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## Negotiating with Gatekeepers: Reflexivity in Exploring Turkish Men's Engagement in Domestic Violence Perpetrator Interventions in the UK

Zeynep Turhan PhD

Bartın University, zturh001@gold.ac.uk

Claudia Bernard PhD

Goldsmiths, University of London, c.bernard@gold.ac.uk

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### **Abstract**

This article explores methodological and ethical challenges and complexities in negotiating access with gatekeepers in research that examines Turkish perpetrators’ engagement in domestic violence interventions in the UK. This research presents the examples and conceptual information about the process of working with gatekeepers based on the sensitive research topic. This paper draws on the first author’s own experiences and the emotional impact of undertaking such sensitive research where community leaders held patriarchal beliefs. It also argues that there are challenges in building trust and rapport with gatekeepers which are related to gender power relations; stigmatisation in the community; ideologies around masculinity and patriarchy. Based on the experience of accessing hard-to-reach participants while undertaking a doctoral study, this paper discusses issues that arise when negotiating with gatekeepers to access study participants. The paper contributes to debates about gatekeepers by discussing the benefits of ethical considerations and of implementing reflexivity and field notes in the gatekeeping process.

### **Keywords**

Access, Gatekeepers, Negotiation, Power, Reflexivity

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# Negotiating with Gatekeepers: Reflexivity in Exploring Turkish Men's Engagement in Domestic Violence Perpetrator Interventions in the UK

Zeynep Turhan  
Bartın University, Turkey

Claudia Bernard  
Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom

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*This article explores methodological and ethical challenges and complexities in negotiating access with gatekeepers in research that examines Turkish perpetrators' engagement in domestic violence interventions in the UK. This research presents the examples and conceptual information about the process of working with gatekeepers based on the sensitive research topic. This paper draws on the first author's own experiences and the emotional impact of undertaking such sensitive research where community leaders held patriarchal beliefs. It also argues that there are challenges in building trust and rapport with gatekeepers which are related to gender power relations; stigmatisation in the community; ideologies around masculinity and patriarchy. Based on the experience of accessing hard-to-reach participants while undertaking a doctoral study, this paper discusses issues that arise when negotiating with gatekeepers to access study participants. The paper contributes to debates about gatekeepers by discussing the benefits of ethical considerations and of implementing reflexivity and field notes in the gatekeeping process. Keywords: Access, Gatekeepers, Negotiation, Power, Reflexivity*

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## Introduction

A gatekeeper has been described as a person who allows or restricts the researcher to access research participants (Clark, 2011; De Laine, 2000; Saunders, 2006). The influences of gatekeepers on research projects are part of an ongoing debate in social science, and the process is often challenging for the researchers (Clark, 2011; McAreavey & Das, 2013). Despite these challenges in the gatekeeping process, several scholars emphasise the important roles of gatekeepers for a hard-to-reach population during sensitive research (Andoh-Arthur, Hjelmeland, Osafo, & Knizek, 2018; Campbell, Gray, Meletis, Abbott, & Silver, 2006; McAreavey & Das, 2013; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Some studies paid attention to the power, trust and complex negotiations for cooperation and accessing participants in the gatekeeping process (Campbell et al., 2006; Clark, 2011; Crowhurst & Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). This complex and dynamic gatekeeping process impacts on the research process (Crowhurst & Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). This article concentrates on the complex issues around power and trust in building relationship with gatekeepers including programme providers, professionals (e.g., therapists, facilitators, and mental health workers), community members and their leaders. This gatekeeping process is examined based on experiences during the course of doctoral research.

A number of researchers have recognised different types of negotiations during the gatekeeping process for accessing participants (Campbell et al., 2006; Clark, 2011; Emmel,

Hughes, Greenhalgh, & Sales, 2007; Heath, Charles, Crow, & Wiles, 2007; Homan, 2001; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). In these negotiations, the researchers' social and political positions can be interconnected with building a relationship with gatekeepers, and this can be better recognised and examined through reflexivity (Doyle, 2013; Mcfadyen & Rankin, 2016; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). The researchers' engagement with gatekeepers can help them to access their participants.

