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QUESTIONING THE SOCIAL SERVICES IN TURKEY THROUGH RAPE SURVIVORS

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Abstract

In Turkey, policies are mainly based on strengthening family ties which actually weaken women's positions in every aspect of life and there is still no gender equality in law especially in practice. Social policies and institutions in Turkey are not so much supportive of women or focusing on the needs of women. This stems from the social structure which mostly concerns men's needs. Raping women is a part of systematic and political violence in Turkey. Our research aims to examine what conditions women are in and suffer through in Turkey when they have been raped or exposed to sexual violence. A woman has to deal with the patriarchal structure in every step of reporting procedure to the police and prosecution officer in the process of forensics to get a report when she has been raped. It means that she experiences the same trauma over and over again. Women are questioned as offenders rather than victims. Hence, women avoid reporting their cases in the first place, and of course this happens when the case did not end with death. However, lack of emergency response plan for rape survivors in Turkey is the main issue of this work. We need rape crisis centres established under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (ASPB) and Ministry of Health

or a network of NGOs and research centres in universities. However, Turkish government does not set budget for such centres. This is another concern of our research. This study mainly aims to investigate the legislation of rape crime and to argue the issues on implementations of international conventions on preventing and combating violence against women. It also presents the results of the interviews carried out with NGOs working on sexual violence.

Keywords

Rape Survivors, Rape Crisis Centres, Social Services, Sexual Violence, Feminist NGOs

1. Introduction

When we have searched the Rape Crisis Centres' historical development process referring to the feminist movement of the 1970s which rejected the violence against women and claimed that empowering women is a necessity. According to Dominelli (2002, p. 26-27), radical feminist movement describes the patriarchy as a systematic subjugation of women by men and has taken a key role to emphasise that men use violence to control women while it indicates that social work and its tools can be utilized to empower women. However, they have highlighted empowering women by the services such as shelters and rape crisis centres they also highlighted the idea of empowering women by the establishment of services, such as shelters and rape crisis centres which have been developed by women.

The idea of Rape Crisis Centre was developed by the feminist movement in the 1970s in England and Wales and the first Rape Crisis Centre was established in 1973. Rape Crisis England & Wales (2017) is a national umbrella body for the autonomous Rape Crisis Centres across England and Wales. Although it works to help and support the needs and rights of women and girls who have been exposed to sexual violence, it is also an organization which struggles to raise the awareness and understanding of sexual violence in a wider community and with local, regional and national governments at the same time.

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (2017) was established in 1985 while there were six Rape Crisis Centres which have been offering support, information, counselling, and advocacy, medical or legal processes. Rape Crisis Scotland (2017) is the national office for the rape crisis movement in Scotland and it supports local centres and works to develop new centres. The first two rape crisis centres in Scotland were opened in Glasgow in 1976 and in Edinburgh in 1978. The Rape Crisis Network Europe likewise is a coalition of voluntary organizations in Europe which works to provide services to the survivors of sexual violence and lobbying to develop a change in social attitudes toward sexual violence. This coalition

includes The Rape Network Ireland and Rape Crisis Wales and England (Rape Crisis Network Europe, 2003).

In England and Wales, it was shown up that 2,5% of women aged 16-59 had been exposed to sexual offence within the previous 12 months as a result of the survey which was conducted by Home Office. However, age, race, economic or social status, religion or immigration status are not distinctive factors for being victim of sexual violence (Rights of Women, 2014, p. 2).

Even if the rape crisis and sexual assault centres, which are the focus of the present research, have not been discussed in detail within legal and institutional level by the policy makers in Turkey, women organizations and NGOs put on the agenda at the end of 2000s the issue of creating a rape crisis centre model convenient to Turkey's social system by examining the rape crisis models in Europe. Even though the criminalization of the act of rape is very important within the limits of law, it is also a requirement to provide an institutional service for the women who have been exposed to sexual violence.

