite the continuing emotional importance of the relationships, they described many active attempts to resolve the problem of violence in their lives, including confronting their partners, temporarily leaving them, and seeking formal and informal help. Although the feeling of “having failed” to stop violence at the end of each attempt created another cycle of hopelessness hindering further efforts, the accumulation of disappointments was stated as gradually evolving into an intrapersonal transformative process, which empowered them to take the final decision to leave.

Considering these transformative processes, each of them pointed out certain instances, mostly involving their partners’ violence, that created “sudden” changes in their perception. Their narratives demonstrated how their understanding of violence and their perception about their subordination changed over time, and how these transformations helped them to deconstruct the ideals of romantic commitment and to move away from the cycle of violence. In addition, supporting previous studies (Bell et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 1998; Hage, 2006; Kearney, 2003), experiencing the escalation of violence and the increasing coerciveness and brutality of their partners, women revealed that they started to perceive staying in the relationships as exceedingly costly in terms of

their physical and psychological well-being, which in turn seemed to pose a challenge to the previously held gendered perceptions of romantic love.

All 4 women reported that the emergence of a feeling of emotional detachment and the resulting decrease in their sense of dependence on the partners became a very critical turning point in their decision-making processes. Their narratives showed that this process of disengagement occurred through their increasing realization of the systematic nature of the violence and the extent to which they were being deprived and exploited by their partners. It still should be noted that this transformative realization does not indicate a binary shift from a complete lack of awareness to gaining realization. Instead, as emerged in their narratives, although they prioritized their emotional commitment and made an effort to maintain their relationships, this position did not totally exclude their awareness of the contradictions and wrongness of the situation they were involved in. However, once they were able to emotionally differentiate themselves from their partners, the ambiguities, and the violence itself, seemed to become much more visible and concrete in their minds. This position of clarity eventually seemed to evolve into a resolution of their doubts and ambivalences, which then eased their decision-making.

This process of emotional disengagement was also coupled with a simultaneous process of change in terms of how they constructed and viewed their roles in the relationships and what they expected from their partners. In this regard, women's narratives revealed a transformative process by which they started to question and reframe their position of subordination and dependence. Considering these changes, all women recalled several instances through which they painfully confronted the

inconsistencies and contradictions between their expectations of being loved and the hostile/ insulting attitudes of their partners. The accumulation of these confrontative moments, which also helped them to recognize how the repeated pattern between violence and intimacy was employed as a manipulation and control strategy by their partners, seemed to lead to a gradual shift in their focus from ensuring their partners' happiness and satisfaction towards self-care and self-compassion.

For two women in this pattern (Harika and Esra), the issues around children and the identity of motherhood were identified as determinative in these transformation processes they experienced. As discussed in the literature (Brosi & Rolling, 2010; Campbell et al., 1998; Keeling, Smith, & Fisher, 2016; Turan et al., 2016), women highlighted that increasingly observing the negative impact of violence on their children became a very crucial factor leading them to move away from violence. However, beyond witnessing how their children were affected by violence, witnessing, and describing themselves as “needy”, “weak” mothers, “incapable” of protecting and caring for their children seemed to be a very central process regarding how they redefined their emotional involvement with their partners. Staying in and prioritizing their partners became overwhelmingly costly when they considered themselves as “failing” mothers, in contrast to the ideals of good mothering in their minds.

In sum, in line with a large body of previous research (e.g., Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Baly, 2010; Giles & Curren, 2007; Farrell, 1996; Hage, 2006; Landenburger, 1989; Mills, 1985; Lempert, 1996), these four women described their experiences of leaving as occurring through intrapersonal transformation processes by which they questioned and redefined their priorities and their roles. A lessening feeling

of emotional dependence, increasing recognition of how their partners systemically used violence as a tool of control and exploitation, increasing self-prioritization, witnessing the negative impact of violence on children, and increasing realization of their “failures” as mothers were revealed as interrelated critical processes that encouraged them to take the decision to leave their partners.

4.2 Post-separation narratives

Rather than a smooth and gradual transition towards recovery and empowerment by which the vulnerabilities and suffering in their lives eventually and permanently ended, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bell, 2003; Bell et al., 2009; Diemer et al., 2017; Duffy, 2015; Flasch et al., 2017; Goodman et al., 2005; Safadi et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2015; Young, 2007), women’s post-separation narratives demonstrated that their experiences after leaving involved many emotional and external challenges that required them to continually fight to sustain their lives. While they put a great deal of effort to overcome these struggles on a daily basis, and often felt overburdened, it was revealed that a sense of healing also emerged as they concurrently started to enjoy their individuality and autonomy with a growing sense of empowerment and hopefulness. Thus, in contrast to the stage models of change, where suffering and healing are identified as mutually exclusive and a linear transition from trauma to recovery is assumed (Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Hou et al. 2012; Smith, 2003), in this current study, as addressed by several other studies (Crann & Barata, 2016; D’Amore et al., 2018; Flasch et al., 2017; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), the results suggested that the experiences

of distress and relief nearly always coexisted in women's post-separation processes, reciprocally constituting their individual pathways of recovery and empowerment.

The factors identified as underlying the differences in women's pre-separation processes seemed to have less impact on their experiences after leaving. First of all, while romantic love and emotional involvement were revealed as the significant determinants of women's decision-making in the second pattern, these were not found to be influential aspects of their experiences in their post-separation processes. Similar to the women in the first group, their processes after leaving mostly involved their efforts to establish and maintain their well-being under the challenging circumstances of post-separation violence and/or practical daily-life concerns. However, it should be noted that, for the women in the first group, particularly associated with the extent of the economic difficulties they had, sustaining their living still seemed to be much more laborious and complicated. In this sense, even though three women in the second group (Harika, Esra and Safiye) experienced various difficulties in their re-settlement processes due to a combination of factors including post-separation violence, economic losses, employment instability and child-related problems, they were also found to have more resources and support to deal with these struggles than the women in the first group. In relation to these, Zeynep's story diverged from the rest to a significant degree. As she had no children and no significant economic or housing concerns, her post-separation narrative was revealed as mostly based on her experiences of post-separation violence and her challenging disengagement process from the political organization she was involved with (due to the negativity of people's reactions she faced after leaving her partner).

4.2.1 Leaving is not an escape

Previous studies largely documented that being out of violent relationships is not a straightforward predictor of women's safety from violence, their well-being and empowerment (e.g., Bell et al., 2007; Crann & Barata, 2016; Flasch et al. 2017; Goodman et al. 2005; Thomas et al., 2015; Tutty et al., 2014). On the contrary, it has been shown that, beyond being a factor contributing to the women's recovery, leaving can even further increase their psychological distress and suffering. Consistently, separation was not found to be a benchmark for achieving safety and emotional well-being for any of the women in this study; instead, it was experienced as a challenging life transition where women had to "start over" with their lives by facing emotionally, socially and/or economically costly consequences of leaving. Despite the differences in their stories regarding this challenging process of re-settlement, for all women, this position of "starting over" was revealed to be accompanied by a strong sense of unfairness and indignation, where they felt that they gave up so many things and took so many risks while seeking safety from violence, but found very limited support from their communities or the institutions responsible of protecting them.

Although post-separation violence has been determined as a severe consequence of leaving -as it even encompasses the risk of femicide (Brennan, 2017; Davies et al., 2009; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003), it has been often left out in research on leaving. Thus, unsurprisingly, its possible negative/ hampering impact on women's processes of healing and empowerment remained underexamined. In the current study, as anticipated by most women before leaving, post-separation violence emerged as a hazardous outcome of moving away, and it was underscored as a central dimension of their

experiences after separation. Consistent with the research evidence provided by a limited number of studies existing in the literature (Bell et al., 2007; Goodman et al., 2009; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Hynes et al. 2016; Turan et al., 2016), women's narratives showed that continuing violence of their former husbands/ partners and/or the repeated threats of violence further compromised their emotional, economic, social and/or physical well-being and safety. It caused some to lose their jobs and made it harder for many to find a safe and secure place to live. Some women also reported that it had a damaging impact on both children and mother-child relationships. The harmful consequences of men's efforts to discredit women in their communities were also revealed by several of them. Hence, in relation to all these experiences, for many, it remains as the main source of distress and fear in their lives, even sometimes years after separation.

Based on their research on the UK context, Humphreys and Thiara (2003) concluded that the existing laws often remain insufficient to protect women and children from the ongoing violence of former partners, and mostly because of the problematic regulations regarding the father-child contact arrangements, it further endangers the emotional and physical safety of women and children. Although there is no existing research on post-separation violence in the context of Turkey, several studies have documented the institutional shortcomings in the country, which have been revealed as causing to additional difficulties for women in their safety-seeking efforts (Akyüz et al., 2014; Diner & Toktaş, 2013; Ekal, 2011; Kabasakal, 2018; Kaya et al., 2014; Sakallı et al. 2017; Uçan et al. 2016). Uniquely contributing to this literature, the findings of the current study illustrated that the negative emotional and practical impact of post-

separation violence on women's lives was substantially compounded by the inefficient and unfavorable responses of the state institutions. The challenging bureaucratic mechanisms that complicated women's access to support, the police's unwillingness to intervene and implement the laws, the consequent ineffectiveness of protection orders, and highly laborious, lengthy, and discriminatory legal processes of divorce were reported as major structural barriers increasing women's vulnerability to post-separation violence and enabling men to further control women's lives.

In relation to these structural constraints, the narratives of women who stayed in the shelters run by government agencies (six women) also showed how negative shelter experiences could be detrimental to women's processes of post-separation adjustment. Although limited in number, previous studies in Turkey have demonstrated that, besides the bureaucratic barriers in the processes of admission to the shelters, the shortage of sufficiently trained personnel and the common paternalistic/ biased attitudes of the practitioners often result in unfavourable and disappointing experiences for women (Akyüz et al., 2014; Ekal, 2011; Sakallı et al., 2017; Uçan et al. 2016). Congruently, the current research provides significant insights regarding how the various administrative mistakes in shelters -especially prohibiting/ restrictive rules and regulations-, and the misogynistic attitudes of the practitioners contribute to the further victimization of women. In contrast to the primary goal of women's shelters to provide necessary physical conditions and relational opportunities for women to make them feel safe, secure and supported, women recalled many instances where they felt highly insecure and unsafe due to the physical conditions of the places they stayed (mainly representing the experiences of women who stayed in the transition houses before settling in shelters)

and where they felt discredited and disrespected because of the negative treatment of the shelter practitioners. Moreover, restrictive shelter rules, mostly justified as required measures to protect the confidentiality of shelters and to ensure the safety of women, seemed to be merely experienced as a continuation of violence and oppression that they were striving to escape. Hence, far from meeting their needs and expectations and quite the opposite of being a resource of recovery and empowerment, as expressed by some, staying in shelters has become another intersecting challenging/ disempowering aspect of their post-separation experiences.

Interconnected with the experiences of post-separation violence and institutional failings, previous studies have also shown that financial concerns and housing instability are the most critical intersecting dimensions in women's post-separation experiences (e.g., Baker et al., 2003; Duffy, 2015; Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Goodman et al., 2009; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017; Tutty et al., 2014). Similarly, in the current study, all women but one (Zeynep), emphasized their constant worries regarding their economic conditions and consequent uncertainties in their settlement processes. Coupled with the difficulties of finding childcare support and the reality of post-separation violence, for the majority who have been living under the conditions of poverty, and particularly for the ones who have minor children, these concerns have become daily matters of physical and economic survival. Relatedly, except for six women (Harika, Esra, Safiye, Arzu, Nermin, Yeliz) who achieved a relative stability in their housing conditions in a shorter period of time (within the first six months after separation) -these women also the ones who had relatively less economic concerns either due to the material family support as in the cases of Harika, Esra and Safiye or because of their better and stable employment

conditions as for Arzu, Nermin and Yeliz-, many others experienced various adversities in relation to the absence of stable housing over a period of several years after separation (even longer than that for a few of them). Previous studies have reported that attaining housing stability -which is mostly associated with the extent of economic resources that women have and the existence of necessary measures in their lives to ensure their protection from violence of former partners- often becomes a benchmark in women's post-separation processes, facilitating their social and psychological adjustment (Diemer et al., 2017; Duffy, 2015; Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). Correspondingly, in this study, until women reached a point where they felt relatively safe and steady in their current conditions of finance and housing, their worries and distress seemed to remain constant in their lives.

At the center of all these struggles, child-related concerns and relational difficulties with children were stressed by many women as reflecting another significant dimension of their experiences. Firstly, not all, but the women who have minor children under the age of 6 at the time of separation and/or the ones whose former husbands strategically manipulated their children with the purpose of damaging the mother-child relationships, reported that their confidence in their mothering was quite damaged, and they recalled many moments where they felt that they were failing their children. As many of them were deprived of family/community support for childcare and lacked financial resources to afford professional daycare costs, and furthermore along with the multiple distressing and pressuring circumstances in their lives, single motherhood seemed to be experienced as emotionally overwhelming and exhausting, even more than it was before leaving. In addition, for a minority, losing contact with their children as a

consequence of men's efforts to alienate the children from the mothers was revealed as the most disappointing aspect of their experiences.

Although the constraining impact of cultural norms and values regarding marriage and divorce on women's decision-making processes have been widely studied in previous research (e.g., Brosi & Rolling, 2010; Childress et al., 2017; Liang et al. 2015; McCleary-Sills, Namy, Nyoni, Rweyemamu, Salvatory, & Steven., 2016), the issue of how and in which ways these restrictive norms continue to influence women's post-separation processes remains as an unexamined area in the related literature. As the protection of women's honor is viewed as tied to men's patriarchal control over their behaviors, particularly their sexuality, a divorced woman becomes "ownerless", who does not have a man in her life to control and protect her sexuality (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). In this study, as articulated in several narratives, this state seemed to create additional vulnerabilities for women while they were interacting with men in their social lives. In other words, being divorced was identified as a factor placing women in jeopardy of experiencing further exploitation and harassment by men in their social/ working environments. Particularly workplace abuse (sexual and/or nonsexual) was experienced as highly frustrating because of its direct negative impact on women's employment stability, causing women to flee from one job to another. Furthermore, being frequently targeted by men in their close living environments (a neighbor, the landowner, a shopkeeper in the street etc.) and encountering stigmatizing, disrespectful, and exploitative responses of men in their attempts to establish new intimate relationships were reported by women as restricting their social/ behavioral freedom and

resulting in further social exclusion and relational marginalization in their post-separation period.

These results, overall, pointed out that, depending on the stress-inducing factors in women's lives in the post-separation period, the level of women's psychological distress can become even higher after separation. While women in this study reported that they developed a moderate sense of self-efficacy before leaving, which was associated with a variety of overlapping intrapersonal, interpersonal and contextual transformative processes that they had undergone through their pre-separation period, the challenging and unsettling realities of the post-separation period seemed to overburden them emotionally, lessening their sense of confidence and control over their life conditions. Bolstered by the post-separation violence and the other external stressors in their lives, women underscored that the adverse psychological outcomes of the violence (depression, social withdrawal, anxiety, mental exhaustion, sleeping difficulties, suicidal thoughts) became more discernible after separation.

In that sense, at multiple times, mostly in the one-year interval after separation, many of them reported that the unfavorable emotional outcomes significantly constrained their functionality in their daily lives, which consequently further complicated their adjustment process. However, as a noteworthy finding of the current study, women still emphasized that, as they relentlessly strived to survive their daily battles, surrendering to these emotional difficulties was not affordable for them, as remarkably explained by one of them "I did everything to survive with my tiny body. I dealt with everything by myself . . . Depression for three days, and then I got to my feet again" (Feride). In that sense, particularly in the context of post-separation violence and

due to their constant childcare responsibilities, many women revealed that they either “postponed” their emotional struggles or “ignored” them. Corresponding to these results, intersectionality scholars also addressed that “being paralyzed” (Skoloff & Dupont, 2005, p. 54) by their powerlessness and victimization does not become an option for marginalized and oppressed women (Bograd, 1999; Goodman et al., 2009). However, rather than undermining or refuting women’s emotional suffering and vulnerabilities, this conceptual understanding contributes to the acknowledgement of women’s agency while identifying the conditions causing their powerlessness at the same time.

In sum, as shown by these findings, separation did not create a clear-cut line where the conditions of oppression and powerlessness disappeared or lessened. In contrast, the external threat of violence continued to be existent in their lives for a considerable amount of time after separation -even in some cases violence escalated after leaving-, and, many of them felt overburdened by the compounding difficulties of re-settlement. However, even though the constraints, vulnerabilities, doubts, and uncertainties were still there, their stories still preserved their enduring struggle to resist and survive these encumbering contextual and emotional realities.

4.2.2 Pathways of transformation, recovery, and empowerment

Lending support to previous research on women’s recovery and empowerment processes after male partner violence (e.g., Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Anderson et al., 2012; D’Amore et al., 2018; Farrell, 1996; Hou et al., 2012; Flasch et al., 2017; Smith, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999; 2001), women addressed that the unwavering and unyielding struggles in their lives, both before and after leaving, gradually and

eventually led up to a state of self which they observed and valued their endurance and accomplishments, defined themselves as empowered and felt more satisfied with their lives. Still, as underlined before, unlike the prevailing conceptual models in the literature that suggest a successive progression between distinct stages -where all the difficulties are left behind, and women achieve struggle-free, stable lives at the end (e.g., Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Hou et al., 2012; Smith, 2003), providing supportive evidence to a few recent studies (Crann & Barata, 2016; Flasch et al., 2017, D'Amore et al., 2018; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), women's processes were found to occur in a cyclical, nonlinear and dynamic pattern. Compounded by the complicated realities in their lives, conflicting elements that either contributed to their distress or engendered a sense of stability and empowerment always coexisted in women's pathways of seeking safety.