The original study on which this is based was the first to examine how Turkish men engage in domestic violence interventions (e.g., psychotherapy, mental health services and psychiatric clinics) in the United Kingdom (UK). In this examination, a conceptual framework was developed in order to provide the rationale of the study and achieve a better understanding of the research topic. Intersectionality and feminist-gender theories were theoretical forms of the conceptual framework. The author of this study coded and analysed the data by applying the thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). While some strategies such as snowball sampling and involvement in the community were helpful in recruiting the participants, the use of gatekeeping was the key strategy for accessing this hard-to-reach group.

Sensitive research projects include the investigation of complex and intensely subjective lived experiences (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). Key considerations for sensitive research were identified as "ethics associated with interviewing participants, the process of engaging with gatekeepers, and how the findings would be published" (Johnson, 2018, p. 424). The researcher's sensitive engagement with gatekeepers can ensure an "empathetic understanding" of the research phenomenon and participants (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2018, p. 295). Several scholars highlighted the importance of exploring positionality and the influences of the researcher's power, gender and identity on fieldwork which included gatekeepers (Gunaratnam, 2003; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008; Song & Parker, 1995). In the following paragraph, we present a summary of prior research about working with gatekeepers.

This research was sensitive, and the researcher's positionality needed to be discussed by illuminating how race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and class position impacted on the research process. Likewise, the sensitive research environment illustrates the importance of positionality and the roles of gatekeepers in accessing participants. For example, the gender power dynamics between the researcher and gatekeepers were also a critical aspect in accessing participants. Moreover, connecting with numerous Turkish speaking therapists in private practices, crisis centres and mental health agencies via email and phone calls allowed the researcher to reach some participants. The majority of participants were reached through the gatekeepers. Throughout the research process, complex and dynamic negotiations with gatekeepers might arise and they need to be recognised as they impact on the research process.

Eide and Allen (2005) note that gatekeepers hold significant roles in accessing Black and other ethnic minority participants during recruitment. For example, Black and ethnic minority participants might experience difficulties in building trust with the researcher because of the researcher's outsider positions within the community. In addition, several studies emphasised that the researcher needs to consider Black and ethnic minority groups' cultural issues related to the sensitive insider and outsider position of researcher and participants and reflexivity (Fischer & Ragsdale, 2005; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). The concept of insider and outsider positions based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class are often identified as key dynamics in recognising how they shape the relationship with participants (Brown, 2012; Kita, 2017; Muhammad et al., 2015).

The positions around race, class and gender are key in recognising how they impact on domination and resistance in communities (Hill Collins, 1990). The domination and resistance are often structured at the individual and societal level (Hill Collins, 1990). It is crucial to be aware of these potential experiences around resistance and domination among Black and ethnic minority groups, and how insider and outsider positions might have shaped the gatekeeping

process. Furthermore, Sixsmith, Boneham, and Goldring (2003) noted that these insider and outsider positions are dynamic and “outsiders sometimes occupy social positions as insiders, and vice versa” in certain community groups (p. 579).

Some key authors examined the relationship between gatekeepers and researchers by focusing on positionality (e.g., Crowhurst & Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013; Davies & Peters, 2014; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008; Tushman & Katz, 1980). In addition, Aaltonen and Kivijärvi (2018) explored the importance of the relationship between researcher and gatekeeper in sensitive qualitative research by highlighting the role of gatekeepers. However, few studies examined the extent that potential gatekeepers are willing or unwilling to help with sensitive research due to positionality. While the researchers have already identified the critical roles that gatekeepers play in accessing hard-to-reach groups (Davies & Peters, 2014; Gunaratnam, 2003; Liamputtong, 2007, 2010), the roles of gatekeepers related to trust and power in sensitive research will be discussed by focusing on the reflexivity in this article. This paper will increase researchers’ understanding around key circumstances in building trust with gatekeepers by discussing the positionality and complex field experiences within ethical and methodological considerations.

## Method

The dynamics of the relationship between the researcher and potential and actual gatekeepers are considered in the following sections of this article. The guiding questions used to explore these relationships included: Who were the gatekeepers and why were these individuals willing to be gatekeepers? Why did some individuals refuse to be gatekeepers and was this related to power dynamics? How did the researcher build trust and rapport with these gatekeepers? What were the advantages of implementing reflexivity in such sensitive and complex research? This article seeks to answer these questions by concentrating on the first author’s perspectives and experiences with gatekeepers. Importantly, reflexivity is helpful to recognize the influences of different social-cultural identities on the gatekeeping process. The experiences and perspectives described in this paper reflect doctoral research based on twenty semi-structured interviews, and the reflections were integrated with feminist-gender theory and intersectionality.