1.1 The Laws and Policies of the Elimination of Violence against Woman in Turkey (From 1980s to 2000)

In Turkey, the 1980s was a decade of the feminist movement started to question the family relationships and women's role in society. At the end of 1980s, the requests for right based social work for women have been come into agenda within shelters (Sallan Gül & Alican Şen, 2016, p. 125-127).

As a result of the struggle of the women's movement in the 1980s, it has been observed that -taking the international commitments into account - Turkish state has made a number of legal and administrative arrangements and began to take responsibility in order to prevent the violence against women (Turkey, Ministry of Family and Social Policy, General Directorate of Women's Status, 2012, p.13). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was enacted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981, has been an important basis for the steps taken by Turkish state for the women facing violence. Turkey's accession to the Convention as a signatory was approved in 1985. CEDAW, which stipulates that traditional roles defined for women and men should be questioned and all forms of discrimination against women should be prohibited made certain updates to the existing laws and practices.

In Turkey, the first examples of advisory centres and shelters for women who experience sexual violence were opened in 1990s. Also in 1990, with the opening of the first state-run women's shelter, the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK,

henceforth Ministry of Family and Social Policies/ASPB) were given the responsibility of protecting women from domestic violence (Sallan Gül & Alican Şen, 2016, p. 127). Since then, as well as by the state institutions, social services for women facing violence have also been carried out by non-governmental organizations (besides the state institutions, non-governmental organizations have also provided social services for women facing violence.) (Turkey, Ministry of Family and Social Policy, General Directorate of Women's Status, 2012, p. 19).

Turkey's first targeted regulation on the prevention of domestic violence against women was the Law on the Protection of the Family (No:4320) which was adopted in 1998. However, this law, which takes "protection of the family" as its focal point, was heavily criticised because of targeting to protect the individuals only from the domestic violence while leaving them unprotected when the violence is not at home (Ateş, 2007, p. 172). Especially the challenges faced during the implementation of the law underline the fact that merely adopting a law is not enough to prevent violence against women. However, in spite of all critics, it has to be said that the Law Number 4320 was functional in some ways and it can be seen as a milestone for Turkish legislation in fighting against domestic violence (Erdem, 2007, p. 50).

1.2 Developments in Post-2000's Turkey

After the year 2000, significant changes have been achieved due to the intensive efforts of women's organizations to remove discrimination against women from Turkish legal system"). The Turkish Civil Law (2001) and the Turkish Criminal Law (2004) stand out as the two prominent texts which were updated in this sense. When the laws are examined for the crimes against women, it is seen that in the Criminal Law, punishment for the acts such as honor killings or marital rape is defined and penalties for aggravated sexual assault crimes are arranged. Also we should note that the provisions for impunity or impunity in rape crimes, which were placed in the Turkish Criminal Law before 2001, have been completely abolished with the new regulations. With the legal arrangements regarding working life have aimed to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace; and "sexual harassment at the workplace" is considered as merely a cause for the termination of the employment contract of the worker in the Article 24 of the Labor Law (2003) (Karinca, 2011, p. 38, 133, 134).

The Convention on the Preventing and Combatting Violence and Domestic Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention), which was committed by the Council of Europe and signed in İstanbul in 2011 and came into force in 2014, is a critical precaution to combat sexual violence against women. The Convention is the first document to be legally binding on

Europe and has utmost importance for predicting the standards of combatting all forms of domestic and non-domestic violence against women regardless of their biological, legal or family ties (Bakırcı, 2015, p. 134). As the Convention involves to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, it also requires that substantive quality is promoted in society, women are empowered, a complete structure for both protecting women from violence and providing service is developed (Westmarland, 2015, p. xiv). The signatory states undertake the responsibility to take all measures to punish sexual violence including rape (Article 36) and to establish rape crisis or sexual violence advisory centres (Article 25). Another article of the Convention that stands out in the context of combatting sexual violence against women is the 5th one (Article 5), which expresses the obligation of the state and its responsibility to show due diligence. This article emphasizes that the state is the only responsible if the political will and determination of the state to combat violence against women cannot be converted into practice or if the political will is not supported by public officials (Doğan, 2016, p. 116).