The failure of most previous studies in grasping the intricate and complex nature of women's experiences of change, recovery, and empowerment is linked with the non-inclusion of a multidimensional and contextualized approach in their examination. Based on a common conceptualization that leaving eventually brings safety and security to women's lives, these studies mostly theorized recovery and empowerment as an end-point psychological state in women's post-separation processes that would be reached after women leave behind violence and let go of their fears, doubts, and vulnerabilities (e.g., Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Czerny & Lassiter, 2016; Keeling et al., 2016; Smith, 2003). However, contrary to this understanding, the stories of women in this study showed that even though they talked about an increased sense of control and fulfillment along with the lessened feelings of fear and doubts, there is still no time for them that they felt themselves completely safe, secure, and stable free of fears, uncertainties,

constraints and hardships in their lives. While one starts to enjoy her life more and to feel better and confident about the future, an unfair decision of the court endangering the safety of woman and children can reverse this process. While one strives to ensure her financial stability, not being able to go to work because of her child's illness would result in her getting fired. While one finally feels that she is overcoming her fears, hearing that a woman in her neighborhood was killed by her ex-husband would escalate her fears again. Hence, in this study, women's stories of seeking safety mostly become their stories of struggle, survival, healing, and empowerment against all the odds. In this sense, survival and empowerment do not necessarily indicate the elimination of oppressive factors in their lives; rather, as nicely put by one of them who separated from her husband 5 years ago, it mostly signifies an indispensable obligation to continue despite all the oppressive realities that limit their chances of survival: "I never felt powerful. I still do not feel like that. I am trying to survive, for myself and my children. This is my everyday reality . . . I just do not see any other option". (Melek). To emphasize once more, under the encumbering conditions of socio-structural marginalization where powerlessness was not "affordable", resistance and empowerment become a must more than a choice (Skoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Another reason for over-psychologization of women's post-separation recovery and empowerment processes may also be partly related to the sample choices of the previous studies. That is, much of the prior research lack socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, regional or cultural heterogeneity in their samples, which appeared to result in an overrepresentation of mostly White, educated, urban women (e.g., Farrell, 1996; Smith, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999). This does not suggest that privileged women are

entirely invulnerable to the socio-structural injustices and inequalities, but obviously their social status brings many financial, educational and social advantages to their lives that significantly enhance their opportunities and chances to set firm boundaries and take control of their lives by leaving behind past experiences of violence and vulnerabilities in their sense of self (Fine, 1992; Goodman et al., 2009). Thus, this may be a reason why the psychological/ emotional dimensions of women's experiences have emerged much more dominantly in these studies than the contextual aspects of their experiences. To compare, previous research with marginalized and vulnerable populations (etc., immigrants, poor women, or racial/ ethnic minorities) illustrated that the women from these groups, mostly due to their social, educational and/or financial disadvantages, encountered substantial constraints and difficulties after separation which curtailed their efforts to achieve a basic sense of safety, stability, and well-being in their lives (e.g., Burgess & Campbell, 2016; Duffy, 2015; Hynes et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2015; Tutty et al., 2014; Vil et al., 2017).

These arguments suggest that such concepts of suffering, vulnerability, recovery, or empowerment may reflect diverse meanings for diverse populations. The divergences revealed in Zeynep's narrative provide supportive evidence for these claims. Firstly, she did not address any concerns regarding her financial and housing conditions and did not have any children. In addition, she did not have to be involved in any legal processes after separation as she was not married to her ex-partner, and her experiences of post-separation violence mainly included her ex-partner's efforts to undermine her credibility in the political organization where they worked, rather than being a threat for her physical safety as in the cases of other women. Linked with these differences, in her

story, leaving did not appear as a worrisome matter of survival and self-preservation; instead, her post-separation process primarily involved her efforts to overcome the negative emotional and psychological consequences of violence in her life, and her struggle for individuation and differentiation first from her partner and then her community. In a sense, it seems that while she has more power and control of drawing a clear line between her current life and her past, and reclaiming her identity, this presumably becomes a much more complicated and difficult task for others.

Another related finding noteworthy to discuss is that, in contrast to Zeynep, the post-separation narratives of the other three women in the second pattern (Harika, Esra and Safiye), who also came from more advantageous backgrounds, were revealed to have more commonalities with the rest of the narratives than the differences. Although these women still were not at a point of worrying about the money for daily grocery shopping unlike many others, it seems that mostly due to the increased safety risks and the growing financial pressures in their lives, similar to the first group of women, their post-separation narratives largely reflected their daily struggles to survive. In addition, more than before separation, they suffered from institutional failings and encountered the limitations of their privileges, as remarkably elaborated by Harika after 4 years of child-custody battle: “I am struggling like hell, although I have so many advantages . . . How would a woman without no education no money no experience handle all these?”. Hence, consistent with feminist approaches, these results significantly demonstrate how power is continuously mediated by the socio-structural and psychological complexities in women’s lives (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015).

Within the constant, dynamic, and nonlinear processes, it has been revealed that all women in this study put a strong emphasis on their growing experiences of healing and empowerment as much as they emphasized the disempowering circumstances in their lives and their unceasing distress. In this respect, enhanced relational/social connections and achievement of a sense of independence and autonomy were identified as the two fundamental interconnected processes that contribute to the women's efforts to obtain their safety and well-being. These essential processes, beyond their underlying constant struggle for achieving physical safety and improving their financial resources, jointly helped women to heal their emotional wounds and re-establish their sense of self.

Underrepresented in the prior literature on women's post-separation empowerment and recovery processes, the achievement of economic independence was found as a core dimension contributing to the women's emerging sense of autonomy and freedom. As discussed earlier, while much of the previous studies have typically focused on intrapersonal processes of change (e.g., Allen & Wozniak, 2010; Farrell, 1996; Smith, 2003), the possible links between women's economic conditions and post-separation well-being often remained unexamined. In this study, especially for the majority of women who came from disadvantageous and restrictive social backgrounds, having an increased sense of financial control over their livelihoods and observing themselves as capable of directing their own lives without being economically dependent on others were identified as primarily engendering a growing sense of social/relational power and enhanced feelings of self-respect and confidence. Although it is not possible to talk about a complete status of economic security and stability as many are paid less than, or around, the minimum wage (except Arzu), work in unstable/ unregistered jobs without

the social security benefits (except Arzu, Nermin and Yeliz), and have no financial and/or housing support from their families (except Harika, Safiye, Esra and Pervin), every one of them still emphasized their increased feeling of resourcefulness to ensure their living.

Seeing themselves as financially independent women capable of continuing their lives and taking care of their children without depending on others was reflected as producing a robust sense of moral righteousness free from shamefulness, self-doubts, or blame. This encouraged women to assert and prioritize themselves more, particularly in their relationships with the families but even sometimes with the children. In a sense, they seemed to view their financial independence as an authorizing warrant for their rights and freedom, a warrant giving them the power to resist against the control of others and set necessary boundaries. Especially when they considered that they endured and survived many hardships and constraints by their individual efforts with a very restricted or no help from others, they felt very rightful in their position of independence and autonomy, proudly owned their accomplishments, and strongly emphasized that they owe no debt to anyone.

Along with the sense of increased autonomy, in nearly all the narratives, positive interpersonal processes were underlined as another central determinant of enhancing women's post-separation well-being and adjustment. While they started to set more firm boundaries towards controlling and exploitative others (for many of them towards families, but it also included friends, colleagues, employers or, only in a few cases, children), the presence of supportive relationships, through which women felt valued, respected and cared, seemed to have a very counteracting positive impact on their

processes of building a sense of individuality. A number of women shared their stories of how empowering relational experiences in the shelter context (a feminist-run nongovernmental shelter in these cases), particularly in terms of their interactions with the social service practitioners but also with the other women staying in the shelter, became essential in their processes of healing. Beyond getting social, legal or material support which helped them to solve the practical problems in their daily lives, women fundamentally emphasized the non-coercive, non-exploitative, solidarity-based nature of these relationships that enabled them to experience their freedom independent of others' control and to reassess themselves from a different, more empowering perspective.

In addition, even though it has typically remained unexplored in the previous literature except for one exception (Flasch et al., 2017), in this study, women's involvement in new intimate relationships after leaving was identified as a significant dimension in several narratives. While for most women being in a new relationship continued to be unimaginable even long time after separation because it was mostly considered as a potential threat to their independence and safety, and for some it resulted in further disappointment, frustration, and distrust (Harika, Canan, and Yeliz), others described their romantic relationships as a major source joy and satisfaction in their lives (Melek, Aysel, Reyhan, Arzu, and Feride). It is especially noteworthy to highlight the newly emerged role of romantic love in these women's lives as it was absent in their marriages. In this sense, through these positive and non-abusive relationships, they seemed to experience reciprocal love and intimacy for the first time. In the midst of the daily struggles, women particularly underlined that the presence of their partners has become a constant positive reminder of the possibility of a life without suffering and

distress, increasing their hopes for the future and strengthening their sense of enjoyment and peacefulness.

The presence of children, another relatively less examined aspect of women's post-separation experiences in previous literature, was underlined as a core factor in this study for women's enduring power and their unceasing struggle to survive. On the one hand, both in their pre- and post-separation processes, having children has been construed as a constant reason for women's distress and emotional exhaustion. Still, at the same time, women overwhelmingly addressed their children as the positive relational sources of resilience and contentment. In this respect, more than the mere existence of their children in their lives and the "obligatory" responsibilities of motherhood, being appreciated and supported by their children, having increasingly rewarding relationships with them, and a growing sense of reciprocity and trust in their mother-child interactions were defined as the central components of their healing and empowerment processes. Even though much of the previous research presumed and focused on "problems" in mother-child relationships based on a deficiency model of mothering (see Lapierre, 2008, for a review), the results in this study suggested the resilience of these relationships. This finding was also revealed consistent with several recent studies providing evidence for a strength-based positive framework of mothering in the context of violence (e.g., Radford & Hester, 2006; Mohr, Fantuzzo, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001; Thiara & Humphreys, 2014).

Overall, these results significantly demonstrated that despite the ongoing sources of distress and continuing hardships in their lives, women can still achieve a sense of healing and empowerment, first as an outcome of their efforts to maintain their

independence and autonomy (mainly refers to increased financial control in the particular context of this study) and through the positive relational connections they have built during their pre- and post-separation processes. This state, however, does not reflect an end-point in their stories that ensures their safety and well-being, resolving once for all the burdening problems in their lives. Instead, it represents their enduring efforts and will to re-establish a peaceful, self-governing life for themselves against the challenging circumstances.

4.3 Limitations

While this study provides significant research findings in terms of women's stories of escaping male partner violence and their processes of healing and empowerment, it also includes some limitations. One of these limitations is the retrospective design of the study. Particularly regarding their recall of the experiences before leaving, which encompasses the earlier responses and reactions to violence and their stay/leave decision-making processes, women's narrative accounts would consist of some biases based on recollection errors. However, the conduction of second interviews seemed to become a useful methodological choice in terms of reducing recall bias, as their second interviews also enabled them to correct something they misremembered in their first interviews and/or add some more details that they omitted before.

Another important limitation is that some of the differences between participants that would have possible impacts on their processes of leaving and recovery have remained underexamined; particularly the variances in term of the characteristics of the violence they were exposed to (forms, intensity, and frequency), the duration of

exposure to violence prior to leaving, and the time elapsed after separation. However, this does not refer to that these factors were entirely overlooked during the analysis; rather, as the commonalities between participants' processes regarding these distinctive characteristics were identified as more prominent than the differences in the initial phases of the analysis period, further in-depth exploration was not proceeded. An additional limitation is that although the divergent processes between the first and second groups of women have been widely documented and discussed, still, due to the imbalance in sample sizes between the two groups (4 to 12), the stories of women in the second pattern were represented less abundantly than the stories of the majority. While theoretical sampling would have been a solution to this limitation, its application was not considered as a practically achievable goal in the context of this research.

Lastly, despite the challenging barriers and although not always successful, all women in this study reported that they sought informal and/or formal/ institutional help at various times both before and after separation. However, according to the nation-wide survey studies on violence against women in Turkey, only a small percentage of women (11%) sought institutional assistance, and nearly half of them did not disclose violence to anybody before the interviews conducted for the study (Akadlı-Ergöçmen et al., 2013; Arat & Altınay, 2008). Thus, it should be noted that the results in this study may only represent the experiences of a small number of women in Turkey who sought support and accessed the resources for their survival.

4.4 Implications for theory and practice

The present research has several noteworthy practical implications in supporting women in their efforts to build and sustain their lives free from violence. Consistent with the feminist approaches that persistently emphasize the critical importance of societal and structural level interventions to combat male partner violence and to ensure women's safety and well-being, the results significantly demonstrated the socio-structural determinants of women's experiences of leaving and recovery. Relatedly, in line with feminist intersectionality theory, the results indicated how women's experiences of coping, help-seeking, recovery, and empowerment differed depending on their conditions of privilege and disadvantage. Thus, the following implications and suggestions aim to contribute to the development of feminist-informed multidimensional, non-reductionist, and community-based intervention and empowerment strategies.

Grounded on psychology research on leaving and recovery, current intervention strategies often target individual women by typically focusing on intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Cole, 2009; Fine, 1992; Goodman & Smyth, 2011; Profitt, 1996). These interventions mainly aim to strengthen women's awareness and knowledge on gender-based violence, to initiate transformations in women's perception of themselves, and to increase their confidence and motivation for moving away from violence. In this sense, escaping violence and achieving to sustain one's life without relapsing back are fundamentally defined and conceptualized in terms of women's emotional and cognitive transition from a self-state of lacking recognition, motivation, and control to developing hopefulness, determination, and courage.

However, congruent with the previous studies that have utilized a multidimensional sociological perspective (e.g., Childress, 2013; Hamby, 2013; Mannell et al., 2016; Schuler et al., 2008; Zakar et al., 2012), the results of the present study showed that women's stay/leave decision-making processes and their experiences of keeping themselves away from violence after separation, particularly for economically and socially marginalized women, occurred in a much more complicated way than described above. First of all, it was demonstrated that most women in this study who came from disadvantageous settings did not construct their pre- and post-separation narratives based on their psychological challenges and emotional needs; instead, they primarily addressed the tangible and practical challenges in their lives that inhibited their processes of leaving and recovery. In this sense, beyond being associated with their subjective sense of determination, motivation, or courage, the decision of staying-or-leaving was articulated as mostly linked with women's assessment of themselves in terms of several pragmatic issues, particularly the degree of financial resources they had, the level of social/ family support in their lives, and child-related concerns.

These findings indicated the necessity of an integrated, contextually situated approach while working with individual women to support them in their processes both before and after leaving. At the most essential level, it is important for practitioners to recognize and acknowledge the multiple institutional, economic, and social barriers in women's lives that curtail their processes of moving away from violence, and to establish a collaborative and detailed intervention support plan to assist them in finding ways to overcome these barriers. However, when practical intervention work with women overwhelmingly relies on trauma-informed psychological approaches, these

constraints and barriers mostly become invisible in the eyes of practitioners (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Profitt, 1996). When women continue to stay in or go back to violence, they are typically viewed as failing to ‘take control’ of their lives (Fine, 1992), and this ‘failure’ is regarded as a sign of their psychological state of ‘denial’, ‘passivity’, ‘learned helplessness’ or ‘psychological entrapment’. Yet, the present study showed that women’s decision-making processes often included their cautious and realistic consideration of the pros and cons of their actions, both for themselves and their children. Thus, rather than directly starting from the assumption that women who continue to stay in violent relationships have ‘distorted’ perceptions of themselves and their circumstances, women’s reasoning behind their actions and choices and their insights about the risks and the available options in their lives should be carefully understood and assessed by the practitioners without pathologizing their responses and reactions. This unbiased collaborative work can be an essential supportive resource for women in their search for safety and well-being.

Congruent with these suggestions, Baines (1997), based on her fieldwork in a public hospital with an ethnically and racially mixed group of women, concluded that despite the extensive focus on psychotherapeutic work in the intervention policies, for poor, marginalized women, tangible material support became much more indispensable, beneficial, and functional. In the context of the present study, this research observation is particularly useful to understand women’s experiences of recovery and empowerment after leaving. Rather than primarily pointing out a mental and spiritual process of healing, women’s post-separation narratives mostly revealed their daily life struggles to ensure the physical and financial safety of their children and themselves. In this sense,

for instance, some women who got short-term psychotherapy support during their shelter stay expressed that the therapeutic work became counterproductive. These women viewed that talking about their negative past experiences and focusing on their suffering, depression, or anger affected them adversely and thus interfered their daily efforts to survive. In parallel, many women emphasized their tendency to suppress their negative emotional and psychological reactions as these were considered as distractions in their everyday struggles to achieve safety and stability in their lives.

These findings, rather than indicating the redundancy and futility of psychological support in women's processes of leaving and recovery, confirm women's need for more active, immediate, and practical guidance in their processes of achieving their emotional well-being during the early years after separation. In this regard, women typically highlighted the crucial role of the positive experiences with their social service providers as they provided necessary, daily-life guidance for women and as they felt respected, cared, and encouraged in these relationships. Getting advice on how to behave in a job interview, how to manage a crisis with children, how to apply for financial welfare assistance, how to interact with the police, how to proceed in legal issues, or simply hearing reassuring responses were recounted as highly motivating and functional in their processes of building their lives after separation. Overall, even though psychotherapeutic models that focus on working through clients' traumatic past histories and their emotional struggles would be effective in the conditions where women achieve more secure and sustainable livelihoods, the results of the current study suggested that women who have social and economic disadvantages and continue to struggle under challenging circumstances to ensure stability in their lives after separation, would better

benefit from non-pathologizing, strength-based and client-oriented therapeutic approaches that primarily aim to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and capacities for them to manage the hardships in their daily lives in more efficient ways.

Another significant implication of the results is the crucial need for community-level intervention approaches beyond individual-based models. The findings demonstrated the adverse impacts of inadequate community and institutional responses on women's efforts to leave violence and to have control of their lives. First of all, although several previous studies have partially documented the role of family support on women's achievement of non-violence (e.g., Goodman & Smyth, 2011; Hayes & Franklin, 2017; Mannell et al., 2016; Vil et al., 2017), the present study is the first to reveal the centrality of family responses in shaping women's processes of leaving. As mainly related to their social, financial, and material needs, most women felt dependent on the family support to leave their partners and repeatedly underlined how the reluctant, negligent, and discouraging attitudes of the families formed major obstacles inhibiting their attempts to move beyond violence. Thus, these results indicate that, particularly in the traditional family contexts where intrafamily relationships are constructed on a strong material and emotional interdependence between family members and where women's personal freedom is highly restricted under the patriarchal values, the prevention and intervention models targeting family-level change and prompting adequate family responses and family engagement would be so much effective in helping women to overcome the emotional, social, and economic barriers hindering their pathways of leaving and recovery. One way is to implement psychosocial, educational programs, or public campaigns on a broader level to increase knowledge and awareness

of families in terms of gender-based violence and gender inequalities. Additionally, while working with individual women, families would also be considered as possible targets of intervention by practitioners to enhance family support in women's lives.