Reflexivity is a methodological tool helps researchers to recognise how their ethnicity, racial background, cultural identity, educational background, gender and religion might impact accessing the sample with respect to data collection, power relations, building rapport, and the research process (Charmaz, 2014; Liamputtong, 2007; Russell, Touchard, & Porter, 2002). Engaging in reflexivity helped the first author to engage in self-analysis through data collection. The data were generated through field notes comprising the first author’s reflections about data collection process. These notes are about the process of gaining access to the participants through gatekeepers and negotiating with these gatekeepers. In these notes, the first author focused on how the rapport and trust were built with the gatekeepers. After meeting with potential gatekeepers, the field notes were taken as soon as possible after the meeting. These field notes were often very useful to illustrate the power dynamics as it clarifies the environment and key issues of the meeting. While there is no specific log for these field notes, the guidance by Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016) was applied. For instance, focusing on key points in gatekeepers’ comments; the first and last explanations in each conversation, and focusing on key points of the observation have been important strategies to guide field notes (Taylor et al., 2016). Following, we summarize the first author’s experiences and describe potential strategies for gatekeeper negotiations.

## **Trust and Power When Working with Gatekeepers**

Interconnections between trust and power are key in recruitment strategies, namely how the researcher interacted with community members and professionals to access participants. In this section, we consider how trust and power play a vital role in the gatekeeping process by presenting examples of complex situations in the field. These situations included the community members' mistrust of the services; researcher's outsider positions; blaming women for domestic violence; and stigmatisation due to perceiving domestic violence as a secretive issue. The presented excerpts were derived from the first author's field notes.

In the interactions with gatekeepers, power and trust has been exercised based on social structures and identities of the researcher and gatekeepers. For instance, the researcher's female identity, migration position and socio-economic status related to insider and outsider positions shaped the gatekeepers' willingness to help in accessing the participants. Although sharing the same racial and ethnic background sometimes increased the gatekeepers' support for this research, their concerns and mistrust of the services also prevented them from helping the researcher access participants. Therefore, the idea that sharing the same racial and ethnic background reduced the gatekeepers' concerns appeared to be more fluid and complex than first thought. This complexity illustrates how gatekeepers' positions and experiences in services in the UK impact on building trust and balancing power dynamics with the researcher.

The lack of trust in the research project can be connected to the researcher's positions because an outsider position can be linked to differences in position associated with educational attainment. For example, the first author's knowledge about women's rights and the importance of perpetrators' accountability for domestic violence interventions contrasted with those held by some community members who were potential gatekeepers. While complex and different positions affected the gatekeeping process, being aware of the social and cultural backgrounds of the Turkish community in the UK was helpful to understand some community members' stressors around living in a country that holds different social and cultural values than their home country. This awareness is critical to understand how different identities and positions are associated with interacting with gatekeepers and participants.

During the recruitment process, involvement in a community and developing new networks in Turkish groups increased the first author's knowledge about community members' perceptions with respect to male violence against women and men's participation in domestic violence perpetrator interventions in the UK. Contacting community leaders and members more than once often improved trust with them. For instance, during the research, eight social law centres, seven Turkish mosques and four Turkish community centres were visited more than once in order to build rapport and trust with potential gatekeepers. Personal connections in the Turkish community were other important ways of reaching participants as trust had already been built in these networks. These personal networks were helpful to access some research participants.

Building trusting relationships with gatekeepers is a key practice when researchers access them from the community (Edwards & Alexander, 2011). In accessing appropriate gatekeepers, the researcher experienced obstacles in explaining the rationale of the research because some individuals blamed women by asserting the importance of traditional gender roles. This blaming issue prevented them from understanding and recognising the need for the perpetrators to be held accountable for their violent behaviour. Additionally, they recommended that the researchers interview the women. While some religious leaders blamed women and the legal system by highlighting the cultural and religious views around strict gender roles, a few imams were aware of the consequences of violence against women and children and argued for the importance of making these men accountable for their violent behaviour.

