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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE DURING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin İlköğretim Dönemindeki Şiddet Deneyimleri

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This research was performed in order to determine experiences of violence during elementary education among nursing department students at a state university in Turkey.

Material and Method: One hundred five students participated in this descriptive study. A questionnaire prepared by the authors in the light of the existing literature and consisting of open- and closed-ended questions was employed as the data collection tool. Descriptive statistics (number and percentage) were employed for data evaluation.

Results: The majority (64.8%) of teachers inflicting violence on the students in the study during their elementary education were men, students were most frequently (84.8%) subjected to physical violence, they generally (53.3%) experienced physical violence in the form of being stuck on the hands with an object, and the majority of students (52.4%) exposed to violence felt powerless and unable to speak out.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Male teachers generally inflicted violence, and physical violence was the most common form experienced. The majority of students exposed to violence feeling powerless and reacting by remaining silent is an important finding of this study, showing that students need to be supported on the subjects of self-expression and speaking out.

Key Words: Bullying, violence, school violence

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu araştırma, Anadolu'daki bir devlet üniversitesinin hemşirelik bölümünde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin ilköğretim dönemindeki şiddet deneyimlerini belirlemek amacıyla yapıldı.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Tanımlayıcı tipteki bu çalışmaya toplam 105 öğrenci katıldı. Veri toplama aracı olarak; araştırmacılar tarafından literatür doğrultusunda hazırlanan, açık ve kapalı uçlu soruları içeren bir soru formu kullanıldı. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde tanımlayıcı istatistikler (sayı ve yüzde) kullanıldı.

Bulgular: Çalışmaya katılan öğrencilere ilköğretim eğitimleri sırasında şiddet uygulayan öğretmenlerin çoğunlukla (%64.8) erkek olduğu, öğrencilerin en sık (%84.8) fiziksel şiddete maruz kaldıkları, fiziksel şiddeti en sık (%53.3) cisimle ellerine vurulmak suretiyle deneyimledikleri, maruz kalman şiddete karşı öğrencilerin çoğunluğunun çaresiz hissettiği ve sessiz kaldığı (%52.4) belirlendi.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Sonuç olarak, çoğunlukla erkek öğretmenlerin şiddet uyguladığı ve fiziksel şiddetin en sık deneyimlenen şiddet türü olduğu görülmektedir. Şiddete maruz kalan öğrencilerin çoğunun çaresiz hissetme ve sessiz kalma şeklindeki tepkileri, öğrencilerin kendini ifade etme ve problem çözme konusunda desteklenmesi gerektiğini göstermesi bakımından araştırmanın dikkat çekici bir bulgusudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zorbalık, şiddet, okul şiddeti

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence is the most important factor affecting children's physical and emotional development. Children may sometimes be exposed to violence in the family setting, sometimes at school, and sometimes among friends (Gracia & Herrero, 2008). Violence may be physical or verbal, or take the form of threatening behavior or damaging property (Astor et al., 2004; Benbenishty & Astor, 2005). Violence at school is one of the greatest stress factors threatening students' psychological well-being (Graham & Bellmore, 2007).

Teachers and peers are important sources of social support for students. Research has shown that powerful peer support and a positive teacher-student relationship can strengthen students' feelings of confidence and improve their coping abilities, while school violence can reduce and even eliminate those positive effects on self-esteem and depression (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Naylor & Cowie, 1999; Williams et al., 2005)

Violence inflicted on students by teachers has long-term adverse effects. Students who regard aggressive behavior by teachers as a legitimate means of social impact and conflict resolution can internalize this through 'social learning.' Teachers are important models in the acquisition of conflict resolution skills, empathy, and respect for others. Mistreatment by teachers also affects the teacher-student relationship, and may lead students to fear or avoid teachers instead of respecting them (Ünsal 1996: 29-36).