Women's stories also illustrated that the support and guidance provided by people around them became influential in their processes of transformation, recovery, and empowerment. Hearing a supportive comment or an advice from an employer or colleague, making an escape plan with a neighbor, learning a useful information about their rights from a teacher in her child's school, or being guided by a friend to find a job; women emphasized these moments in their stories as transformative benchmarks that lessened their sense of isolation and helplessness. Particularly for women who were living in small rural towns or traditional isolated community neighborhoods where their access to information and their behavioral freedom were largely restricted, and where the available and accessible institutional support was totally absent or very limited, these positive relational interactions were found to be crucially influential in their pathways of leaving. These results addressed the possible beneficial outcomes of systemic local community intervention strategies in women's lives, such as implementing awareness-raising programs in neighborhood schools with teachers and families, targeting community leaders or elders in small towns to change common conceptions of violence against women, or developing local neighborhood campaigns to combat violence and support women at risk. In other words, the establishment of non-victim-blaming and supportive community engagement would significantly contribute to women's efforts to escape violence and to ensure their physical, financial, social, and emotional well-being.

Problematic institutional responses and limitedness of adequate and accessible services in aiding women to leave violence and to enhance their well-being were also identified as major factors in determining women's sense of powerlessness and escalating their vulnerabilities to violence both prior to and after separation. The narratives revealed that women encountered many disempowering and discouraging barriers in the justice system that often intensified their distress and frustration and further curtailed their process of recovery during the post-separation period. Consistent with the previous research in Turkey (Kabasakal, 2018; Kaya et al., 2014; KSGM, 2015), negative police attitudes, long and highly bureaucratic divorce proceedings, gender-discriminatory policies and practices in the legal system, problematic child contact arrangements or ineffectiveness of protection and restraining orders were recounted by women as major examples that created additional stresses and difficulties in their lives and resulted in a profound sense of distrust to the state institutions. In this regard, these experiences addressed the central requirement of public intervention policies to ensure the proper implementation of the current laws and regulations, and to improve institutional responses towards women's needs and demands further. Additionally, better equipped and nonbiased practitioners (police, social service providers, lawyers, judges, psychologists etc.) at assisting women to navigate in the legal system would also be considered as a prerequisite of effective implementation of the institutional intervention strategies, which would significantly contribute to the women's well-being and empowerment by easing their access to proper information, resources, and support.

The quality of women's experiences in shelters was also revealed as an essential factor in their post-separation psychosocial adjustment and recovery processes.

Women's shelters, beyond providing physical location for women to guarantee their safety from violence, aim to function as relationally safe, empowering spaces that they can experience their agency and autonomy freely, strengthen their resources and skills to build their lives independently, and start to challenge the existing violent, restrictive and exploitative relationships in their lives (Elizabeth, 2003; Humphreys, 2003; Wright, Kiguwa and Potter, 2007). Thus, while striving to escape violence and ensure their safety and well-being, women's shelters constitute opportunities for women to increase their control over their own lives and to establish egalitarian and non-violent relationships. However, Ekal (2011) argued that as the vast majority of shelters in Turkey run by the central government or local municipalities, rather than being managed by feminist principles of solidarity and equality, they "stand as bureaucratic institutions" (p. 10) where the prevailing gender norms are reproduced. Supporting these arguments, in the present study, the narratives of women who stayed in the governmental shelters provided examples of restrictive and oppressive shelter policies and practices, which were recounted as adversely affecting their individual efforts to strengthen their confidence, control, and autonomy. On the contrary, women who stayed in a shelter run by a non-governmental feminist organization highlighted their experiences that they enjoyed their individuality and freedom, they felt safe and supported, and they gradually started to discover alternative models of non-hierarchical, non-abusive and solidarity-based relationships. These positive empowering experiences were also revealed to help women in managing their daily lives and dealing with the challenging circumstances

they encountered every day. Hence, as a significant implication, these results highlighted the need for a substantial change in the policies and practices in the state shelters towards non-bureaucratic, non-oppressive, and non-patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, as the economic dependence and poverty, along with patriarchal values and social structural limitations, were determined as the main critical factors in women's stories that hindered their attempts to escape and move beyond violence, the need for widespread state-level measures and organizational efforts to strengthen women's economic well-being also emerged as a crucial suggestion of the current study. Even though achieving financial control and stability is not the only indicator of women's empowerment and does not ensure their escape from violence, the results significantly showed that prior to leaving but especially after they left, having stability in their employment conditions, and improving their economic well-being became the primary goals in women's lives. Additionally, gradually gaining a sense of financial independence and autonomy, regardless of the employment conditions, was defined to be critical for women that they felt more confident, assertive, free, and emotionally safe in their positions. Thus, these findings suggested that providing systemic, accessible, and sustainable welfare assistance to women, and implementing economic empowerment programs to improve the employment opportunities in their lives and to increase their sense of financial power and safety would be long-term effective intervention strategies to ease women's separation and recovery processes.

In line with feminist approaches, these emerging suggestions mainly accentuate the importance of state and community-level prevention and intervention programs and services to combat violence effectively and to prevent women's suffering. Several cross-

cultural studies, for instance, showed that the countries, like Turkey, with the highest prevalence numbers of male partner violence, shared some characteristics, including non-existent social policies and laws against gender-based violence or unsuccessful implementation of existent legislative programs; ineffective and inaccessible service provision; a lack of widespread community and advocacy responses against men's violence; or the promotion of patriarchal political ideologies and sociocultural norms by the state itself reinforcing and justifying gender-based oppression at the institutional and societal levels (Bott, Morrison, & Ellsberg, 2005; Devries et al., 2013). Thus, although women in this study achieved to escape violence, to obtain a sense of control over their lives, and to empower themselves by increasing their resources and skills, their stories still largely pointed out the substantial hardships in their processes, mainly shaped by the contextual realities of the country. In this regard, at a broader level, endorsing reformative political programs that explicitly challenge historically rooted patriarchal social norms and cultural practices justifying and normalizing gender-discrimination and violence against women, having effective planning and implementation of social policies specifically targeting gender inequalities and gender-based violence, enacting non-discriminatory legislation and effectively implementing law enforcement strategies penalizing male violence against women and providing protection and support to women, and having an established state welfare system enabling effective and accessible service provision would transform women's lives towards safety, well-being, and empowerment.

4.5 Conclusion

The present research intended to provide a contextually situated analysis of women's leaving and post-separation processes in the context of male partner violence. Rather than utilizing a trauma-informed mental health approach with a predominant focus on women's intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences in violent relationships, the narratives were examined and discussed through feminist intersectional, multidimensional lenses, which enabled a better reflection of women's complicated realities. The in-depth systematic exploration of women's stories significantly demonstrated the sociocultural and structural embeddedness of women's individual and relational histories of being exposed to and escaping male partner violence. In the context of Turkey, where the patriarchal norms largely permeate social, cultural practices, political ideologies, and institutional state structures, women encountered many barriers impeding their safety and well-being both before and after separation. In addition, reflecting the educational and class-based differences among women in Turkey and consistent with feminist intersectionality framework, the divergences between women's experiences in terms of their stay/leave decision-making and their post-separation processes illustrated how these contextual impediments constructed the stories of women living in economically and socially disadvantageous settings.

As with challenging barriers, women's narratives also included their outstanding and stable efforts to escape violence, to achieve physical and emotional safety, and to feel healed and empowered. For many women, these efforts firstly and primarily aimed physical and economic survival in the disempowering conditions of risks and threats. Even though the lines between being safe and unsafe, suffering and contentment,

vulnerability and empowerment continued to be fluid for most of them, going through the constant, coexisting, and nonlinear transformation processes both prior to and after separation, and as they devoted much effort to increase their social, relational, and economic power, women's continuing state of resistance and their struggle for bare survival simultaneously yielded experiences of autonomy, achievement, empowerment, and healing.

Overall, this study significantly showed the importance and necessity to look beyond the predominant psychology-based individualistic explanations to understand the complexity of women's decision-making processes in violent relationships and to develop effective supportive intervention strategies to ease women's transformation towards empowerment and emotional well-being. As suggested by feminist approaches, clinical and/or social practice with women who struggle to escape violence or who try to sustain their lives after leaving should involve the consideration of the diverse dynamics of sociocultural and structural context that women's experiences of violence and leaving are shaped in. The prevailing emphasis on community- and family-based barriers and institutional failures in women's narratives also pointed out the need for broader intervention models beyond individual strategies to support women. In this sense, even though women's stories in this study are promising and inspiring stories of achieving safety, well-being, and empowerment against all the odds, it should still be considered that escaping violence does not become possible for a vast majority of women in Turkey and many have lost their lives while trying to break free from violence. Therefore, rather than solely focusing on individual voices of resilience and power, to better assist women, both violence against women scholars and practitioners should develop a better

understanding of how contextual constraints and oppressive structures limit the effectiveness and functionality of individual power.

APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW GUIDLINE

- First interview
- 1. Yaşadığınız olayların sonucunda bugün buradasınız. Bana biraz kendinizden bahseder misiniz? (Burada söz önce kadına bırakılacak; gerekirse aşağıdaki sorular sorulabilir) (*You are here as a result of your experiences. Can you tell me about yourself? / Ask probe questions as in the following only if necessary.*)
 - a. Şu anda hayatınız nasıl geçiyor? (Sosyal hayatı, çalışma hayatı, aile hayatı, çocuklarla ilişkiler) (*Can you tell me about your current life? - Social life, current family life, relationships with children*)
 - b. Peki sizi bugün siz yapan şeyler, geçmişiniz, çocukluğunuz... Belki biraz bunlardan bahsedebiliriz? (*Can you tell me about your history? I mean your past family life, your childhood?*)
- 2. Şiddete maruz kaldığınız evliliğinizden/ ilişkinizden bahsedelim isterim. Bu ilişkiye dair deneyimlerinize ilgili bazı sorular sormak isterim size. (*I would like to ask you about your marriage, your relationship in which you experienced violence of your partner.*)
 - a. Bu ilişkinin başladığı zamanlara şöyle bir geri dönerseniz, o zamanlara dair neler anlattırınız? Neler hissettiğinizi, düşündüğünüzü merak ediyorum. (*If you go back to the times that this relationship had begun, what would you like to tell me about those times? What were the things you felt or thought?*)
 - b. İlişkinize dair hislerinizde düşüncelerinizde zamanla nasıl değişimler oldu? (*How did your feelings or thoughts about your relationship evolve within time and in what ways?*)
 - c. Bu ilişki içinde maruz bırakıldığınız şiddetten bahsedebilir misiniz? (Eğer önceki iki soruda henüz bahsetmeye başlamamışsa) (Burada söz kadına bırakılacak; gerekirse aşağıdaki sorular ayrıca sorulacak) (*Can you tell me about the violence you experienced in this relationship? / Ask this question only if the participant does not start to talk about violence while they are answering the previous questions. / Ask the following probe questions only if necessary.*)
 - i. Gördüğünüz şiddet karşısında siz ne hisseder ne düşünürdünüz? Nasıl tepkiler verirdiniz? (*Can you tell me about your feelings, thoughts, and reactions to violence you experienced?*)

- ii. İlişki boyunca nasıl baş ettiniz bu şiddetle? Baş etmek için ne tür yollar denediniz? (*How did you cope with it during your relationship? What kind of ways did you try to deal with it?*)
 - iii. (Çocuğu/çocukları varsa) Çocuğunuz/çocuklarınız nasıl etkilendiler bu yaşananlardan? (*How do you think your children were affected by these experiences of violence?*)
 3. Şu anda şiddet ortamından uzaklaşmaya çalışıyorsunuz. Bu süreçte yaşadıklarınızı, düşüncelerinizi, neler hissettiğinizi konuşmak isterim. (Burada söz önce kadına bırakılacak; gerekirse aşağıdaki sorular sorulacak) (*You are trying to move away from violence. I would like to talk about your experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding this process of escape. / Ask the following probe questions only if necessary.*)
 - a. Bu süreçte hem hayatınızda hem hislerinizde/ düşüncelerinizde nasıl değişiklikler oldu/ oluyor? (*How, and in which ways, are your feelings and thoughts, as well as your life as a whole, change, evolve in this process?*)
 - b. Bütün bu değişimler sırasında, bu süreçte çevrenizden (aileniz ya da arkadaşlarınız) nasıl tepkiler gördünüz/ görüyorsunuz? (*How, and in which ways, did people from your family and/or social environment respond to these changes in your life? How are they reacting now?*)
- Second interview
1. İlk görüşmemizden bu yana nasılsınız? (*How have you been since our last meeting?*)
 - a. Diğer soruya geçmeden önce araştırmacı tarafından ilk görüşmenin özeti yapılacak ve katılımcılara ilk görüşme ile ilgili neler hissettikleri ve söylemek istedikleri şeylerin olup olmadığı sorulacak. (*Before asking the following questions, the researcher will present a summary of the first interview to the participants and then will ask about how they feel about the first interview and whether they have anything in their mind to tell about it.*)
 2. İlk görüşmemizde ayrılık sürecinizden bahsetmeye başlamıştık. Bugün biraz daha bu ayrılık sürecinden ve sonrasında bahsetmek isterim. (Burada söz kadına bırakılacak; gerekirse aşağıdaki sorular sorulacak) (*We have started to talk about your leaving process in the first interview. Today I would like to continue to talk about that more and also about your experiences after separation - Ask the following probe questions only if necessary.*)
 - a. Ayrıldığınız günden bu güne kadar geçen zamanda nasıl, ne gibi şeyler zorluyor sizi? Hangi açılardan, nasıl zorluyorlar? (*From the time you left*

*your partner until today, what kind of difficulties are you experiencing?
How do these difficulties affect you and your life?)*

- b. Size iyi gelen, hayatınızı olumlu etkileyen neler var? (*What are the things in this process that affect your life in a positive way?*)
3. Sizi siz yapan kişiliğinizi, karakterinizi bir düşünün istiyorum. Sizce kişiliğinizin karakterinizin hangi yönleri yaşadıklarınızla baş etmeniz size yardımcı oluyor? (*I would like you to think about yourself, your personality characteristics. Can you tell me which qualities you have help you to cope with the difficult things you have experienced?*)
4. Şöyle bir şeyi biliyoruz, çok zorlayıcı deneyimlerden sonra bu deneyimleri yaşamış olan kişiler çokça bunalmış da hissedebilirler, yeni bir hayata kavuşmuş/ rahatlamış / güçlenmiş gibi de hissedebilirler. Siz bu açıdan bakınca neler yaşadınız? (*We know that people like you who had such difficult experiences in their lives may feel overwhelmed after going through these, but they may also feel relieved and strengthened. Can you describe your own experiences in terms of this?*)
5. Kendi geleceğinizi düşündüğünüzde neler görüyorsunuz orada? Gelecekte beklentilerinizi, kendi hayatınızla ilgili hayallerinizi anlatabilir misiniz? (*When you think about your future, what are things you see there? Can you tell me about your expectations or your dreams in life?*)
6. Peki, benzer şeyler yaşayan kadınlara siz kendi deneyimlerinize bakarak ne anlatırdınız? Duygusal olarak iyi hissetmeyi, güçlü hissetmeyi mümkün kılan şeylerle ilgili neler söylemek isterdiniz? (*Looking into your own experiences, what would you tell women who have similar experiences like you? What would you like to tell them about the things that make possible to feel good and powerful after such difficult experiences?*)

APPENDIX B

TRANSLATED QUOTES

1. “Çiftlikteki tavuklar gibiydim ben işte, hani hiç kafesin dışına çıkmamış, hiç gökyüzünü görmemiş.” (Canan)
2. “Kız çocuğusun sen, hep geride durman lazım, itaat etmen lazım. O erkek, onun hakları var ama senin yok ki . . . hep böyle aşağı olma hisleri, böyle zayıfsın güçsüzsün. Ben bu hislerle büyüdüm yani.” (Lale)
3. “Diyorum ya, benim için bir kafeye gitmeye bile izin almak zordu ki . . . Hala hatırlarım yani, anne babasından saklamadan erkek arkadaşlarında kalan kızlar vardı, ben nasıl şaşırmıştım.” (Harika)
4. “Her gün döverdi beni, her gün, çünkü ona devamlı karşı çıkıyorum ya, ben intihar bile ettim . . . Ama sonunda artık mecburen kabullendim, beni zorladı yani kabullenmeye, e ben de artık daha fazla dayanamadım zaten onun dayaklarına.” (Oya)
5. “Affedilmek istedim ben. Hani düşündüm ki beni böyle evli çocuklu görürlerse ikna olurlar belki, benim onları utandıracak bir şey yapmadığıma diye.” (Oya)
6. “Aşık oldum çünkü başka bir şehirde yaşıyordu [gülerek anlatıyor]. Acele ettim evlenmek için, yani annemden kaçmak istedim herhalde.” (Canan)
7. “Bu adamdan eninde sonunda ayrılırim diye düşündüm ben, önemli olan şey kiminle evlendiğim değil, o kadınlardan kurtulmam, tek önemli şey buydu.” (Feride)
8. “Benden onunla kaçmamı istedi ama ben reddettim. Ailemin, babamın şapkasını eğmek istemedim.” (Hayat)
9. “R: Kendinizi çok çaresiz hissetmişsinizdir.
N: Çaresiz hissetmedim ben, çaresizdim gerçekten de, gerçektir, öylesine hissetmedim.” (Nermin)
10. “Ayrılmak tamam, o bir şey, hadi ayrıldın, ama sonrasında ne olacak işte? Kiranı nasıl ödersin, çocuklarına nasıl bakarsın? İş yok güç yok, sonracığıma eğitimin yok, becerin yok, yani paran yok paran.” (Canan)