The first author's gender, class, social and cultural positions and religion affected the communication with them because presumably it was their perceptions of these identities that stopped their involvement in the research. For instance, these participants might have mistrusted the researcher because they may have had fears that the researcher would represent their culture and beliefs in a negative light. The examples from field notes about this conclusion are provided below:

When I used the term violence against women or domestic violence, I have received immediate responses such as there is no violence in our neighbourhood or community, or violent events did not occur in our community.

As seen in the notes above, community members held stigma about domestic violence, and they did not recognise violent events at home as domestic violence. For instance, one woman argued that there was no domestic violence in their community at the beginning of the conversation. However, she talked about how one man battered his wife and then got in prison, after the trust was built with the first author due to their sharing the same racial and ethnic background. While the initial meeting often held some concerns about the research, this was at times overcome after by building trust and rapport. Moreover, some community leaders thought their culture would be perceived as violent or barbaric because of the subject of the research project. The examples from the field notes about this conclusion are provided below:

The imam started to talk about how their culture included peaceful practices and helping behaviour. His talk was about how their mothers in the past were obedience and hardworking. They also pointed out that their mothers provided a peaceful environment for all family members.

It was important for us as researchers to keep in mind that these concerns in relation to stigmatisation might have been held during the fieldwork. However, ethical and methodological considerations such as informing them about the rationale and purpose of the research; emphasising the credibility of the study; and providing important information by highlighting confidentiality, anonymity and volunteer participation were crucial in increasing the participants' trust in the research project.

Power is a very important dynamic in understanding gatekeepers' actions to contact anyone who was appropriate for the research. The imams have great power and are important individuals in many Muslim communities (Hamid, 2015). The researcher thought that they might be beneficial for data collection. According to a few imams' accounts, the men felt more comfortable in requesting help from them than from mainstream services to address their violent behaviour towards their wives. Likewise, migration-related problems including language barriers and culture often prevented these men from seeking help from mainstream services. The men might have perceived the imams as more helpful than such services given their shared religious and cultural background which was often associated with male privilege and traditional gender roles. The imams frequently expressed their reluctance to share the research topic with community members because domestic violence is seen as a secretive topic even though they indicated that some people contacted them and sought advice about this. As gatekeepers hold critical roles and power over access to hard-to-reach groups (Campbell et al., 2006; McAreavey & Das, 2013), building a trustful relationship with gatekeepers has been an essential ingredient for an effective outcome.

## **Negotiations with Gatekeepers**

In this section, we will focus on two key areas: the unique circumstances and factors that prevented some community leaders, members, and programme providers from being gatekeepers, and the key conditions around some professionals' and community members' willingness to be gatekeepers. Complex negotiations took place with gatekeepers in order to access the participants. It was important to recognise that gatekeepers often hold much power in negotiating with participants (Campbell et al., 2006; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008; Tushman & Katz, 1980). For instance, some imams, solicitors, and a few community leaders did not cooperate with the researcher in terms of giving access to participants. However, some gatekeepers such as professionals (e.g., psychotherapists, mental health workers, a psychiatrist) and those in personal networks who lived and worked in Turkish communities were helpful in this regard. These different gatekeepers (e.g., professionals, community members and their leaders) illustrate how their interests and priorities impacted on their actions around being gatekeepers (Aaltonen & Kivijaarvi, 2018; Nir, 2018). New negotiations took place when the participants were not accessed through some gatekeepers.

## **Obstacles to Accessing Gatekeepers**

Campbell et al. (2006) emphasised the benefits of employing gatekeepers in their research by indicating the complex relationship between the researcher and the gatekeepers. It is critical to be aware of the conditions and negotiations around accessing appropriate gatekeepers for sensitive and qualitative research projects. It could be argued that Turkish men's engagement in domestic violence interventions includes controversial and contested ideas in the community because of the minimisations of male violence and privilege in a patriarchal social structure and stigmatisation around attending therapeutic support. Gatekeepers' awareness of such stigma around the research topic in the community can increase their sensitivity during the gatekeeping process (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2018). As a result of the contested research topic, the recruitment process was challenging. The challenges of accessing participants were often related to community members' perception that domestic violence was a private issue in the community.

