Female and Male Suicides in Batman, Turkey: Poverty, Social Change, Patriarchal Oppression and Gender Links

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Traditional sociological theories have overlooked the different reasons why men and women commit suicide. In this paper, we first discuss and then challenge traditional theories, paying close attention to Batman, Turkey where suicide rate for women is much higher than for men. Based on interviews with the guardians of 31 suicide victims, we attempt to reconstruct the disheartening living conditions of the victims. The disheartening conditions in Batman are due to geographic isolation, terrorist/ultra-religious activities and an unprecedented migration to city centers. The outcomes are unemployment, poverty, demise of education and healthcare systems and congested, substandard housing arrangements. Yet, the presence of such anomie conditions have not alarmingly raised the suicide rates of Batman men. We suggest that extreme patriarchal oppression of Batman women may be responsible for their high suicide rate. Our observations lead us to believe that prevention of female suicides may require the loosening of the patriarchal choke on women in general and young women in particular.

Historically, suicide has been approached as a personal pathology or a sinful act rather than as a social, structural or genderized phenomenon. The first sociologist who systematically studied suicide as a social occurrence was Durkheim (1951) who claimed that suicide was a social problem rather than an individual illness. Durkheim’s exclusive interest was why men kill themselves. Ironically, women have the “highest suicidal behaviour” even though more men die as a result of a suicidal act (Canetto & Lester, 1995). Since Durkheim, although sociological research on suicide has declined, most research continues to focus on the behaviour of men.

1 We thank the Sociology, Psychology and Psychiatry departments of the Dicle University and the Mayoral Office of Batman for their various help in setting up contact with the guardians of victims of suicide. The second author thanks SSHRC for its generous help in her work of cross-cultural studies of violence against women. We thank the two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and insights on an earlier version of this paper. Questions can be forwarded to Aysan Sev’er, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto at Scarborough, 1265 Military Trail, Scarborough, ON. Canada. M1C 1A4 (sever@utsc.utoronto.ca).
2 From this point on, the surviving parent/older sibling or mate of the suicide victims who served as respondents in this study will be referred to as “guardians.”
3 Currently, there is some excellent work done on suicidal behaviour of aboriginal populations/youth. Yet, our perusal of this literature failed to unearth a gendered analysis that would shed light into the processes we seek in the current work. Therefore, we chose to exclude the work on aboriginal suicides from the literature review of the current paper.
More recently, there are at least two noteworthy changes which require a revamping of sociological interest in suicide and gender links. First, suicide rates, both in highly developed as well as developing parts of the world may be on the rise (Schmidtke et al., 1999). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report, suicide is reported within the top 10 causes of death for the whole world, with a rate of 16 suicides per 100,000 population and one of the top five causes of death amongst the 15-24 age group (WHO, 2000). Worldwide, approximately one million people die as a result of suicide annually. Secondly, in at least one developing country (China), female suicide rates are higher than rates for men. Another example for this unique phenomenon is the Batman region in southeastern Turkey (Erkan, 2001). The existence of these counter-normative patterns in suicide rates urges us to explore gendered patterns in suicides.

In relation to the developed societies, Turkey has very low suicide rates (Schmidtke et al., 1991). According to national reports, the rate in 1975 was 1.97 per 100,000 population. In 1997, the rate has increased to 3.19 and since 1998, it has stabilized around 3.00 (Erkan, 2001; Sahin, Batigul & Sahin, 1998). Batman region is a unique outlier in this otherwise low and relatively stable trend. While there were only 11 recorded suicides in Batman in 1995, this number has climbed to 27 in 1999 and to 31 in 2000. The latter translates into a rate of six, which is more than twice the rate for Turkey in general. Moreover, female suicides for Batman is more than three times the Turkish general rates (9.9 vs 3.0). We believe that traditional personal, social and sociological theories of suicide may explain why men kill themselves, but are ill equipped to explain why women commit suicide. To explain the unique and counternormative phenomenon of higher rates for female suicides, we need to construct new models.

In the current paper, we will first discuss selected theoretical models that try to explain why some people kill themselves. We will attempt to re-construct these models through feminist insights in order to compare and contrast patterns for men and women. Then, we will discuss the unique circumstances surrounding south-eastern Turkey, particularly focusing on economic hardships for both men and women and the patriarchal forces in women’s lives. We will end by making suggestions about how more traditional theories of suicide can be revised through the integration of poverty, social change and gender into the analysis.

TRADITIONAL THEORIES ABOUT SUICIDE

Trying to decipher causes of suicidal behaviour has been difficult and controversial. There are intra-personal, social/sociological, criminological
and bio-medical attempts to understand suicides. For the purposes of the present paper, we limit our discussion to the first two.

Sigmund Freud (1963) is one of the most influential theorists who explained suicide as an intra-personal pathology. For Freud, suicide was the outcome of severe manic depression and the ambivalence and ambiguity between feelings of intense love and intense hate. He hypothesized that the general death-wish (concept of thanatos, see Rattray, 1968, Ch. 1, also see Greenwald, 1959) of individuals creates an aggressive turbulence in the primary forces of personality. Eventually, these aggressive forces are propelled towards the destruction of the self (Gectan, 1988, p. 200; Greenwald, 1959; Kagitzibasi, 1983, p. 247). Freud (1963) also asserted that the unresolved Oedipal Conflicts create extremely fearful feelings about men’s perception of their own sexuality. In sum, Freud saw suicide as uniquely personal and as a product of unresolved conflicts amongst the subconscious and semiconscious personality components of men. Although Freud recognized self-destructive behaviour of his Victorian female patience, his explanation about women did not go much beyond a diagnosis of neurosis.