It should be kept in mind that ratifying the Istanbul Convention without any reservation in Turkish Parliament, Turkey is the first signatory of the Convention (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2015, p. 156). In addition, in order to fulfill the requirements of the Convention, Turkey abolished the Law No. 4320, which has faced great criticism from women's NGOs. Instead of this law, Law No. 6284 on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women came into force in 2012. With this law Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres (ŞÖNİMs) were decided to be established under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (ASPB). These centres are aimed to provide support and monitoring services 24 hours 7 days for all applicants who his/herself is a violent person or a victim of violence. As of December 2016, ŞÖNİMs are in function in 49¹ out of 81 provinces across Turkey. The first-step units are the places where the first intervention is done for the victim of violence and a victim can accommodate up to two weeks; these units can be accessed through the 183 phone helpline (ALO 183) and women shelters are the 24/7 services provided by ASPB (Turkey, Ministry for Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Women's Status, 2016, p. 23-25).

It should be noted that in conjunction with the ASPB, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, municipalities, bar associations and non-governmental organizations also make effort in order to combat violence against women; and within those ministries some

¹There are 81 provinces in Turkey.

units providing services for women victims of violence are established. It is also stated that as a signatory of the Istanbul Convention, the state will establish special service models under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health for the benefit of sexual violence victims (Turkey, Ministry for Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Women's Status, 2016, p. 72).

In Turkey, *Women's Network Against Sexual Violence* was established in 2009 with the participation of 27 feminist NGOs. The Platform has prepared and presented to The Great National Assembly a draft law on the establishment of crisis centres which women can apply to after an exposure to sexual violence (Kadınlar Cinsel Şiddete Karşı Harekete Geçti, 2010). In this draft law (2010), the underlying philosophy of the establishment of these centres, technical and personnel infrastructure of the centres are expressed as follows:

“Article 8: At least one convenient and easily accessible sexual violence crisis centre will be established in all provinces in order to provide free services such as medical and judicial inspections, treatment, identification and storage of evidences, trauma support and counselling for victims of sexual violence. These centres will provide emergency services for 24/7 and each centre will have a forensic medicine specialist, a female gynaecologist, a female psychologist, a female social worker and a female nurse. The application and victim complaints processes are also brought to the end under the supervision of the public prosecutor and/or by inviting law enforcement officials to the crisis centre.”

As women's NGOs have been able to communicate with the state on how to approach women survivors of sexual violence, the draft law should be regarded as one of the most important developments of 2000s. Moreover, the establishment of the Association for Combating Sexual Violence in 2015 should also be noted as another significant near-term development.

The approach and practices recommended by the women's movement in Turkey for organizations such as rape crisis centres, women's shelters etc. are defined as advanced social work practices (Atasü Topçuoğlu, 2016, p. 20). For this reason, this article, views from feminist NGOs are tried to be reflected.

2. Research

This section presents the results of the interviews carried out with the NGOs working in the field of sexual violence and the discussions in the literature.

2.1 Methodology

The in-depth interviews were conducted in İstanbul with the women who actively work for the organizations² which focus on the issues of violence against women and lasted between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. Based on these interviews, ideas of the NGOs, which are also members of Women Network Against Sexual Violence, about the ongoing system and rape crisis centres were detected. Those five feminist NGOs below mentioned with names work in the field of discrimination and violence against women since their foundation. Also, because working with women who have been exposed to sexual and domestic violence in close and professional way for years give them a great experience in that field, they have been considered very efficient and suitable samples for this research. Due to this research concept, non-feminist NGOs which work in the field of violence against women are not involved to this research because their perspectives are close to family strengthening policies which follow government's policies. Even if it seems like this research is not a comparative work, it is developed in such a perspective which tries to understand what women who have been exposed to sexual violence need are in a feminist perspective.