There were some circumstances associated with not being gatekeepers. For instance, some community leaders found it difficult to understand the rationale of the research. In addition, these individuals perceived domestic violence as a family matter—an idea that is held by many cultures and groups (Burman, Smailes, & Chantler, 2004; Patel, 2013). This sensitivity and the cultural perceptions around domestic violence prevented many potential gatekeepers from inviting men to take part in the research. It can be hypothesised that their decision whether or not to be a gatekeeper was associated with their lack of skills and knowledge on how to communicate with individuals who had attended interventions for their violent behaviour as well as the stigma of domestic violence in the community. The researchers also need to recognise that gatekeepers often want to fully understand the researchers' goals in order not to "jeopardise their relationships in the community" (McAreavey & Das 2013, p. 116). Likewise, some community leaders may not have been willing to be gatekeepers so as not to receive any negative reactions from the community.

Some gatekeepers such as religious leaders might have experienced difficulties identifying the appropriate participants because perpetrators of domestic violence are a difficult and sensitive group to recognise in the community. The first author reached this conclusion based the below field notes:

The lack of contact with them or insufficient interactions with these groups were conditions around their obstacles to accessing them. They also stated that when they invited these men to the mosque, they were resistant to participating in the meeting.

These gatekeepers often voiced their concerns and questions about how they could explain the research topic to the men who attended domestic violence interventions because they often avoided speaking about the men's participation in therapeutic interventions in general. For instance, the imams often did not know whether the men attended intervention programmes.

While potential participants might request help from imams, the difficulty of inviting imams to be gatekeepers was the perpetrators' position in mosques. According to some imams' explanations, perpetrators of domestic violence were not always individuals who regularly attended activities or religious practices at mosques. Therefore, many imams were only aware of domestic violence incidents through these individuals' fathers or wives. They mostly knew the men's stories through the women's words because it was they who tried to get support from imams to reduce or stop their husbands' abusive and violent behaviour. If the imams contacted these men with a view to ending the violence, they hardly ever received a response. The examples from the field notes about this conclusion are provided below:

Regular meetings with parents took place in the mosque to talk about their children's learning process of Islam and the Qur'an. He emphasised that women often came to these meetings. Moreover, he stated that when they requested to meet their husbands, they said that they hardly saw him.

The first author felt that some imams' unwillingness to support this research was linked to their beliefs about gender norms. For instance, a few of them avoided inviting any potential participants to the research due to the researcher's female identity. They mentioned their concern about the appropriateness for men to participate in research conducted by a female researcher. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the gender of the researcher appeared to be an important condition in the gatekeeping process. In addition, some imams made plain their patriarchal beliefs by blaming women and the legal system instead of the men. These beliefs were related to their male positions; their advice was to focus the research on the women's problems in domestic violence. Such complex and difficult interactions with the imams in the Turkish community are described here in order to illustrate how power, trust and rapport are interconnected with patriarchal social structures.

The experiences in the field suggested that community members and leaders in local areas were mostly unwilling to tolerate discussion about male perpetrators of domestic violence in an intervention process. They often refused to accept that domestic violence existed in their communities. The stigmatisation of the community and the fear of attracting the ire of the perpetrators stopped them from becoming gatekeepers. Therefore, the difficulty they experienced of inviting the men was associated with their unwillingness or inability to be gatekeepers.

While unique circumstances and positions of community leaders made them reluctant to be gatekeepers, the literature on interviewing men who attend domestic violence interventions often concentrates on the importance of the programme providers as they appeared to be helpful for the researchers to access their participants (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; Stanley, Graham-Kevan, & Borthwick, 2012). However, these programmes were not beneficial in the examination of Turkish men's engagement in domestic violence interventions in the UK. It was the limited or lack of Turkish men in domestic violence perpetrator programmes that was the reason for programme providers' inability to be gatekeepers. In

addition, their lack of time to fulfil this role was described by the programme providers during data collection. This lack of support immediately led the first author to search alternative gatekeepers.

