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Religious Institutions and Educational Policies in Combating Violence Against Women: The Case of Türkiye

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Abstract

Violence against women remains one of the most persistent social problems in Türkiye, often reinforced by patriarchal interpretations of religion and cultural traditions. This study investigates the role of religious institutions and values-based education in preventing such violence by analyzing national curricula, mosque sermons, policy documents, and reports of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. Using a qualitative design based on document analysis and literature review, it examines how religious education reflects or omits gender-related themes and how institutional practices shape public awareness. The findings reveal that while formal and non-formal types of religious education promote moral values such as compassion, justice, and respect, they rarely address gender-based violence explicitly. Religious discourse tends to emphasize general moral development rather than specific strategies for preventing violence against women. The study concludes that integrating gender-sensitive content into religious curricula, promoting authentic Qur'anic teachings on equality and mercy, and providing professional training for religious personnel are essential to transforming societal attitudes. Strengthening cooperation between educational institutions, religious authorities, and policymakers will ensure that religion functions as a constructive moral resource rather than a tool for legitimizing inequality.

Keywords: violence against women; religious education; gender equality; Islamic ethics; Türkiye; patriarchal interpretation; Diyanet; moral values



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1. Introduction

The status of women has historically been a subject of debate across various religions and cultural contexts. In different belief systems, the social position and rights of women have been addressed in diverse ways, with religious norms and cultural traditions playing a decisive role in shaping women's rights. Islam, in this regard, has provided a significant framework for women's rights and has introduced specific regulations in this domain.

Social perceptions and rights concerning women have undergone significant transformations throughout history. In pre-Islamic Arab society, commonly referred to as the Jahiliyyah Period, the social status of women was considerably low. Although some researchers suggest the existence of a matriarchal structure during a certain phase (Samadi 2021, pp. 1–23), the oppression and discrimination faced by women were markedly evident. Wealthy free women were valued not for their individual identities but primarily for their material possessions, while all legal rights were defined and controlled by men. This indicates that, historically, women's rights have been directly shaped by the economic and cultural dynamics of society (Halverson et al. 2011, pp. 37–48).

With the advent of Islam, women came to be recognized as both social and individual beings, no longer regarded merely as extensions of men but as individuals entitled to rights. The Qur'an emphasizes that all individuals—regardless of gender—who demonstrate righteous conduct and possess correct belief will be rewarded ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), p. an-Nahl, 16: 96). However, the advancements Islam introduced regarding women's rights were gradually marginalized due to social and cultural influences. Notions rooted in the Jahiliyyah Period were reinterpreted and adapted into an Islamic framework. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the social status of women began to decline, as pre-Islamic cultural beliefs were reintroduced and reinforced under the guise of religious legitimacy.

Religious education is considered a significant tool in preventing violence against women ([Ellison and Anderson 2001](#)). Religious belief functions as a guiding force that shapes an individual's actions and behavior; however, at its core, religion emphasizes internalized moral virtues and sincere intentions. In today's educational system, the goal should extend beyond imparting knowledge to also fostering individuals' emotional regulation skills. In this context, religious education can contribute to social peace and security by helping individuals understand themselves and their surroundings. Preventing violence against women is only possible through the dissemination of authentic religious knowledge, free from superstitions and false beliefs. At this point, both formal and non-formal religious education institutions bear crucial responsibilities. The deterioration of relationships between men and women often stems from misinterpretations and misunderstandings of religious values.

In this context, following an examination of the various forms of violence against women, the article investigates the contributions of compulsory religious education courses (DKAB) and the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Türkiye to the prevention of violence against women.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in document analysis and an integrative literature review. Given the study's focus on the relationship between religious education and the prevention of violence against women in Türkiye, document analysis was selected as the most appropriate method for examining institutional texts, policy documents, and educational materials that shape public discourse on gender and religion.

The document corpus was constructed through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) relevance to religious education or religious institutional practices in Türkiye; (2) explicit or implicit reference to family, gender, moral education, or violence; and (3) public accessibility through official platforms such as the Ministry of National Education (MEB) and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet).

Within this framework, the analysis included:

National religious education curricula, including the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (DKAB) program for primary and secondary levels, as well as elective course content within the Türkiye Century Maarif Model implemented in 2024–2025.

Official reports and publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, such as the High Council of Religious Affairs' guidelines, Family and Religious Guidance Bureau activity reports, and public statements by the President of Religious Affairs (e.g., the 18th Coordination Board Meeting briefing).

A corpus of Friday sermons (khutbahs) delivered between 2021 and 2025, with particular attention to khutbahs addressing moral values, family life, compassion, justice, or the sanctity of human life.

National policy documents, including Law No. 6284, the Fourth National Action Plan for Combating Violence Against Women (2021–2025), and the Presidential Circular announcing the Fifth National Action Plan (2026–2030).

National statistical datasets, primarily the Türkiye Kadına Yönelik Şiddet Araştırması (2024) conducted by TÜİK, to contextualize the prevalence of violence.

Academic publications, including studies on Islamic ethics, gender roles, non-formal religious education, and sociological analyses of violence against women.

These documents were chosen because they collectively represent the formal, non-formal, and policy-based dimensions of religious education in Türkiye and thus provide a multidimensional view of how religious discourse interacts with gender-related issues.

