

Full Length Research Paper

Violence in schools: From the perspective of students, teachers, and mothers

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How school violence is perceived by the members of school is of importance because their conceptions might affect their understanding of the reasons and consequently, finding the solutions. The objective of this study is to analyze how students, teachers, and mothers perceive an event of school violence. The study was conducted in high schools with a mid-socioeconomic level in Adana city located in the Southern Region of Turkey. A purported event of school violence was staged in front of a group consisting of 36 students, 16 teachers and 17 mothers. The participants were asked to evaluate the event they watched in a written form. In terms of the findings about defining what the problem is, the results showed that a great majority of the students and mothers focused on the context of clearly displayed violence, while the teachers, on the other hand, focused on the ways of communication and the shortcomings in behavior while defining the problem. Based on the comments received on who is acting inappropriately in a problem situation, the majority of the students and teachers feel that the behavior of teachers is inappropriate. In a situation like this, they pointed out, that the teacher has to be more sympathetic, more tolerant, and has to make better contacts with the students.

Key words: School violence, violence scenario, mother, teacher.

INTRODUCTION

In a report published by WHO (World Health Organization) on violence and health, it is noted that violence among the youngsters is one of the most commonly observed types of violence in society. Every other day, news reports on the violence by youngsters in streets or gangs at schools make headlines in newspapers and the mass media. Violence among youngsters affects not only the victims, but also their parents, friends, and the society as a whole. The effects of violence are not just sickness and injuries; rather it

affects the quality of life as a whole (Krug et al., 2002, p.25). Just as anywhere in the world, violence in schools is also experienced in Turkey. In line with this fact, an international version of questionnaire in Health Behavior in School Age Children (HBSC) was distributed to 1720 students living in the metropolitan city of Turkey, İstanbul so as to determine the extent of violent behavior among high school students. The results of this research revealed that 42% of the students were involved in at least one case of physical fight in the last 12 months and

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7% of the students had to undergo a medical intervention. In addition, it was found that the rate of the students engaging in bullying behavior during their school life was 30% and that of students carrying a gun within the borders of the school was 8% (Alikasıfoğlu et al., 2004). In another study conducted with high school students, it was found that the percentage of the students engaged in verbal bullying was 33.5%; in physical bullying was 35.5%; in affective bullying was 28.3%; and in sexual bullying was 15% (Kepenekçi and Çınkır, 2006). Basic strategies on the prevention and reduction of violence in educational environments and an action plan were developed and implemented against the ever-increasing violence in schools in Turkey, by the Ministry of National Education with support from various institutions and the UNICEF on July 4, 2006 (MEB, 2006).

In order for a violence prevention program to be effective, it is necessary to build mutual cooperation and participation of all school members, including students, staff, and parents (Jimerson and Furlong, 2006; Waasdorp et al., 2011). While many bullying prevention programs aim to include all these multiple partners, cognitive differences between the students, the staff, and the parents were investigated in a few studies according to the school environment. In a study investigating the environment of bullying based on multiple perspectives, it was found that there were perceptual discrepancies between the students, the school staff, and the parents (Waasdorp et al., 2011). The results of a study investigating the perceptions of school staff toward violence showed that the school staffs were afraid not only of the behavior of the students but also of their parents. The researchers suggest taking this issue into consideration in future as the behavior of parents with respect to school violence is not fully understood (Pietrzak et al., 1988).

When the description by secondary school students and the school staff and the perceived seriousness of bullying behavior comprising aggression were compared, it was found that the students and the teachers differ in their opinion (Maunder et al., 2010). In a qualitative case study of violence in schools, the following questions, in particular, were tried to be answered: How do students and teachers define violence? When and how does violence start? Who resorts to violence? Whom from and how do students get help when they face violence? Who are the ones resorting to violence the most in school? What are the probable solutions to prevent violence in school? According to the results of the research, it was observed that students had the tendency to resort to violence when they had disagreements with each other; they believed that violence is unavoidable; they usually perceived violence as a physical behavior; and they stated that they resorted to violence as they were also exposed to violence. It was observed that the students' and the teachers' definition of violence were similar. The

students, teachers, and parents who participated in the study on violence in school revealed that the definition of violence could change with respect to situations. In other words, a case that is perceived as violence in a particular environment cannot be perceived as violence in another (Altun and Baker, 2010).