### **Accessing Primary Gatekeepers While Building Trust and Rapport**

Effectively building trust and rapport might require different approaches based on the gatekeepers' social and cultural positions. Whilst implementing the best approach may be difficult, personal networks are often useful for successful recruitment as trust has already been built in advance (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2018). Likewise, having a personal network was helpful in accessing gatekeepers because trust and rapport had already been built with them. This insider position was enhanced by sharing the same language, ethnicity, and racial and cultural background. However, building rapport and trust with potential gatekeepers was not easy and required a great deal of effort on the part of the first author in the form of multiple visits to Turkish community centres. Similarly, the researcher's skills in building "rapport, reflexivity, and mutual understanding" were important in terms of building a "common vocabulary" with different potential gatekeepers in order to increase their cooperation (Aaltonen & Kivijarvi 2018, p. 5). However, it is crucial that sufficient time is allocated to achieve this cooperation (Aaltonen & Kivijarvi, 2018).

Community members or leaders might have held the fear of breaking confidentiality because of the insufficient information they held about the confidentiality and ethical considerations of this sensitive research. Their concerns regarding damage to their interactions with participants based on confidentiality increased their unwillingness to be gatekeepers. Providing robust information about confidentiality by highlighting the ethical approval by the University was therefore a critical practice in order to reduce their concerns and so help them feel more comfortable about "opening the gate." In general, providing information about ethical considerations and confidentiality procedures is useful in reducing gatekeepers' concerns.

Some therapists were willing to be gatekeepers by helping the researcher to reach participants. Sharing the same racial and ethnic background with some professionals created a positive relationship and improved rapport. This relationship increased their willingness to be gatekeepers. For instance, Turkish-speaking therapists, mental health workers and counsellors were more helpful in negotiating access to participants. The examples from the field notes about this conclusion are provided below:

She paid attention to culturally-sensitive therapy. Also, mental health workers' training about culturally-sensitive practices was highlighted because many Turkish clients dropped out of the therapy running by non-Turkish practitioners. So, her position as a Turkish practitioner was helpful to be a gatekeeper.

Moreover, the knowledge held by the professionals around the benefits of therapeutic support for male perpetrators and the problems around these men's high rate of drop-out in interventions increased their willingness to take part in the research as well as being gatekeepers. Their interest in hearing about the findings of this research was also associated with their willingness to participate in the research project because they expected to benefit from the results of the research in their practices. Their cooperation as gatekeepers was linked to their trust in the researcher's educational position and knowledge about domestic violence interventions. A few of the therapists were also doing a PhD and so were aware of the difficulties of accessing participants. Therefore, sharing a similar educational status was helpful in their efforts to be gatekeepers.

**Table 1.** Different types of gatekeepers

<b>Primary and potential gatekeepers</b>	<b>Information from gatekeepers</b>	<b>Results of interactions</b>
<b>Turkish-speaking psychotherapists and mental health workers</b>	Knowledge and belief about the importance of the research topic	Attended the research as gatekeepers
<b>Community members and personal contacts</b>	Different views and beliefs about domestic violence perpetrator interventions	Helped building rapport and trustful relationship to access participants by being gatekeepers
<b>Imams and solicitors</b>	Perceived domestic violence as a private matter, fear of social stigma	No help accessing because of lack of skills and willingness. Provided cultural insights of male violence.
<b>Programme providers in DVPPs</b>	Insufficient number or lack of Turkish men in the programmes	No time and resources for the research

Campbell et al. (2006) suggest that researchers should take into account the importance of understanding the negotiations that exist in the relationship with gatekeepers. As illustrated in Table 1, different types of gatekeepers gave access to the participants. The majority of the gatekeepers were psychotherapists, personal contacts and community members. This table illustrates the information the gatekeepers gave and the results of the interactions.

### Reflexivity

Reflexivity is key for effective negotiation with potential and primary gatekeepers to access participants. The researcher's gender, class, race and other social structures often affected the relationship with the gatekeepers. Likewise, Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) note that researchers' social identities impacted positionality and their ability to access participants. Moreover, the gatekeepers' social positions and migration experiences impacted their willingness to help the research.