While research has investigated harm inflicted by students on themselves, school personnel, and school property, there has been very little study of violence inflicted by teachers on students (Benbenishty et al., 2002; Chen & Wei, 2011; Khoury-Kassabri, 2006; Kondrasuk et al., 2005). Mistreatment of students by teachers is a widespread form of school violence in many countries (Benbenishty et al., 2002; Khoury-Kassabri, 2006). The use of physical violence against students in the imposition of discipline is an ineffective model and has destructive physical and mental effects on those subjected to it. Exposure to violence from teachers can lead students to misbehave and exhibit violence themselves. The infliction of violence in order to impose discipline results in alienation, aggressive behavior, and a sense of being thwarted (Hyman et al., 1997) and in a desire to be take revenge on school personnel (Hyman et al., 1988). At the same time, these experiences lead to problems such as interpersonal difficulties, depression, suicide, alcohol and narcotic use, psychotic disorders, and permanent weak self-esteem in children (Graham & Bellmore, 2007; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Salmivalli, 2001; Seals & Young, 2003), psychological distress (Flannery et al., 2004; Gladstone et al., 2006; Graham & Bellmore, 2007), violent and criminal behavior (Kim et al., 2000) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reactions (Hyman, 1990). The most important result of violence from a teacher is depression (Baldry 2004; Chen & Wei, 2011; Gladstone et al., 2006; Klomek et al., 2008).

Students who feel supported by teachers experience greater belonging and participation and fewer behavioral problems, and exhibit better academic performances (Konishi et al., 2010; Maldonado-Carreño & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Wentzel et al., 2010). One study involving first, middle, and later school years determined that 28.5% of students experienced physical violence at the hands of teachers at least once monthly (Gümüş et al., 2004). In the Sabah-TNS Piar survey (2006), 27% of students reported being subjected to physical violence by a teacher at least once during their lives. Due to the intangible character of the subject, very little is known about the frequency with which teachers resort to corporal punishment (Kim et al., 2000). One piece of research into teachers' views concerning violence reported that 18% agreed that 'beating is necessary whether we agree with it or not,' while a further 18% were undecided (Gümüş et al., 2004). The fact that 25.66% of teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school groups responded with violence to problem behavior at least once a week in another study (Gözütok, 1993) reveals teachers' opinions regarding violence.

The aim of the present study was to determine attitudes and feelings toward acts of violence experienced during elementary education.

The following research questions were adopted”

- ✓ What types of violence are encountered during elementary education?
- ✓ What behaviors and feelings develop in the face of violence?

2. METHOD

2.1. Type of Research

This descriptive study was performed in order to determine experiences of violence during elementary education among students at the nursing department of a public university in Turkey.

2.2. Research Population

The research population consisted of 403 students at the nursing department of a public university in Turkey in the fall term of the 2019-2020 academic year.

2.3. Sampling

The research was performed using the total count method. The entire population was therefore included, with no sampling being conducted. One hundred five students agreeing to take part, fully completing the data tool, and reporting experiencing violence during their elementary education constituted the study sample.

2.4. Inclusion Criteria

Students attending the nursing faculty of a public university in Turkey, who had been exposed to any form of violence from a teacher during their elementary education, and clearly recalling their feelings and behaviors in the face of that violence were included in the study.

2.5. Data Collection Tool

A two-part questionnaire prepared by the authors in the light of the previous literature was employed as the data collection tool (Bulut, 2008; Gözütok et al., 2006; Gündüz 2015; Shumba, 2001; Teyfur, 2014). The first part of the questionnaire consisted of closed ended-questions investigating sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, and economic status. The second part consisted of open-ended questions prepared for determining variables such as the type of violence experienced and its effects, the reactions to the violence applied, the effects of violence on academic performance, the sex of the teacher administering the violence, whether or not the student's attitude toward the sex involved had changed, whether the family also resorted to violence during the same time as the teacher was applying it, and the resulting effects on the student's reaction to violence at school.