11. “Yıllarca düşünmüşüm ki ben hiç olmazsa kira ödemiyorum. Evi bul, depozitosunu öde, kirasını öde . . . Bunları karşılamam imkansızdı yani. Elini kolunu bağlıyor bunlar.” (Melek)
12. “Tam bir ev kuşuydum, her yere annemle giderdim, bulaşıkları yıka, evi temizle... Öyle ev dışında bir şey yaşamadım yani. O yüzden de cesaretim yoktu, ayaklarımın üzerinde durmaya cesaretim yoktu, ya da imkanım diyelim.” (Hayat)
13. “Banka kartını nasıl kullanacağını bile bilmediğini hayal et Büşram, ben tam böyleydim işte [gülerek anlatıyor]. Kocadan ayrılmayı nasıl düşüneceksin o zaman?” (Aysel)
14. “Eğer sana arka çıkan bir ailen yoksa dizini kırıp oturmaktan başka seçeneğin olmuyor.” (Nermin)
15. “Ben anneme yalvardım yalvardım. Ne olur anne, ne olur annem, geri al beni diye . . . Kaçtım ben, anneme gittim yine de bana yardım etsin diye. Ama onlar ne yaptılar, beni geri gönderdiler. Kendi ailem beni kabul etmedi, koydular beni kapının önüne, bu yüzden başımı önüme eğdim oturdum kaldım orada.” (Arzu)
16. “Bir Allah’ın kulu da çıkıp demedi ki ‘Sen ne yapıyorsun eşek oğlu eşek, bizim kız kardeşimize bizim kızımıza sen yasak koyamazsın bizi görmesini engelleyemezsin, ne cüretle bunu yaparsın sen’. Öyle diyeceklerine bana dediler ‘Madem kocan istemiyor yapacak bir şey yok’ . . . Kimse benim neler yaşadığımı umursamadı.” (Hayat)
17. “Bir kadının kendi başına yaşaması doğru değil. Biz bunu öğrendik. ‘Şu kadına da bak sen, ailesinin hayatını mahvetti, genelevlere düşecek sonunda’ . . . İnsanın çevresinde herkes böyle şeyler söyleyince sen de inanmaya başlıyorsun, onu gerçek sanıyorsun.” (Reyhan)
18. “Dedim ki kendime annemin babamın yüzünü önüne eğdim dedim ben, bu şekilde devam edeceğim dedim, aynı şeyi boşanıp yapamazsın dedim. Tekrar tekrar kendime telkin ettim, bu senin cezan, çekeceksin, sabretmek zorundasın.” (Lale)
19. “Aradan ne kadar zaman geçerse geçsin şunu bil ki ben senden ayrılacağım dedim, bir yolunu bulunca ayrılacağım. Ama böyle söylerken de tabii kendime soruyordum, bunu nasıl kendi aileme açıklayacaksın?” (Pervin)
20. “Anneme söylendi hep. ‘Ben bu utançla nasıl yaşarım, insan yüzüne çıkamaz oldum, hiçbir yere gidemez oldum, onun yüzünden kimseyle konuşamaz oldum’. Ben nasıl kalayım ki orada?” (Lale)

21. “Babam bana yardım etmeyi kabul etti de nasıl etti? ‘Sen artık boşanmış bir kadınsın. Kendi başına dışarı çıkamazsın’ . . . Kızıma nasıl kötü davrandığını fark ettim sonra ben, o yüzden yani geri dönmek dışında başka bir seçeneğim de yoktu.” (Melek)
22. “Sana bir şey söyleyeyim mi, ben daha çok önceleri, çoktan kaçmıştım. Onlarla bile denedim ki ben, denemiş bir kadınam. Onlara bakmaya param yetecek mi yetmeyecek mi diye düşünmesem hayatım tabii ki çok kolay olurdu.” (Arzu)
23. “Eğitiminmiş iş deneyiminmiş . . . Evde bakacak iki küçük bebeğin varsa hiç birisi bir işe yaramıyor. Onları yalnız bırakıp işe gidemezsin. Onlar sana bağımlılar, sen de kocana bağımlısın.” (Harika)
24. “‘Onun çocuğunu bu eve getirme’, babam açık açık söyledi böyle . . . Oğlumu geride bıraktım, ama sen bana sor bir onu, günlerce gözüme uyku girmedi, nasıl bir huzursuzluk o allahım. Hayattaki en zor şey çaresizlik söyleyeyim [ağlayarak anlatıyor]. Kendimi unuttum artık, oğlum için geri döndüm.” (Yeliz)
25. “Yalvardım anneme ‘Gel anne, benimle yaşa, çocuklarıma bak, ben çalışayım, sen çocuklarıma bak’ . . . İstemedi, reddetti. Eğer o gün kabul etmiş olsaydı ben bu adamdan çok daha önceleri kurtulmuştum.” (Oya)
26. “İnsanın ana babasını kaybetmesinin nasıl acı bir şey olduğunu bilirim ben [ağlayarak anlatıyor]. Ben şöyle düşünüyorum, galiba ben onlara böyle bir şey yaşatmak istemedim. . . Benim oğlum daha düne kadar babasına çok bağlıydı. O bana şey der diye korktum, yani ‘Sen ailemizi dağıttın, senin yüzünden ailemiz dağıldı, babamızı senin yüzünden kaybettik, sen sabretmedin’ diye.” (Nermin)
27. “Ergenliğini bile düşünüyorsun Büşram. Onu kadın halimle nasıl kontrol ederim? Bir oğlun babaya ihtiyacı var.” (Aysel)
28. “Çocukların için kalman lazım, çocuklarının iyiliği için katlanman lazım . . . Onların hayatını mahvedeceksin, böyle kayıp çocuklar olacaklar, kızların orospu olacak. Böyle şeyler duyunca korkuyorsun. Bunların her biri aklına geliyor kendini geri tutuyorsun o zaman.” (Canan)
29. “Durumu yatıştırmaya çalışıyorlar, ‘Kocan senin, ne yapalım, yapacak bir şey yok’. O zaman düşünüyorsun ki polis yardım etmiyor, bu adam beni öldürmeye kalksa bana kim yardım edecek o zaman . . . Bir defasında darp raporu almak için hastaneye gittim; oradaki polis beni çağırdı ‘kocasından dayak yiyen kadın gelsin, kocasından dayak yiyen kadın nerede’ . . . Anlıyorsun ki erkekler her yerde aynı.

Kocan erkek, polis erkek. Gerçekten de kendini yani böyle yapacak bir şey yok diye hissediyorsun.” (Aysel)

30. “Ben televizyonda duydum sığınma evlerini, ama diyordum ki bunlar normal kadınlar için iyi yerler olamaz . . . Orospularla doludur bu yerler diye düşünüyordum.” (Arzu)
31. “Sığınma evine gitmekten korkuyordum bir şekilde. Nereden nasıl tam bilmiyorum, ama düşününce bunu her yerde duyuyorduk, sığınma evleri kötü, güvenli değil. Çocuklarımı da kendimi de orada koruyamam, bizim için güvenli olmaz diye düşündüm.” (Lale)
32. “Bana dediler ki ‘Sen sığınma evlerinin nasıl yerler olduğunu biliyor musun? Çok kötü yerler oralar, kızını orada yetiştiremezsin ne yatacak yer var ne oturacak koltuk’ . . . Düşünebiliyor musun yani, sen oraya yardım almaya, bir destek görmeye gidiyorsun, ama tam tersine daha da çaresiz bir durumda geri dönüyorsun.” (Melek)
33. “Telefonda konuştuğum adam böyle rahatlatıcıydı, rahatlatı beni yani, bilgiler verdi şöyle şöyle hakların var diye, ne yapacağımı anlattı, anlaştık biz. Tam evde ayrılmayı planladığım günden önce, onun gecesinde yani, yattık böyle kızımınla, dedi ki bana ‘Ya bu yer kötü bir yerse anne, ya buradan daha kötü olursa?’. Ben de çok korkuyordum zaten, çekiniyordum, o da öyle deyince gitmemeye karar verdim. Yani biliyorsun polisi, sana nasıl kötü davrandılar, düşündüm yani ‘Var mı ki bir garantisi, daha mı iyi olacak burası sana çocuklarına?’ Yok.” (Melek)
34. “Çocuklarının hepsi için yerimiz yok dediler bana. Neymiş sadece birini getirebilirmişim, diğerleri çocuk esirgemeye gideceklermiş. Böyle saçmalık olur mu inanabiliyor musun? Yani diyorlar ki sen sessiz sessiz otur oturduğün yerde, kır bacağı otur.” (Hayat)
35. “Ben onlara ne dedim biliyon mu, dedim ki ben yani bu canavar adamla yaşamayı yeğlerim oğlumu koyuvermektense burada . . . Ailen senin, devletin korumalı yani seni, korumalılar, e seni ateşe atıyorlar ama. Babam da aynı şeyi dedi ya bana ‘Sen gelebilirsin ama piçini buraya getirmeyecen.’ (Reyhan)
36. “Ne devletin ne ailen. O zaman diyorsun, demek zorunda kalıyorsun, ‘Bu benim kaderimmiş, alın yazımmış’. İnsan kabul eder mi böyle bir şeyi, etmez ama etmek zorunda kalıyorsun işte.” (Nermin)
37. “Her zaman düşünürdüm ben ‘Onu bıraksan ne olacak sonra? Bağı kırabilir misin yani onunla? Yani o bağımlılığını yenebilir misin, vazgeçebilir misin?’

Bilmiyorum, aşk herhalde. Ne yapsa da ne etse de ben yine bir şekilde onsuz yaşayamam gibi hissettim. Normal değildi.” (Esra)

38. “Ben öyle bir salaktım öyle bir salaktım ki ben, köle oldum ben ya ona, onun sevgisini hak edeyim diye, takdirini kazanayım diye. Yani böyle sanki kendime kanıtlayacağım, ben sevinebilir bir insanım diyeceğim... İnsan bunu ailesinde yaşamayınca galiba hep arıyorsun işte, aramaktan vazgeçmek kolay olmuyor.” (Harika)
39. “Kendimi oyaladığımı da fark ettim, kendini sürekli bir meşgul etme hali, temizlik yemek . . . Farkındasın da seni incittiğinin ve senin bunu bitirmen gerektiğinin ama yine de onu mutlu etmeye çalışıyorsun, seni sevsin diye uğraşıyorsun.” (Esra)
40. “Dönüp de ne yapacaksın, döneceğin yer harika değil, olduğum yerden daha iyi değildi. Her zaman kendime şey diyordum ‘O kaçıp geldiğin eve geri mi döneceksin?’.” (Esra)
41. “Böyle bir ilişkide olmuş olmak aslında iyi oldu, şu açıdan diyorum, bana şunu anlamamda yardım etti çok, yani benim zihnim kafam toplumumuzda olan o cinsiyet normlarından bağımsız değil. Benim ailem hep bana eşitlik nedir öğretmeye çalıştı, bana kendine yeter bir kadın olmam için yardım ettiler ama yine de bütün şeyler orada, yani, fedakarlıklar, fedakar bir kadın olmak, anlayışlı olmak, yumuşak, alçak gönüllü alttan alan... Bunlar güzel de olabilir ama böyle bir adamla karşılaştığında kendine otomatikman şey diyorsun ‘Tamam, dur bir bekle bakalım, elinden geleni yap onu anlamaya çalış, rahatlatmaya çalış, bir kadın ilişkisini devam ettirebilmeli.’” (Zeynep)
42. “Böyle bir sanki yarışmaya döndü, sanki öyle hırslıyım ki bu ilişki yürüsün diye. Sanki kendime kanıtlayacağım, bir de tabii çevremdeki insanlara da ‘Bakın bakın ben hala onun karısıyım, evde ekmeğimi kendim yapıyorum, yoğurdumu kendim yapıyorum, bakın bakın, hala beni seviyor’. Hiç şaşırmıyorum ama biliyor musun çünkü düşünüyorum sana her zaman şey öğretilmiş ‘Bir kadın ancak kocası olursa böyle tam bir kadın olabilir, ancak o zaman saygı duyulur ona’. Ben X’in [şirketin ismi] genel direktörüydüm ya, ama böyle böbürlendim kendimle çünkü çocuklarıma kendim bakmak için istifa ettim. Böyle salakça bir şeydi.” (Harika)
43. “Tam net şunu yapıyorum, şunu istiyorum, bunu yapacağım gibi bir şey olmuyor hani. Şöyle aslında hep bir arafta oluyorsun. Hatırlamıyorum hani ben bir gece böyle rahat huzurlu uyuduğumu, kendimi kötü hissetmeden, hayal kırıklığı olmadan üzgün olmadan... Yine de şey ama aynı zamanda çok böyle tutkulu zamanlar da var, çok tatmin olduğun anlar da var tabii ilişkide. Benim psikolojim sağlıklı değildi; duygularım bir orada bir buradaydı yani [uzun bir duraklama]. Bazı zamanlar

kendime şey diyordum ‘Bu ilişki bitmeli’, o zaman karşı çıkıyorsun, kızgın oluyorsun. Ama diğer zamanlarda uyum sağlıyorsun, pasifleşıyorsun, olduğu gibi kabul etme eğilimine giriyorsun.” (Zeynep)

44. “Ben çok aktif güçlü bir kadındım . . . Benim ona karşı duygusal olarak kırılgan olmam, sanki dünyadaki tek adammış gibi hissetmem, bu beni mahvetti . . . Kendime saygı duyamamaya başladım, kendime inanmamaya başladım çünkü ayrılmaya karar veriyorum, defalarca karar verdim ama yapamadım. Çok böyle her şeyle ilgili kaygılı çekimser olmuştum.” (Safiye)
45. “Bana diyor ki ‘Gözümü kapattığımda senin eski kocanla seviştiğini görüyorum’, ya manyak niye görüyorsun demiyorum. Ya yazık adam ne kadar acı çekiyor diyorum, onun için üzülüyorum . . . Bırakıp gitmek yerine daha da daha da bağımlı oldum yani adama. Her zaman şey söylerdi o bana, onun benim için bu hayatta tek ve son şans olduğunu hissettim. Kim iki kere boşanmış bir kadını ister ki?” (Harika)
46. “Bir sürü arkadaşım bana kızmaya başlamıştı artık . . . Belki ben de onlar yerinde olsaydım ben de öyle davranırdım ama öyle olunca giderek daha zor oluyor bırakmak, hayatındaki tek kişi o olmaya başlıyor.” (Safiye)
47. “‘Sen feministsin, bu ilişkiye nasıl devam edebiliyorsun hala?’ Benim duymaya ihtiyacım olan şey bu değildi ki. Böyle bir şey duymak sadece kendini daha suçlu hissetmene yol açıyor, kedine daha kızgın oluyorsun. Arkadaşlarımla konuşmak istememeye başlamıştım o zaman. Onları görmek istemiyordum. Şunu düşündüğümü hatırlıyorum, kendime böyle demeye başlamıştım, galiba gerçekten haklı bu adam, benim yanımda kimse yok, sadece o var.” (Zeynep)
48. “Dayak yedim, kemiklerim kırıldı ama yenilmedim ben. Hiçbir zaman vazgeçmedim, hiçbir zaman. Her zaman kendime şunu hatırlattım benim bir şeyler yapmam lazım. Dedim ki ‘Eğer sen bu adamın dayaklarına dayanabiliyorsan yani bu hayatta dünyada başa çıkamayacağın şey yok’ . . . Garip söylemesi tabii ama beni bu kadar direngen yapan kendisiydi galiba.” (Feride)
49. “Aysel bankamatikten nasıl para çekilirmiş öğrendi, akıllı telefonu oldu, kredi kartı oldu. O kullanmasın diye bankamatik kartımın şifresini değiştirmiştım. Bayaa da bir dayak yedim ama yapacak bir şey yok. Daha zeki oldum Büşram, yıllar yılı gözlerim açıldı benim.” (Aysel)
50. “Bir kere çalışmaya başlayınca kendimi iyi hissetmeye başladım. Başarılı oldum iş hayatında. Müşterilerim bir takdir ediyordu hep çünkü neden ben işimi mükemmel bir şekilde yaparım. Bu yüzden de o beni her akşam döverdi, ben yine de vazgeçmeyen bir kadını, ertesi gün işe gittim hep, dayakları yedim yedim işe

gittim. Direndim ve kazandım. Bir gecede olmadı bu, yıllar yılı güçlendirdi beni. Her zaman da biliyordum çalışmak benim kaçış biletim olacaktı, oldu da.” (Arzu)