Document analysis followed a systematic thematic approach. The selected texts were read multiple times and coded according to recurring themes such as “moral virtues,” “family values,” “violence prevention,” “gender equality,” “patriarchal interpretation,” and “religious misconceptions.” Particular attention was paid to how religious texts and institutional documents framed women’s rights, addressed forms of violence, or omitted explicit references to gender-based violence.

The analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. Descriptive coding, in which explicit statements and conceptual categories appearing in curricula, sermons, and reports were identified.
2. Interpretive coding, focusing on underlying assumptions, cultural patterns, and theological arguments related to gender.
3. Comparative synthesis, in which formal educational content (DKAB, elective courses) was compared with non-formal religious education practices (sermons, family guidance centers) and national policy frameworks.

The document analysis was supported by a literature review of studies addressing women’s rights in Islam, the role of religious education in shaping moral behavior, and sociological patterns influencing gender-based violence in Türkiye. This helped situate the findings within existing scholarly debates and provided a theoretical grounding for interpreting the tensions between doctrine, policy, and social practice.

Scope and Limitations: The analysis is limited to publicly available documents and does not include empirical fieldwork such as interviews, observations, or surveys. While this allows for a detailed examination of institutional discourse, it does not measure the real-life impact of religious education on attitudes or behaviors. These limitations are elaborated in the conclusion.

3. The Concept of Violence and Its Forms

Violence, although shaped by temporal and social contexts, has remained a significant issue confronting humanity both individually and collectively since the earliest periods of human history. While women have played important roles throughout history, a considerable number have frequently been marginalized and subjected to various forms of oppression by society. These pressures have not been limited to social status but have also profoundly impacted women’s fundamental human rights. Violence against women has emerged as a consequence of these longstanding forms of oppression, and throughout history, women have often been subordinated to male dominance. Societal beliefs and values concerning women have defined their roles in public life, gradually rendering them more vulnerable and exposed to violence. As a social wound deeply rooted in human history, violence has left lasting scars and led to numerous adverse consequences. Violence against women, in particular, represents a destructive problem that threatens not only individuals but the fabric of society as a whole (Türkkan and Odacı 2024, pp. 211–12).

Violence not only causes personal trauma but also undermines the social structure and gives rise to broader societal problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force or power—whether threatened or actual—that results in or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, or adverse effects on physical and mental development, directed against oneself, another person, a group, or a community. WHO data further indicate that women represent the highest proportion of victims among those who experience violence (Krug et al. 2002, pp. 1083–86; World Health Organization 2002, p. 5). In psychological terms, violence is defined as the most extreme and advanced form of aggression, expressed through physical coercion directed at individuals or objects, disregarding personal freedom and human will (Budak 2009, p. 686). The factors shaping an individual's behavior stem from various social systems in which they are embedded. These systems include the microsystem, which encompasses the individual's immediate environment such as family and close friends; the mesosystem, which involves broader settings like home and school; the exosystem, shaped by external influences beyond the individual's direct control; and the macrosystem, which reflects the individual's cultural values, beliefs, and religious orientations (Bronfenbrenner 1979, pp. 209–10). The interaction among these systems plays a significant role in the acquisition of behaviors such as violence. In other words, violence is not innate but is learned through social environment and interactions (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

In the 21st century, marked by rapid technological advancement, violence remains a widespread phenomenon that can be interpreted differently across cultures and traditions. A behavior considered violent in one society may be perceived as normal in another. In Türkiye, the violence most frequently experienced by women is closely linked to gender roles. However, women constitute one of the foundational pillars of the family. Violence against women not only deeply affects their psychological well-being but also negatively impacts children, leading to the serious destabilization of the family structure.

For instance, interviews conducted with 63 female victims of violence who applied to the Violence Prevention and Monitoring Center (ŞÖNİM), an institution affiliated with the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services, revealed that some women began to suspect problematic behaviors or attitudes from their partners or their families during the engagement or dating period. However, the onset of violence was generally found to coincide with the beginning of marriage. The same study also identified alcohol and drug use as major contributing factors to violence. Moreover, a partner's extramarital relationship was frequently cited by women as a trigger for violence, often leading to a loss of self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy (Altıparmak 2019, p. 66).

Violence remains a significant issue even in developed countries, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable segments of society, including women, children, and the elderly (Krug et al. 2002; World Health Organization 2002). When the term “violence” is mentioned, the first association is often with physical violence. In Türkiye, Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women defines violence as “any act or conduct—whether physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, or economic—that results in or is likely to result in harm to an individual's physical, psychological, sexual, or economic well-being; including threats, coercion, and restriction of freedom, occurring in public, social, or private spaces” (Law on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women 2012). In its Fourth National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women, the Ministry of Family and Social Services emphasized various forms of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic, unilateral persistent stalking, and cyber violence (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021).