Unlike Freud’s pathology model, a sociological approach explores the link between social and structural factors and suicide. This approach is deeply rooted in Durkheim’s seminal work Suicide (1951). Durkheim set out to negate the effects of intra-personal and environmental variables (mental illness/drunkenness, race/biology, climate and copy-cat tendencies) that have commonly been invoked as explanations of suicide. Instead, he sought the causes of suicide in the structural domain which brings about anomie (powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and isolation). Durkheim (1951) classified suicide in three categories as: Egoistic, Anomic and Altruistic. The first, he reasoned, is a product of loose ties between individuals and the social groups to which they belong. In contrast, in altruistic suicides, Durkheim saw an extreme and unhealthy interdependence between the group and the person. In other words, an extraordinary level of solidarity was seen as dangerously reducing individuality and replacing freedom of choice by the decision-making power of the group. Suicides in cults/armies etc., were the examples Durkheim used to exemplify the altruistic type.4

4 To exemplify the altruistic type, Durkheim also used women who kill themselves after the death of their husbands (Indian sati) and slaves who kill themselves after the death of their masters. From a feminist perspective, there are at least two glaring counter-points to his exemplification: One is the implied equivalence between “slaves” and “wives,” an equivalence Engels also underscores in his Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1972[1842]). The second point feminists can argue against is his naive assumption about the free choice of women in “willingly” throwing themselves into the funeral pyre of their husbands. As the literature points out, there may be immense social pressure on these women in pockets of India that still practice “sati” (Narasimhan, 1994). Strongly patriarchal societies may also exert indirect pressure on widows by disallowing any legitimate role for women outside of motherhood and wifery, thus effectively signalling an end to their lives after the death of a husband.
The third category, anomic suicide, is what Durkheim’s theory is really buttressed on. This type was seen to arise during times of rapturous change and upheaval in a society. These changes, it was argued, reduce the power and efficacy individuals feel and increase their perceived helplessness. The rapturous changes may be political, economic or they may take on the form of war. Regardless of the type, they bring about extreme poverty for many and riches for a few. However, Durkheim (1951) took pains in his work to show that the cause of suicide is not poverty itself, but the anomic (powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, hopelessness etc.,) that such a state unleashes.

The “anomie” concept in Durkheim’s assertion is replaced by the “alienation” concept in Marx (Marx, 1978a[1844], p. 66). Marx sees the roots of social troubles in industrialized societies (including self-directed troubles), in the exploitation workers suffer at the hands of the capitalist classes. In this model, exploitation reaches its peak in transition to industrialization. For the workers and those who cannot find work (the reserve army), there is a realization that all economic surges in the society will be accomplished on the sweat and tears of their own labour (Marx, 1978b [1867], p. 375, 413), yet workers are not the ones who benefit from economic booms. Instead, all wealth is usurped by the capitalist classes. According to Marx, the two dangers inherent in this process are: 1) that workers will lose their class consciousness, and 2) that they will get alienated from the products of their own labour (Marx, 1978a,c,d[1845], p. 70, 150, 160 and 203; Tolan, 1983):

The material on which it works is alien material; the instruments is likewise an alien instrument; its labour appears as a mere accessory to their substance and hence objectifies itself in things not belonging to it. Indeed, living labour itself appears as alien vis-a-vis living labour capacity, whose labour it is, whose own life’s expression it is, for it has been surrendered to capital in exchange for objectified labour, for the product of labour itself (Marx, 1978e[1857]), p. 253, emphases in original).

Thus, Marx’s alienation concept links the socioeconomic conditions of work and subjective reactions to it more clearly than Durkheim’s anomie concept does. Nevertheless, what neither theoretical orientation asks is if women and men are affected by and/or react to the conditions of their lives in identical or different ways. Durkheim (1951) has observed the lower suicide rates for women and used this information to dispel the

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5 Slight variations of Durkheim’s anomic suicide type is still used to understand the high suicide rates amongst First Nations people in Canada (see, Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Jarvis & Boldt, 1982)
myth that suicides have genetic or biological causes. If they had, boys and girls from the same family would have a similar propensity to kill themselves whereas universally, men’s rates are much higher than women’s. He also observed that married women were more likely to commit suicide than unattached women whilst married men were much less likely to do so than their unattached counterparts. Nevertheless, Durkheim (1951) advocated marriage as a protective panacea against suicides, despite the fact that his own data showed the protective effects of marriage worked only for men. Ironically, none of the gender-based observations Durkheim made led him to ponder the different reasons behind women’s and men’s suicidal behaviour.

So what may differentiate and even reverse the suicide rates for women in comparison to men? Neither Durkheim’s anomie, nor Marx’s alienation concepts can help us to answer this question. It is our contention that we have to look for factors leading to women’s suicidal behaviour within the feminist literature. Two sources that will be appropriate for the topic at hand will be women’s work for pay/without pay and the workings of patriarchy, especially (not exclusively) in less developed pockets of the world that are experiencing social change (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kelly & Radford, 1998).

### Stress Associated with Women’s Paid, Unpaid and Reproductive Work

The North American feminist literature clearly shows that women undertake the vast majority of housework and childcare (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984; Hamilton, 1996; Hochschild, 1989; 1997; Luxton, 1980; Lupri, 1991). Moreover, unlike most paid workers, homemakers do not have well-defined work schedules, coffee-breaks, vacation times or sick-leave privileges. They are deprived of advancement and promotions and lack objective standards of expected performance. The feminist literature suggests that the 24-hour nature of housework/childcare is very stressful for women and even the leisure moments they may have are tainted by the always “on-call” aspect of their duties (Hochschild, 1989; 1997).

The North American literature about paid work also shows numerous adverse conditions for women. For example, in general, women get less pay than their male counterparts, even when the formal education and length of experience are held constant for the two groups (Nelson & Robinson, 2002, Ch. 6). They are much more vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace than men are (Sev’er, 1999). Women also work in mostly service and secretarial jobs which translate into a lot of work with very little decision making-power, authority or prestige (Nelson & Robinson, 2002). Poorly paid service jobs are vulnerable to layoffs. Lack of control and lack of decision-making combined with low
security of jobs are strongly linked to high stress levels. However, the worst matrix for women is when they work for pay and still have to carry the major responsibility for their household/childcare (see “the double ghetto” (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984), the “second shift” or “time-bind” (Hochschild, 1989; 1997) and “two hands for the clock” (Luxton, 1983) assertions).