51. “İş yerinde bir baktım, aa aa herkes bana bir saygı duyuyor bir saygı duyuyor... Herkes beni takdir ediyor, aferin kızım güzel kızım. Ben sonra düşündüm ‘Benim kocam o zaman bana niye hiçmişim gibi davranıyor?’” (Arzu)
52. “Yalvardım izin versin diye. Nasıl oldu bilmem herhalde bir zayıflık anına denk geldi izin verdi. Ama sonra işler değişti tabii. Ben artık ondan izin mizin sormamaya başladım. ‘Bunu bunu yapıyorum, şuraya gidiyorum demeye’ başladım. Bütün gününü orada geçiriyorsun tabii, çok çalışıyorsun, bir şeyler başarmaya başlıyorsun, insanlar sana saygı duyuyorlar, senin dediklerini dinliyorlar. Bütün bunlar senin kendine güvenini yükseltiyor.” (Hayat)
53. “Benim babam çok katı, dediğim dedik, otoriter bir adamdı. Annemi arada dövdüğüne de şahitlik etmişimdir. Ama bir zaman hatırlamam ki babam annemi kimseye muhtaç etsin. Kazandığı bütün parayı, maaşını alınca cebinden çıkarır anneme verirdi. O yüzden, düşünsene adamı, çalışmıyor, karısının bütün maaşını kumarda harcıyor, o sırada çocukları evde acı acına bekliyor. Ben sabahtan akşama kadar çocuklarım için çalıştım. Ama artık bir süre sonra kendine sormaya başlıyorsun ‘Ne için?’ ‘Kim için?’ ‘Neden ben böyle kendimi öldürürcesine yaşıyorum?’” (Yeliz)
54. “Tamamen bırakmıştı artık para vermeyi, bir parça ekmek bile alıp getirmezdı eve. Her şey bana bakmaya başladı . . . Faturaları ben öderim, alışverişi ben yaparım, meyvesiydi sebzesiydi etiydi, çocuklara harçlıklarını veririm. Madem o zaman kocaya neden ihtiyacım var?” (Nermin)
55. “İyice erkeğe döndüm sonraları. Çalış, kazan, evi geçindir . . . O yüzden neden adamı koca diye tutayım ki evde? Paramı daha da harcasın beni daha fazla dövsün diye mi?” (Oya)
56. “Herkes herkes, hatta onun ailesindeki insanlar bile bana ‘Sen ne kadar iyi bir eşsin!’ diyorlardı . . . Kendimi yavaş yavaş çekmeye başladım. Bıraktım iyi olmayı. Beni öldürür diye korkmama rağmen ‘Hayır’ demeye başladım.” (Hayat)
57. “Bana sorunca elimde ne var ne yok bütün paramı ona verdim . . . Evlilik böyledir değil mi? Müşterektir. Birbirine yardım edersin, fedakarlıklar yaparsın birbirin için. Ama beni takdir etmek yerine kandırdı beni, çok çok defa. ‘Eğer sen iyi bir koca değilsen, ben de bundan sonra iyi bir eş olmayacağım’. El mi yaman bel mi yaman bakalım görelim. Böyle dedim ona, evden çıkmadan bir yıl önceydi. Benimle 7 ay konuşmadı biliyor musun? Eve ekmek bile getirmede o zaman.” (Canan)

58. “Oraya gidiyorsun, şey umuduyla, sana bir çatı olurlar, ama anlıyorsun ki orada istemiyorlar seni. Her seferinde yine de bir şeyler belki bu sefer farklı olur diye bekliyorsun, belki seni kabul ederler bu sefer diye. Onlar yardım etmeyecekse kim edecek ki sana. Sonunda ben anladım ki bu böyle olmayacak . . . Ben bunu dedim kendi kendime halletmeliyim, kendime ve çocuklarıma bakmalıyım.” (Melek)
59. “Kendimi çekmeye başladım. Onlardan yardım istemenin anlamı yoktu, ne olacağını biliyordum nihayetinde . . . Yeter ki benim hayatımı mahvetmesinler daha da bir şey istemem.” (Hayat)
60. “Dedem, teyzem, babam... Hepsi ama hepsi bana yardım etmeyi reddettiler, o yüzden bir süre sonra ipleri elime alıverdim. Daha başka ne yapayım? Hepsi böyle şok oldular. Daha demiştim ki onlara ben ‘Tamam, yardım etmiyor musunuz, bak ben kaçacağım bu adamla’, hepsine dedim. Ama sandılar ki blöf yapıyorum, inanmadılar, yapamam sandılar. Yaptım ama, inanabiliyor musun?” (Reyhan)
61. “‘Bu senin cezan’ dedi. Zaman geçtikçe kızmaya başladım ben. Kaçtım evet, yanlış bir seçim yaptım. Bunu zaten kabullendim. Yine de yıllarca bu adamın işkencelerine maruz kalmak benim suçum muydu, benim hatam mıydı?” (Lale)
62. “Özür diledi benden . . . Sonunda anladı . . . Ama yine de ben anne babamın evine dönmek istemedim. Kendi kendime aşmak istedim bunu. Belki onlara olan öfkem yüzünden.” (Lale)
63. “Kardeşim eve gelip dedi ki ‘Topla pılını pırtını, gidiyoruz’. Reddettim. Dinlemeden, sormadan etmeden, bana bir şey yapmamı emretti sadece. Bana kızgındılar biliyorum. Daha da suçlu hissetmek istemedim artık. ‘Hayır’ dedim, ayrılacağım ama sen ya da babam istediği için değil, ne zaman hazır olursam o zaman ayrılacağım.” (Pervin)
64. “Çocukların küçükken hem çalışıp hem onlara bakmak nasıl olacak, nasıl düşünebilirsin ki? Benim oğlum 16 yaşına gelmişti, kızım 14. O zaman biliyorsun ki kendi kendilerine bakarlar yani o şekilde ya da bu şekilde. Açlıktan ölmezler.” (Melek)
65. “Bugün ölsem birbirlerine bakabilirler onlar, birbirlerini koruyabilirler diye düşündüm işin açığı . . . Öyle bir noktaya geldim ki ‘Ne olursa olsun bunu yapacağım’. Ama bir 10 sene önce çok küçüklerdi o zaman. Risk almak o zaman çok daha zordu.” (Nermin)

66. “Benim pırıl pırıl evlatlarım bana yardım ettiler. ‘Anne, kurtulacağız, korkma, umutsuz olma, üzgün olma, birlikteyiz biz bu işte’. Bana cesaret verdiler. Her şeyi birlikte planladık. Bir karar almadan önce hep birlikte konuştuk.” (Hayat)
67. “Kızım bana hep derdi ki ‘Anne, senin bu adama ihtiyacın yok. Hadi ne olur kaç bu adamdan’ . . . Bunu düşünebiliyor musun yani sen? Sadece mini mini 13 yaşındaydı benim kızım o zaman. Onun ısrarını görmek, nasıl olgun benim kızım, onun olgunluğunu görmek beni yavaş yavaş böyle güçlü yaptı, güçlü kıldı böyle. En sonunda da zaten ne olursa olsun dedim ben ayrılıyorum bu adamdan.” (Arzu)
68. “Kendimizi odaya kilitledik böyle. Hepimiz titriyoruz. ‘Anne’ dedi oğlum, ‘Biz eşyalarımız olmadan nasıl yaşayacağız, babam kırdı her şeyimizi’. Yavrum benim. Ben daha cevap vermeden ama kızım girdi araya ‘Merak etme sen kardeşim. Annemiz bize ne ihtiyacımız varsa alacak, çalışacak, yeni televizyon alacak, yeni koltuk alacak, yeni oyuncaklar...’. İşin aslı biz o gece öldürülebilirdik orada [ara veriyor, ağlıyor]. Bundan sonra ben onlara tutundum, daha sıkı sıkı. Onun böyle konuşmasını duymak beni rahatlattı. Kendime dedim ki yani çocukların sana güveniyor, onlar var yanında, kaçacağız, güvende olacağız.” (Lale)
69. “Hani bir şarkı var, oradaki gibi ‘Ama kendinden yanadır ya hep yürek, feda edip aşkı korur ya kendini’. Bir yere kadar kendinden verip verip eziliyorsun ama bir yerden sonra artık kalbin karşı gelmeye başlıyor, yeter diyor yani artık. Işığımı kaybettim, kalbim bana dedi ki ‘Ne yapıyorsun Harika?’ Sen buraya ait değilsin, bu adama ait değilsin. Hiçbir şey yok sana burada.” (Harika)
70. “Evine gitmiştim o zaman, bağırdım, çok bağırdım, yalnız değildi ama umurumda da değildi o saatten sonra . . . Hiçbir şey yapmadı, sadece durumu kontrol altında tutmaya çalıştı. Soğukkanlı erkeği oynadı yani orada çünkü hani arkadaşı orada ya. Ben de böyle duygusal, histerik bir kadın oluverdim . . . Gerçekten de o an şeyi hatırlıyorum bir katilin soğukkanlılığı. Hiçbir kızgınlık emaresi yok, sakın ses tonu, oturuyor sadece öyle. Bu benim için bir örnekti yani sonra dedim ki hani dur bir düşün Zeynep, bütün bu davranışlar, bunlar çok stratejik, manipülatif şeyler.” (Zeynep)
71. “O geceden sonra ben aslında tamamen ikna olmuşum, hani orada benim için iyi hiçbir şeyin olmadığına. Ne güven var ne aşk sevgi var ne özgürlük var ne güç.” (Zeynep)
72. “Bana hakaretler ediyordu, kısıtlıyordu. Tamam tamam. Bunlar oluyor olmasına ama kendine diyebiliyorsun ki ‘Senin ona ihtiyacın var, sen onu seviyorsun’. Ama beni merdivenden aşağı atmaya çalışmış, karnımı yumruklamış, bana böyle bağırmış ‘ikinizin de ölmesini istiyorum’ diye... Tam bir canavar gibiydi,

normal değildi . . . Onu öyle o şekilde görmek sanki böyle bir perde vardı gözümün önünde onu kaldırdı.” (Safiye)

73. “Bir günde olmadı ki bu, ben ruhumu zihnimi özgürleştirdim önce. Kendim gibi hissetmem lazımdı, ona ait bir şeymiş gibi değil. Tekrar kendini özgür hissedince, o kapıdan çıkmak o kadar kolay ki, geriye bakmadan çıkmak. Ben inanır mısın birkaç hafta için çocuklarımı bile bıraktım adamda çünkü biraz kendi başıma olmam gerekiyordu. Bu sondu işte. Aklımda her şey böyle berraklaştı onu bıraktığımda.” (Harika)
74. “O günün geldiğini biliyordum aslında, bu ilişkinin bir geleceği olmadığını biliyordum. Ama kendime her zaman demişimdir ‘Sen Esra bu kapıdan çıktıktan sonra bir daha geriye bakmamalısın, asla. Pişmanlık hissetmemelisin, özlem duymamalısın’. Benim içimde ona dair hiçbir şey kalmaması gerekiyordu, kalmadı da herhangi bir şey, herhangi iyi bir his. Sonra sonra fark ettim ona karşı olan hislerim nasıl yük oluyormuş bana. O halden sıyrılınca her şey daha kolay olmaya başladı. Çıkıp gitmek daha kolay oldu. Kendim için ve kızım için iyi bir şeyler yapabilecek kadar güçlü olduğumu fark ettim.” (Esra)
75. “Babanın şiddeti bir yerde, bir de devamlı depresif, kafası karman çorman, duygusal çöküntü içinde bir anne başka. Elinden gelenin en iyisini yapmaya çalışıyorsun ama kendini o kadar muhtaç kırılgan hissederken nasıl iyi bir anne olacaksın çocuklarına?” (Harika)
76. “Benim kızım hayatımdaki en önemli kişi. Benim annelik içgüdüm bir şekilde çok güçlü. Her zaman bir anne olmak istedim, her zaman bir çocuğum olmasını istedim. Ama böyle bir ilişkinin içindeyken iyi bir anne olamazsın ki . . . İsteddiğim gibi bir anne olmadığımı fark ettim. O yüzden en sonunda da kendime şöyle bir soru sordum aslında, sormak zorundaydım ‘Kızın mı Esra yoksa sevdiğin adam mı?’” (Esra)
77. “Bana bağıyor, vuruyor, dayak yiyorum, gözümün ucuyla kısacık bir süreliğine oğlumu gördüm, odanın köşesinde saklanıyor kulaklarını kapamış, aynı şeyi tekrarlıyor ‘Allahım lütfen dursunlar lütfen dursunlar, annemi koruyamıyorum Allahım sen koru onu’. Daha 4 yaşındaydı bu çocuk o zaman [ağlıyor- uzun bir ara]. Hep hep aynı soru ‘Neden bunu yapıyorsun?’ Sen kaldıkça çocukların zarar görüyor. Bitirmelisin artık. Çocukların daha iyisini hak ediyor.” (Harika)
78. “. . . Onun o çılgınlıklarını duymak çok çok beni dehşete düşürdü. Bir yaşında mini minnacık bir bebek bu. Nasıl olurda sen kendi kızını onun için feda edersin? Eğer kızına iyi bir gelecek vermek istiyorsan bu hemen bitmeli diye düşündüm.” (Esra)

79. “Çocuklarını koruyabilecek misin diye sormuştu polis. E dedim ne yapacağım zorundayım yani. Ama böyle var ya kafam kaynıyor, endişe içindeyim. 50 yaşındasın bir kere, çok da aman aman sağlıklı değilsin. Nasıl iş bulursun? Nasıl ev bulursun? Kocan seni bulabilir. Çocuklarının geleceği için korkuyorsun sonra. Sen 4 kızı olan yalnız bir annesin yani artık.” (Hayat)
80. “Çocuklarımla kaçtık biz, ondan sonra öyle bir bankta oturduk, düşünmeye çalıştım, korku içindeyim, Allah’ıma dua ettim ki bize bir yol gösterebilir diye.” (Melek)
81. “Bir yere gidiyoruz ama nereye gittiğimizi bilmeden, kendimizi ifade edecek anlatacak gücümüz kelimelerimiz yok gibi.” (Hayat)
82. “Yaşasın kadın dayanışması yaşasın kadın dayanışması’, hep öyle söylerlerdi. Ama sonra kocamın korkusuyla kapının önüne koyuverdiler beni. Ne iş kaldı ne para ne de dayanışma [gülüyor]. İş aradım ben aylar boyunca. Sığınma evi var tamam güzel de orada güvendesiniz de ama orada da seni sonsuza kadar komazlar ki. O yüzden yani anlayacağın böyle hep diken üstündesin, tedirginsin, hiç bitmiyor o tedirginlik.” (Aysel)
83. “Kocamı bırakıp kaçtığımda kendime çok güveniyordum ben. Böyle ne bileyim güçlü hissediyordum çünkü yaptım ya kaçmayı başardım ya, ben yani, benim gibi bir kadın o zamana kadar kendi başına hiçbir adım atmamış bir kadın. Ama bir gün falan ya da daha kısa da olabilir, o kadar sürdü bu [gülüyor]. Çünkü 40 yaşındaydım ben, sokaklarda kalmış 40 yaşında bir kadın, evi yok, işsiz . . . Sonunda bir sığınma evi buldum, ama şöyle düzgün bir iş bulamadım ki ev kiralayayım. Düşündüğümden beklediğimden çok daha zordu. 6 aydan fazla duramıyorsun ya sığınmada, bir sığınmadan diğerine birinden diğerine iki yıl böyle geçti . . . Çocuklarımı alırdım diyordum artık inancım kalmamıştı ona da çünkü evim yoktu, işim yoktu.” (Canan)
84. “Sonuç olarak öldürülmekten kaçtım ben. Ya kocamın ailesi ya da abimin beni öldüreceğini biliyordum. Yine de yani bir tehlikeden diğerine kaçmış oldum. Hiçbir şey bilmeden, ne yapacağımı bilmeden kaçtım çünkü, nerede kalacağımı bilmeden. Sadece 21 yaşındaydım. Şey gibiydi aslında... Diyim sana daha iyi anlaman için, Suriyelileri düşün evlerinden kaçan. Burada çok var onlardan, sokaklardalar. Ben işte onların ne hissettiğini çok iyi biliyorum çünkü ben de aynısını hissettim . . . Evsizliğin ne demek olduğunu bilirim ben. Ne güvenebileceğim bir kimsem vardı ne de sahip olduğum bir şey.” (Oya)
85. “Zorundaydım ben yani, zorundaydım, işe gitmek için iki küçük çocuğumu evde bırakmak zorundaydım. Bir gün kızım ocağı söndürmeyi unutmuş, yangın çıkmış evde. Neredeyse kaybediyordum ben onları [ağlıyor]. Çocuk küçüklerdi, evde kendi kendilerine kalabilecek yaşta değillerdi. Ama bir seçeneğin yok işte... Tekrar tekrar

başla... Oya 21'indeyken başlamış, hiçbir şeyi yokmuş, şimdi aynı yine 40 yaşındayken. Bu benim hayat hikayemdi yani. Tek istediğim şey neydi biliyor musun, birazcık daha önümü görebilmek, çocuklarımı güvende tutmak, ama uzun zaman olamadı. Artık herhalde bundan sonrası yok dediğim çok an vardır benim.” (Oya)

86. “Benim bütün psikolojim çökmüştü, sağlıklı değildim. Konuşmak bile zordu, kendimi ifade etmek. Ekonomik olarak çökmüştüm. İş bakacak bile gücüm yoktu. Sadece oğlumun ihtiyaçları için, yani işte bezini alayım, bebek maması alayım, babamdan günlük para alıyordum. Benim ailem, kendi ailem benim durumumdan faydalandılar. Benim üzerimde baskınlık kurmaya çalıştılar, beni cezalandırmaya çalıştılar. Babam açık açık söyledi, ‘Bundan sonra benim kurallarına uyacaksın, istediğin gibi davranmaya hakkın yok’. Hiçbir şey diyemedim, kendimi savunamadım. Başka yollar arayamadım çünkü iyi değildim, iyi hissetmiyordum, harekete geçecek bir enerjim yoktu. Öyle bir çıkış yolu bulamadım ki kendimi öldürmeyi bile düşündüm.” (Pervin)
87. “Eminim ki insanlar benim deli olduğumu düşünmüşlerdir. Tamamen normal, haklılar [gülüyor]. Birisine bir şey soracağım, birisiyle konuşacağım diye tir tir titriyordum. Düşünebiliyor musun? Basit, konuşma becerisi ya. Kaybettim işte. E iş bulmak? İş görüşmesine gitmek? Kızımın öğretmeniyile konuşabildiğimde bile mutlu hissediyordum kendimi.” (Feride)
88. “Her şey zaten zordu . . . kendine çekidüzen verebiliyorsun yine de zaman içinde . . . Daha iyi hissetmeye başladım derken, kendime ‘Çalışabilirsin artık, hazırsın devam etmeye’ derken bizi buldu. Bütün korkular, bütün o kötü duygular geri geldi, sonra başka bir sığınmada 7 ay daha kaldık.” (Lale)
89. “İş arkadaşlarıma, arkadaşlarıma, ailemdeki herkese mail yazmış. Kızımı kullanmış bunu yapmak için. ‘Benim annem iyi bir anne değil, çocuklarını terk eden bir anne iyi bir anne olamaz, bizimle olmaktansa başka bir adamla olmayı tercih etti’ . . . Ölmek istedim. ‘Daha iyi olacak, iyisin, iyi gidiyorsun, güçlüsün’, kendine söyle dur. Sonra bu olunca, sonsuza kadar kaybolmak istiyorsun.” (Yeliz)
90. “‘Seni istemiyorum, sen kötü bir annesin, sen orospusun’. Böyle söylerdi oğlum. Kelimelerim tükeniyor bunun karşısında . . . Senin oğluna, onun da öz oğlu, çok kötü bir şey yapıyor ve sen bunu durduramıyorsun [uzun bir ara]. Hadi bakalım başla hayatını yaşamaya bütün bunlar olurken. Bazen düşünüyorum da ancak o ölürse mümkün olabilir belki.” (Harika)
91. “Oğlumu kışkırttı bana karşı. Yaptı bunu, öz babası. Benimle konuşmak istemedi oğlum, neredeyse iki yıl boyunca ya. Onun kaybetmenin korkusu . . . Ne

yapabilirsin? Bir şey yapamadım çünkü telefonlarıma bile çıkmıyordu. Çok çok acı çektim . . . Kırık bir kemikle yaşarsın da hani bu acıyla yaşayamazsın. Aklımı kaçırmaktan korktum.” (Feride)