3.1. Physical Violence

Physical violence refers to any act involving the use of force intended to cause harm to a person's body. This type of violence is not limited to direct physical contact; it can also manifest through threats. For instance, intimidating someone with a weapon or a sharp object is also considered a form of physical violence. The overt display of power or dominance inflicts both physical and psychological harm on individuals (Limnili and Özçakar 2017, p. 56). Since such actions are directed at an individual's bodily integrity and health, these types of behaviors are classified as criminal offenses under the Turkish Penal Code (Özkan 2017, p. 543). Physical violence is most frequently perpetrated by former spouses and intimate partners in cases of domestic violence (Çalışkan and Çevik 2018, p. 220). Although it is the most commonly experienced form of violence, physical violence often persists in silence, as many women—out of fear, shame, or a desire to preserve their existing circumstances—choose not to report or confront it. This type of violence is particularly prevalent among individuals who have experienced abuse within their families and in traditional societies.

Violence, passed down through generations and learned over time, is often employed—particularly between spouses—as a means of exerting control or enforcing discipline. One of the main reasons for the varying prevalence of violence in rural and urban areas is the more traditional social structure of rural regions. Men who tend to establish dominance over their spouses frequently resort to methods such as physical assault to maintain their authority. Consequently, the incidence of violence in rural areas is more pronounced compared to urban settings. However, this does not imply that women in urban areas are exempt from violence; in fact, the rates of violence continue to rise in both rural and urban contexts (Yiğitcan 2013, p. 68).

Islam firmly opposes all forms of violence. Even Abū Bakr, known for his composed and gentle temperament, once attempted to strike his daughter 'Ā'ishah after she raised her voice toward the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but the Prophet intervened and prevented him. Emphasizing that women are entrusted to men by Allah, the Prophet questioned in one of his sermons: "How can any of you beat his wife as he would a slave, and then lie with her in the evening in the same bed?" Through such statements, he expressed his disapproval of men resorting to violence against their wives (Özafsar et al. 2014, p. 4/454). Such behaviors were explicitly prohibited by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and those who engaged in them were described as immoral or blameworthy individuals (Topal and Küçük 2012, p. 17).

3.2. Psychological Violence

Psychological violence refers to any behavior aimed at controlling an individual through emotional manipulation, humiliation, intimidation, threats, or isolation. This form of violence includes actions such as yelling, using abusive language, instilling fear, issuing threats, belittling, restricting someone's freedom, controlling how they dress, where they go, and with whom they interact, preventing them from participating in household decisions, taking out anger on children, threatening to withhold access to their children, or displaying weapons. Such behaviors are typically intended to break the individual's self-esteem and instill a sense of fear (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021, p. 15).

Society has historically positioned men and women according to their gender, characterizing men as free, assertive, and independent, while defining women as passive, quiet, compliant, and dependent on men. These attributes are not based on individual capabilities but are shaped entirely by cultural values. Within the context of gender roles, psychological violence can vary across cultures, and in some cases, such violence is perceived

as normal or an expected part of everyday life (Ayhan and Ak 2023). Women are often subjected to violence simply because of their gender, and patriarchal social structures frequently legitimize this violence. Such normalization can even lead some victims to believe that the violence they experience is justified. Traditional norms contribute to the various manifestations of psychological violence against women, to the extent that even strangers in public spaces may engage in such abusive behavior (Ayhan and Ak 2023, p. 145). Psychological violence, which is closely linked to physical violence, often persists even after physical violence has ceased and can function as an ongoing threat of physical abuse (Çetiner 2006, p. 8).

3.3. Sexual Violence

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to exploit a person sexually, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, occurring in the home, workplace, or other settings.” Acts targeting an individual’s sexual integrity—such as sexual assault and sexual abuse—can occur in various environments, including workplaces and educational institutions. Forced marriage, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, coercion into prostitution, and the use of sexual activity as a means of threat, intimidation, or control are also considered forms of sexual violence (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021). Treating a woman as a sexual object, displaying excessive jealousy and suspicion, forcing her to dress more revealingly than she desires, disregarding her sexual needs and desires, using sexuality as a form of punishment, coercing her into sexual activity through emotional pressure or physical force, and engaging in sadistic behavior during intercourse are all indicators of sexual violence. These actions inflict deep psychological and emotional wounds, both in the short and long term (Güneri 1996, p. 89).

Sexual assaults most frequently occur between individuals who know each other, with spouses, family members, or intimate partners being the most common perpetrators. Sexual coercion against a woman can take place at any stage of her life, including in older age. Indeed, rape crisis centers report cases in which elderly women have also been subjected to such assaults. Furthermore, instances of rape during armed conflicts, particularly targeting women and children, underscore the fact that women are disproportionately victimized in such acts of sexual violence (Yiğitcan 2013, p. 79).

3.4. Economic Violence

Economic violence refers to actions that cause financial harm to a woman or hinder her participation in the workforce. This form of violence manifests in various ways, including forcing a woman to work in undesired jobs, confiscating her income, restricting her spending, or interfering with her financial decisions. It also includes situations where men make economic decisions unilaterally, create conditions that lead to a woman losing her job, obstruct her acquisition of employment-related skills, or deprive her of access to financial resources necessary to meet household needs. Such behaviors severely limit a woman’s financial independence and her ability to participate in the labor force (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021, p. 15).

In patriarchal societies, a woman’s economic independence is often perceived as a threat. When a woman attains financial autonomy, it disrupts the traditional dynamics of the patriarchal order, which in turn may lead to increased risk of violence against her (Aksan and Karakoç 2024, p. 204).