The Patriarchal Grip

The extension of the North American findings to the developing nations with different sociopolitical, cultural and religious characteristics needs to be done with extreme caution. In her insightful article, Kandiyoti (1988, p. 278) explores the effects of what she calls “classic patriarchy.” A distinguishing characteristic of classic patriarchy is that it operates in “patrilocal extended households that act as the main mechanism in reproduction of peasantry in agrarian regions” (p. 278). Women have only one legitimate path to power: production of sons and rule over the brides they will one day bring into the household. According to Kandiyoti (1988), younger women lack the means to fight the patriarchal system. As girls, they are deemed a burden by their own families and in their teens, they get parachuted into patrilineal homes through arranged marriages (a system of stranger-wives). Fraser (2000) states that many men do not even bother to learn the names of their female children. Ironically, when women get old, they do not want to lose the tenuous hold on power they may have achieved after years of suffering. So, classical patriarchy remains unchallenged and women “active[ly] collud[e] in the reproduction of their own subordination” (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 280). Kandiyoti suggests that classic patriarchy crosses over religious and political boundaries and appears in North Africa, the Muslim Middle-east (including secular Turkey), India and China.

Thus, the gendered axis both anomie and alienation concepts bypass is the bastion of patriarchy. According to feminist assertions, even the least powerful group of men and the most exploited male worker in the capitalist and pre-capitalist systems have a private world within which they rule (Dworkin, 1974). Legal, moral, familial and political systems often allow even the most socioeconomically disadvantaged men to dominate and control women and children. Of course, the level of domination is many fold in parts of the developing world where patriarchy is rampant and deeply embedded in family life (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kelly & Radford, 1998; Kocturk, 1992). In small pockets of the world, men’s domination over women/children is so absolute that men can decide whether women will go to school, if they will work or when or to whom they can marry (Carroll, 2000). Violence against women is also
rampant (Aile Ici Siddet, 1995). In extreme cases, men decide whether women will live or die (Duzkan & Kocali, 2000; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Yirmibesoglu, 2000).

Patriarchal societies are obsessed with controlling acts even thoughts about female sexuality (Accad, 2000; Kayir, 2000; Mernissi, 2000; Narasimhan, 1994; Saigol, 2000). Societal control systems vary from one society to another and may take the form of clothing restrictions, withholding resources from female children in already impoverished parts of the world, forced virginity tests for girls, bloody sheet or underwear tests after the first night of marriage, genital mutilation of girls, arranged childhood marriages, sati (wife burning) and honour killings. In numerous cases, there is an officially established link between virginity tests and the suicide of young girls in Turkey (Cindoglu, 2000, p. 221). In a study of attributions to suicidal behaviour by Turkish girls, Sahin et al. (1994) observed that out of wedlock loss of virginity was considered to be a sufficient reason for Turkish girls to kill themselves. Respondents also perceived being a rape victim to be a sufficient reason for women to take their own lives.

Other terrors women face relate to honour killings. According to an Amnesty International Report, in southeastern Turkey, there are around 20-25 honour killings of girls/women per year (AIR, 1999). Newspapers often sensationalize the gruesome deaths. For example, Semse Kaynak (20) was killed by her older brother after a family council decision. Her murder was committed by a farm tractor and reported as an “accident.” Just a short time earlier, two other women (Gonul Arslan and Sevda Gok) were also killed after their respective families decided that they had tarnished the family honour. Sevda’s (17) throat was cut at the market place and Gonul was first strangled and then thrown into the Euphrates river (Yine Tore Vahseti, 1998). It is not hard to imagine how terrified girls/women must feel. Poverty and patriarchy form a dangerous matrix in women’s lives. According to Duzkan and Kocali “[h]ere the girls give their lives for doing what in other cities girls would only be scolded or beaten for. There are so few options —insults, violence or death” (2000, p. 387).

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6 There are numerous explorations of the continuum of control on women’s bodies, behaviour and even life chances. For spousal violence, see Aile Ici Siddet (1995); for virginity tests, see Altinay, 2000; Cindoglu, 2000; Seral, 2000; Turgut, 1998; for bloody sheet or underwear tests after the first night of marriage, see: Cindoglu, 2000; Mernissi, 2000; for bride price and bride exchange, see Duzkan & Kocali, 2000; Yirmibesoglu, 2000; for genital mutilation, see Al-Dawla, 2000; Boddy, 1998; Toubia, 2000; for stoning to death of women for adultery, see AI Canada, 2002; for sex selection, sati and sex-determination, see Anand, 1989; Narasimhan, 1994; for honour killings and bride-burnings, see Abu-Odeh, 2000; Duzkan & Kocali, 2000; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Shah, 1990; Yirmibesoglu, 2000.
Above all, female sexuality is still rigidly and exclusively tied to marital “obligation” and “legitimate” reproduction, not to individual choice, preference, experience or freedom (Carroll, 2000, Kocturk, 1992). From infancy on, girls are taught that any deviation from pre-marital chastity will end in extreme punishment, not disbaring death. Yet, patriarchal societies also make these same girls/women particularly vulnerable to either random violence of unrelated men or abuse by men who are related to them (i.e., incestual rape, see Arin, 1997, pp. 84-85; Sezgin, 1997, p. 78-83.). A quote from a Turkish man who was interviewed by a female reporter crystalizes the first problem: “We hear that you [reporter] are opposed to beating women. But do women understand anything if they are not beaten?” (cited in Yirmibesoglu, 2000, p.391). A government sponsored study into violence against Turkish wives found that out of a randomly selected sample of 4,287, only 738 (17.2%) reported to live in homes free of violence. The remaining 82.8% reported either mild (25.6%), usual (19.6%), more than usual (20.7%), severe (13.2) or very severe (3.7%) violence (Aile Ici Siddet, 1995, p.174). Reported violence in the home was inversely correlated with socioeconomic status (pp. 177-178) and directly correlated with household density (p. 181).