92. “Kendimi ne zaman iyi hissetsem, aklıma geliyordu, böyle ensemdede bir bıçak var sanki devamlı. ‘Bir gün beni öldürecek ama ne zaman?’. Gerçekten de her gece başımı yastığa koyup bu soruyu sordum . . . Mutlu olmaya çalıştım, özgür hissetmeye. Ama onun eline fırsat geçse beni öldürebileceğini bilmek . . . Yani böyle korku içinde yaşarken insan nasıl mutlu olur ki?” (Melek)
93. “İstediğim tek şey çocuklarıma yiyecekleri yemeğin uyuyacakları yatağın olduğu, onları böyle kanatlarıma altına alabileceğim bir evde güvenle yaşamaktı. Bunu başarmak için iş araman lazım . . . 4 ay boyunca ben o sığınma evinin kapısından dışarı çıkmadım. Ondan korktumdan. Daha önce buldu beni, bıçakladı, neredeyse ölüyordum. Güvenecek hiçbir durumum yoktu, tam işte bıçak sırtında yaşamak derler ya öyle.” (Reyhan)
94. “Böyle zombiler olur ya, yürüyen ölüler, zaten onlara benziyorduk. Bir sürü korkumuz vardı. Nereye gidiyoruz? İyi olacak mı yoksa daha mı kötü olacak? Bizim böyle bu dev gibi böyle binaya getirdiler, hapishane bildiğin... Kocaman teller, gardiyanlar, polisler her yerde . . . En küçüğüm benim ağlamaya başladı ‘Anne biz nereye geldik böyle, neredeyiz?’. Kızlarımdan dolayı korktum yani ben . . . Sadece 3 gün kaldık orada ama 3 yıl gibiydi sanki.” (Hayat)
95. “Oraya gittiğimde çok korkunçtu . . . Kaos vardı tamamen. Aynı odada 9 tane yatak var, ayakta durmaya bile yer yok . . . Bir sürü küçük çocuk var. Benim oğlum çok küçük, onunla oynamak istiyorlar ama oğlum korkuyor, üzülmüş, yanımda oturmuş bana bakıyor. Telefonlarımızı her şeyimizi aldılar, üzerimizde bir şey bırakmadılar. Kalamadım orada, ailemin evine geri döndüm. Güvende hissedemedim.” (Pervin)
96. “Oraya hep kötü şeyler zor şeyler yaşamış kadınlar gidiyor, yardım almaya gidiyorlar oraya. Yardım aradığım için desteğe ihtiyacım olduğu için gittim ben de. Ama zaten bunları geçtim her şeyden önce bir insan evladı olarak saygı duyulmalısın değil mi? Temel insan hakları işte ya, ne bileyim özel yaşam, korunmak gibi gibi. Ama biz hani potansiyel yalancılar onlar için [sığınma evinde çalışanlarını kastediyor]. Saygı yok. Her şeyden öte benim neyim var neyim yok her şeyimi, bütün kişisel eşyalarımı aldılar, telefonumu, saç kurutma makinemi, diş fırçama varana kadar. Nedenmiş? Çünkü intihar edebilirmişim ben. Ya allah aşkına ben akıl hastası değilim ki . . . Çocuklarıyla konuşmaya izin yok, özel bir şekilde konuşamazsın. Görüşmecim izin vermedi bana. Sığınmanın adresini onlara verebilirmişim. Böyle bir şeyi niye yapayım ki ben? Bu kişi bir profesyoneldi ve de. Bana yardım etmesi gereken bir kişi. Orada kalmak hayatıma başka bir travma kattı.

İyi yani derim ki sokaklarda kalmaktan daha iyi tabii de, o kadar sadece, daha fazlası yok.” (Canan)

97. “Çabalıyorsun çok çabalıyorsun bir şey başarmak için, ama onlar sanıyorlar ki sen orada birkaç ay kalıp yine kocanın yanına döneceksin. Oradaki insanlardan duydum ben bunu kulaklarımla: ‘Senin gibi kadınları biliriz biz, eninde sonunda kocanıza geri dönersiniz’. Madem kadınlara inanmayacaksınız niye var ki böyle yerler o zaman? Birisinin sana inandığını bilsen görsen kendine hiç olmazsa şey dersin değil mi, bana inanıyor, daha çabalamam lazım.” (Aysel)
98. “‘Dediklerinizi anlayamıyorum’ dedi bana. ‘Bu anlattıklarınız çok gerçekdışı geliyor’ dedi. Çok çok büyük bir şoktu . . . Oraya bir daha hiç adım atmadım. Bana böyle bir şey söylemiş olduğuna inanamadım. Hala üzülüyorum bunu düşününce. Şiddetle ilgili hiçbir şey bilmeyen cahil bir insan bunu söyleyebilir ama onun gibi eğitilmiş birisi, bilgisi olan birisi... Bilemiyorum.” (Feride)
99. “Her babaya gittiğinde döndüğünde benden nefret eden iki çocukla uğraşmak zorundaydım. Sinir krizleri geçiren, sen çok kötü bir insansın diyen iki çocuk. Onlar beni tekrar sevsin diye uğraşmam, onlara aslında bir orospu olmadığımı anlatmaya çalışmam. Yani tek savaşım bu da değil üstelik. Bir sürü ekonomik problem zorluk. Psikolojik olarak iyi durumda değilim zaten. Çok agresifim, çok kaygılıyım, çok tahammülsüzüm . . . Çocuklarım benim için hayattaki en önemli şeyler, ama pişman oldum biliyor musun, öyle zamanlarda çocuk sahibi olmaktan pişman oldum.” (Harika)
100. “Ona bağırdım zamanlar oldu, buna hala da inanamıyorum. Çok küçüktü, benim için her şey demekti o. Sonradan anlayabildim sadece ben hani çok iyi olmadığımı, o yüzden o da değildi. Sanıyorum ikimiz de travmatize olmuştuk. Çok kötü bir şeyden kaçmışsın, o kaçtığın şeyin etkileri hala senin peşinde. Küçücük bir odadasın sığınmada. Onun için ne kadar zor olmuş olduğunu düşünüyorum şimdi, hareket etmesi için yeterli yer yok, bir sürü tanımadığı insan var çevresinde, hiçbir şey tanıdık değil. Bir de kafasında bir sürü şeyler meşgul, dağınık bir anne var.” (Esra)
101. “Beni en çok zorlayan şey onların öfkeli davranışlarıyla baş etmek oluyor. Sadece ben değil ki, onlar da bir sürü korkunç şey yaşadılar hem de çok küçüklüklerinde. O yüzden normal diyorum kendi kendime biliyorum normal olduğunu ama bana vurdukları zaman, bağırdıkları zaman, ya birbirlerine, o zaman babaları gibi olacaklar diye çok korkuyorum. Genelde onları sakinleştirmeye çalışıyorum, kendi yöntemlerim var, işe de yarıyor ama bazen de çok çok yoruluyorum.” (Lale)
102. “Şey hissettim ben bir adamın zorbalığından kaçarken başkasına tutulduk. Oğlum benim bilemiyorum o da çok şeyler yaşadı babasıyla, kafası karıştı, herhalde hani

o da kendi problemleriyle böyle baş etti, evin erkeği rolünde, o rolü alarak, ama benim için çok zordu, sıkıldım ben. Kendi oğlumdan korkmaya başladığımı fark ettim . . . İşte ‘Benim iznim olmadan bir şey yapamazsın’ demeye falan başladı, bakıyorum kendimi titrerken bulmaya başladım önünde, bir şey açıklayacağım titriyorum . . . Kadın olmanın çilesi yani, kurtuluş yok gibi.” (Melek)

103. “Ben onlar için katlandım bu evliliğe . . . Kızım hadi çok küçüktü, oğlum her şeye şahit oldu. Evde ayrılınca benimle konuşmak istemedi. Bana hakaretler etti orospusun sen diye, benim annem değilsin artık diye. Neyin ne olduğunu, doğruyu yanlış ayırt edebilecek yaşıydı. Öyle olunca e niye diyorsun, hayatımı bunca niye feda ettim, bunun için mi, böyle şeyler duyayım diye mi diye soruyorsun.” (Yeliz)
104. “Hala kızgın hissediyorum işin aslı çünkü bu ilişkinin bana nelere mal olduğunu düşününce. Ama o hiçbir şey yaşamadı, bir şeyleri kaybetmenin korkusunu yaşamadı. Ben her şeyden önce örgütteki pozisyonumdan vazgeçtim. Tamam bu benim de seçimimdi ama kendimi korumak için başka da bir yol bulamadım.” (Zeynep)
105. “Kızının düğününe çağırmak için aradı abim . . . ‘Sen benim neler çektiğimi, neler yaşadığımı biliyor musun?’ dedim, dedim ‘Beni bir kere aradın mı sen bir şeye ihtiyacın var mı diye? Şaka gibi bana dedi ki ‘Eğer gelmek için paran yoksa ben gelir seni alırım’. Madem öyle niye öncesinde gelmedin bana yardım etmeye? Sabahtan akşama üç kuruş para için çalışıyorum ben.” (Nermin)
106. “‘İhtiyacım var sana bana yardım et, ben de senin kızınım’ dedim . . . ‘Çalışmam gerekiyor, çocuklarım küçük, kal benimle anne, sadece çocuklarıma göz kulak ol istiyorum’. Ama hayır! İkna edemedim, sanki onun kızı değilmişim gibi. Ben o yangında çocuklarımı kaybediyordum neredeyse. Annemi suçluyorum, onu suçluyorum tabii ki çünkü o çocuklarımla olmuş olsaydı o gün öyle bir şey yaşanmayacaktı. Hala o kadar kızgınım, hala aynı. Benim annem değil artık o.” (Oya)
107. “Ya ben ev tuttum, her şeyimi ayarladım, depozitoyu ödedim, sadece 200 lira param eksik nakliye tutacağım. İki gün boyunca ağladım ben bunun için, çok ağladım böyle, ne yapabilirim dedim, düşündüm, o zaman kendimi çok yalnız hissetmişim, dedim hiç kimsem yok dedim ya [kısa bir duraklama]. Aslında böyle bakıyorum bu biraz çelişiyorum yani kendimle. Aslında çok çevrem var ama böyle bir şey olduğu zaman çok yalnız hissediyorum, hiç kimsem yokmuş diyorum. Bir arkadaşım vardı sonra sığınmadan, çıkmıştı o, onu aradım konuştuk, o verdi bana parayı. O kadar basit ki, iki gün boyunca sen niye ağladın diye kızdı bana. Ben şimdi böyle düşününce insan ailesinden beklediği desteği göremeyince ailesi olmayınca böyle yapayalnız hissediyor, çaresiz hissediyor.” (Melek)

108. “Kapıma dayanmış, kapımı kırmaya çalışmış, seni öldürücüme diye beni tehdit etmiş. Ne yapayım ben? Polisi aradım tabii şikayetçi oldum . . . Erkek kardeşim arıyor beni sonra, bana destek olacak sandım , ama onun yerine diyor ki ‘Sen ne yapmaya çalışıyorsun? Utan kendinden utan! Boşanmak yetmedi şimdi de çocuklarının babasını polise mi şikayet ediyorsun?’. Onun için ben iyi miyim değil miyim hiç önemli değil, yaralandım mı bir şey oldu mu . . . Ölebilirsin sen, bir değer yok ama ailenin namusu her zaman korunmalı.” (Yeliz)
109. “‘Ömrünce bu utançla yaşayacaksın’ dedi kardeşim bana. ‘Unutmana izin vermeyeceğiz, bu utancı hep yüzüne vuracağız’. Sanki birisini öldürmüşüm. Ne yapmışım, yanlış bir evlilik yapmışım sonra da kaçmaya çalışmışım. Benim kendi hayatımı kurmak için, oğlumu şiddet gösteren bir babadan kurtarmak için ne kadar uğraştığımı takdir etmediler hiçbir zaman. Ne görmek isterlerse onu gördüler. Yardım etmek istemiyorsan beni rahat bırak, ama onlar benim daha fazla canımı yakmaya çalıştılar.” (Pervin)
110. “Uyuşturucu bağımlısı olduğumu iddia etti, şizofren olduğumu ve parayla fahişelik yaptığımı iddia etti. Ee ve ben bunların aksini iddia edebilmek adına maalesef, hani bangır bangır bağıryorlar ya ‘Kadının yanındayız’, hepsi yalan hikaye. Bağımlı olmadığımı göstereyim diye DNA örneği verdim, Adli Tıp’ta polisle beraber gittim ben suçlular gibi. Şizofren olmadığımı ispat edebilmek için 4 ay boyunca ruh sağlığı hastanesine gittim mütemadiyen, ayda ikişer kere. Ee fahişe olmadığımı ispat edebilmemin yolu da yok açıkçası . . . Böyle koruyorlar bizi işte. Hakim diyemedi ki ‘Ya senin bu kadına nasıl işkenceler yaptığının zilyon tane kanıtı var, böyle zırvalarla uğraştırma bizi buna hakkın yok’ diye [ağlıyor- kısa bir ara]. Yani bu adam psikopat, her şeyi beklersin, bunları beklersin, ama böyle olunca hep daha canın acıyor, inanamıyorsun.” (Harika)
111. “Çocuklarımı öldürmekle tehdit etti bu adam. Şiddet sadece bana değildi çocuklarım da devamlı şiddet gördü babalarından. Bütün bunların kanıtları var, çocuklarımda da ayrı ayrı tanıklıkları dinlendi. Ama hakim hala çocuklarımda babalarına ihtiyaçları var, babanın ayda iki kere çocukları görmesi gerekiyor diye karar verdi. Böyle bir şey nasıl olur aklım almıyor. Benim çocuklarım korku içindeler şu an, travma geçiriyorlar, onu görmek istemiyorum kesinlikle. Daha da zarar gördüler bu karardan. Yeter yani artık yeter bu adamın korkusuyla yaşadığımız. Düşünmek bile istemiyorum bunu, ya onları öldürürse sırf bana ceza olsun diye . . . Çok kızgıyım . . . Ne yapacağımı kime güveneceğimi bilmiyorum.” (Lale)
112. “Bazı hayvanlar böyle tehlike sezince donup kalırlar ya, bildin mi? Ben mahkeme salonun tam öyleydim. Üst üste üst üste bir sürü yalanlar . . . Mahkemenin orada bir köprü var . . . Bir defasında o köprünün ortasında yığılıp kalmışım, yürüyememişim, bacaklarım tutmuyor, insanlar ölüp gittim sanmış . . . Neden hakim ona bu kadar

konuşma hakkı veriyor ki? Ben onun gibi konuşamıyordum, sadece hakim bana bir şey sorarsa konuşabiliyorum. Kadının adı yok.” (Nermin)

113. “Eve zorla girdi o gün bulmuş yerimizi. Elindeki bıçağı gördüm, koşmaya çalıştım ama sonra kendini kesmeye başladı. Şok girdim böyle ben kızım aramış polisleri. Polisler geldi ‘Yapacak bir şeyimiz yok bu ailenin özel meselesi’ dedi. Ben işte orada bir sinir krizi geçirdim, öyle bir kızdım ki, bağırıp çağırmaya başladım, ya dedim ya siz nasıl insanlarsınız böyle, biz kimden yardım alacağız, ölmem mi lazım illa çocuklarımın ölmesi mi lazım dedim. Bir de koruma kararı var yani . . . Bak hala ellerim titriyor bunu konuşunca.” (Melek)
114. “Bir şeyler yaptığında her zaman polisi aradım. Hep ‘iyi adam’ı oynadı. Bütün bunları oğlunu çok özlediği için yapıyor (!) . . . ‘Barışmalısın onunla, iyi bir adam o, bir çocuğunuz var sizin. Bak sana bunu baban olarak abin olarak söylüyorum, ikiniz için de iyisi olsun istiyorum’. Sanki bana yardım ediyorlar gibi ama aslında şey hiçbir şey yapmayarak daha fazla tehlikeye atıyorlar bizi, beni değil de onu dinlemeyi tercih ettiklerinden . . . Sadece söyledikleri her zaman, geçmiş geçmişte kaldı artık, affetmelisin bu adamı.” (Pervin)
115. “Ben nasıl saftım, nasıl iyi niyetliydim. Düşünemedim hani benim patronum beni taciz eder. Ama hayat bu öğretiyor işte. Senin patronun da yapar, ev sahibin de yapar. Bir kere senin boşanmış olduğunu öğrenirlerse, yalnız yaşadığını öğrenirlerse... Yani ya adam bu muhitte işte, adam markette çalışan adam aynı şeyi yapar ona gülümsedin ya, kibarlık yapmaya çalışıyorsun merhaba diyorsun falan . . . Bazen şu kapıyı kilitleyeyim bir daha da dışarı çıkmayayım diyorum . . . Bu erkeklerin dünyası. Eğer sen bir kadınsan onlar devamlı seni baskılamaya çalışırlar . . . Her zaman sen kaybeden olursun.” (Canan)
116. “Bana mesaj atıyor sonra ‘Kusura bakma tatlım, sen boşanmışsın, seninle olamayız’. Ya hepiniz ruh hastası mısınız siz toptan? Ben neyim yani canavar mıyım? Boşanmak niye benim suçum oluyor? Bu adamlar yani... Seni böyle aşağılayabiliyorlar rahatlıkla, onların hakkı oluyor. Sonra bir de hayatını cehenneme çeviren adamı düşünüyorsun. Ona bir şey olmaz . . . Hayatını yaşamaya devam ediyor, zevk sefa içinde.” (Harika)
117. “Erkekler düşünüyor ki sen boşanmışsan her türlü ilişkiye açıksındır, seni istedikleri gibi kullanmayı hak görüyorlar kendilerinde . . . Ben 27 yaşındaydım boşandığımda, çok gençtim, o kadar zordu ki bütün o tacizlerle her yerde olan yani ama özellikle de iş yerinde olanla baş etmeye çalışmak. Bir işte bir işe bir işten bir işe kaçmak zorunda kaldım hep, o olmadı bu o da olmadı o zaman şu. Bir iş bulsan dahi kötü bir şey başına gelmeyecek diye emin olamıyorsun ki, garantisi yok çünkü her yerde erkekler.” (Feride)