2.2 Findings and Discussion

Findings from the interviews and the discussion regarding those findings are presented below:

2.2.1 Ignorance towards the Problems of Women by Government and the Family Based Social Policies

The participants emphasized that the most important reason of not establishing the rape crisis centre in Turkey basically depends on the patriarchal ideology (the most important reason behind not establishing rape crisis centres in Turkey is the patriarchal ideology) of government policies –even if the party in power changes. Collecting datas of violence against women in a corporate system and examining the results in detail are very important (Şengül & Ergören, 2017, s. 95). It was stated that the most important barriers to developing an institutional structure which will combat violence against women are the idea of inequality between women and men and the ignorant attitude of the government about the problems of women. The most emphasized discussions are the family based policies put into practice by

²The NGOs interviewed: Women for Women's Human Rights- New Ways, Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, Women's Solidarity Foundation, Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association (Kaos GL), Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation.

government's party and applied with the view of weakening women, hence women are ignored and there is no enough resource to solve these issues.

“The AKP is trying to weaken us by using family based policies and manipulating us as women by letting people believe in that feminism is a western notion based only on the values of the west. So, in short, they try to marginalize and undermine feminism to weaken women's positions in all aspects of life. Political power is against the equality of women and men and it declares this clearly without concealing it. So this idea extends to all the matters related to women and men or strengthening women. There are only 101 women's shelters operated by the government, let alone sexual violence or rape crisis centres. There are approximately 140 shelters run by the government, NGOs and the local government with the capacity of 3400 bedspace. The government does not spare any resources because it does not recognize it as an issue and applies policies against women. Basically, it is a matter of resource...” (Participant 1, Feminist Activist)

“The needs of women are never treated as a separate category. Because we exist in the men's world... The irony of “if men could get pregnant, the abortion could operate in groceries” is usually mentioned by the feminists. So, the services provided to the citizens are prioritized with sexual discrimination. Because of this, providing service especially to the women who have been exposed to sexual assault enlightens the source of violence. And this does not fit to the masculine people's book.” (Participant 2, Feminist Activist)

“This government refuses and covers that progress as if it misses this. It does not want women to be strong, to be activists and involved in politics, the offenders have been punished and above all anything that would damage the concept of family.”(Participant 3, Feminist Activist/Lawyer)

It is seen that in Turkey the processes of marketisation and privatisation have been risen in social work instead of the institutionalisation policies in the 2000s and also seen that the responsibility of the task for providing welfare and care has been given to the families – mostly to the women (Sallan Gül & Alican Şen, 2016, p. 123-24).The policies implemented for ensuring gender equality are built as family based ones and women are described in the family and dependent on the men in Turkey (Özar & Yakut Çakar, 2013, p. 32).

As understood from its context and discourse, the Law 6284 underlines the point of “protection of the family” and supports the abovementioned ideas. Moroğlu (2012, p. 369) emphasizes that designing and naming the law as “protecting family” instead of “preventing the violence against women, protecting women from violence” is a choice in Turkey. It is useful to remind the speech of Deputy Ramazan Can on the behalf of Justice and Development Party (AKP)³ during the development process of the Law 6284, thus it describes this issue of choice clearly:

“The right of woman as an individual is important for sure but the integration of family is more important. The positive discrimination for the woman makes sense as long as domestic relations are protected, because, if we protect the woman, we protect the human. The priority of protecting human is keeping the family well protected. The practices of positive discrimination should not change into the implementations facilitating divorce and causing disintegration of the family easily I think the balance should be kept, it should be chosen, the family rights and domestic relations should be protected together with the women’s rights as an individual.”(The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2012).

Beside this, it must be reminded that in spite of the reactions of all women’s organizations, “Ministry of Women and Family” was abolished in 2011 and instead "The Ministry of Family and Social Policies" (ASPB) was founded.

