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# Comparing Attitudes Towards Violence Among Adolescents Who are Victims or Non-Victims of Violence

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#### Abstract

This study has been conducted to compare attitudes towards violence among adolescents who are victims or non-victims of violence. In addition, this current study examines how attitudes towards violence vary according to gender, perpetrator group of violence, type of violence and immigration case. For data collection, Personal Information Form and Attitude Towards Violence Scale were used. The research sample was composed of 680 middle school students at 8th grade level. In the analysis phase of the study, Mann-WhitneyU. and Kruskal WallisH. tests were utilized. According to the results, attitudes toward violence vary depending on exposure to violence, gender, perpetrator group of violence and immigration case. However, victims' attitudes towards violence do not vary depending on type of violence. It can be said that the students who are exposed to violence at school or in their family normalize the violence and see the violence as a problem-solving way in daily life.

*Keywords*: Violence, Victim of Violence, Attitude Towards Violence

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### 1. Introduction

Although 'violence' is a common concept that is familiar to almost everyone, it is difficult to identify it because it has a wide range of limits. According to the detailed description of the concept by the World Health Organization, "violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (WHO, 2002). It really draws attention that different classifications of violence are made in high number in recent years. According to Meyer and Farrell (1998); insulting, accusing, swearing, despising, abusing and shouting loudly etc. are described as verbal violence. On the other hand, physical violence is described as slapping, hitting, pushing, beating someone up, hitting the wall, hairpulling, kicking, attacking with a knife, hurting and even killing. While abusing, threading, forcing and even killing someone due to economic reasons are defined as economic violence; cutting off communication, not talking, sulking, preventing someone to express oneself and his/her thoughts, preventing someone to meet with his/her family and friends etc. are defined as physical violence. While humiliating and making fun of someone in front of other people, checking one's behaviors etc. are defined as social violence; rape, forcing sexual contact, sexual abuse by a family member, sexually explicit implications, saying sexually explicit words, touching up etc. are classified as sexual violence.

According to UNİCEF report (2011) about the conditions of children in Turkey, children who grow in Turkey are surrounded by violence. The studies conducted both in Turkey and various places around the world in recent years show that almost all children witness violence at home, at school and in their social environments and also most of the children are affected directly from this phenomenon. According to a research conducted in Turkey about effective parenting education, 9.3% of parents express that they give physical punishment to their children, 7.3% of parents scare their children and 31,8% of parents shout at or reprimand their children loudly (UNICEF, 2008). Besides, children usually complain about violence used by the teachers and staff at school. Moreover, violence between children, bullying and gangster wannabe behaviors are mostly seen at school and around schools (UNICEF, 2011).

According to Social Learning Theory, adolescents learn and demonstrate problematic behaviors through observation (Siyez, 2010). Bandura (1973) asserts that children exhibit aggressive behaviors by observing people around them, especially their parents. Conducted studies have shown that children model their parents' behaviors and the children who are exposed to aggressive behaviors tend to violence (Ayan, 2007; Verlinden, Hersen & Thomas, 2000). Unfortunately, tendency to violence and aggressive behaviors are seen at early ages. There exist various risk factor groups that explain the reasons of adolescents' tendency to violence. One of these risk factor groups is generally the one related to developmental characteristics of adolescence and structural features of adolescents. For instance; socialization difficulties, learning problems, low academic success and interest, no tolerance to individual differences, drug use, being impulsive, being easily disappointed and lack of ability to cope with this, low self-perception, having difficult character, lack of empathy, underdeveloped social skills, poor emotional and cognitive development are some examples of these factors (Edminson & Bullock, 1998; Korkut, 2007; Yorukoglu, 1996). Also, new responsibilities and development process of identity during adolescence may cause adolescents to experience both internal and social conflicts (Ozgur, Yorukoglu & Baysan Arabaci, 2011). Another risk factor is related to family structure where the adolescents have grown up, family disorganization and parents' relations. For instance; adolescents may resort to violence due to lack of education, bad home environment and life conditions, family disorganization, low income, lack of child education, parental unemployment, loveless family, broken family, multi-child family, alcohol and drug addicted parents, bad relationships, abuse, domestic violence, incoherent discipline, harsh child raising methods based on punishments (Korkut, 2007; Yorukoglu, 1996). Another risk factor that causes adolescents to resort to violence is life conditions and social environment that adolescents and their parents live in. For

instance; unfavorable and dangerous social conditions, lack of social support systems, living in an environment at low education level, living in a place where it is easy to obtain guns illegally, living in an environment where violence is accepted as a problem-solving method, violent TV programs in the media, organization problems in school structure, unclear school rules, indiscipline at school, peer rejection and modeling violent behaviors among friends are some of the risk factors that explain adolescents' tendency to violence (Siyez, 2010). It is thought that adolescents' attitudes towards violence and how they describe it can be shaped within framework of interaction of all these risk factors.