118. “Patron senin bekar bir kadın olduğunu, çocuğun olduğunu paraya ihtiyacın olduğunu biliyor. E ne yapıyor seni kullanmaya çalışıyor, senin emeğini sömürmeye çalışıyor. Senin işini bırakma lüksün yok diye düşününce seni onun kölesi gibi oluyorsun. Bu yüzden işte ben sık sık iş değiştiriyorum, hala yani . . . Bir de eğer uygunsuz teklifler oluyor bazen onları reddedince de işinden oluyorsun ya da patron çalışma koşullarını kötüleştiriyor, seni cezalandırıyor yani bir şekilde.” (Safiye)
119. “Ailemle hiçbir zaman ben paylaşamadım ki sorunlarımı çünkü onlar benim seçimlerimi kabullenmek istemediler, beni desteklemediler hiçbir zaman. Şimdi geçmişe bakıyorum da aslında çok iyi insanlar girmiş benim hayatıma. Çevreme bakıyorum şöyle bir, hep de böyle yanımda duracak birilerini buluyorum. . . O kadar zamanlar oldu ki kimseyle konuşmak istemediğim. Arkadaşlarım beni arardı suratlarına telefonu kapardım. Ama hiçbir zaman olsun da bana kızmadılar, beni eleştirmediler. Geri aradığımda onları hepsi de ‘Seni özledik, seni merak ettik nerelerdeydin?’ dediler. Böyle böyle olunca kendini daha iyi hissetmeye başlıyorsun, canlı hissetmeye başlıyorsun yani tekrardan.” (Melek)
120. “Ben bu eve ilk böyle geldim, anlatamam sana nasıl yıkık dökük bir ev, kapılar kırık, döşemeler dökülüyor böyle, böcekler böyle böyle etrafta geziniyor, pis... Ben dedim ki ‘Allahım yani güzel Allahım ben çocuklarımı nasıl getireceğim bu eve, biz nasıl yaşayacağız burada?’. Ertesi gün hemen ben hemencik işe gittim tabii, biliyorlar ya, herkes biliyor benim kocamdan ayrıldığımı, fark ettiler tabii ben çok üzgünüm, yüzümden düşen bin parça. Sonra mucize gibi Allahım, herkes bana yardım etmeye çalıştı, iş arkadaşlarım, müşterilerim... Bazısı kapılarımı yeniledi, bazısı eşya getirdi kullanmadığı, bazısı alışverişimi yaptı . . . Böyle bir arka çıkmaya ihtiyacı oluyor insanın, seni böyle kendinden emin yapıyor, eminliğini artırıyor . . . Çevrende insanlar olsun. Şimdi ben diyorum ki kendi kendime olsun varsın annen yardım etmedi sana ama şimdi bak gördün mü büyük bir ailen var işte benim arkamda durur onlar, ben kızı gibiyim onların kız kardeşleri gibiyim. Korkma sen korkma diyorum kendime, Arzu sana burada eğer bir yardıma ihtiyacın olursa yardım edecek bir sürü insan var.” (Arzu)
121. “Neden yani neden insanlar böyle çevremde pervana bana yardım etmeye çalışıyorlar? Sana bir şey söyleyeyim çünkü bana güveniyorlar, ben kazandım o güveni, ben kazandım, böyle hanım hanımcıklığımla, becerikliliğimle, dürüstlüğümla, titizliğimle. Beni takdir ediyorlar . . . Bunun benim için ne kadar değerli olduğunu bilemezsin. Ben küçüktüm ya, bu kadarcıktım, kırılmıştım ben. Çok çalıştım Allah burada, onlar da beni ödüllendirdi.” (Arzu)

122. “Herkes o maili gönderdiğini öğrendim [hakaret içerikli bir mail] . . . O kadar utandım ki . . . Ama umduğum olmasını beklediğim şey olmadı. Herkes bana yardım etmeye çalıştı. Beni tekrardan utandırmasınlar diye o kadar dikkat etti ki herkes. ‘Böyle davranılmayı hak etmiyorsun, hiçbir kadın hak etmez’ dediler bana. ‘Eğer hukuki desteğe ihtiyacın varsa söyle yardım edelim, psikologla görüşmek istersen yardım edelim. Bizimle her zaman konuşabilirsin’. Ben orada söyledim ya basit bir çalışandım sadece. Böyle bir zorunlulukları yoktu benimle ilgilenmek gibi böyle bir sorumlulukları yoktu ya da. Maili okuyup bir şey yapmayabilirlerdi görmezden gelebilirlerdi. Ama arka çıktılar bana. Benim ailem ya da çevremde arkadaş olarak bildiğim insanlar bunu yapmadı . . . Onlar bana ne kadar değer verildiğimi gösterdiler, insanların ne kadar birbirine saygılı olabileceğini birbirlerine anlayışlı olabileceğini gösterdiler.” (Yeliz)
123. “İşim işte etrafı temizlemek çay kahve ikramı yapmaktı. Ama ellerim titriyor benim demiştim ya [şiddet sonrası oluşan fiziksel hasarlara bağlı olarak]. Müşterileri geliyor, kahve götürüyorum, kahvenin yarısı fincanın altlığında [gülerek anlatıyor]. Çok utanıyordum böyle artık, yani sıkıldım artık daha tahammül edemedim patronlarımla konuşmaya karar verdim, kovacaklarsa kovsunlar yani beni. Dedim yani böyle böyle ‘Beni kovmak istiyorsanız tamam ben anlarım sizi’. İkisi birden beni daha konuşturmadan ‘. . . ya sen ne diyorsun Melek, biz sana güveniyoruz, sen burada çalışmaya devam edeceksin, sen bizim için değerlisin yani müşterilerimiz ne kadar değerliyse sen de o kadar değerlisin’. Ben duyduklarıma inanamadım. Baban, kocan sana böyle davranmıyor işte.” (Melek)
124. “Böyle birkaç çok iyi dostum benim neredeyse arkadaşlıklarını bitirme aşamalarında . . . Ayrıldıktan sonra onların güvenini tekrardan kazanayım diye çok çabaladım, neler yapmadım neler. Ama oldu da. Arkadaşlarımı yeniden kazandım, sosyal yaşantımı. Çok güzeldi çok önemliydi benim için. Çok ağladım, çok acı çektim ama onlarla buluştuğumda böyle bana terapi gibi oldu hep. Bu evlilikten önce nasıl birisiydim onu hatırlamama yardım ettiler, nasıl zevk alırdım hayatımdan. Bir sürü yaram var, bir sürü derdim var hala ama hiç olmazsa yeniden gülmeyi öğrendim arkadaşlarım sayesinde. Kendim gibi hissetmeyi, kendim gibi davranmaktan korkmamayı. Onların varlığında şey rehabilite ettim kendimi ben.” (Harika)
125. “Çok uzun saatler çalışıyorum, çoğu zaman tükenmiş bir halde geliyorum eve. Fiziksel olarak sağlığım pek iyi durumda değilim, eski kocam sağ olsun . . . Bir kahve var bizim sokakta tam evime yakın, işten sonra hep oraya gidiyorum. Rahatlamak için birebir. Herkes birbirini tanıyor, herkes birbirine arka çıkıyor birbirini kolluyor . . . Şöyle bir özelliği var orasının herkesin bir yarası var orada; kimi kardeşini kaybetmiş, kiminin kocası politik sebeplerden mahkum... Birbirimizi anlıyoruz . . . Yılla yılı duvarlara konuştum, kendi başımaydım yalnız, her şeyle

kendim uğraştım, baş ettim . . . Şimdi yani diyorum buna ihtiyacım var. Bu insanlara sahip olduğum için şanslıyım.” (Feride)

126. “Çok iyi bir insan. Benim için eski kocamdan sonra başka bir erkeğe güvenmek neredeyse imkansızdı ama bütün testleri geçti neyse ki o [gülüyor]. Hala da bilemezsin gelecekte ne olacağını ama şimdi bana sevildiğimi hissettiriyor . . . Hayatın boyunca hiç böyle hissetmemişsin, sanıyorsun ki romantik ilişkiler aşklar sadece filmlerde olur [gülüyor]. Onunla birlikteyken geçmişimi unutuyorum, daha iyi hissediyorum, genç hissediyorum, gelecekte daha az korkuyorum.” (Aysel)
127. “Benim zihnimin içini bir gör, devamlı yapılacaklar, yapılması gereken şeyler uğraşmam gereken şeyler. O zaman şey düşünme eğiliminde oluyorsun hep böyle sen hayatında uğraş verirken mücadele ederken bir ilişkiye bir erkeğe yer olamaz diye. Ama şimdi benim hayatım, nasıl anlatayım böyle daha renkli oldu. Sık sık arıyor beni, sadece nasılım diye sormak için. Bir şeyler yapmaya davet ediyor, birlikte bir yerlere gitmeye . . . Geçen hafta tartıştık . . . Sonra ellerinde böyle çiçeklerle geldi. Onun varlığı bana daha enerji veriyor. Yine aynı şeylerle uğraşıyorum ama daha az yorgun hissediyorum.” (Melek)
128. “Bağırmadan nasıl konuşacağını biliyor bir kere. Tartıştığımızda neyle ilgili olursa olsun, bağırarak yok, agresyon yok. Öfkesini kontrol edebiliyor, saygıdeğer bir şekilde nasıl davranacağını biliyor. O zaman ben anlıyorum ki ya benim hayatımda da birisi olabilir, her adamlar benim eski kocam gibi değilmiş ki yani, kavga etmeden konuşmak mümkünmüş ki. Ve yani benim böyle kadın gibi hissetmeme yol açıyor. Kadını ben. Bir erkek beni sevebilir . . . Sevgi! Sevgi iyileştiriyor. Ben hayatımdan zevk almaya başladım. Hayatın sadece çalışmaktan ve mücadele etmekten ibaret olmadığını öğrendim.” (Arzu)
129. “Bitmiştim ben oraya ilk gittiğimde, bittiktim yani . . . Çok büyük bir korku vardı o zamanlar içimde o beni bulabilir açısından yani. Onlar hep dediler ki bana ‘Merak etme, birlikte aşacağız bunları, sana kendini koruman için yardım edeceğiz’ . . . Bizi böyle bir koruma çemberine aldılar onlar. Hep dediler ‘Güçlüsünüz siz, bütün bu zorlukların üstesinden geleceksiniz . . . biz burada sizi destekleyeceğiz hep, arkanızda olacağız’. Şimdi var ya böyle hayat benim için o kadar zor değil, eskisi kadar değil. Böyle benim bakış açımı değiştirdiler yani onlar . . . Şimdi işten mi kovdular beni, hayatta da yalvarmam, başka bir şey bulurum elbet, bir çözüm bulurum. Benim hayatımı değiştirdiler yani, bana kendime güvenimi kazanayım diye yardım ettiler yol gösterdiler.” (Reyhan)
130. “Onlar benim kanatsız meleklerim . . . Dinlemek, eleştirmeden yargılamadan desteklemek. Bana hep yol gösterdiler her şey için. Ellerimi tuttular böyle ve yol gösterdiler. Hayatta kalmamda rolleri o kadar önemli ki. Senin için bir şey

yapmıyorlar ama sana yolu gösteriyorlar, sana seçeneklerin ne onu anlatıyorlar. Onlar sana değer veren ve seni güçlendirmeye çalışan insanlar senin davranışlarını eleştirmeden.” (Canan)

131. “Çok şey öğrendim ondan. Çok hata yaptım ama beni hep yönlendirdi . . . Benim adım karar vermiyordu, beni kendi kararlarımı alayım diye destekledi hep, kendi sorumluluğumu almam için. Ona minnettarım, çok şey borçluyum . . . Hayatımı ben meğerse hep diğerlerinin doğrultusunda yaşamışım, önce babam annem sonra kocam onun ailesi. Ama orada ben şey gibiydim ergen bir kız gibiydim, hayatı yeni yeni keşfetmeye çalışan böyle. O da benim mentorumdu.” (Aysel)
132. Bizim iyi hissetmemizi sağlamak istediler, rahatlamamızı. Ben adım adım kendimi özgür hissetmeye başladım. Dışarı çıkıyorduk kimse bize bir şey sormuyor, garip hissetmişim çok, suçlu gibi. Dışarı çıkmak için onlardan izin almam gerekir gibi düşünmüştüm. Düşünsene hayatın boyunca hayatın hep birilerine bir şey sorarak geçiyor, baban, annen, kocan . . . Sosyal çalışmacımın sesi hala kulaklarımda: ‘Sen bunlara katlanmak zorunda değilsin, kendi hayatını yaşayabilirsin, başarabilirsin bunu’. Ben hayatım boyunca o zaman kadar böyle şeyler duymamışım, kimseden. ‘Güzel bir kadınsın sen, sen değerlisin’. Aynaya bakıp bakıp duruyordum, ‘Öyle miyim?’ Evet, öyleyim, daha iyisini hak ediyorum.” (Melek)
133. “Kendime dedim ki ‘Bak, onlar başarmış, hem de koşulları seninkinden çok daha kötüyken, ama başarmışlar. Sen niye bu kadar çaresiz hissediyorsun o zaman, sakinleş, kafanı topla, başarı hikayeni yazacaksın sen’. Hala da biraz üzgün hissedince, böyle bir şekilde çaresiz hissedince onları orada tanıştığım kadınları hatırlamaya çalışıyorum, bana kendi hakkında söylediklerini, onca zorlukla nasıl baş ettiklerini . . . Bana büyük bir ilham kaynağı oldular.” (Esra)
134. “Oradaki her bir kadın birbirine deva oldu çünkü hepimiz aynı acıyı paylaşmışız. Orada olup da onların acısını dinlemek beni daha da büyüttü bir kere. En yaşlılarıydım orada, bana çok saygı duyarlardı. Onların annesi oldum ben, bana güvendiler, ihtiyaçları olunca tavsiye istediler. Hepsi benim kendi öz kızlarım gibiydi.” (Hayat)
135. “Oğlum. Beni çökerten de oğlum hayatta tutan da oğlum. Çünkü oğlum için şey yapıyorum Büşra, bir ekmek bana bir hafta yeter, oğlum için bunca mücadele . . . Böyle hep yaralı bir kuş gibi çırpınıp duruyorum düşmemek için. Hani hep oğlum, onun için çabalıyorum bu kadar. Ayakta durma gücünü veren de o çelmeyi takan da o.” (Aysel)

136. “Zorluklarla karşılaştığım her an oturup ağlamayı seven bir insan değilim ben. Benim onlarla uğraşmam mücadele etmem lazım. Her şeyden önce iki çocuğum var benim. Onlar beni bu kadar kararlı yapıyor. Onlar için güçlü olmaktan başka bir yolum yok benim . . . Onlar için çalışıyorum, onlar için yaşıyorum ben. Hep kendime dedim ki, hep böyle bir şeyler olduğunda ‘Başka seçeneğin yok paşa paşa savaşacaksın, onlar için mücadele edeceksin’ . . . Kendime dedim söz verdim huzurlu bir aile kuracağım çocuklarım için. Bunu başarayım diye çalıştım bunca. Yaptım da . . . Pes etmedim. Mutlu olmaya devam ediyorum, çocuklarım için güçlü olmaya çünkü başka bir seçenek yok böyle olmak zorunda. Ben de onları sırt üstü bıraksam arkalarında durmazsam ne yaparlar o zaman?” (Oya)
137. “Onunla ilgili evliliğimle ilgili ne yaşadığımla ilgili hiçbir şey hatırlamak istemiyorum çünkü yoluma devam etmek istiyorum, önüme bakmak istiyorum. Kendimi kötü hissettiğimde hemen o moddan kaçmaya kurtulmaya çalışıyorum, kendime öyle hissetmeme izin vermek istemiyorum. Çocuğum var benim. Eğer geçmişte tıklıp kalırsam bunun oğlum için iyi olmayacağına eminim. O mutlu olsun diye güçlü ve sağlıklı olmalıyım. Ondan ben sorumluyum, sırf onun iyiliği için çabalamak zorundayım. Başka bir yolu yok. Mücadele, mücadele etmeliyim, benim hayatım bundan sonra böyle.” (Pervin)
138. “Biz kadınların gerçekçi olması gerekiyor, kadınlar gerçekçi olmalı. Zayıflığa kendimizi kaptırırsak ne olacağını çok iyi biliyoruz. Ben üzülünce ağlayınca kendime kızıyorum çünkü böyle yapmaya devam edersem hiçbir şey kazanamayacağımı biliyorum. Benim, bir tek ben bu zorlukların üstesinden gelmesi gereken. İlk 19 yaşında anne olduğumda bunu kendime söylemeye başladım kendime, senden başkası yok, sadece sensin bunu yenmesi gereken diye. Hala da aynı şeyi söylüyorum. Sen bir annesin, senin depresyonda olmak gibi bir lüksün yok, senin kendine bakman lazım, güçlü durman lazım çünkü sana ihtiyaçları var. Sen bu zorluklar karşısında eğilip bükülürsen onlar da acı çeker . . . Ben çok acı çektim evet, ama yapacak bir şey yok, ağlamak hiçbir şeyi çözmiyor, önümüze bakmamız lazım, gerçekçi olmamız lazım.” (Feride)
139. “Artık benim mottom oldu. Üzüntümü erteleyebilirim, onlar uyuduktan sonra ağlayabilirim ama bunlar benim çocuklarımla ilişkiyi engellemeyecek, mutlu olacağım, oyuncu olacağım. Gülümseme daha fazla mutluluk getiriyor. Ben gülümsediğimde, onlar da daha fazla gülümsüyor. Zor süreçlerden geçtik biz, atlattık. Benim oğlum o kadar öfkeli nefret dolu bir çocuktaki ki . . . Diğer çocuklara hakaret eder, ısırır, döver. Çok hani çok huzursuz bir çocuktaki. Geçenlerde okulun rehberlik öğretmeniyle görüştüm, bana ne dedi biliyor musun ‘Oğlunuz diğer çocuklar kızdığında onları sakinleştirmeye çalışıyor’. Bunun benim için ne kadar önemli olduğunu anlatamam sanan [ağlıyor]. Bunu ben başardım, artık o öfke dolu

nefret dolu bir çocuk değil. Sevgi dolu, kibar bir çocuk. Böyle şeyler insanı güçlendiriyor, daha güçlü hissediyorsun.” (Harika)

