

# Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Retrospective Analysis of Cases in Aydın, Türkiye

## COVID-19 Pandemisi Döneminde Aile İçi Şiddet: Aydın İline Başvuran Olguların Retrospektif İncelenmesi

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**ABSTRACT Objective:** This study retrospectively analyzes cases of domestic physical violence reported to the Forensic Medicine Clinic at Aydın Adnan Menderes University during the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. As one of Türkiye's few regional analyses, this study aims to compare its findings with pre-existing literature to evaluate the unique impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence. **Material and Methods:** From March 11, 2020, to March 11, 2022, a total of 2,034 outpatient visits were reviewed, of which 55 involved domestic violence. The study focused exclusively on cases of physical violence involving offenses against bodily integrity, with 6 cases excluded due to incomplete data, resulting in a final sample of 49 cases. Data collected included demographic details and incident specifics, such as location and injury type. **Results:** Among the 49 cases, 61.2% involved female victims and 38.8% male, with an increase in male victimization observed compared to pre-pandemic studies. Incidents primarily took place at home (65.3%) and were more often reported from urban areas (57.1%). The most commonly injured body region was the face (51%), and it was determined that 65.3% of injuries were mild enough to be managed with basic medical intervention. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest shifts in domestic violence patterns during the pandemic, including changes in gender distribution. These results may offer useful insights for healthcare providers and policymakers seeking to understand domestic violence dynamics under crisis conditions. Further research could support preventive measures for similar future situations.

**ÖZET Amaç:** Bu çalışma, koronavirüs hastalığı-2019 [coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19)] pandemisi döneminde Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Adli Tıp Ana Bilim Dalı'na başvuran aile içi fiziksel şiddet vakalarını retrospektif olarak incelemektedir. Türkiye'de yapılan sınırlı sayıda bölgesel analizden biri olan bu çalışma, COVID-19 pandemisinin aile içi şiddet üzerindeki özgün etkilerini değerlendirmek amacıyla bulgularını mevcut literatürle karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. **Gereç ve Yöntemler:** 11 Mart 2020-11 Mart 2022 tarihleri arasında toplam 2.034 poliklinik başvurusu incelenmiş ve bunlardan 55'inin aile içi şiddet vakası olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma, yalnızca vücut dokunulmazlığına karşı işlenen fiziksel şiddet vakalarına odaklanmış, eksik veriye sahip 6 vaka dışlanarak nihai analiz 49 vaka üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Demografik bilgiler ve olay yeri, yaralanma türü gibi olay detayları toplanarak analiz edilmiştir. **Bulgular:** Kırk dokuz vakanın %61,2'si kadın, %38,8'i ise erkek mağdurlardan oluşmakta olup, pandemi öncesi çalışmalara kıyasla erkek mağduriyetinde artış gözlemlenmiştir. Vakaların %65,3'ü evde gerçekleşmiş ve %57,1'i kentsel bölgelerden rapor edilmiştir. En çok yaralanan vücut bölgesi yüz olup (%51), yaralanmaların %65,3'ünün basit bir tıbbi müdahale ile giderilebilecek ölçüde hafif olduğu belirlenmiştir. **Sonuç:** Bulgular, pandemi süresince aile içi şiddet vakalarının cinsiyet dağılımında değişimler olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlar, kriz koşullarında aile içi şiddet dinamiklerini anlamak isteyen sağlık hizmeti sağlayıcıları ve politika yapıcılar için faydalı olabilir. Benzer durumlara yönelik önlemler geliştirmek amacıyla daha fazla araştırma yapılması önerilmektedir.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence; coronavirus disease-2019; intimate partner violence

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aile içi şiddet; koronavirüs hastalığı-2019; yakın partner şiddeti