3.5. Unilateral Persistent Stalking

This type of violence is defined in Article 3 of the Regulation ([Republic of Turkey Official Gazette 2013](#)) on the Implementation of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women in the Republic of Türkiye. It refers to behaviors by the perpetrator that create a sense of physical or psychological fear and helplessness in the victim to the extent that it threatens their sense of safety. Such behaviors can be carried out through physical, verbal, or written means, regardless of any familial relationship. Examples of unilateral persistent stalking include repeated phone calls, sending messages, following the victim on social media, or appearing at the victim's location to cause discomfort. These actions have the potential to seriously disrupt the victim's daily life ([Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021](#), p. 16).

3.6. Cyber Violence

The widespread use of the internet, the rapid accessibility of mobile data, and the extensive use of social media have turned cyber violence into a global threat, particularly for women and girls. Cyber violence involves exploiting individuals' security vulnerabilities to manipulate them in ways that can cause physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm ([Bauman and Taylor 2015](#), pp. 2–3). Cyber violence against women takes various forms, including the theft of personal information, online stalking, gender-based insults, and threats. This type of violence should not be viewed in isolation from other forms of violence, as it often occurs simultaneously with them. Indeed, in many cases, multiple forms of violence are experienced concurrently ([Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Services 2021](#), p. 16).

In the report titled Global Estimates of Violence Against Women Prevalence published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2021, global estimates for the year 2018 were calculated across 161 countries and territories. According to the report, 26% of women aged 15 and older, and 27% of women aged 15–49, had experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner. South Asia recorded the highest prevalence rate at 35%, while Southern Europe had the lowest at 16%. Regarding the most recent 12-month prevalence data included in the latest estimates, Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest rate at 20%, whereas Australia and New Zealand reported the lowest at 3% ([World Health Organization 2021](#)).

In Türkiye, a nationwide study was first conducted in 2008 with the aim of examining the sources and forms of violence against women in depth. The study, titled Domestic Violence Against Women in Türkiye, was repeated in 2014. Some of the key findings from these two studies are as follows:

In addition to the comparative findings from 2008 and 2014 presented in Table 1, more recent national data provide an updated picture of the current situation in Türkiye (Table 2). The “Türkiye Kadına Yönelik Şiddet Araştırması (2024),” conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) in cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and Marmara University, involved face-to-face interviews with 18,275 women aged 15–59 residing in 22,110 households across the country. The findings indicate that 28.2% of women have experienced psychological violence, 18.3% economic violence, and 12.8% physical violence at least once in their lifetime. Within the last 12 months, 11.6% of women were subjected to psychological violence, 3.7% to digital violence, 3.2% to economic violence, 3.1% to persistent stalking, and 2.6% to physical violence. These updated figures clearly demonstrate that psychological violence remains the most prevalent form of abuse experienced by women in Türkiye. Although the 2024 dataset offers a comprehensive national overview, it does not yet include the longitudinal analyses necessary to assess the direct impact of recent educational, institutional, or policy interventions. Nevertheless, the inte-

gration of these findings strengthens the contextual framework of the study and provides a more solid baseline for evaluating current prevention strategies ([Turkish Statistical Institute \(TÜİK\) \(2024\)](#)).

Table 1. Prevalence of Different Forms of Violence Against Women in Türkiye (Comparative Data from 2008 to 2014).

	2008	2014
Percentage of women subjected to physical violence by a current or former spouse	%39	%36
Percentage of women who have experienced emotional violence	%44	%44
Percentage of women subjected to sexual violence	%15	%12
Percentage of women who have experienced both sexual and physical violence	%42	%38
Rate of physical violence in urban areas	%38	%35
Rate of physical violence in rural areas	%43	%37.5
Percentage of women injured as a result of physical violence	%25	%26

Table 2. Updated Prevalence of Violence Against Women in Türkiye ([Turkish Statistical Institute \(TÜİK\) \(2024\)](#)).

Type of Violence	Lifetime Prevalence (%)	Past 12 Months (%)
Psychological violence	28.2	11.6
Economic violence	18.3	3.2
Physical violence	12.8	2.6
Digital violence	–	3.7
Persistent stalking	–	3.1
Sexual violence	–	0.9

4. Islam’s Approach to Violence Against Women

Individuals’ perceptions of religion are shaped by social norms and cultural influences. Religion is often misused to portray violence against women as something socially and even religiously justified. A negative perception of women formed through religious teachings during childhood can later manifest in violent or aggressive behavior. Therefore, a correct understanding of the egalitarian perspective between men and women in Islam is essential in preventing violence against women and countering other negative judgments ([Gümrukçüoğlu 2021](#), p. 293).