Women also fall victim to sexual advances and even sexual assault of men. Even when girls/women may have done nothing improper, rumours about “inappropriateness,” or erroneous attributions of flirtatious behaviour, or misinterpretation of casual acquaintance with men as “dating” can unleash severe punishment from the patriarchal elders (AIR, 1999, Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Yirmibesoglu, 2000). The punishment is almost always directed towards girls/women, not to boys/men who accompany them. Even when women are sexually victimized (i.e., raped), it is they rather than their perpetrators that get chastised, locked-up, beaten or even killed (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001).

Issues Kandiyoti (1988) and Fraser (2000) raise intrigue us to ask: is there no female resistance to classic patriarchies? The simple answer is: of course, there is! At least some women challenge their subjugation and oppression by acting outside of the patriarchal choke. However, the threat or the actual reprisal (from men and older women) may be so overpowering that choosing to die may be the single option open to them (Fernandez, 1997). On June 24, 1999, a young woman (Sukran) doused herself with kerosene and burned herself to death (Cakmagi Caktigi An, 1999). As it turned out, she was being publicly harassed by her fiancé and his family for being a divorced woman. The in-laws had prohibited their son from marrying her since she was not a virgin and her own family had kicked her out for bringing them shame through divorce. Many researchers report high female suicide rates in repressive societies (Fraser,
2000; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mayer & Ziaian, 2002). The stress and fear these patriarchal systems create in girls/women’s lives need to be configured if we are to understand female suicides.

It is thus the intent of this paper to look at the economic and living conditions within this mostly rural but quickly urbanizing and extremely patriarchal region of Turkey in order to compare men’s suicides with women’s. We concentrate on Batman where women’s suicide rate is almost two-and-a-half times higher than men’s.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

*Facts about Suicide Rates and Male/Female Differences*

According to the World Health Organization reports (WHO, 2000), approximately one million people take their own lives and suicide rates have shown a 60% increase in the last 45 years. Another way to underscore the seriousness of these numbers is to say that every 40 seconds, someone in the world will commit suicide and every three seconds, someone will attempt to commit suicide. In general, developed nations have much higher suicide rates than developing nations and rates for men are much higher than rates for women (WHO, 2002). For example, for every 100,000 population, male and female suicide rates in the following countries are: Australia: 21.2 vs 5.1; Austria: 29.3 vs 10.4; Belgium: 31.3 vs 11.7; Canada: 19.6 vs 5.1; Finland: 37.9 vs 10.6; France: 27.1 vs 9.2; Germany: 20.2 vs. 7.3; U.S.A: 18.6 vs. 4.4, etc. Men complete suicides three or four times more often than women do. This pattern has two notable exceptions: The suicide rates in the newly formed republics of the former USSR have surpassed the rates of even the most developed countries. For example, male and female suicide rates in the following new republics are: Belarus: 61.1 vs 10.0; Estonia: 56.0 vs 12.1; Latvia: 56.6 vs 11.9; Lithuania: 75.6 vs 16.1; Russia: 62.6 vs 11.6; Ukraine: 52.1 vs 10.0 and Slovenia: 47.3 vs 13.4 (WHO, 2002). As these rates show, in the former Soviet Block countries, men are likely to kill themselves anywhere from five to seven times more often than women do. The second notable deviation from the above-made generalizations is that only in China,

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7 The extraordinary amount of stress in women’s lives is apparent in the following episode: During a study visit to the region, two male professors and a 24-year-old, female graduate student from a local university took the second author (a female professor from Canada) for an early evening tea in the city. The graduate student, who is working full-time at a child-care facility, was so anxious about her 7:00 pm curfew that she had to call her home three times about a possible delay, had to profusely apologize and had to insist that the group members finish their tea so that they can take her home (only one local professor had a car). She was extremely agitated in the car and constantly checking her watch. Her older sister was waiting for her at the outside gate of her parents’ apartment building when the group arrived. The time was 7:25 pm and this was certainly an upper-middle-class neighbourhood.
female rates of suicide are higher than those for men (14.3 vs 17.9), but the difference is small (a few percentage points).

As a developing country, Turkey has much lower suicide rates than its above-stated counterparts (Icli, 1993; Schmidtke, 1999). Although Turkey is a secular republic, the fact that the vast majority (99%) of its population is Muslim may explain the pattern. Contrary to western misconceptions and ultra-fundamentalist misrepresentations, Islam strongly condemns any act to injure oneself (or others) and strongly condemns taking one’s own life (Eskin, 1995, p. 160, Ibrahim, 1995; Kocturk, 1992; Zein, 2002). Thus, Turkey’s suicide rates are only a fraction of its western counterparts (Sahin, Batigul, Sahin, 1998, p. 158). In 1998, male and female suicide rates were 3.5 vs 2.4 per 100,000 population. In the Batman region, however, a more exaggerated form of the Chinese pattern is in effect. In 2000, male and female suicide rates for Batman was 4 versus 9.9 (from the Municipal Coroner’s reports, Batman). Moreover, the highest proportion of these suicides were committed by very young girls/women (15-24 age category, Erkan, 2001).

**Facts about Batman and the Southeastern Turkey**

In secular Turkey, the geographic spread of classic patriarchy is uneven. For example, the participation of Turkish women in the labour force ranges from region to region (Arat, 1996; Kiz Cocuklarinin, 2000). Nevertheless, women do work for pay. Poor and rural women often work in family or kin owned fields, or they may work as farm labourers, usually under the most adverse and unsafe conditions (Kirsal Alan, 2000). In the southeastern region, female work involves cotton-picking in scorching fields, working in one of the gruelling shifts of the cotton industry or seasonal work in hazel-nut farms. Some women work as cleaners in people’s homes or toil in marginal, outdated industries where the conditions may be unregulated. The minimum wage in 2002 was 5,000,000 Lira a day (approximately $3.00 US or $5.00 Can.).