2.6. Data Collection

The research data were collected online. Links to the data collection tool were sent to students via “Google Forms.” The first part of the form contained explanatory information concerning how students should complete the data collection tool.

2.7. Data Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 software. Descriptive statistics (number and percentage) were employed during data analysis.

2.8. The Ethical Dimension of the Research

Approval for the study was granted by the Batman University Non-Interventional Research Ethical Committee (No. 8144, dated 06.03.2020). Written consent was also obtained from the individuals taking part, and the study was based on the principle of voluntary participation.

3. RESULTS

Women represented the great majority (75.2%) of the students in the study. Student distributions by age groups were similar, and the majority (84.7%) described their economic status as average. The

majority of students' mothers and fathers were educated to elementary level (60% and 68.6%, respectively) (Table 1).

Table 1: Students' demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	79	75.2
Male	26	24.8
Age groups		
17-20 years	48	45.7
21-25 years	57	54.3
Place of residence		
Urban center	61	58.1
Village/small town/rural area	44	41.9
Perceived economic status		
High	5	4.8
Average	89	84.7
Low	11	10.5
Maternal education level		
Illiterate	27	25.7
Elementary	63	60
High school or above	15	14.3
Paternal education level		
Illiterate	4	3.8
Elementary	72	68.6
High school or above	29	27.6

The majority of students regarded their relationships with their families as very good (53.3%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Students familial relationship levels

Level of relationship with the family	N	%
Average	11	10.5
Good	38	36.2
Very good	56	53.3

Analysis revealed that 64.8% (n=68) of teachers inflicting violence were men, and 35.2% (n=37) were women. In terms of the type of violence to which students were exposed during their elementary education, the most common form (84.8%) was physical violence. Analysis of the types of physical violence to which students were exposed revealed striking the hands with an object as the most common (53.3%) form (Table 3).

Table 3: Teachers inflicting violence on students by gender, and the types of violence inflicted

Sex of the teacher inflicting violence	N	%
Female	37	35.2
Male	68	64.8
Type of violence		
Physical violence	89	84.8
Verbal violence	5	4.8
Sexual violence	1	0.9
Emotional violence	2	1.9
Verbal and physical violence	8	7.6
Type of physical violence*		
Striking the hand with an object	56	53.3
Kicking and slapping	3	2.9
Striking the head	4	3.8
Hair-pulling	2	1.9
Slapping	24	22.9

*Distribution of students exposed to they experienced physical violence.

The majority (52.4%) of students felt helpless and silent in the face of violence inflicted by teachers (Table 4).

Table 4: Students' reactions to violence

Reaction to violence	N	%
I cried	18	17.1
I told my mother, and she spoke to the teacher	1	0.9
I told my mother, and we complained about the teacher	3	2.9
I was very unhappy	3	2.9
It put me off that class, and I started not going	1	0.9
I felt helpless, but did not speak out	55	52.4
It did not affect me	2	1.9
I became withdrawn	8	7.6
I was angry	5	4.8
It put me off that teacher, I detested that teacher	8	7.6
I changed classes	1	0.9

The majority of students (62.9%) stated that their academic performance was unaffected, while 65.7% reported that their attitudes toward the sex represented by the teacher inflicting the violence remained unchanged. Sixty-five (61.9%) of the students in the study were not subjected to violence by their families during the time when they were exposed to violence by teachers. The majority of students (16.2%) exposed to violence from their families at the same time as violence from teachers reported that the violence inflicted by the family did not affect their reactions to violence in school (Table 5).