The Qur’an contains numerous verses that clearly emphasize the equality of men and women as human beings, without distinction. In this regard, the Qur’an states that: Human beings have been created in the best form ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter at-Tīn, 95: 4), human beings have been honored and placed above many of the other created beings ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter al-Isrā, 17: 70), men and women were created from a single soul ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter an-Nisā, 4: 1), they were created to worship none but Allah, not others ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter adh-Dhāriyāt, 51: 56), A good life is promised to every believing person—male or female—who performs righteous deeds, both in this world and in the hereafter, without discrimination between genders ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter an-Nahl, 16: 97), for Muslim men and women, for believing men and women who are devoted to worship, truthful, patient, charitable for the sake of Allah, those who fast, guard their chastity, and remember Allah frequently—an immense reward has been prepared ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018](#), Chapter al-Ahzāb, 33: 35; an-Nisā, 4: 124),

believing men and believing women are commanded to lower their gaze from what is forbidden and to guard their chastity (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018, p. an-Nūr, 24: 30–31), Men have rights over women, and women have rights over men (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018, p. al-Baqarah, 2: 228), Although men and women are equal in creation, certain differences in their natural dispositions may lead to variations in their social roles (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018, Chapter an-Nisā, 4: 34), Men and women are allies and supporters of one another; they are commanded to encourage what is good and forbid what is evil (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018, p. At-Tawbah, 9: 71), Superiority in the sight of Allah is based not on gender but on piety (taqwa), and individuals are instructed to act with this awareness—thus emphasizing the equality of men and women (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2018, p. Al-Hujurat, 49: 13).

As the guide for the believers, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) consistently advised kind treatment toward women. He listened to their concerns, offered solutions, did not exclude them from social life, and emphasized in his Farewell Sermon that women are entrusted to men by Allah. Indeed, the value placed on women is evident in many hadiths. Some of these narrations include the following:

According to a narration by Abū Hurayrah, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “The most complete of the believers in faith are those with the best character. And the best among you are those who treat their wives the best.” (al-Tirmidhi 2013, Chapter Radā’, 11).

According to a narration by Abū Hurayrah, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “A believing man should not harbor resentment toward his wife; if he dislikes one of her traits, he may be pleased with another.” (Muslim 2023, p. Radā’, 61).

In one narration, Abū Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “O Allah! I seriously warn against violating the rights of two vulnerable groups: orphans and women.” (al-Tirmidhi 2013, Chapter Salāt, 59).

The nomadic society of the Jahiliyyah period, living under harsh desert conditions, viewed women merely as consumers and treated them as second-class human beings. Practices such as a widow being inherited by her stepson or brother-in-law, the buying and selling of women as property, the burial of infant girls alive, and the complete lack of social or economic rights for women are all evidence of this outlook (Köse 2024, p. 87). In contrast to the rigid customs of nomadic tribes, urban women held a degree of social and economic agency. For example, Hind, the wife of Abū Sufyān, was a respected figure who played an active role in opposing the Muslims, while Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), serves as a prominent example through her management of her wealth and business as a successful merchant in Mecca. With the advent of Islam, women gained extensive rights, participated in military and political matters alongside men, cared for the wounded during battles, and took responsibility for duties outside the battlefield (Köse 2024, p. 87).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not merely oppose the society of the Jahiliyyah period, but rather the mindset and worldview associated with it. Highlighting the perception of women before Islam, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb stated: “During the Jahiliyyah, we did not value women. Then Islam came, and Allah commanded us to treat them well, and we realized that they too have rights over us.” (al-Bukhari 2014, p. Libās, 31).

Surat al-Mumtahina (Surah 60 of the Qur’an) was revealed in reference to women who fled from their disbelieving husbands and sought to join the Muslim community, and the chapter derives its name from the term meaning “those who are tested.” Likewise, Surat al-Nisā’, which means “women” and contains numerous verses concerning their rights and responsibilities, serves as evidence that women are regarded in the Qur’an as honored beings, beyond mere gender classification. Indeed, the Qur’an highlights exemplary female

figures such as Maryam, who is praised without reservation, and Asiya, the queen, both of whom represent noble character and unwavering faith (Martí 2015, p. 8). The distinction between men and women mentioned in verse 34 of Sūrat al-Nisā' is not ontological but purely functional. It is articulated that men may be assigned a particular coordinative function within the family structure, informed by their customary responsibilities and socially recognized roles. This function entails assuming the duties and obligations associated with that position. The underlying rationale of this arrangement is to uphold stability within the familial system and to minimize potential sources of conflict. Nevertheless, this functional delineation cannot be construed as granting men unrestricted authority, hierarchical superiority, or any form of discretionary power. Within the Islamic legal and ethical tradition, this role is framed not as an entitlement to dominance but as a legally and morally bounded responsibility premised on protection, care, accountability, and the fulfillment of specific obligations. Accordingly, the statement refers to a reciprocal framework of rights and responsibilities that governs familial relations, rather than to any form of coercive or unilateral authority.

5. Religious Education in the Prevention of Violence Against Women

Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth, during which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. This process may occur in a systematic and planned manner, or in a spontaneous and unstructured way. From a developmental perspective, education is categorized into two main types: formal and informal, depending on whether it serves a specific purpose or arises naturally. Formal education is further divided into two subcategories: structured (formal schooling) and non-formal (organized but outside the formal system). Structured education refers to regular and systematic instruction provided in schools to specific age groups through public or private institutions. Non-formal education, on the other hand, encompasses a wide range of learning activities designed for individuals who are not part of the formal education system or have not completed it, tailored to their interests and needs (Erden 2011, pp. 13–14).