Batman’s historic past can be traced back to 546 BC (Batman, 1998, p. 17). It is situated in the socioeconomically deprived, southeastern portion of Turkey, close to the Iraqis and Syrian borders. According to the 1935 unofficial census, Batman’s total population was 319 (Batman, 1998, p. 53). In 1945, Batman had only 90 households (443 people) in total (Erkan, 2001). Amazingly, in slightly over 50 years, Batman city’s population has grown more than 2325% to 427,000 (Akyildirim, 2001, p. 19). This growth is the by-product of two developments: First, finding (modest)\(^8\) oil reserves in the area has attracted the excess rural population into the

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\(^8\) In 1997, a total of 471 oil wells produced eight million barrels of oil (Batman, 1998, p. 99).
Batman centre. Scattered farming/herding communities eking out difficult lives on relatively inhospitable lands have migrated to the city, hoping to get in on the new-found oil wealth. Unfortunately, oil profits have not raised the general standard of living. On the contrary, migration has brought about massive unemployment and a crisis in municipal services (mostly in education and healthcare). For example, according to 1995 Turkish census results, the official unemployment rate in Batman is 58% (Erkan, 2001) and the literacy rate is only 69% (Batman, 1998, p. 53). The very first public library in Batman was opened as recently as 1984 (Batman, 1998, p. 37). Within its 282 schools, 61% of students are male and only 39% are female. After the primary education, the numbers diverge more drastically for the two sexes (Batman, 1998, Erkan, 2001).

Table I. Comparisons of Batman, Southeastern Region and overall Turkey on Selected Sociodemographic Variables (2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>TURKEY</th>
<th>REGION (Southeast)</th>
<th>BATMAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>65,293,000.0</td>
<td>6,613,000.0</td>
<td>427,000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Population Increase</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Rate (per 1000)</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Rate (per 1000)</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility Rate</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy (Men)</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy (Women)</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of 0-14 gr.</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of 65+ gr.</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Batman region has also suffered from outlaw groups. The dramatic increase in the city population combined with its geographic remoteness has provided a convenient cover for the divisive, illegal and even terrorist activities of groups such as the PKK and the Hezboullah. The first is an internationally outlawed, violent terrorist group, erroneously claiming to represent the Kurdish minority in the region. The second is the outlawed

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9 Terrorist groups like the PKK must be carefully differentiated from the peaceful political struggles of the Kurdish-Turks who are trying to improve their minority rights and status within the Turkish Republic.
ultra religious network with a long list of terrorist activities in the Middle East. Both groups have exploited the general insecurity of people due to economic and social displacement, thus creating deep ethnic and religious fissures (Akyildirim, 2001, p. 10). Currently, Batman has one of the lowest life expectancies (62.2 for women and 58.0 for men). Corresponding numbers for Turkey are 71.5 and 66.9 (Akyildirim, 2001, p. 28). Again, it is not surprising that the region has one of the worst infant mortality rates in Turkey (68.9 per 1000 population for Batman while 35.3 for Turkey, see Table I). Female children may have suffered even more than male children. For example, Batman’s demographic data reveals that in the 0-4 year-old category, there are 38,400 male but only 34,000 female children recorded (Akyildirim, 2001). In developed nations, the proportion of female to male children in young ages is reversed (Nelson & Robinson, 2002, Ch. 9, Kendall, Murray & Linden, 2000, Ch. 19).

Table I compares Batman’s sociodemographic indicators to the southeastern region and to overall Turkish rates. As the previous review and Table I indicate, Batman can serve as a text-book candidate for Durkheim’s anomic suicide category (Erkan, 2001; Icli, 1993) as well as for Kandiyoti’s classic patriarchy. It is an area of social and economic upheaval where outlawed groups cause violent ethnic unrest or make ultra-religious claims. Studies show that exposure to community violence increases the risk of suicide in young adults, especially for males (Vermein et al., 2002). However, we need to gain further insights into why two-and-a-half times more Batman women than men are killing themselves, since this trend defies traditional suicide theories.

**METHODS**

The current study was undertaken by the sociology, psychology and psychiatry departments of Dicle University (Diyarbakir, Turkey) and with the approval of Batman City’s Mayoral Office. The analysis focuses on the year 2000 in which suicides have reached a peak in Batman’s history (31 completed and 99 attempted suicide cases which respectively translate into 6.9% and 20.81% per 100,000 population).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a surviving parent, an older sibling or a mate of the 31 Batman men and girls/women who committed suicide in 2000. Twenty-two (71%) of the 31 victims were females. Guardians of all victims were asked about the age, education, rural/urban residence patterns, income, employment, marital status and refugee/migratory status of the suicide victims. Because of the low educational level of the respondents and the highly emotional content of
the topic, there are numerous missing responses. Nevertheless, recorded responses do allow us to create an economic profile of the victims.

In addition, victims’ perceived social support systems, trouble with work (if applicable), verbalization of problems before suicide, existence of earlier attempts, therapy/medication history, family tolerance for relations with the opposite sex, trouble with family members and complaints about parental control were asked. There are numerous missing values in the data due to the emotional content of the topic and the strength of Turkish mores against suicides. Nevertheless, responses provide insights into the social conditions of the victims’ lives and more specifically, insights into the patriarchal forces that control women.10

**Ethics**

The study was conducted according to the ethical requirements of the Dicle University (Diyarbakir) for human participants. Because of the involvement of the psychology, psychiatry and sociology departments of a prestigious local university as well as Batman’s Mayoral Office in the project, the participation rate is almost 100%. Contact information for the respondents was gathered from police records, coroner’s reports and hospital records (which are not protected information in state institutions in Turkey). Given the fact that most participants were illiterate or semi-literate, only the verbal consent of the participants was required. Their refusal to participate or their refusal to answer questions had no negative consequence for the respondents. Interviews took anywhere from one to two hours and were conducted at the local hospital/health centre. Respondents received no monetary compensation for their participation in the study but most expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk to a professional about their loss/problems. Some respondents were referred to counselling.

**FINDINGS**

**Incidence**

There were 31 completed suicides and 99 suicide attempts in 2000. Twenty-two of the 31 (71%) and 85 of the 99 (86%) were girls/women. Reported findings are on the completed suicides.