The first author's role as an activist when describing the existing domestic violence perpetrator programmes or therapeutic support to the community members was critical to enhancing their understanding about the project. In order to increase their understanding of the research topic, the researcher emphasised the vital need for the men's engagement during domestic violence interventions in order to provide a safe environment for women and children survivors of domestic violence. Even though there was no direct purpose for informing the community or raising the consciousness about domestic violence interventions among Turkish groups in the UK, the dynamic and complex field environment led to this in some community members when the researcher tried to access gatekeepers. This was termed the "edge effect" by Burton and Kagan (2000) who highlighted how community members can benefit from their interactions with the researcher during the gatekeeping process.

One of the most difficult moments the first author experienced while accessing gatekeeping processes was when a religious leader and his colleague had an argument about men's rights and women's blame during which the responsibilities of wives to meet their husbands' needs arose. A connection was made between the man's right to expect traditional gender roles (e.g., raising children, doing housework) to be adhered to by his wife and the

justifications for their violent behaviour when these traditional gender roles broke down. In these perceptions, the religious leader blamed women for not meeting the man's needs and justified the behaviour by recounting that when such men remarried they had no further problems. At that moment, the first author emphasised the need to investigate the violent behaviour based on all family members' experiences; not only focusing on the man's rights and desires but also on understanding the woman's rights in marriage.

At an emotional level, the first author felt frustration towards individuals who tolerated and excused violence against women by blaming women and the legal system. These individuals often argued that male violence against women was taken into consideration in different levels in their home country and so domestic violence was a private issue. For instance, they indicated their upset and anger at how the government supports women financially and puts men in prison due to their violent behaviour in the UK, claiming that this was an injustice. The majority of the men in the community felt aggrieved that the legal system did not allow men to see their children due to their violence. Being aware of these minimisations of male violence against women and the reduction of women's rights and freedoms increased the researcher's feelings of frustration and upset. The researcher also experienced obstacles to accessing the participants and gatekeepers because of it.

The challenges of hearing the ideas around gender power dynamics and the blaming of women and the legal system impacted power dynamics in gatekeeping process. For instance, a few community members shared their ideas regarding how the UK system empowers women unfairly and puts men in prison for their violence, focusing on the men's vulnerability and justifying their violence based on patriarchal beliefs. Due to these perceptions, individuals with these beliefs were unwilling to take on the gatekeeper position and instead used their power to restrict the researcher's access to participants. It is possible that the obstacles to recruiting the participants were also related to the stigma surrounding domestic violence and therapeutic support in Turkish communities in the UK.

Hearing the strong patriarchal beliefs around tolerance of violence against women from community leaders who held powerful positions in society was a very challenging moment. Even though these experiences included very challenging moments, they increased the first author's understanding about how difficult it is to find gatekeepers and participants among these groups. During fieldwork experiences, the first author felt distant from individuals who did not accept male violent behaviour or kept blaming women and the legal system. While hearing stories related to tolerance of violence, sharing the same racial background and ethnicity was not an important dynamic.

The researcher became increasingly unhappy and felt anxiety hearing the ideas around male privilege and gender power relations among some religious leaders and community members. As a researcher, her position was respectful of their perceptions, which took the form of listening to their stories and views about domestic violence and their personal responses to these issues. However, when the perspectives around male privilege, violence and power over women and blaming the legal system were voiced, the researcher shared their own ideas and knowledge about women's rights, freedom and the importance of making men attend interventions in order to stop their violent behaviour by highlighting the violence against women as a criminal act. The researcher tried to counter ideas of male privilege by being informative, for instance, by explaining the meanings of domestic violence interventions while being respectful of the gatekeepers' positions and ideas. This process was very difficult and often resulted in gatekeepers deciding not to help.

In sum, accessing gatekeepers was constrained by the obstacles in the power relationship and the sensitive research topic in terms of stigmatisation of the community. Negotiations on accessing gatekeepers in the local centres occurred because the researcher tried to get help from imams, other community leaders and members from the Turkish communities

in the UK. These individuals provided information and cultural insights even though they were not directly helpful in accessing participants. The main reasons for their inability to provide access to participants were to do with the stigmatisation of domestic violence and the men's unwillingness to take part in the research due to gender dynamics, class, and migration status. Participants' migration experiences were about the stressors around living in a society with different cultural values to Turkey. The perceptions of potential gatekeepers about the researcher and research topic shaped their decisions on whether to help give access to participants. According to this research, the gatekeepers' social identities, the social and cultural context, as well as other complex and dynamic field environments, shaped the gatekeeping process.