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Domestic violence encompasses a range of behaviors, including physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse, and controlling actions.<sup>1</sup> A systematic review published in 2023 indicated that the prevalence of domestic violence against women in developing countries ranged from %29.4 to %73.7.<sup>2</sup> A study in Türkiye conducted between 2008 and 2011 revealed an increase in domestic violence crimes over the years, with the highest rates of reported incidents observed in the Eastern Marmara and Aegean regions.<sup>3</sup> Studies indicate that the prevalence of domestic violence increased globally during the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

This study aims to retrospectively analyze cases of domestic physical violence reported to the Department of Forensic Medicine at Adnan Menderes University in Aydın, Türkiye, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to compare the findings with other studies in the literature. As one of the few regional analyses of domestic violence cases in Türkiye during this period, the research provides valuable results for policymakers and healthcare professionals in addressing domestic violence at both regional and national levels.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The case files of domestic violence victims who presented to the Forensic Medicine Clinic at Adnan Menderes University between March 11, 2020, and March 11, 2022, were retrospectively reviewed to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical violence within domestic settings. During this period, a total of 2.034 outpatient entries were recorded at the clinic, of which 55 cases involved domestic violence; these 55 cases were selected for inclusion in the study. The study focused specifically on instances of physical violence, with cases of sexual violence excluded to maintain an emphasis on offenses affecting bodily integrity and their medical consequences. This approach enabled a more detailed examination of the physical injuries and associated forensic findings. Initially, 55 cases were identified; however, after excluding 6 cases due to incomplete or missing data, a final sample of 49 cases was included in the analysis.

Demographic and incident-specific data were collected, including the victim's gender, age, and region of residence, along with the perpetrator's gender, their relationship to the victim, the location of the violent incident, and the outcomes as recorded in the forensic medical reports. These data were then systematically analyzed using SPSS version 22 (IBM Corp., USA), with frequency analyses conducted to explore patterns and distributions within the dataset. The findings provide a statistical overview of domestic violence incidents during the pandemic period, with particular attention to demographic factors and the nature of the physical violence experienced by the victims.

The study was approved by the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Adnan Menderes University Faculty of Medicine (date: October 21, 2021, decision no: 04). It was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

## RESULTS

A retrospective analysis of cases presented to the Forensic Medicine Clinic of Adnan Menderes University Hospital between March 11, 2020, and March 11, 2022, identified 49 cases of domestic violence. Of these cases, 61.2% (n=30) involved female victims, while 38.8% (n=19) involved male victims (Table 1). The average age of female victims was 32.5 years, and the average age of male victims was 33.8 years.

**TABLE 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the victims

		n	%
Gender	Female	30	61.2
	Male	19	38.8
	Total	49	100
Residence	Urban	28	57.1
	Rural	21	42.9
	Total	49	100
Employment status	Unemployed, student	24	48.9
	Employed	19	38.7
	Retired	6	12.2
	Total	49	100
Marital status	Married	35	71.4
	Single	14	28.6
	Total	49	100

An analysis of the alleged perpetrators revealed that 87.8% (n=43) were male, while 12.2% (n=6) were female. Among the suspects, 42.0% (n=21) were spouses, and 18.4% (n=9) were parents (Table 2).

An examination of the locations where the assaults occurred revealed that 65.3% (n=32) of the cases reported the assault took place at home, while 24.5% (n=12) indicated that they were assaulted in public spaces. When assessing the nature of objects used in the acts of violence, it was found that in

**TABLE 2:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the perpetrator

		n	%
Gender	Female	6	12.2
	Male	43	87.8
	Total	49	100
Degree of relationship	Spouse	21	42
	Parent	9	18.4
	Child	5	10.2
	Partner	2	4.1
	Grandchild	2	4.1
	Sibling	6	12.2
	Relative	3	6.1
	Ex-spouse	1	2
	Total	49	100