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10 Because of the emotional fragility of the guardians who have lost a daughter/sister/wife to suicides, we refrained from asking direct questions about whether the victims were subjected to violence or threats of violence. In this article, the presence of violence against women is not directly tested but assumed on the basis of national statistics.
Age
The largest group of victims (20/31 or 65%) was between 15 and 24 years of age. The youngest victim was 12 years old (a girl). There were five additional suicides (16%) in the 25-34 bracket. The mean age of suicide victims was 23 and the range was 12-61.

Marital Status
Of the 22 female victims, 13 (59%) were single and nine (41%) were married. Of the nine men, seven (78%) were single and two (22%) were married. These observations support Durkheim’s claim about the protective effects of marriage, but mostly for men.

Suicide Method
Of the completed suicides of the nine men, four (44%) hung themselves, three (33%) used fire-arms and one each either jumped (11%) or used drugs (11%). Of the 22 female victims, 10 (45%) hung themselves, seven (32%) used fire-arms, three (14%) jumped and one each took drugs (.5%) or burned themselves to death (.5%).

Education
Approximately 40% of the suicide victims were illiterate or barely literate. Less than 20% had completed primary school or high school (20%). The proportion of those who had gone beyond high school was less than 20%.

Income
The family income of the suicide victims is telling. The majority (86.7%) of these families had a monthly income of less than $100.00 (US). Given the fact that 53% of our female victims had no paid work and 20% of male victims were unemployed, we conclude that the majority of those who killed themselves were outside of the workforce. Twenty-one of the 24 (87%) female victims and five (55%) of the nine male victims had no income of their own.

Urban/rural Settlement Pattern of Victims
Sixteen (52%) of the 31 completed suicides were in the Batman city and eight (25%) in the adjoining villages. Of the male victims, only two (28%) and of the female victims, only nine (37%) were born in the Batman city.

Housing and congestion
Sixty-seven percent of the families of the victims lived in substandard housing which is locally referred to as “gece-kondu.” The literal
translation of the term is “perched on a single night” which quite accurately reflects the haphazard, shanty and often illegal nature of these housing arrangements. Only 23% of the victims’ families stated that they lived in apartments. Even some of those may have been less than desirable accommodation. These findings take on even more serious implications when we consider the fact that 93% of the victims had more than three siblings and 73% of the families had five or more people residing together. Three victims had three, two victims had four, two had five, two had six, three had seven, three had eight and another three had 10 siblings each. One victim had nine and another, 11 siblings. Yet, 22 victims (79%) lived in residences with three or fewer rooms. In sum, the lack of privacy in these victims’ lives is astounding, even in relation to the modest Turkish standards of living. Table II summarizes some of the stated observations.

Table II. Summary of Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Women #</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>Men #</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Sc.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Sc. +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Income</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batman</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages are calculated on the basis of the number of responses for that question, not on the basis of the total number of female or male suicide victims. The number of respondents range from 25 to 31.
Findings Relating to Patriarchal Pressures

From some of the open-ended questions which were designed to tap into the patriarchal pressures in girls/women’s lives, the following summaries are of interest. Of the females who committed suicide, only 72% were allowed to go out for shopping on their own. Twenty-eight percent were not allowed to go out of the house without being accompanied by a designated chaperone. Eighty-four percent of the girls/women who committed suicide were not allowed to go to a park, a movie theatre or participate in any social gathering without the permission or accompaniment of their older kin and family. Eighty percent of the victims had never been outside of the Batman city and 90% had never been outside of Batman or the surrounding towns or villages. This geographic isolation is compounded by a social isolation as the following observations depict: Only 10% of the girls/women who took their own lives had ever talked with someone else about their feelings of desperation; 90% had not. Only three women had left a suicide note, leaving 86% taking their final departure in total silence.

In terms of opposite sex relations, controls on women were intense. Two thirds of the guardians polled were totally opposed to allowing their female children/sisters/wives in mixed-sex groups and a substantial proportion (90%) was opposed to their acquiring male friends or boyfriends. Three of the female victims (12%) were under 24-hour family watch when they died.11 Fifty percent of the guardians of the female suicide victims admitted that all major decisions about the family were made by fathers and another sizeable proportion admitted that elders (20%) or mothers (20%) made all the decisions concerning family life. Sixty-six percent of the guardians polled said that marital partners for daughters are better selected by family, kin or match-makers. Only 27% said that sisters or daughters could have a say in the matter. Exactly 50% of the polled female and an additional 23% of the polled male guardians of the suicide victims said that they will completely oppose their daughters’ marriage with someone they personally disapprove. The same group’s responses for the marriage partners of their sons was much more flexible: only 21% claimed that they would completely oppose their son’s choice of a mate. These traditional patterns in censuring mates for the younger generation, especially for girls/women is not surprising given that 92% of the guardians themselves had gotten married through matchmakers. What is also interesting to note is that female respondents

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11 Family watch in this case means a form of round-the-clock family curfew. Family watch does not mean a suicide watch, since the vast majority of the guardians had no clue about the suicidal tendencies of the victims.
were more strict executioners of patriarchal rules than male respondents seemed to be, at least on self-reports (see Brown, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1988 for an evaluation of older women’s control over younger women in classic patriarchies).

As the above responses from the guardians clearly show, the traditional patterns leave little agency for the youth about their own life choices. These choices are suffocatingly regimented for girls/women. According to the recollections of the polled guardians, 52% of the female suicide victims had expressed no hope about improvement in the conditions of their lives while they were still alive.

**SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

As the earlier review of the literature clearly indicates, Batman region (southeastern Turkey) is experiencing an unprecedented level of urbanization. Unfortunately, the speed of urbanization is faster than a corresponding growth in the infrastructure (including health, education or social safety). One of the two pronged reasons for this unchecked development is the recently discovered oil in the region. However, the modest amount of oil reserves (see footnote 8), their concentration in the hands of private companies/families/tribes and the lack of technological efficiency to extract oil from the rugged terrain have curbed the creation of new jobs. The other undesirable outcome of the unprecedented urbanization has been the ethnic unrest and fundamentalist strife. Outlawed organizations such as the PKK and Hezboullah have rained terror in the rural portions of the Batman region, forcing many farmers/herders to abandon their traditional lives in order to seek safety and protection in urban centers. Due to the ever-present fear of terrorist mayhem, the regional government was also eager to cajole rural people’s migration into the relative safety of the cities. As a result of these pressures, the structurally immature city of Batman has buckled under the tide of in-migration. For example, in 1997, Batman region had a single major hospital, one public tuberculosis centre, 16 day clinics and 14 ambulances (Batman, 1998, p. 141). The inadequacy of these services becomes clearer when we consider the fact that Batman’s population in the same year was 215,000 in 1997 (p. 53). The above listed factors of deprivation form a ripe condition for “anomie,” Durkheim’s major

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12 Windsor, Ontario is a Canadian city which has roughly 200,000 population. However, the number of hospitals, clinics, ambulance services, etc. is anywhere from 10 times to 100 times of the corresponding numbers in Batman.
explanatory factor in suicides. Indeed, Batman’s overall suicide rates have climbed to more than twice the rate for the rest of Turkey (6.9 vs 3).

Yet, when we analyzed the suicides of men, we saw that the rates were only marginally higher for Batman than the overall Turkish rate for men (4 versus 3.5 per 100,000). The real anomaly is in the women’s rates (2.4 for Turkey; 9.9 for Batman). We argued that the anomie producing conditions alone cannot provide a satisfactory answer for why Batman women are killing themselves at such a high rate. After all, Durkheim never claimed that women are more prone to the effects of anomie than men. On the contrary, Durkheim always argued (and for most of the world, rightly so), that women are less likely to commit suicide, possibly because they are more immune to anomic conditions than men are.

The anomaly in Batman brings us back to our findings about the sociocultural and patriarchal controls on women’s lives. As our findings show, more than three quarters of the female victims were below 25 years of age. This observation begs a feminist analysis of the gender-based conditions that are obviously detrimental to women’s physical or mental health. We found that these women came from crowded families (more than three and up to 11 siblings, more than five family members living under shanty houses which had three or fewer rooms). Crowded living arrangements are amongst high risk factors of suicide ideation/attempts by Turkish adolescent girls (Cetin, 2001, p. 648). Cetin also found a significant correlation between number of siblings and heightened suicidal behaviour of girls (not for boys). Batman’s victims did live under intolerable congestion.

Victims’ families had very little income (almost 90% of these families reported living on less than $100 (US) per month). These are harsh conditions even within the overall Turkish standards of life. Moreover, in patriarchal societies, it is almost always the girls/women who end up getting less than their fair share of the meagre resources (Kagitcibasi, 1993). For example, in the responses we received, the percentage of families who would totally support formal education for their sons was 90%. In contrast, only 20% of the respondents stated similar aspirations for their female children. It is our contention that the unequal treatment girls receive leads to tension in their family relationships. For example, in Cetin’s (2001), Sahin, Batigun and Sahin’s (1998) and Sahin, Sahin and Tumer’s (1994) studies with Turkish girls, problems in family relations was consistently identified as a correlate in suicide attempts or suicide ideation. Sahin et al. (1998) did not find family problems to affect men’s suicidal thoughts/behaviour.

In terms of personal leisure and freedoms, women’s situation was more dire. Our overall findings indicate that 53% of the female victims did not
work. Eighty-seven percent had no income of their own. At least 67% lived in shanty houses (gece-kondu) with 73% reporting to share these intolerable circumstances with more than five members of their household. More than 93% of the victims had three or more siblings. A few had 10 or 11 siblings. In patriarchal societies and especially in extremely patriarchal regions such as Batman), adverse living conditions and low income are particularly disheartening for girls/women. Men spend the majority of their awake hours at work (if they have work), or in the company of other men (Kocturk, 1992). The preferred environment for these all-male support groups are streets for male children and usually open-air coffee houses (kahvehane) for adult men. Hundreds of coffee houses scattered all over the town cater to all-male clients who drink Turkish tea and play cards or checkers, from very early in the morning until late in the evening. This inexpensive method of passing time is especially favoured by unemployed men. For girls/women, escaping the disheartening circumstances of their day-to-day life is much harder if not impossible. As our data reflect, only 72% of the women were allowed to shop on their own, even when shopping was necessary for family needs (i.e., groceries). A whopping 84% of the female victims had to get special permission or arrange for a chaperone to go to a park, or to attend a social event. Two thirds of the victims’ families we polled were totally opposed to allowing their female children in mixed-sex peer groups. Ninety percent of the guardians of those who died were opposed to having their daughters/sisters to acquire a boyfriend. According to Eskin’s work (1995, p. 169) on suicidal behaviour and attitudes of Turkish adolescents, opposite sex-problems were rated as one of the most crucial factors in female suicides. Given the extraordinary limitations in Batman girls’ lives, it is not hard to imagine the impact of forbidden cross-sex attractions.

Some other measures of isolation were also obvious. Eighty percent of the victims have never been outside of the Batman city limits and 90% have never been outside of the surrounding villages/towns of Batman. Only 15% of the victims have ever confided in someone about their suicidal thoughts, leaving 85% without someone they have felt comfortable to disclose their troubles. According to Eskin’s work (1995, p. 168) on attitudes of Turkish adolescents, family support systems were identified as the most effective buffer against suicidal thoughts or behaviour of girls. In the poverty stricken, over-crowded shanty houses of most of Batman’s victims, the protective effects of healthy family support seems totally absent. As Fraser (2000) points out, in such regions, many men do not even bother to learn their daughters’ names.