It is important to see how the events including violence are perceived by the members of the school society, since the way they perceive might influence finding the reasons of the problem and eventually the solutions to the problem. Besides, the variations in the definitions might result in an inconsistent approach, and it can affect the outcomes of the interventions. In this regard, data were obtained in the workshop conducted for students, parents and teachers by researchers in the scope of a project entitled, "Non- Violence Rules- Schools without violence" (LLL, 2010) under the financial support of European Union Education and Youth Programmes- Comenius Regio Partnerships and the coordination of Adana Directorate of National Education in Turkey. The focus of the workshop was on two main topics. In the first stage, it was aimed at revealing how a case of violence in the classroom was evaluated by the students, the teachers, and the mothers. In the second stage, it was aimed at finding the proposals of the students, the teachers, and the mothers in order to prevent violence in school. The results of the study designed to answer the first question of the research are presented in this article. In the first part of the research, a purported incidence of violence was scripted and staged in front of the working group. The students, the teachers, and the mothers who watched this performance were asked to answer the following three questions about the staged performance:

- (1) What is the situation in the scenario watched by you?
- (2) Who is acting inappropriately in the observed problem situation?
- (3) What are your suggestions as the solution to the situation in question?

METHODS

Participants

The participants were classified into two study groups. The study was conducted in high schools with a mid-socioeconomic level under the scope of the project entitled, "No Violence in Schools" in Adana city located in the southern region of Turkey. A working group of 80 people (40 students, 20 mothers, 20 teachers) from two schools, covered by the project, was invited to participate in the workshop conducted in the school's theatre. For this study, ninth grade students (15-16 years) were chosen, and the mothers and the teachers of the selected students were taken into consideration. The aim of the study was explained to the selected group. A scripted violent scenario in the class within the scope of work was staged in front of the group. A people group, who wanted to participate as volunteers after demonstration, was selected for evaluation of the staged scene. A total of 36 students (14-15 years), 17 mothers, and 16 teachers participated in the study.

Table 1. The questions which were asked to the participants about the scenario.

1	What is the problem?
2	Who is the incorrect person in the situation and why?
3	Who is the person resorting to violence?
4	Who is the person exposed to violence?
5	What is the reason of the problem?
6	Can the problem be solved in other ways? If yes, how?

The research process

A purported scenario of violence in classroom usually experienced at schools that causes stress was scripted. In the scenario, to enable viewers to better understand and interpret the events, the most often experienced events of violence in class that create a situation of stress were determined, and this scenario was adopted as a screenplay. According to the scenario, Mehmet did not do mathematics homework on that day. During the homework control, when it is time to check Mehmet's assignment, he says that one of his relatives had passed away and, hence, he could not do his homework. The teacher says, "This is not my problem. You always have an excuse"; and he gets angry with Mehmet, as he did not do his homework, and scores him zero. Mehmet gets annoyed and punches his teacher. Mehmet is sent to the discipline committee at school. His father is invited to the school and the event is told. His father says, "How dare you punch your teacher? He is both your elder and your teacher", and slaps Mehmet. Finally, Mehmet is admitted to another school. To enable the participants to focus on issues and to draw attention to the subject, the visualization of prepared material has been found useful and the scenario was staged as a drama. The scenario was staged in the school's hall by the students who are members of theatre club at Çukurova University, for the mothers, the teachers, and the students. Then, they were asked to answer the questions about the play in writing.

Data collection tool

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared on the possible violent scenario in the classroom. The participants were asked to answer the open-ended questions about the scenario in writing (Table 1). While the open-ended questions provide the researcher with an opportunity for a flexible approach on the topic he wants to research, they prevent the important variables from being overlooked as well (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). The questions that were asked to the participants were as follows: What was the problem in the scenario? Who did act inappropriately and why was it inappropriate? And, what other means can be used to solve the problem?

The analysis of data

The written answers given by the participants to the open-ended questions were analyzed through content analysis. The written explanation of each participant was analyzed; the main themes were determined within the scope of the research question; and explanations were compared with other explanations perpetually and common themes were determined (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In this process, the papers of the participants were numbered in the first place and then the specified

codes were identified. Finally, they were combined under common main themes. These common themes were converted into a table based on the prevalence.

In order to increase the reliability of the study, the defined categories and common themes were investigated separately by another expert colleague who was experienced in qualitative research and possessed a doctoral degree in education, and was employed at the same university. In addition, the discrepancies between the common themes were resolved together by the two researchers. Finally, there was a common accord on the codification and categories.

RESULTS

All the answers given by the participants of the research were analyzed in order to find the common themes, and are summarized as follows under three headings:

Definition of the problem

The data obtained from the answers of the students, teachers, and mothers to the question "What is the problem?" aim to define the problem in the scenario and is summarized in Table 2.

Based on the data obtained from the students, the teachers, and mothers, four themes—homework, violence, deficiency and system—were identified for determining the problem (Table 2).

The Theme of Homework: It was observed that the code of "not doing homework" was stated as the problem by 8 students, 4 teachers, and 7 mothers. The sample expressions from these answers include the response of one student that states, "I think the first reason is the student not doing homework, suffering oppression, and being scored zero"; while another student wrote that, "the student not doing homework and the teacher scoring the student zero and insulting"; one teacher wrote, "the student not doing homework, the teachers' and parents' overreaction"; another teacher wrote, "the student not doing homework"; one mother wrote, "the student not doing homework and the teacher resorting to violence".