The primary aim of education is to instill new attitudes and behaviors in individuals, reinforce existing ones, or transform undesirable ones. In this context, religious education not only seeks to increase individuals' knowledge of religion but also aims to shape their religious attitudes and behaviors, correct harmful beliefs, and contribute to the development of a new mindset at both the individual and societal levels. Thus, religious education can be defined as a comprehensive process of transformation that enables individuals to attain a higher level of awareness and moral responsibility (Groome 1991).

Although the Qur'an and the Sunnah emphasize the equality of men and women in their creation and declare that superiority lies in piety (taqwa), negative attitudes and acts of violence against women have become increasingly serious issues within many Muslim societies. One of the primary reasons for this is the departure from Islamic ethical principles and the misrepresentation of harmful behaviors as being rooted in Islam. Therefore, preventing violence is only possible through comprehensive religious and values-based education. Indeed, a study conducted among women residing in shelters for victims of domestic violence examined both their own and their husbands' religious attitudes and behaviors. The findings revealed a negative correlation between religiosity and domestic violence. Notably, 40% of the women reported believing that their husbands—who had beaten them severely—lacked any fear of Allah in their hearts (Öztürk 2008, p. 184).

5.1. Formal Religious Education in the Prevention of Violence Against Women

This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically document analysis. In Türkiye, the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi,

DKAB) course is included in the primary school curriculum only at the 4th-grade level, and at all levels of lower secondary school (grades 5–8), it is taught for two hours per week. A curriculum update in 2012 introduced optional courses—such as Qur’anic Studies, the Life of the Prophet Muhammad, and Basic Religious Knowledge—at the 5th to 8th-grade levels, each offered for two hours weekly. In Imam Hatip Middle Schools, in addition to these courses, the curriculum includes two hours each of Qur’anic Studies and the Prophet’s Life, three hours of Arabic, and one hour of Basic Religious Knowledge.

Under the “Türkiye Century Maarif Model,” the DKAB course has been made compulsory across grades 4 to 8. The implementation guidelines for this program emphasize encouraging students to act with respect for human beings, critical thinking, human rights, morality, and cultural heritage. The curriculum also includes recommendations for the integration of values education. Starting from the 2024–2025 academic year, this program has been implemented in 5th and 9th grades and will gradually be integrated into other grade levels over time.

The unit outcomes of the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (DKAB) course in Türkiye’s primary school curriculum generally focus on values that form the foundation of good character, such as love, respect, tolerance, compassion, sensitivity, and honesty. The curriculum also addresses harmful habits, which are among the contributing factors to violence. Although the concepts of violence or violence against women are not directly addressed, the units covering the childhood, youth, and family life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) aim to present his exemplary character as a model for students. Additionally, elective courses include references to *zarūrat al-khamsah* (the five essential objectives of Islamic law), and the Prophet’s role as an ideal husband and compassionate father is discussed in detail within the context of family life.

The secondary school Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (DKAB) curriculum emphasizes moral attitudes and behaviors, the importance Islam places on the family institution, belief in the afterlife, and issues related to addiction. Similar to the primary school curriculum, the subjects of violence or violence against women are not explicitly addressed; instead, emphasis is placed on values that aim to prevent violence. The elective courses offer a broader range of unit content, and notably, the addition of the unit “An Important Figure in the Prophet’s Life: Khadijah” to the 9th-grade elective course *The Life of the Prophet* under the new Maarif Model is particularly noteworthy. The inclusion of exemplary female figures from Islamic history in the curriculum is considered a commendable and appropriate decision.

5.2. Non-Formal Religious Education in the Prevention of Violence Against Women

As a result of the rapid advancements in science and technology characteristic of the 21st century, formal education alone has become insufficient. In order to keep pace with these changes and stay informed about contemporary issues, non-formal education institutions have gained increasing importance. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Türkiye, with its extensive outreach capacity, stands out as the most competent institution in the field of non-formal religious education (Genç 2013, p. 139).

Indeed, the Prime Ministry Circular issued in 2006 designated the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) as the responsible institution for organizing educational programs in mosques aimed at fostering mindset transformation among men, delivering awareness-raising sermons and *khutbahs*, producing written and visual publications, and conducting various public events. In addition to being a primary responsible body, Diyanet is also listed among the institutions to cooperate with in these efforts. Within its organizational structure, the High Council of Religious Affairs operates the “Fatwa Line,” and local Mufti Offices manage “Family Guidance and Counseling Bureaus” that carry out ini-

tatives aimed at protecting the family and preventing violence against women, children, and the elderly.

Given that education begins within the family, it is essential to first raise awareness among parents. Religious education received at home profoundly influences a child's entire life. When a child is raised in an environment centered on love, respect, tolerance, compassion, and sensitivity, their tendency toward violence is significantly reduced. In this regard, the family—considered the cornerstone of non-formal religious education—is a central focus. The Diyanet Family Magazine (*Diyanet Aile Dergisi*), a periodical published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Türkiye, provides valuable guidance in this area. By emphasizing moral virtues and offering articles to parents on religious education for children in a globalizing world, the magazine serves as an effective mass communication tool.