## Discussion

The main difficulty encountered in accessing available gatekeepers among community leaders and members appeared to be the combination of a culture of tolerating violence against women and a perception of domestic violence as a family issue. As domestic violence is a sensitive and secretive issue in many communities (Chantler & Thiara, 2017; Hester, 2011), accessing gatekeepers included challenges. The major challenges around negotiations and gatekeeping processes included the individuals' unwillingness to be gatekeepers and the researcher's difficulty building trust and rapport with some programme providers, therapists, and community leaders. This paper focused on how the researcher built trustful relationships with gatekeepers or failed to build rapport with some community leaders by emphasising the complex and dynamic circumstances in the fieldwork. These complex circumstances were very important because they impacted on the data-gathering process as well as the data analysis.

Even though domestic violence perpetrator programmes providers might have been key gatekeepers in order to access the participants, this research suggests that these institutions were not helpful as gatekeepers. This contrasts with Turkish-speaking therapists and counselling services which did help with access to participants. Moreover, some therapists highlighted how this research was useful to them as it enabled them to recognise important circumstances and factors of the men's engagement in therapeutic support for ending their violent and abusive actions.

This paper contributes new knowledge about how some professionals, community members and leaders perceived the men's engagement in domestic violence interventions and how these perceptions impacted on them acting as gatekeepers. The major concern of this investigation was about how to negotiate with these individuals to make them help because the majority of them expressed their inability or unwillingness to be gatekeepers. A number of key issues emerged during the process of accessing appropriate and available gatekeepers: sensitivity and stigma around the research topic, gender power dynamics and various negotiations around encouraging individuals (e.g., professionals and community leaders) to help this research. Building trust and rapport was also identified as a key requirement to create a willingness to act as gatekeepers. Therefore, building trust, rapport and respectful interactions and reducing power dynamics with gatekeepers are crucial in negotiations in the field.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on the complex and dynamic interactions with potential and primary gatekeepers. We clarified how gender power relations, the elements around building trust and rapport, and a sensitive field environment had an impact on a researcher's ability to access participants. This article contributes to the field by highlighting the complexities of the negotiating process with gatekeepers in terms of power dynamics, stigma and sensitivity of the

topic, and ethical considerations. Despite complex and challenging field experiences, the gatekeeping strategy was useful in accessing this hard-to-reach population. Reflexivity in the form of examining the relationship with gatekeepers was an important practice. It can be concluded that the positions of the researcher and gatekeepers were central in understanding the power relations during field experiences. This reflexive practice resulted in effective data collection and analysis, as well as a reduction in the power dynamics and an increase in equality and respect in the fieldwork.

The relationships with gatekeepers included critical interactions because these connections were associated with how the researcher built trust and rapport with the participants who were reached by the gatekeepers. Therefore, this process recognises how positionality and actions can shape the interactions and the results of the contact with the participants and gatekeepers. Being able to negotiate complex field circumstances is critical for reaching gatekeepers when the research topic is so sensitive and secretive. Overall, negotiating access with primary gatekeepers included dynamic, complex, and delicate circumstances based on the positionalities of the researchers and gatekeepers. Throughout this article, the challenges and negotiations for accessing gatekeepers in order to reach a hard-to-reach population were discussed. Because of the complex and dynamic interactions in the field, it can be stated that there is no single way of accessing gatekeepers. This article suggested that reflexivity that focuses on the social identities of researchers, gatekeepers and participants aids in recognising complex interactions, potential tensions, and cooperation during a gatekeeping process.

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### Author Note

Zeynep Turhan, MSW, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Social Work at Bartın University in Turkey. Her studies focus on research and theory of violent and abusive behaviour in family settings, specifically on improving strategies and approaches in domestic violence perpetrator interventions. Her research interests include intersectionality theory, black and minority ethnic men's experiences in domestic violence perpetrator interventions and behavioural change processes. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: zturh001@gold.ac.uk.

Claudia Bernard, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is also Head of Postgraduate Research. Her general interests lie in the areas of social work with children and families, gender-based violence, critical race theory, equalities, and social justice. She has also developed an interest in research ethics. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: c.bernard@gold.ac.uk.

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