The Theme of Violence: It was observed that 10 students opted for the code 10, i.e., "the teachers insulting" in the

Table 2. Students', teachers' and mothers; definitions of the situation.

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Students (36)	Teachers (16)	Mothers (17)
Homework		Not doing homework	8	4	7
	Verbal violence	The teacher insulting	10		1
Violence	Physical violence	Violence against teachers	5	1	2
		Violence by teachers	4		2
	Verbal and physical	Resorting to violence	10	3	5
		Overreaction of the teachers and mothers		1	
		The teacher facing the student out		1	
Deficiency	Behaviour	Misbehaviors of the teacher and the student		1	1
		Deficiency in the sense of mission		1	
		Lack of education	2		3
	Communication	The student not being able to control anger	1		1
		The student's deficiency in expressing his or her feelings		1	
		Lack of healthy communication	4	3	
System	Educational system	Lack of sympathy	1	2	
		Lack of empathy		1	

sub-theme of verbal violence. The code for "resorting to violence" under the sub-theme of verbal and physical was stated by 10 teachers, 5 mothers, and 3 teachers. The code for "resorting to violence against teachers" was stated by 5 students and 2 mothers. The code for "teacher resorting to violence" was opted for by 4 students and 2 mothers. It was observed that the students and the mothers were the majority of the participants who defined the problem as violence. The sample expressions are as follows: One mother wrote, "the student not doing homework and the teacher scoring the student zero and insulting"; another mother opined, "violence and ignorance"; one student expressed, "the teacher is guilty as he insulted the student and the student is guilty as he slapped the teacher".

The Theme of Deficiency. Under the sub-theme of behavior, the teachers opined as "misbehaviors of the teacher and the student" and "deficiency in the sense of mission"; while the mothers and the students emphasized "lack of education" and "the student inability to control his anger". Under the sub-theme of communication, the teachers pointed to "lack of healthy communication", "lack of tolerance", and "lack of empathy". It was observed that the teachers focused more on the themes of communication and lack of behavior. The sample statements are as follows: one teacher stated, "the teacher not being able to build a healthy communication"; another teacher wrote, "The teacher's attitude and the student's behavior are wrong".

The remarks on who acted inappropriately in the situation and its reason

When the answers to the question, "who acted inappropriately according to the problem situation?" were analyzed, it was found that 13 students, 12 teachers, and 10 mothers felt that the guilty person was the student. On the contrary, 29 students, 13 teachers, and 8 mothers held the teacher accountable.

With reference to the reason of the violence; one mother expressed, "the student is the person who acted inappropriately as he slapped the teacher"; another mother stated, "The student is the person who acted inappropriately as he did not do his homework and slapped his teacher"; one teacher wrote, "The person who acted inappropriately is the teacher as he could not build a healthy communication"; another teacher said that, "the student and the mother are the persons who acted inappropriately as the student tries to resort to violence in school since he is exposed to violence back home". One student wrote that, "Both the student and the teacher are the persons who acted inappropriately since the student would not have resorted to violence had the teacher not resorted to violence. The first person who acted inappropriately is the teacher"; another student wrote, "The teacher is the person who acted inappropriately as he insulted the student"; another student expressed, "the teacher is the person who acted inappropriately as he should not have threatened the student. The problem might have been solved by soft

Table 3. The codes, themes and frequencies obtained from the answers of the students, the teachers and the mothers about the solution of the problem situation.

Theme	Code	Student	Teacher	Mother
		N (36)	N (16)	N (17)
Communication	Talking	16	4	7
	Listening without prejudice	2	1	3
	Apologizing from the teacher			1
	Communicating		2	
Sympathy and tolerance	Staying calm, sympathetic and tolerant	11	5	1
	Giving some time to student		1	
	Forgiving the student for once	2		1
	Ignoring		1	
	Searching the reason	1	2	2
Behaviour	Criticizing himself or herself			1
	The teacher's changing his or her behaviours		1	
	Not resorting to pressure and violence	1		
	Taking precautions		1	
Getting help	Giving different homework	1		
	Getting help from the school counselor		2	1
	Not including the headmaster into the problem	1		

words"; another student stated, "the teacher is the person who acted inappropriately as the student forgot to do his homework just like me".

The remarks on the solution to the problem

The data obtained from the answers of the students, teachers, and mothers on the solution to the problem are summarized in Table 3.