Table 5: Effects of violence on students

	N	%
Effects of violence on academic performance		
No effect	66	62.9
It adversely affected my assertiveness	18	17.1
It adversely affected my academic life	13	12.4
It caused me to lose my affection for the teacher	4	3.8
It had a positive effect on my academic life	4	3.8
Reactions to the sex represented by the teacher inflicting violence		
Unchanged	69	65.7
I think that males are aggressive and prone to violence	21	20.0
I find it difficult to express myself to men	2	1.9
It put me off female teachers	13	12.4
Exposure to violence from parents at the time when violence was being inflicted by a teacher		
Yes	40	38.1
No	65	61.9
Reactions of students exposed to violence from parents at the time when violence was being inflicted by a teacher *		
The violence inflicted by my family did not affect my reaction to violence in school	17	16.2
Violence in school seemed normal to me because my family also inflicted violence	12	11.4
I became a much quieter person	1	0.9
I was put off my school and my family	4	3.8
I was reluctant to tell my family about violence in school	3	2.9
It caused me to be prone to violence	3	2.9

*Distributions of students exposed to violence from families at the time they were subjected to violence from teachers.

4. DISCUSSION

In their endeavors to reduce violence in schools and inappropriate behavior on the part of students, school authorities contribute to the potential for violence by applying sanctions that victimize students or by ignoring it. Mistreatment of students under the guise of discipline is rarely accepted by teachers, managers, and other school personnel since this can contribute to inappropriate behavior on the part of students, alienation, and aggression (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Violence toward students by teachers in the school has therefore not been sufficiently studied in the literature. We therefore think that this study investigating violence toward students by teachers from various different perspectives will contribute to endeavors to create a safe and positive school environment.



In this study investigating experiences of violence during elementary education among students at a university nursing department in Turkey, 64.8% (n=68) of teachers inflicting violence on students were men and 35.2% (n=37) were women. The number of previous studies on this subject in the literature is limited. One study from Zimbabwe investigating the nature, scale, and causes of violence against elementary school students by teachers reported that 78.9% of teachers resorting to physical violence were men (Shumba, 2001). Retrospective research examining acts of violence toward students by teachers in Turkey and considering 172 cases reported in the press concluded that violence was 6.4 times greater among male teachers than women (Bulut, 2008). The findings of those studies are compatible with those of the present research. Violence or aggressive behavior is known to be equated with male gender in societies in which a male-dominated conception prevails. It may therefore be concluded that male teachers use violence as a disciplinary tool under the effect of societal gender roles, and behave more impulsively when angered. In addition, Gündüz's (2015) qualitative research involving 300 final-year education faculty students aimed at determining students' experiences of violence during their primary and middle education determined no marked difference in terms of numbers or types in violence inflicted by men and women teachers. In that context, it may be concluded that female teachers are not immune from exhibiting violent behavior, and that women teachers should be more included in strategies aimed at preventing in preventing violence by teachers against students in schools.

In terms of types of violence, 84.8% of students were subjected to physical violence during their elementary education. Consistent with our findings, previous studies of violence by teachers towards pupils have also shown that physical violence is the most common form. A cross-sectional study involving 2,170 elementary and middle school students intended to reveal the prevalence of corporal punishment and the determinants thereof in Egypt found that physical violence had been inflicted by teachers on 79.96% of male students and 61.53% of girls (Youssef et al., 1998). A study from Turkey analyzing reports of school violence appearing in the press reported that physical violence constituted the great majority of reports of violence in schools, followed by psychological violence (Teyfur, 2014). Gündüz's (2015) qualitative research from Turkey also reported that physical violence was the most common form of violence applied by teachers. The similarity between the results of this research on similar subjects, despite the use of different methodologies, indicates that physical violence is employed by teachers as a control mechanism for resolving problems. In contrast to our finding, one wide-sample study involving 24,243 students in Israel and Chile reported that students were most subjected to verbal/emotional mockery or humiliation by their teachers, and that this finding applied to all the cultural groups in the research. Physical sanctions were reported to be less common in both cultures in that study (Benbenishty et al., 2018). This may be interpreted as showing that the perception of violence and forms of violence applied are affected by cultural norms. On the other hand, due to the greater visibility of physical violence, it may be that forms of converting violence into action alter over time, with emotional violence becoming more prominent.