2.2.2 The Same Trauma Over and Over

It must be specified that the number of the centres for women who experience violence has increased –though it is still unsatisfactory- since 2000s when it is compared to that in 1990s. Nevertheless, it must be stated that the application procedure in those centres is disorganized and complicated. The participants pointed out that a woman who has been raped experiences the same trauma over and over as she has to give statement in different agencies such as police department or prosecution office over and over again as a result of disorganized application procedure.

It is a necessity that the women especially the ones who have been exposed to sexual assault need to deal with only one organization. In Turkey, it is seen that Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres (ŞÖNİMs), which have been planned to provide such services still refer the women to the police departments. This is an important evidence that the institutional

³AKP is the only government party since 2002 elections.

mechanism does not work properly (Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies, 2015, p. 312).

Because the women in Turkey generally think that the domestic violence should be kept in family relationship, this attitude causes to continue the violence against women. (Bilgin Şahin & Erbay Dündar, 2017, s. 208) In Turkey, the application rate for the institutional mechanism is very low regarding to the women who have been exposed to violence. It is seen that the women who experience sexual or physical abuse share their cases with their families or friends instead of going to the police, gendarme, hospital/ health services, Ministry of Family and Social Policies, council, prosecutor, attorney or NGOs. The results of the researches for violence against women show that the agency most women get service is the police agency (Turkey, The Prime Minister, General Directorate On The Status Of Women, 2009, p. 89-90; Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies, 2015, s. 162-164, 272).

It was frequently expressed that the first appeal should not be directly to the police agency in the in-depth interviews carried out within the context of our research. It was also pointed out that it is a problematic approach that women have been referred to the police agency when they went to the prosecution office. An anecdote from a lawyer in an interview describes the case obviously:

“A woman who experienced rape should not have been approached by a male police officer in the first place. Regarding this matter, I would like to share a casework with you. A woman who had been raped went to a police station initially and she was seen by many male police officers there. One of the police officers had offered her his spare trousers with a good intention as hers was ripped during the attack, she accepted this as she had no other option. When I was in another room and dealing with a similar matter this woman came through and she was continuously pulling her trousers as if she was going to tear it. I asked her what was wrong with it and whether she wanted to change it. She said she did not like the trousers as it was a man’s trousers. So we found something else for her. It was not right and she did not have to go through this in the first place whereas she was in a very sensible state. I understand that they tried to help her but there was still a legal gap there which had to be fulfilled.” (Participant 4, Feminist Activist/Lawyer)

This anecdote obviously shows that the treatment and care services should be organized in systematically with humanistic perspective for rape survivors. Non-judgmental

and empathic perspectives should be considered for rape survivors to make themselves explained (Demiralp & Sarıkoç, 2016, s. 363, 365).

There are various critics in the literature regarding the operation of Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres (ŞÖNİMs), which have been created to be central to combat violence against women. The significant departments for combating violence against women such as police departments and health care services have no enough connection with ŞÖNİM, the bureaucratic difficulties on processing of ŞÖNİM and ŞÖNİM is criticized for not increasing its service standards and for the difficulties faced in its operational processes. (Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies, 2015, p. 272). Besides, it is known that it is the same staff who provide service both to the victim and the offender in the same place. Difficult access to ŞÖNİM due to their far location from city centers and the existence of only one ŞÖNİM, which is inefficient especially for the big cities, are other points of criticism about ŞÖNİM (Sulu Gülten, 2014, s. 217-218). The data obtained from the interviews focus on the procedures and practices that traumatize women over and over again:

“The feedbacks from the women we refer to ŞÖNİM without our company show that they experience psychological violence there. The situation changes with our company. We do not know the atmosphere inside the shelter but the women we refer to ŞÖNİM do not want to stay there more than a few days. They start to look for another option. The procedures are restrictive for the women in terms of entrance and exit time, cutting their connection with the outside world and making them feel guilty for what they are exposed to. We need to talk about how to change this.” (Participant 4, Feminist Activist/Lawyer)

“The women who experience violence have generally been exposed to it for a long time. And they have already started to get information during this exposure time. They say that they do not want to go to shelter in the end. We hear such questions almost from all: ‘Is there any other place? Do we have another way out?’” (Participant 5, Feminist Activist)

Even if the participants criticize the procedures of ŞÖNİM, they agree that it would be for the benefit of women if ŞÖNİM’s institutional mechanism is organized from a woman’s perspective. So, it is pointed out that rape crisis centres must be developed considering the critics for ŞÖNİMs and shelters.