**TABLE 3:** Characteristics of the violent incident

		n	%
Location	Home	32	65.3
	Public	12	24.5
	Car	1	2
	Multiple locations	4	8.2
	Total	49	100
Weapon used	None or body parts	28	57.2
	Sharp-edged tool	10	20.4
	Firearm	1	2
	Blunt object	10	20.4
	Total	49	100
Injured body region	Face	25	51
	Scalp	4	8.2
	Thorax and back	4	8.2
	Upper extremity	4	8.2
	Lower extremity	4	8.2
	Pelvic region	3	6.1
	Multiple region	5	10.2
	Total	49	100

**TABLE 4:** Characteristics of the issued reports

		n	%
Treatability with simple medical intervention	Treatable	32	65.3
	Non treatable	17	34.7
	Total	49	100
Presence of life-threatening condition	Present	1	2
	Non present	48	98
	Total	49	100
Fracture	None	46	93.9
	Vertebra	1	2
	Upper extremity	1	2
	Multiple*	1	2
	Total	49	100
Impairment or loss of function of one of the senses or organs	None	43	87.8
	Follow-up examination required	6	12.2
	Total	49	100
Presence of permanent facial scar	Present	3	6.1
	Non present	32	65.3
	Follow-up examination required	14	28.6
	Total	49	100

\*Upper extremity and lower extremity

57.2% (n=28) of the cases, no objects were used, and the perpetrator employed only body parts (hands, feet, etc.) in the attack. In an equal number of cases, blunt objects and sharp-edged tools were used (n=10, 20.4%) (Table 3).

An examination of the reports issued following the medical evaluations revealed that in 65.3% (n=32) of the cases, the injuries were determined to be treatable with simple medical intervention. Additionally, it was found that the injuries in 1 case (2%) posed a life-threatening risk (Table 4).

## DISCUSSION

The most notable finding in our study is the gender distribution of the victims of domestic violence. A study conducted in Brazil between 2012 and 2014 found that women were 4 times more likely to experience domestic violence compared to men.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, our study shows that this ratio is approximately 2 to 1. A review of the literature reveals that similar ratios have been found in other recent studies conducted in the same period as our research.<sup>6-8</sup> A systematic review published in 2021 identified an increase in domestic violence cases worldwide during

the pandemic period. The primary causes of this increase were attributed to social isolation, alcohol and substance use, and economic hardships.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in a study conducted by Kolbe et al., social isolation and alcohol or substance dependency were highlighted as key factors contributing to domestic violence against men.<sup>9</sup> In Türkiye, the periods during which lockdown measures were implemented, particularly when the predominantly male workforce was confined to their homes, may be associated with an overall rise in domestic violence cases, especially those involving male perpetrators.<sup>10</sup> The lack of investigation into the causes of this phenomenon represents a limitation of our study.

In our study, the majority of domestic violence victims were found to be women. This finding aligns with numerous other studies, which have similarly reported that women experience domestic violence at higher rates, particularly in societies with greater gender inequality.<sup>9,11,12</sup>

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of domestic violence victims were from urban and district centers. A study conducted in Denizli reported that 71.9% of the domestic violence cases originated from urban areas.<sup>13</sup> Research from Poland indicated that domestic violence victims in rural areas are more hesitant to seek help, or professionals in these regions have difficulty identifying instances of violence.<sup>14</sup> In line with these findings, the lower rate of reports from rural areas in our study suggests that victims in rural regions may have limited access to support services due to societal and logistical barriers.

In our study, it was found that the majority of victims were married (71.4%). This finding is consistent with the study by Alkan et al., which reported that 88.2% of the 6,796 physical violence victims they analyzed were married.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a study conducted in Ankara revealed that 83.3% of married women had experienced domestic violence.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, research by Lasong et al. in Zimbabwe identified low education levels, low income, and unemployment as significant contributing factors to domestic violence.<sup>17</sup> The higher prevalence of domestic violence among married women in our study may also be attributed to similar socioeconomic factors.