Child's migrating to another country, city or place in order to live a settled life with the his/her family is also seen as one of the risk factors. Migration is a social problem that affects society and family leading to changes in behaviors of children and their parents (Delice & Yasar, 2014). During migration process, families need to obtain new behaviors due to changes in social environment and culture and these changes force family members. This adaptation problem to new life causes interfamilial and interfamily conflicts and there may be an increase in tendency to violence and aggressive behaviors. The interfamilial conflicts, new social environment and new school cause children to have troubles and also change their attitudes to violence. Koc (2011) accepts that migration and fast urbanization are among social reasons of violence.

In this study, it has been aimed to compare attitudes towards violence between adolescents who are victims and non-victims of violence. Also, this study aims to investigate whether attitudes of adolescents towards violence differ depending on gender, perpetrator of violence, type of violence they have been exposed to, migration situation of adolescents to the city center they go to school. In accordance with this aim, following questions have been attempted to be answered:

Is there a difference between adolescents who are victims of violence and adolescents who are not experiencing violence in terms of their attitudes towards violence?

Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to gender?

Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to perpetrator of violence?

Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to the type of violence?

### 2. Method

#### 2.1. Research Model

Causal-comparative research method has been used in this research in order to compare attitudes towards violence among adolescents who are victims or non-victims of violence. In causal-comparative research, a comparison is done between groups who are subjected to same situation but affected at different degrees (Buyukozturk, Kilic-Cakmak, Akgun, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2009).

### 2.2. Study Group

Research data was obtained in 2014-2015 academic year spring term from public middle schools in Mediterranean region of Turkey. The sample consisted of 680 eight grade students, 50.4% (n=343) girl and 49.6% (n=337) boy. It is found out that while 42.5 percent of teenagers (n=289) have been subjected to violence, 57.5 percent of teenagers (n=391) have never been violated. Among teenagers who have been subjected to violence, 14 percent have been violated by their families, 3.8 percent by their teachers and administrators (n=26), 6.8 percent (n=46) by their friends and 42.5 percent (n=289) by other people. In terms of violence type, 13.2 percent (n=90) have been subjected to physical

violence, 24 percent (n=164) to emotional violence, 0.1 percent (n=1) to sexual violence, 42.5 percent (n=35) to other types of violence. Of these students, 70.6 percent (n=480) were born in the same city center where they go to school, 29.4 percent (n=200) migrated to the city center later for some reasons.

## 2.3. Instruments

Personal Information Form, which has been developed by the researcher is utilized to collect information about adolescents who are victims or non-victims of violence, their gender, perpetrator group of violence, type of violence and immigration situation. Attitude Towards Violence Scale (ATVS) has been used as data collection tool in order to identify attitudes towards violence.

Attitude Towards Violence Scale: It was developed by Blevins (2001). ATVS is one dimensional scale consisting of 11 items. Items are scored on four point liker scale. High scores of scale indicate that attitude towards violence is positive, low scores mean negative attitudes towards violence. It is found that internal consistency reliability of the scale is .74 and total item correlation ranges from .39 and .53. At the end of factor analysis, it is seen that variables load highly on one factor with 2.943 eigenvalue accounting for 36.8% of variance (Balkis, Duru & Bulus, 2005).

# 2.4. Data Analysis

Mean, median, mode values related to attitude towards violence scores, kurtosis and skewness values, Kolmogorow Smirnov test, histogram graphics and Q-Q plot graphics have been evaluated in order to determine what kind of analysis will be done. At the end of evaluations, it is found that attitude towards violence scores are not normally distributed; therefore non-parametric tests have been preferred in this study. In accordance with analysis results related to distribution, Mann-Whitney U Test has been used for investigating whether attitude towards violence differs depending on exposure to violence, gender and migration issues. Kruskal Wallis test has been used for investigating whether attitudes towards violence differ depending on perpetrator of violence and type of violence adolescents are exposed to. SPSS 22.0 program has been preferred for all statistical analysis.