2.2.3 Ideas On How a Rape Crisis Centre Must Be Organized

Even if it is stated that rape crisis centres must be properly designed within the social policy structure of Turkey by taking an example of the European structure, it is seen that NGOs do not run the field work researching rape crisis centres. Therefore, the ideas on how a rape crisis centre must be organized remain only as theoretical knowledge from foreign literature. Participants mostly think that the government must take the responsibility of establishing and financing the rape crisis centres. Nevertheless, it is seen that there is a confusion among participants about under which government body rape crisis centres must be organized. Some participants –especially the lawyers– support that the centres must be organized in health departments/hospitals for practical reasons while others support that they must be organized under ŞÖNİMs or as NGOs based. However, there are different opinions regarding if the word ‘rape’ must be in the name of the centre or not. Some participants support the idea that having the word ‘rape’ in the name of the centre is a way of fighting against rape, while others argue that women may avoid to go to a centre with a name involving the word ‘rape’.

All the participants pointed out that government and feminist NGOs need to work in partnership and the practices must be monitored by NGOs. All participants remarked that the consensus of opinion for the rape crisis centres must be developed within the perspectives of feminist social work and women by considering women’s demands. It was also highlighted that centres should be run by women employees with a feminist perspective. Another important issue for all the participants is that the employees must be specialized and experienced in sexual violence:

“I very well know a woman who has been raped. I recognize her world well, how traumatised she can be and how her soul can be damaged. I am talking about a woman who has been exposed to a systematic rape by three forest rangers in 1990s and she has a child from one of them. If she had been exposed to gang rape or martial rape and got pregnant and gave birth, someone specialized must take care of her (you or I cannot handle this). We had great difficulty in that case. How can I know; I was a young woman then and tried to do everything. I think I did not do enough because I did not know what to do professionally. I hope that we had not made a big mistake. But it was really difficult; we experienced things that I could not tell during those times.... There is not enough awareness of gender and equality. Employees specialized in medical and psychological support are required.” (Participant 1, Feminist Activist)

“The centres should be run by the people who have been trained in gender equality and especially in sexual assault. None of the social workers should judge the survivor or label the offender. They also should face the truth that anyone can be a survivor or an offender.” (Participant2, Feminist Activist)

“Rape is a traumatic case. There should be a vehicle to accompany woman -if it is possible with a female driver. It is good to create a system that women can deal with trauma during that time. It would be very good if there could be someone to accompany and support those women throughout the application, reporting and forensic processes to get a report.” (Participant 6, Feminist Activist)

It is significant that employees should be specialized and experienced in sexual violence and all the professionals who get involved in these matters should be in an ongoing training within the services. It must be considered that the rape survivor could be stressful because of the legal processes that she has been already in while she has being evaluated by health professional. Also it must be prevented that to get her in a second trauma or feeling guilty or worthless. Hence, the health professional who works with sexual abuse or rape survivors should treat more careful and thoughtful and also she/he should have special training if needed (Kılıççioğlu, Buran, & Sağlık Küçük, 2016, s. 4775). However, it is clearly seen that in Turkey, the trainings for combating violence against women are provided by short term projects (Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2016). It must be specified that it will pose a problem the employee trainings which are provided by the approach of project.