The present study identified that the largest group of perpetrators were spouses (42.0%) when analyzing their relationship to the victims. A review of the literature highlights that intimate partner violence, particularly against women, is highly prevalent and represents a global issue. These findings suggest that partner violence is one of the most common forms of domestic violence and that gender inequality may be a fundamental factor contributing to this type of violence.<sup>18-20</sup>

A study covering the pre-pandemic period (2005-2013) reported that 55.3% of domestic violence cases occurred within the home.<sup>21</sup> In our study, this proportion was found to be 65%. A systematic review by Kourti et al. highlighted that continuous contact due to measures such as social isolation, unemployment, or mandatory quarantine has contributed to an increase in domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> The higher proportion observed in our study may be attributed to these factors.

The analysis of the tools used during the assaults revealed that the perpetrators most frequently used their limbs to inflict harm (57.2%, n=28), followed by an equal use of blunt objects and sharp-edged tools (20.4%, n=10 each). Studies conducted both before and during the pandemic similarly show that blunt objects and sharp-edged tools follow the use of body parts in assaults.<sup>22-24</sup> These findings indicate that perpetrators commonly use body parts, such as hands and feet, to harm victims, a pattern frequently encountered in forensic cases.

In a study conducted by Gujrathi et al., it was noted that injuries in domestic violence incidents most frequently occurred in the facial region, with perpetrators-either consciously or unconsciously-targeting the victim's face in an attempt to undermine their self-confidence. The face is a significant symbol of a person's identity and social status, which makes the focus of assaults on this area sociologically meaningful.<sup>25</sup> In our study, the fact that half of the victims sustained facial injuries may also be attributed to similar sociologically driven factors.

A study conducted in Muğla between 2014 and 2022 reported that in 76.8% of the cases, injuries were treatable with simple medical intervention.<sup>26</sup> A review of the literature shows similar findings, with

the majority of cases involving injuries that were mild enough to be managed with basic medical intervention.<sup>24,27,28</sup> These results suggest that, while physical injuries in domestic violence incidents are typically minor, serious and life-threatening injuries can also occur, albeit infrequently.

The period examined in this study, March 2020 to March 2022, was not compared with the preceding 2 years or the subsequent 2 years. This represents a significant limitation of the study, as evaluating the effects of the pandemic on domestic violence requires a comparison of pandemic-period data with pre- and post-pandemic periods. Conducting comparative analyses could provide a broader perspective and help better understand potential changes in domestic violence dynamics during the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a detailed analysis of domestic physical violence cases reported to the Forensic Medicine Clinic at Adnan Menderes University during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how crisis conditions may impact patterns of violence. A notable increase in male victimization suggests shifts in traditional domestic dynamics, potentially tied to stressors like social isolation and economic hardship. Despite this shift, the majority of victims remained female, underscoring the persistent influence of gender roles on vulnerability to domestic violence.

The predominance of facial injuries indicates a specific trend in the nature of harm inflicted, which could reflect deeper psychological or punitive motivations during acts of domestic violence. Moreover,

the greater frequency of cases from urban areas may point to differing socioeconomic pressures or varying access to resources for reporting abuse.

These findings offer valuable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers, reinforcing the need for adaptable, crisis-responsive strategies that address the unique stresses of pandemic or similar large-scale disruptions. Future studies comparing pre- and post-pandemic periods could provide a more nuanced understanding of these shifts, enabling targeted interventions and preventive measures tailored to crisis conditions.

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## Conflict of Interest

*No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.*

## Authorship Contributions

**Idea/Concept:** Merthan Erdoğan; **Design:** Merthan Erdoğan, Cihangir Işık; **Control/Supervision:** Musa Dirlik; **Data Collection and/or Processing:** Merthan Erdoğan, Cihangir Işık; **Analysis and/or Interpretation:** Merthan Erdoğan, Cihangir Işık; **Literature Review:** Merthan Erdoğan; **Writing the Article:** Merthan Erdoğan; **Critical Review:** Musa Dirlik; **References and Fundings:** Musa Dirlik.

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