# 3. Findings

Research findings are presented in the following questions within framework of aims of this research.

# **3.1.** Is there a difference between adolescents who are victims of violence and adolescents who are not experiencing violence in terms of their attitudes towards violence?

Mann Whitney U test has been used for investigating whether there is a difference in attitudes towards violence between adolescents who are victims of violence and adolescents who are non-victims of violence. According to analysis result, there exists a statistically significant difference between attitude scores of adolescents who are victims and non-victims of violence [U=50842.50, p=.025]. Considering mean ranks, attitude towards violence scores of adolescents who have been exposed to violence ( $\bar{X}_{rank} = 360.07$ ) are significantly higher than attitude scores of adolescents who are non-victims of violence ( $\bar{X}_{rank} = 326.03$ ).

#### 3.2. Do attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to gender?

Mann Whitney U test has been used for investigating whether attitude towards violence scores differ according to gender. It is found out that attitude towards violence differs depending on gender [U=40866.00, p=.000]. Considering mean ranks, attitude towards violence scores of males ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 390.74$ ) are significantly higher than attitude towards violence scores of females ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 291.14$ ).

# **3.3.** Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to perpetrator of violence?

Kruskal Wallis Test has been used for investigating whether attitude towards violence scores of adolescents who have been exposed to violence differ according to perpetrator of violence. Attitude towards violence differs at significant level depending on perpetrator of violence (teachers-administrators-family-friends-other people)  $[\chi^2_{(2)} = 11.42, p = .010]$ . Mann Whitney U Test has been used in order to see which mean ranks differ significantly from each other. At the end of test, groups whose mean ranks show a significant difference have been reported. Considering mean ranks, adolescents who have been exposed to violence by teachers and administrators ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 74.98$ ) have significantly higher scores than adolescents who have been exposed to violence by teachers and administrators ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 46.85$ ) have significantly higher scores than adolescents who have experienced violence by friends ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 94.10$ ) have significantly higher scores than adolescents who have experienced violence by teachers and administrators ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 94.10$ ) have significantly higher scores than adolescents who have experienced violence by teachers and administrators ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 94.10$ ) have significantly higher scores than adolescents who have experienced violence by teachers and administrators ( $\overline{X}_{rank} = 90.32$ ). Respectively [U=871.50, p=.022], [U=329.00, p=.002], [U=1076.50, p=.010].

#### 3.4. Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to the type of violence?

Kruskal Wallis Test has been used for investigating whether attitude towards violence scores of adolescents differ according to type of violence they have been exposed to?

There is found no significant difference in attitude towards violence scores of adolescents according to type of violence they have been exposed to  $[\chi^2_{(a)} = 6.97, p = .073]$ .

# 3.5 Do the attitudes of adolescents who have been exposed to violence vary according to their migration situation to the city where they go to school?

Mann Whitney U Test has been used for purpose of analysis of differentiation in attitude towards violence according to situation whether they migrated to the city later. Analysis results indicate that there is a significant difference in attitude towards violence between adolescents who migrated to city and native adolescents [U=43385.50, p=.048]. Considering mean ranks, attitude towards violence scores of migrated adolescents ( $\bar{X}_{rank} = 94.10$ ) are significantly higher than native adolescents ( $\bar{X}_{rank} = 330,89$ ) who were born in the same city and go to school there.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

According to result of research, adolescents experiencing violence have more positive attitudes towards violence compared to adolescents who are not experiencing violence. In other words, adolescents experiencing violence perceive violence as positive and accept the use of violence as a normal behavior when it becomes necessary. Cillesen (2002) who conduct studies with children experiencing violence state that exposure to violence increases the use of violence. Slovak, Carlson

and Helm (2007) investigated the effects of exposure to violence on attitudes of young people towards use of violence and guns. As a result, it is found out that young people exposed to violence have highly positive attitudes towards violence. In study of Sezer, Kolac and Erol (2013), it is manifested that parents' attitude and frequency of parents' fight have predictive power on children's aggressive behaviors. When parents of children who have tendency to violence are analyzed; it comes out that these parents are apathetic, rough, and they impose strict discipline, experience conflict between each other and have positive attitudes towards physical punishment (Buluc, 2006). When the relevant studies are reviewed, results of this study show parallelism with research findings in literature. In accordance with these results, it is possible to claim that children experiencing violence at school or home environment normalize violence, view violence as a problem-solving method in daily life.