140. “Çocuklar anneyi zorluklara karşı daha dirençli yapıyor . . . Bir insanın zorluklara dayanabilmesi için çok önemli çocuklar. Ben çok gurur duyuyorum çocuklarımla. Saygılı, doğru dürüst, düşünceli anlayışlı gençler oldular. Geçenlerde şey oldu anlatayım sana. Benim kızın arkadaşları böyle arada onu kahve içmeye falan çağırırlar dışarda. Bir keresinde ben de o telefonda konuşurken kulak misafiri oldum, ‘Siz gelin buraya, evde kahve yaparım ben size, dışarda içsek şimdi en azından 5 lira, annemin böyle çarçur edecek parası yok benim’. İşte böyle, benim çocuklarım böyle . . . Ben öğrettim onlara bunu, çalışkan olmayı, güçlü olmayı ben öğrettim . . . Tuvalet temizledim yeri geldi ama ben çocuklarımı böyle yetiştirmeyi başardım.” (Nermin)
141. “Bağımsızlığımı kazanmak benim şu anda en çok istediğim, benim için en önemli olan şey. Bu hani bir özgürleşme süreci . . . Çilem Doğan [erkek partner şiddetinden kaçmış olan bir kadın] da diyordu yani kendi ailesi ile olan sürecinin onun için en zorlu kısmı olduğundan bahsediyordu, onların kontrolcülüğüne karşı savaşmanın. Bence benim sürecim de onunkinden farklı değil, ya da başka herhangi bir kadının sürecinden. Ben de örgütümün kontrolünden kaçmaya kurtulmaya çalışıyorum . . . Bir köprü inşa ediyorum gibi geliyor, sadece benim kendi değerlerime ve hissettiklerime dayanan bir köprü . . . Bu gerçek hayatmış yani hani bundan önceki bir illüzyon gibiymiş sanki. Şimdi kendi başımayım, kendi kendime karar veriyorum, kimseye hiçbir şey sormadan. Kendi kendime yürüyorum ve bu çok ama çok hoşuma gidiyor.” (Zeynep)
142. “Kıramı kendim ödüyorum, faturalarımı kendim. Allah’ıma şükürler olsun ki kimseden bir destek almadan. Borcum neyse ödüyorum. Evime şöyle mobilya almayı bile başardım. Bu biliyorum bir sürü insan için büyük bir şey değil hani nedir, bir yatak, bir koltuk, yemek masası. Ama bunları yapabilmek benim için çok önemli. Kendime diyebiliyorum ki ben ‘Allahım şükürler olsun sana, kimseye borçlanıp harçlanmadan ben kendi hayatımı idame ettirebiliyorum’. Bir kadının ancak başkasından bir şeyler beklemeyi bırakırsa kendi hayatını istediği gibi yaşayabileceğini fark ettim ben. Ne aileden ne kocandan ne de başka erkeklerden. Sadece ben varım.” (Yeliz)
143. “Bir erkeğe bağımlı olmak artık benim düşünebileceğim bir şey değil, bunu istemiyorum yani ben artık. Ne zamandı hatırlamıyorum bir süre önce bana dedi ki [erkek arkadaşından bahsediyor] teklif etti yani maddi olarak destek olmayı. Hemen anında kapadım konuyu, onun parasını istemediğim söyledim. Benim yanımda durabilir tamam, elimi tutabilir ama hiçbir zaman ona ekonomik olarak bağımlı olmayacağım . . . Sağlık problemlerim çok beni yordu, bazı günler inan eve ekmek

alacak kadar paramız olmuyor. Yine de ama ben özgürüm ya. Evimiz var şükür, çocuklarım yanımda. Bir gün çok yemesek de olur, yarı aç yatağa girsek de. Tek önemli şey kimsenin parasına muhtaç olmamak, kimsenin acımasına muhtaç olmamak.” (Melek)

144. “Kendim kazanıyorum kendim harcıyorum. Borçlandıysam borç benim. Kimseye hiçbir şey açıklamak zorunda değilim. Kimseye minnet etmek zorunda değilim. Kimse bana ‘Bunu sen niye yaptın?’ diye soramaz bundan sonra. Benim hayatım, benim kararlarım, doğrusu yanlışı, kimsenin boynuna değil. Ben özgürüm, bir bunu biliyorum. Geriye hiç bakmıyorum, iyiyim ben kendimle . . . İnsanlar şey der neydi o ‘Mutluluğu parayla satın alamazsın’ ama aslında alabilirsin. Çünkü eğer paran varsa hayatını devam ettirmek için kimseye muhtaç değilsin demektir bu, hem mutlu olabilirsin hem de özgür.” (Hayat)
145. “Ben başardım [ağlıyor]. Neredeyse 4 yıl oldu artık, çok zordu, hala da zor ama daha iyi daha iyi. Başardım. Kendimle gurur duyuyorum. Çalıştığım için daha güçlü hissediyorum. Yani iki yaşında bir çocukla anne olarak çalışmak ne kadar zor biliyor musun? Hele de arkanı yaslayacağın kimse yoksa etrafında. Ama ben yaptım, pes etmedim kesinlikle. Küçük bir ev aldım. Bakalım yakında oraya taşınacağız inşallah orada bir iş bulmam lazım sadece. Ama biliyor musun babam benim çalışmamı istemedi. Kardeşim bile çalışmamı istemedi. Çünkü biliyorlardı ki çalışırsam onlara bağımlı hissetmeyeceğim ve onlar benim hayatımı kontrol edemeyecekler eskisi gibi. Babam kafasına göre istediği zaman bana hakaret ederdi, kaç kere kovdu beni. Ama onların bir kuruş desteği olmadan aldım ben bu evi, öyle davranmamaya başladılar bana artık. Biliyorlar çünkü ben onlara bağımlı değilim artık, çalışıyorum, evim var. Her şey çok zordu inan, ama biliyorum ben başardım. Özgürüm güçlüyüm.” (Pervin)
146. “Hiçbir erkek benim yanımda duramaz! Bak neyi başardığımı nerede olduğuma. Ben 14 yaşındaydım ya, minicik bir çocuktum ben. Zavallıydım, fakirdim. Şimdi güçlü bir kadınam. Şimdi herkes bana saygı duyuyor. İki daire aldım ben kendi paramla. Kimse hiç kimse, annem kardeşim bir kuruş para vermediler bana bunu yapmam başarmam için. Bu evler benim çocuklarımın geleceği olacak. Güçlüyüm ben çok güçlüyüm.” (Arzu)
147. “Erkekler bizden üstün ha, daha güçlü ha! Bu beyefendi bütün gün affedersin şeyini yayıp kahvede çay içiyor. Benim ben sabahtan akşama kadar çalışan, çocuklarına kol kanat geren onlara bakan. Ben daha güçlüyüm, ben daha üstünüm.” (Nermin)
148. “Bir arkadaşım var, depresyonda. Hep mutsuz hep, ama aslında hayatı iyi, ne maddi sıkıntısı var, kocası gül gibi adam. Bazen kendimi karşılaştırıyorum da diyorum ki o zaman ‘Kendim gibi olmayı tercih ederim yani onun gibi olacağıma’. Yaşadığım

başına gelen şeyler çok kötüydü, kimse yaşamasın böyle şeyler. Ama yapılması gerekeni yaptım her zaman. Bu küçücük bedenimle kurtardım kendimi. Her şeyle kendi kendime başa çıktım. Tökezlediğim zamanlar oldu, çok sıkı düştüğüm zamanlar ama hiçbir zaman pes etmedim. 3 gün depresyon sonra yine ayaklarımın üstüne [gülüyor]. Şimdi kendime bakınca çok gurur duyuyorum kendimle.” (Feride)

149. “İş yerinden bir kadın şey sordu neden ayrıldım işte şiddet var mıydı yok muydu? Kafamda ‘Evet’ dedim ama sesli bir şekilde söyleyemedim bunu. Hala utanıyordum, ‘Yazık bu kıza çok genç, işte şiddete maruz kalmış, küçücük bebeğiyle kalakalmış’ derler diye korkuyordum galiba. Ama bu utanılacak bir şey değil ki. Şimdi kendimi ifade etmek istiyorum, hayatımın hikayesini konuşmak istiyorum. Aslında bu çalışmaya katılmayı da o yüzden istedim, yani şunu diyeyim ‘Evet ben şiddete maruz kaldım ama kaçtım, kurtuldum, şimdi buradayım. Bu yüzden kendimle gurur duyuyorum. Kendi ayaklarımın üstüne duruyorum, şiddeti kabul etmedim, direndim, şiddete karşı savaştım ve başardım, utanılacak bir şey yok . . . Bütün bu deneyimler beni daha güçlü kıldı, şu anda kim olduysam bu deneyimle sonucunda oldum.” (Esra)
150. “Burada konuştuktan sonra biraz hüzünlü hissettim, bilemiyorum, hani böyle hepsini konuşmak birden . . . Bir bankta oturdum, ağlamaya başladım. Yani bu şeyle ilgiliydi, çok çabalıyorsun, bir şeyleri başarmak için çok büyük çaba harcıyorsun, sonra da başardığını fark ediyorsun, böyle bir rahatlama mutluluk hissi. Fark ettim ki çok şeyler imkansız şeyler başarmışım ben. Üzülme dedim kendime, üzülme gerek yok, başardın sen.” (Melek)
151. “Çok şey başardım ben. Şunu düşünsene, adamdan ayrılmışsın ondan ayrıldıktan sonra bile bütün hayatımı ona göre düzenliyordum sırf ondan korkumdan. Bir şey söylersem bunu mahkemede kullanabilir. Çocuklarımı çalabilir. Arkadaşlarımla buluştum diyelim ya beni görürse. Sokakta yürüyorum ya bana zarar vermeye çalışırsa. Bütün bunlardan kurtuldum artık. Arkadaşlarımla buluşuyorum, korkmadan eve geç geliyorum . . . Bunlar benim için büyük adımlar. Hala korku var, kayboldu desem yalan olur, o da hala bana zarar vermeye çalışıyor zaten ama ben daha güçlü hissediyorum kendimi, bunlarla başa çıkmak için hani.” (Harika)
152. “Yapabileceğim ne varsa her şeyi yaptım. Şimdi o benden korkuyor [gülüyor]. Evime gelir kapıyı tekmelerdi, şimdi bakıyorum sokağın köşesinde oğlanı ona götüreyim diye bekliyor [gülüyor]. Hiç vazgeçmedim çünkü ben. Polisi arıyorsun diyorlar ki ‘Of be yine mi sen sıkıldık senden yeter’. Polis gelir her seferinde bütün komşular camda film izler gibi bizi izliyorlar . . . Ama hiçbir şey ama hiçbir şey kendimi ve oğlumu korumaktan daha önemli değil. Polisi arıyorum, 5 dakikaya gelmediler mi yine arıyorum o zaman ‘5 dakika önce aradım niye hala gelmediniz?’” (Pervin)

153. “Çok yaralıyım, belki bazıları hiç iyileşmeyecek imkansız. Ama yine de ben kendimle gurur duyuyorum çünkü kimseye teslim olmadım, başkalarının kurallarını kabul etmedim. Kedi fare oynadı o, izin vermedim ona. Haklarımı öğrendim, kendimi savundum. Hakkım neyse isteyecek kadar cesurdum. Ben kedi oldum o da oynamayı bıraktı. En azından bunlar teselli veriyor bana.” (Canan)
154. “Çok ilginç gerçekten. Ondan kurtulduktan sonra ben aynı zamanda diğer ilişkilerimde de daha özgür hissetmeye başladım. Bazı arkadaşlarımla hiç rahat olmadığımı fark ettim mesela. İnsanlar birçok şekilde yaklaşabiliyorlar sana, incitebiliyorlar saldırgan olabiliyorlar, hani şey bazen bilerek isteyerek bazen de öyle kendilerini bilmediklerinden, cahillikten mi diyelim artık. Ben onlar beni kötü hissettirseler de kendimi zorluyordum bu ilişkileri devam ettirmek için. Yani bu nasıl büyük bir duygusal emekmiş, ne gereksiz bir duygusal emekmiş. Artık kendimi tüketmeyeceğim böyle ilişkilere yatırım yaparak.” (Zeynep)
155. “Bunca korkunç şey yaşadktan sonra kendi önceliklerini düşünmeye ihtiyaç duyuyorsun. Ben hep başkalarını memnun etmek üzerine, önceliğim oydu . . . Başkaları benden daha önemli. Şimdi eğer bir şey istemiyorsam istemiyorum. Hayatımı kendim ve oğlum için yaşıyorum.” (Safiye)
156. “Amcam tokat atmaya kalktı, dur dedim dur yapamazsın. Çok büyük bir adam biliyor musun herkes korkar yani. Ama ben dur dedim, ‘Ben yanlış bir şey yapmadım ki bir kere . . . bak kendi ayaklarımın üzerinde duruyorum, çocuklarıma bakıyorum, sen beni dedim suçlayamazsın dedim, senin buna hakkın yok dedim. Herkes böyle dondu kaldı biliyor musun? Ben kendimi böyle savunamazdım ki ama şimdi kimse benim işime burnunu sokamaz, öyle kolay değil.” (Reyhan)
157. “Hepsi kalakaldı, şaşırdılar. Benim ondan ayrılmamı kabullenemediler. Sadece ayrılmam değil hem de sığınmada kalmam, onlarla iletişimi kesmem . . . Telefonda konuşuyorduk, hala daha onunla iletişimdeler. Umdular ki ben dönerim belki diye . . . Bir gün anneme dedim ki ‘Bak anne seni zaten arada bir arıyorum, eğer onunla bir daha görüştüğünü öğrenirsem benim sesimi hayatta duyamazsın bir daha bunu bil’. Çok ciddiye aldı bunu, görüşmüyor artık . . . Artık yetmişti yani, burama kadar gelmişti.” (Hayat)
158. “Onların bana karşı olan davranışlarını kontrol etmeye çalışıyorum. Hayatımla ilgili bir şeyler söylediklerinde, mesela ben eve geç geldiğimde ya da ben eskiden baş örtüsü takıyordum ama bir süreden beri artık takmamayı tercih ettim, yani bu konularda çok ısrar ediyorum onların bunlarla ilgili herhangi bir şey söylemeye hakları yok diye. Annem dindar bir kadın, ben değilim artık. Bu kadar yani. Bununla ilgili yapacağı hiçbir şey yok. Ve de babam. Ben öğrendim, şiddet sistematik, şiddet gösteren bir insan kendi davranışlarının farkında, davranışlarının

sonuçlarının da farkında. Yani babam eskisi kadar şiddet göstermiyor, en azından ben çevresindeyken. Çünkü biliyor ki ben evi anında terk ederim eğer kötü bir şey yaparsa, sıfır toleransım sıfır.” (Esra)

159. “Kendi oğlundan korkuyorsun, çok garip değil mi bu? Onun senden korkması gerekiyor . . . Bir gün artık çok düşündükten sonra sıkıldım dayanamadım, cesaretimi topladım ve konuşmaya karar verdim . . . Dedim ki yani ‘Ben senin annenim oğlum, bana böyle davranmaya hakkın yok senin. Ben zaten babanın şiddetinden sıkılmışım yıllarca bunalmışım, evde ben artık daha gerginlik istemiyorum’ dedim. ‘Sen bana bağırınca ben onu görüyorum senin gözlerinde, sevmiyorum bunu’ dedim. ‘Siz’ dedim ‘Siz benim hayatımdaki en önemli insanlarsınız, sen ve kız kardeşin. Ama ne ona ne de bana böyle davranamazsın. Ben buna izin vermem. Vermeyeceğim. O yüzden kendine çeki düzen ver. Ben senden izin almayacağım ama sen benden izin alacaksın çünkü ben senin annenim’ dedim. Yani birkaç saat konuştuk galiba ama mesajı buydu. İşe de yaradı.” (Melek)
160. “Hayatını feda etmen gerekiyor, kadın olmak bunu gerektirir. Acı çekmek bizim doğamızda var. Ama ben acı çekmekten çok yoruldum artık, fedakarlık yapmaktan çok yoruldum. Ne oldu ki oğlum için fedakarlıklar yaptım da? Çok küçüktü onun için kaldım evde. Acı çeksin istemedim. Ama sonra 16 yaşında şimdi bana fahişe diyor. Hala canımı acıtıyor tabii ki bu, nasıl acıtmasın ama yeter artık. Ben kendi hayatımı yaşamak istiyorum. Bu onun tercihi. Kendimi ona anlatmaya çalıştım ama artık bitti. Artık daha acı çekmek istemiyorum. Bunu kızıma da göstermek istiyorum. Özgür olabilirsin, acı çekmek zorunda değilsin, diğer insanları çok düşünmek zorunda değilsin. Böyle yaparak davranarak ona bir mesaj vermek istiyorum aslında.” (Yeliz)

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