2.2.4 The Tension between Government and NGOs

Feminist NGOs play an important role in the struggle with violence against women (especially for sexual violence) in Turkey. The legal struggle feminist activists led have contributed to the development of gender equality in Turkey. A draft law developed in the late 2000s by Women Network Against Sexual Violence is the best example. The participants stated that the rape crisis centres were defined in detail in that draft law but they also pointed out that the government brought this law into force with only a few sentences.

“In the beginning, we were receiving the information that they were trying to send the women back their home (She is talking about government bodies). We decided to work on a law draft. Then, Nazik Işık presented the draft in the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Parliament on behalf of our Network. But you know that an issue about women never becomes high on the agenda in parliament

and other issues are always at high on the list. As government is the only body to legislate, that turn never comes to such issue, the agenda never changes (Participant 3, Feminist Activist/Lawyer)

It is an important issue that government lacks understanding and ignores the efforts of feminist NGOs. It is significant that all the participants agree that the political authority which dominates patriarchy in Turkey marginalizes the feminist:

“Who will open the centres? Government will. You do not open! (She refers to the NGOs). You do not know this work. Even if you know, you have imperfect knowledge. You do not have finance and human resource. Of course the government will do this and also it is the task of the government. It collects taxes, it has budget, it has all the resources and power. Of course the government will do this. Let us not acclaim but go on to say how to do it. But we gave up when we realized that government does not work well on this issue. Do you hear any word from women organizations? The reason is that they turn their back, when they find that the government works on it on the wrong way. They are not questioning. It is already wrong, they see that AKP did something wrong. So we give up on the centres and the women who go there.”
(Participant 1, Feminist Activist)

It is seen that the network has suspended the works about rape crisis centres and not claimed this matter even if the members of platform are still active. The participants stated that the feminist NGOs have concentrated on the political issues in Turkey and not focused on violence against women sufficiently. Although it was highlighted in the interviews that the monitoring system should be provided by NGOs, it is a contradiction that the ongoing system was not monitored by them. It results in that NGOs are not taken seriously by the government. It is important that suggestions and demands of the participants regarding feminist NGOs must be integrated into the system. However, it is obviously understood that the feminist NGOs do not have enough number of experienced professional workers and volunteers. The unsupportive attitude of the government towards feminist NGOs prevents them from handling the basic problems. The participants highlighted that this tension hinders the social work for the benefit of women.

3. Conclusion

Improving the national legislation with international conventions and defining the aims of practice are positive developments in Turkey. Even if both of these developments in 2000s are important for Turkey, it is seen that groundwork is not developed sufficiently to

practice the legal regulation. It must be pointed out that the system does not support the legal regulations regarding improvement of gender equality. It must be stated that the patriarchal system which keeps women in private and domestic spheres while forcing them to provide care works causes women not to get benefit from the new regulations in Turkish Civil Code, Turkish Criminal Law and Labour Law in the context of gender equality in Turkey (Elveren, 2015, p. 75, 84).

The Law No. 6284, which has been come into force with the adoption of Istanbul Convention, obviously describes what to do about the issue of violence against women without leaving it to the practitioner's discretion (Uygur, 2015, p. 210). Although the establishment of “easily accessible rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres for victims in sufficient numbers to provide for medical and forensic examination, trauma support and counselling for victims” is clearly stated in Istanbul Convention (Article 25), the Turkish government has not started to establish those centres. So, it is seen that the government does not take its responsibility. At this point, NGOs should remind government bodies about their responsibility to establish rape crisis centres and should keep this issue on the agenda. The government should work in partnership with the feminist NGOs on combating violence against women. A practice which prioritises the rights of the survivor can only be possible with the adoption of feminist social work approach.

Because this research involved the NGOs working in the field of sexual violence in Istanbul city, it could be considered as a limited qualitative research in local. It would be beneficial to do a comprehensive research to develop ideas on improving ongoing practices for both now and the future. Furthermore, it would be involved the political and legal bodies such as police agency, relevant ministry/department, legal department and also professionals from health and caring services when further research would be developed for the next step.

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