On 4 February 2025, the President of Religious Affairs, Prof. Dr. Ali Erbaş, attended the 18th Meeting of the Coordination Board for Combating Violence Against Women held in Ankara. In his address, Erbaş outlined the educational and counseling activities undertaken to combat violence against women. He stated that between 2021 and 2024, in-service training seminars were delivered to 2324 personnel working in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus affiliated with the Diyanet Academy's Advanced Religious Studies Center. Additionally, 14,216 contracted personnel (under Article 4/B) received preparatory training on family awareness and the prevention of violence as part of their professional orientation. Awareness training was also provided to 445 religious officials serving in prisons, 2308 personnel in social service institutions, 118 district muftis through orientation seminars, and 889 staff working in the prevention of child neglect and abuse. Furthermore, within the framework of the National Action Plan, a total of 802 events were organized through sermons and khutbahs in mosques, family and religious guidance bureaus, and the religious consultation hotline, reaching 41,983 participants. Erbaş also noted that 114,688 men and women received counseling services through these bureaus.

Since the early years of Islam, mosques have served not only as places of worship but also as centers of religious education, playing a crucial role in the dissemination of religious consciousness within society. The voluntary gathering of individuals from diverse backgrounds in these spaces facilitates the educational process. Through sermons (khutbahs) and religious talks (vaaz), religious and moral values can be communicated to a wide audience, contributing to both individual and societal improvement ([Karataş 2022](#), p. 4). Between 2021 and 2025, several sermons (khutbahs) directly or indirectly addressing the issue of violence against women were delivered. These include the following titles: "Violence Is Incompatible with Human Dignity," "Compassion and Peace in My Family," "A Society of Compassion," "Every Soul Is Sacred," "Women and Men: Dignified Beings Deserving Respect," "Do Not Harm a Soul," "Islam Commands Compassion and Mercy," "He Who Shows Mercy Will Be Shown Mercy," "Knowledge Leads to Honor, Violence to Disgrace," "The Sanctity of Every Life," "Let Us Uphold the Zarūrat al-Khamsah," "Our Family: An Atmosphere of Love, Mercy, and Trust," "Our Family: A Source of Peace and Security," and "To Be a Family: A Divine Blessing." ([Presidency of Religious Affairs 2025](#)). In addition to the sermons and religious talks delivered in mosques, Qur'an courses—another key component of non-formal religious education—carry out various activities such as memorization of selected chapters and verses, teaching about the exemplary character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and organizing religiously themed social and cultural events. With the introduction of Qur'an courses for children aged 4–6 in 2014, the preschool period was also brought under the scope of non-formal religious education. It has been observed that the curricula of these courses contain content that opposes all forms

of violence and include examples from the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad that clearly condemn violent behavior ([Gümrükçüoğlu 2021](#), p. 320).

The Family Guidance and Counseling Bureaus provide support and guidance to individuals who seek assistance, under the supervision of qualified male and female preachers. When necessary, they refer individuals to the Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM). These bureaus also collaborate with other institutions and, with the permission of provincial governors or district governors, offer training in ethics, values, and the Qur'an to women residing in shelters. Through religious discussions and spiritual counseling, staff members help these women find a sense of peace and reassurance ([Yaşar and İşgören 2021](#), p. 354).

With the advancement of technology, mass communication tools have come to play a significant role in education. While they are among the most effective means for expanding access to education, in the context of religious education, it is essential that content is developed with great sensitivity. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media and other digital platforms have become more prominent in daily life and now reach a wide audience. Although the ease of access to information offers clear advantages, it also presents certain disadvantages due to the spread of misinformation. Additionally, social media users may sometimes serve as positive role models for children and youth, but at other times, they may lead them toward harmful influences that can negatively impact their lives.

At the national level, recent policy developments also demonstrate Türkiye's continued commitment to combating violence against women through coordinated, multisectoral strategies. On 25 November 2025, the Presidential Circular announcing the "Fifth National Action Plan for Combating Violence Against Women (2026–2030)" was published in the Official Gazette. The circular emphasizes that preventing violence against women requires a multidisciplinary, intersectional, and holistic approach grounded in the shared responsibility of all public institutions, universities, local governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Building on the experience gained from four previous national action plans implemented since 2007, the new plan outlines Türkiye's strategic roadmap for 2026–2030. It assigns specific duties to relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies and calls for integrating these strategies into institutional programs and budgets. The Ministry of Family and Social Services—through its Directorate General on the Status of Women—has been designated as the coordinating authority responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan. A centralized monitoring system will be established, with annual progress reports submitted to the Presidency and made available to the public ([Republic of Türkiye 2025](#)).

6. Evaluation

The findings of this study reveal that religious institutions and educational policies in Türkiye have the potential to play a significant role in addressing violence against women. Despite the core Islamic principles of equality, compassion, and justice, patriarchal mindsets and cultural interpretations that have evolved throughout history have contributed to the normalization of violence against women and, in some cases, its religious justification. This underscores the necessity of distinguishing authentic Islamic teachings from cultural misinterpretations.

Within the scope of formal education, while Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (DKAB) courses introduce moral values such as respect and compassion, the issue of violence against women is not explicitly addressed. Although these courses contribute indirectly to violence prevention, their impact could be strengthened through the inclusion of content that directly engages with gender-based violence. Highlighting the Prophet

Muhammad's (peace be upon him) compassion toward women, his exemplary family life, and the prominent roles of female companions in Islamic history would make the curriculum more inclusive and transformative.