Our study does not have direct data on violence or threats of violence on girls/women (see footnote 10). However, according to the national
reports, Turkish women and girls indeed suffer from parental, spousal and sibling violence (Aile Ici Siddet, 1995). Turkish women in the southeastern region also suffer violence related to “family honour” which may range from severe beatings to death (Ilkkaracan, 1999; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Tezcan, 1981). Although these extreme cases are small in number, the vicious nature of violence (many get their throats slashed) and the publicity that surrounds the murders are enough to make girls/women live in fear for reprisal against their own behaviour (i.e., falling in love, dating, extra-marital sex). For example, according to Ilkkaracan’s interviews with 599 women from eastern Turkey, 66.6% feared that their husbands would kill them if they suspected an extra-marital affair. A larger majority expressed fears about being severely beaten up. For younger women, actions of a sexual nature may induce enough fear to take their own lives. Patriarchal societies value women’s honour (read chastity) more than their lives (Ibrahim, 1995; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001).

In her observations of suicidal behaviour of Asian-American women, Ibrahim (1995) mentions a close link between the level of frustration victims feel and the method of suicide they choose. She argues that women in patriarchal systems use “violent methods” such as self-burning, shooting and hanging (1995, p. 145). Within this context, it needs to be pointed out that Batman’s female suicide victims did use violent ways to end their lives (77% hung or shot themselves and one set herself on fire (.5%)). Sadly, this may have been the only aspect of their existence where they reached parity with their male counterparts (of the male suicide victims, 77% hung or shot themselves, see Table II).

Women in Batman are isolated and confined in many other ways. Regardless of their personal wishes, their opportunities to seek education, work, friendships, dates and mates are rigidly controlled. These deprivations may have been exacerbated through the anomic conditions surrounding their move to the city and unchecked urbanization that has greeted them. It is possible that these girls/women lacked freedoms and experienced many restrictions in their rural/nomadic lives. However, their relative deprivation may not have been so discernible while they resided in rural domains. In urban life, what may be different is the new found openness to the rest of the world (access to television), while families and kin continue to enforce the rigid and unforgiving norms and taboos of a feudal/patriarchal era. In 1999, Elif Akdag killed herself and her unborn child by hanging (Zoraki Evlilik Kurbani, 1999). Shortly before her suicide, she had been forced to marry her cousin that she never loved. Finding out that she was pregnant from this unwanted marriage had proven too much for her to bear.
In shanty towns, most families live with space and privacy deprivations. Lack of access to running water, inadequate heating, inadequate clothing or lack of nutrition are common. Lack of choices, lack of freedom of movement and lack of even a very basic dream of romance only aggravate the situation. Yet, the irony of globalization is that almost every shanty town is now hooked to the rest of the world through an antenna (85% of the victims’ homes had television). In other words, young women who killed themselves may have lacked many necessities of life before and may have been constantly watched over, as well. Yet, through the media, they may have seen for the first time, the material luxuries and personal freedoms (including freedom of heterosexual relations) other girls/women of their age enjoy. Batman girls/women may have recognized that they can never hope to have such luxuries, freedoms or choice. Even small infractions which involve sexuality may unleash severe forms of punishment, even death (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 1999). Since their sexuality is always suspect, they may be subjected to forced virginity tests, or bloody sheet tests and aside from the degradation they may experience, the sheer terror about the results of such tests may loom over their mental health. Yet, the television programs show dramatically different ways of life. It is not surprising that 52% of the polled guardians of the suicide victims perceived television as a dangerous factor in their children’s/sisters’/wives’ lives, thoughts and behaviour. They seem to have an intuitive sense that insult and injury experienced through relative deprivation may be a more powerful force than absolute deprivation that they all share. Indeed, the “pathologies” these women have exhibited through suicide may not be a pathology at all. Instead, their actions may reflect a desperate, rational choice to break the chains of their structural/cultural/gendered oppressions. Frantz (2000) states that women who live in Batman “cannot control their lives, only their deaths” (p. A3).

CONCLUSIONS

Finding some form of “rationality” in a very self-destructive act (such as suicide) should not mean that we condone such acts or view them without social responsibility or compassion. On the contrary, our attempt is to identify another way of looking at the social phenomenon of female suicides rather than simply resurrecting the androcentric theories of the past to explain such behaviour (Canetto & Lester, 1995). Our victims’ lives show that the root causes of their self-destructive behaviour may go beyond “individual pathology” or “anomie” or “alienation.” Instead, through the insights of western and eastern feminist literatures, we
argued that the restraints and cultural controls over women’s (and young people’s) lives must be understood in order to dismantle the conditions leading to their desperation. Our observations identify the suffocating conditions as economic deprivation (both absolute and relative, on both women and men) and patriarchal control of women’s lives and freedoms. These girls/women seem to be severely isolated in the midst of poverty stricken, over-crowded homes, with very little hope of breaking the cycle. Cetin (2001) has found that these are high risk conditions for girls. Bumiller (1990) concludes her work on female suicides in repressive countries by stating that repressive and abusive conditions may leave women no other option. Batman supports these assertions.

We also proposed that the deprivation Batman women may have felt before moving to an urban city may have grown even more unbearable once they found a window into how other people, in other parts of the world live (media exposure). Our observations also indicated that these women lacked family and parental supports which are generally found to be buffers against self-destructive behaviour. Although our data cannot directly speak to the issue of violence, other research in the region clearly indicates that violence against girls/women is severe and common. If our interpretation of these findings is correct, then the way to remedy the conditions that give rise to the desperate acts by women (mostly young women) is clear: reduced control of their personal lives, reduced control of their physical bodies, decreased punitiveness against sexualized experience and increased opportunities for education, paid work, meaningful social activities and more choices in selecting friends, companions and mates. This may sound like a tall order in a developing country such as Turkey and especially in a very patriarchal region such as Batman. However, the very first step to such a positive change lies in educational opportunities and paid work opportunities for women with decent wages, safe working standards, adequate housing and presence of national and international watch groups over women’s physical and psychological health. It is then and only then that girls/women may see a light (albeit small) at the end of an otherwise all confining and suffocating genderized tunnel.

The remedies for male suicides may also underlie better educational and job opportunities, decreased exposure to community violence, decrease in ethnic and religious frictions and possibly a decreased tension between gendered relations. After all, as we have argued throughout this paper, being under male scrutiny may be unbearable for women. Yet, being a constant and obsessive scrutinizer cannot be all that desirable for men either.
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