In terms of detailed analysis of the types of physical violence to which students were frequently subjected, 53.3% of students were struck on the hands with some kind of object. The forms of corporal punishment most frequently reported to be applied by teachers in the literature include slapping, kicking and hitting, striking the student somewhere on the body with a ruler or some other object, pulling the ears, hair or arms, forcing students to stand on one leg in front of the class, and head-butting (Gündüz, 2015). Although the forms of behavior of teachers resorting to physical violence may vary, all involve a bodily attack on the student and serve a punitive function. Previous studies have suggested that the use of negative motivational techniques, such as corporal punishment and psychological aggression, regarded as preventive and prohibitive, merely serves to alienate students and encourage inappropriate behavior and a desire for 'retribution' (Hyman & Perone, 1998). However, evidence from international studies clearly shows that positive discipline without resorting to violence gives better results, and that all forms of violence are associated with various negative outcomes (Ferrara et al., 2019).

In the present study, the majority (52.4%) of students subjected to violence by teachers felt helpless and unable to speak out. Similarly, a previous study from Turkey reported that students subjected to

physical violence by teachers experienced such negative emotions as sadness, distress and a desire to cry, shame, loss of affection for teachers and school, anger, hatred, and fear (Gözütok et al., 2006). Another study of children in the Turkish city of Eskişehir reported that students experienced negative feelings such as sadness, fear, and distress in the face of violence (Deveci et al., 2008). The findings of those studies are compatible with the present research. Irrespective of who the subject may be, it may be concluded that students experience negative emotions resulting from the destructive nature of violence and are unable to speak out against teachers, whom they perceive as authority figures.

The majority of students (62.9%) in the present study reported that violence did not affect their academic performances. In contrast, however, the findings of a study of adolescents from Uganda revealed powerful negative correlation between teacher violence and school attachment (Namy et al., 2017). The discrepancies between these findings may derive from types of reactions to violence being affected by social and cultural differences between the populations.

The majority of students (65.7%) in this study also reported no change in their attitudes toward the sex represented by the teacher inflicting violence. Considering that the majority of teachers inflicting violence were men (64.8%), it may be concluded that students internalize a social conception regarding violence being a form of behavior specific to males.

Sixty-five (61.9%) students in this study were not exposed to violence by their families at the time when violence was inflicted by teachers. In contrast to this finding, a study involving 723 children receiving outpatient treatment at a child and adolescent psychiatry clinic in Vienna over the course of one year determined that 62 were victims of behavior including violence at school, and that almost half of these (30 children) were also exposed to intrafamilial violence (Völkl-Kernstock et al., 2015). A study involving 100 students in their final years at two high schools in the Turkish city of Adıyaman, one state and one private, reported that 69% of children at the state school and 20% of those at the private high school were exposed to violence by family members due to various behaviors (Taşar, 2019). Similarly, a study of 1807 adolescents with a mean age of 15.1 years in Kırıkkale, Turkey, reported that 311 students were exposed to violence within the family (Oğuztürk et al., 2019). The findings of these studies are noteworthy in terms of showing high rates of exposure to intrafamilial violence among adolescents. The fact that the majority of students in the present study were not exposed to violence from their families at the same time as violence from teachers may be attributable to students have developed positive-type relationships with their families. Indeed, the majority of the students in this study (53.3%) described their relationships with their families as very good (Table 2).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined exposure to violence during their elementary education on the part of nursing students at a university in Turkey, their attitudes to the acts of violence, and the feelings experienced by them. The findings regarding violence experienced by the students during their elementary education may be summarized as follows – the teachers inflicting violence were primarily men, students were most frequently subjected to physical violence, physical violence most commonly took the form of being struck on the hands by an object, and most students felt helpless and unable to speak out in the face of violence. In that context, we recommend that further studies involving larger samples now be performed to assess the frequency, type, causes, and effects of violence inflicted by teachers against students, and by students against teachers, in schools. We think that the results of such studies will contribute to educational policies aimed at creating a safe and positive school environment.

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