The finding which shows that males have more positive attitudes towards violence compared to females is another result of this study. When the studies are analyzed which focus on whether gender variable leads to difference in attitude towards violence, it is found that study results in the literature have consistency with results of this study. For instance, Unalmis (2010) in his study which investigates high school first year students' bully/victim behaviors and social skill and attitude towards violence, observed that male students' attitudes towards violence are more positive than female students. Also, there are more studies which indicate that male students have more tendency to violence compared to females (Balkis, Duru & Bulus, 2005; Akman, 2013). Additionally, psychological and social factors can have a determining role on development of positive attitude towards violence. For instance, within framework of gender roles, while females are socialized as soft, sensitive, warm blooded, expressive, passive, dependent, resigned, weak and modest; males are socialized as strict, indifferent, unfriendly, dominant, active, independent, strong and ambitious (Freedman, 1989). Social roles which are imposed on males which cause them to feel strong in their attitudes can be a reason for their positive attitudes towards violence. Therefore; positive attitudes of males towards violence can be explained by social gender roles. However, while being a male is among biological risk factors for emergence of an anti-social behavior like violence, it is not a risk factor by itself for an anti-social behavior (Siyez, 2010).

According to findings of this study, adolescents who migrated to city where they go to school have more positive attitudes compared to adolescents who were born in the same city where they go to school. Migration and rapid urbanization, negative environment, negative qualities of peer and friend group are social causes of violence (Koc, 2011). According to a study conducted by National Ministry of Education, it is found out that problems such as economic disruption and lack of adaptation families experience who migrated to a new city emerge as factors which lead to increase in aggressive behaviors of children and adolescents (MEB, 2008). The literature supports the conducted study. With migration, adolescents who cannot adapt to changing social and friend environments have more positive attitudes towards violence.

According to research results, attitudes of violence experiencing students towards violence differ depending on perpetrator of violence (teachers-administrators, family members, friends and other people). Students who have been exposed to violence by teachers and administrators have more positive attitudes towards violence compared to students who have been exposed to violence by families, friends and other people. There is found no significant difference between other groups. This finding raises concern about the importance of teachers and administrators on development of positive attitudes towards violence. If we consider that teachers and administrators are accepted as role models, children who experience violence from them perceive violence as a possible action and behavior and they might develop positive attitudes towards violence.

According to research findings, attitudes of adolescents towards violence do not differ depending on type of violence they have been exposed to. In their study, Ozgur, Yorukoglu and Baysan-Arabaci (2011) show that adolescents can easily distinguish physical violence from other types of violence and

describe it. Also, researchers identified that people who were exposed to violence in childhood were abusing their own children (Polat, 2001). Spinette and Rigler's study (1972) revealed that emotional abuse of children would make them a physical exploiter in adulthood. Hence, it is possible to explain that attitude towards violence have no relationship with type of violence. Individuals who experience violence develop positive attitudes towards violence whatever type of violence they have witnessed and possibly there is a risk for them to be a perpetrator of violence (as cited in Polat, 2001).

In the light of current study and literature, some suggestions can be put forward for changing attitudes of children towards violence and preventing justification of violence. Intervention programs should be organized aiming at not only students but also families, teachers and administrators for preventing violence in a school setting paying attention to important role of families, teachers and administrators. Within framework of social learning theory, it must be keep in mind that children at first take parents at home and then teachers at school as models. Also, considering the finding that male students and migrated groups have more positive attitudes towards violence, it becomes important that intervention programs should be organized for these groups at risk.

One of the reasons for studying attitudes is that it supplies a basis to predict the behaviors of people in future (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem, & Hoeksema, 2010). Actually changing attitudes in order to make changes in behavior creates a starting point for researchers (Arkonac, 1998). Therefore, studies which are conducted about attitudes towards violence are very valuable in terms of prevention of violence. It is thought that a meta-analysis study should be conducted in order to see which variables lead to difference in attitudes towards violence, such a study will present a more systematic viewpoint related to attitude towards violence and it will contribute to violence prevention studies.

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