In the realm of non-formal religious education, the Presidency of Religious Affairs holds significant potential to influence public consciousness through mosques, sermons, family counseling centers, Qur'an courses, and digital platforms. However, the issue of violence against women remains underrepresented in these settings. Educational efforts targeting men, particularly on intra-family communication, Islamic ethics, and correcting religious misconceptions, are crucial for fostering gender-sensitive attitudes.

In addition to these findings, a significant tension persists between the normative teachings of Islam and the cultural patterns that shape everyday social life in Türkiye. Although the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition emphasize compassion, justice, and the protection of human dignity, long-established patriarchal structures often limit the practical application of these principles. This divergence does not stem solely from misinterpretations of religious texts; it is also reinforced by broader cultural dynamics such as family hierarchy, traditional gender roles, notions of privacy, and inherited social expectations. As a result, both the lack of accurate religious knowledge and the persistence of deeply rooted cultural habits contribute to the continued normalization of violence against women.

Moreover, there remains a noticeable gap between the discourse of religious institutions and the way this discourse is received and practiced within society. Although DKAB curricula, Friday sermons, and national policy documents highlight moral virtues, they frequently address the issue of violence in indirect terms. This tendency is closely linked to social sensitivities surrounding family privacy and the desire to avoid generating tension within congregations. However, such indirect language can reduce the visibility of gender-based violence and make it difficult for communities to grasp the urgency of the problem. Consequently, the strong emphasis present in official documents does not always translate into meaningful change in everyday behavior, underscoring the need for clearer and more explicit communication.

Furthermore, both formal and non-formal religious education tend to approach social issues within a general framework of "values education," prioritizing abstract moral principles rather than naming the structural nature of gender-based violence. While this pedagogical preference aims to preserve communal harmony and prevent conflict, it may inadvertently delay the broader recognition of violence as a critical social concern. Incorporating direct discussions of what constitutes violence, its different forms, and the religious reasons for rejecting such behavior would strengthen awareness and enhance the transformative impact of religious education on societal attitudes.

7. Conclusions

Violence against women is not merely an individual problem but a structural, moral, and societal issue that requires a multifaceted and integrated response. Based on the study's findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Curriculum Development:** Formal religious education programs should explicitly address violence against women. Qur'anic verses and hadiths related to women's rights must be incorporated directly into the curriculum. At the high school level, new content modules should be developed to raise awareness on this issue.
- **Strengthening Religious Services:** The Presidency of Religious Affairs should ensure that all forms of religious services—including sermons, guidance, and counseling—regularly and consistently address the issue of violence against women. Sermons focusing on women's rights and dignity should be increased in both frequency and clarity.

- **Raising Public Awareness:** Religious messages promoting women's rights should be disseminated through social media, television, and religious publications to reach broader audiences.
- **Male-Focused Educational Programs:** Programs targeting men should be implemented, focusing on family communication, compassion, responsibility, and women's rights in Islam.
- **Training Religious Personnel:** Imams, preachers, and muftis should receive continuous professional development on gender sensitivity, women's rights, and domestic violence prevention.

For future research, the following areas are recommended:

- **Curricular Content Analysis:** Systematic content analysis of DKAB and elective religious courses should be conducted to evaluate their inclusion of women's rights and anti-violence themes.
- **Impact Evaluation:** Empirical studies should be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of religious education and services in preventing violence against women.
- **Social Perception Studies:** Qualitative and quantitative studies should investigate the extent to which religious justifications are used to legitimize gender-based violence in society.
- **Male Engagement Models:** Research should focus on the development of educational models that target male engagement and behavioral change as a means to prevent violence.
- **Role of Religious Leaders:** Further research should explore the role of religious leaders in shaping public opinion on women's rights and how their educational capacity can be strengthened.

In addition, future prevention strategies should incorporate female-focused educational programs, particularly those aimed at mothers. As primary caregivers and the first agents of socialization, mothers play a crucial role in shaping boys' attitudes and behaviors. In contexts where cultural norms may reinforce male-centered expectations, targeted awareness and empowerment initiatives for women can help break cycles of gendered socialization and contribute to the long-term prevention of violence.

Since this study relies exclusively on publicly available documents, it does not directly measure the actual impact of religious education on attitudes and behaviors related to violence against women. The findings illuminate the institutional discourse and the content presented by religious and educational bodies, yet they do not reveal how these messages are received or enacted in everyday life. Future research would benefit from empirical studies examining how DKAB courses, Friday sermons, family counseling services, and religious education programs are perceived in practice and how they influence individual behavior. Qualitative interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork could provide deeper insight into the role of religious education in preventing gender-based violence. In this way, the document-based analysis presented in this study can be complemented with field data to create a more comprehensive understanding.

In conclusion, addressing violence against women requires more than legal reforms; it demands a comprehensive approach that integrates religious education, social awareness, and institutional responsibility. Emphasizing women's rights through authentic Islamic sources and correcting culturally embedded misinterpretations can be a powerful strategy in challenging patriarchal norms and building a more equitable society.

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