The evaluations of the solutions to the problem summarized in Table 3 can be sub-divided as follows:

The Theme of Communication: A solution proposed for the problem by 16 students, 4 teachers, and 7 mothers is through "talking"; 3 mothers proposed, "listening without prejudice", and 2 teachers suggested, "building communication". One mother opined, "both sides should listen to each other without prejudice"; another mother expressed, "the teacher and the parent should know how to listen"; one teacher felt that "the teacher should listen to the student and show empathy and..."; another teacher wrote, "if the teacher had built communication instead of putting pressure on the student, it would have resulted in a different way"; one student felt, "the problem could have been solved by talking and showing tolerance"; another student noted, "the problem might have been solved by using soft words", and "it can be solved by talking sweet".

The Theme of Understanding and Tolerance: 11 students and 4 teachers opted for the code referring to "staying calm and being sympathetic and tolerant". One student noted, "the teacher might have been more sympathetic"; another student opined, "if the teacher might have been more sympathetic, the student would not have behaved in this way"; one teacher expressed, "the teacher could have behaved more moderately when he had seen that the student was not talking"; another teacher wrote, "the problem could have been solved more easily through perpetual sympathy and tolerance".

DISCUSSION

In this study, a scenario representing a purported violent event was staged in the presence of students, teachers, and mothers and their perceptions about the screenplay were investigated. The usage of qualitative approach in research provides an opportunity to study the perspectives of three groups in a detailed way.

When the findings about the determination of the problem situation in the research were taken into account, it was found that the students, teachers and mothers identified the situation by considering various factors in the scenario about violence. The students and their mothers determined the problem by taking the verbal (the teacher's insulting) and physical violence (resorting

to violence against the teacher and the student) into consideration. In this regard, the expressions of the mothers and the students were found similar. Also in previous studies, it was found that there exists a significant positive relationship between the perceptions of the teenagers' and the parents' attitudes towards violence (Cotton, 1994; Malek et al., 1998; Orpinas et al., 1999; Solomon et al., 2008). The study of Cotton et al. (1994) indicated a significant positive correlation between students' attitudes toward violence and their perceptions of their families' attitudes. Malek et al. (1998) found a strong correlation between students' perceptions of their families' violence-related attitudes and the amount of acquaintance violence among students. In this research, the teachers defined the problem by drawing attention to the problem behaviors such as not being able to control the feelings and building a healthy communication, and the lack of building tolerance and empathy. This result might be an indication which shows that the teachers made an evaluation of the situation more profoundly. Some findings point to the lack of awareness in teachers on this issue. In a study which was carried out at schools under the theme of high social violence, teachers admitted that they lack proper awareness on this issue and that they required some training to deal with students' behaviors in the classrooms, to apply the school rules, and to teach the social skill program (Maring and Koblinsky, 2013). In another study, it was reported that the teachers who received an anti-bullying training dealt with bullying more effectively compared with the teachers who did not receive the training (Sairanen and Pfeffer, 2011). In this study, it can be said that the finding about the teachers is consistent with the results of the studies on teachers' training requirements.

In this study, some students, teachers, and mothers claimed that the person who acted inappropriately was the student for the query on who acted inappropriately and what the reasons of the violence were with reference to the problem situation. They showed the reason for their remark as the student's statements and behaviors about his resorting to violence. A great majority of the students feel that the teacher is the person who acted inappropriately; and most of the teachers found both the student and the teacher as the persons who acted inappropriately. The teachers and the students emphasized on the teacher's negative attitude, insulting, being intolerant, being unsympathetic and violent behaviors as the reasons of the crime. It is understood from these results that the teacher was blamed as he is supposed to be more responsible and show proper behavior. It was also found in earlier studies that the teacher's interaction with the students affected the student's behaviors. It was also found that there exists a strong relationship between the teacher having positive expectations from the student and the sociometric status of the student (the students being loved by his or her peers and being popular). This

finding indicates that being considered positively by the teacher is related with high social status for the student and it was also stated that the students who were considered positively by both friends and teachers displayed a high degree of school self-concept. It was observed, on the other hand, that the students who were perceived negatively by the teachers had negative school self-concepts and low sociometric status (Ochoa et al., 2007). In another study conducted with secondary school students aimed at revealing which intervention strategy the students preferred in case of bullying, the results showed that the students find the intervention of the teacher as the most helpful strategy in cases of bullying (Crothers et al., 2006). This shows that the teachers who are trained to tackle bullying are really important to understand and intervene with the violent cases in schools. There exists a direct correlation between safe school climate and positive learning experiences. Educators have a good reason to deal with violence cases at their schools. The fear of violence interferes with education at schools (Joong and Ridler, 2006). Accordingly, teachers have the power to assess the situations at the school individually and to look for all possibilities so as to reduce the violence cases at schools.

The students, teachers, and parents who emphasized the themes of communication and sympathy indicated tolerance as the solution to the problem. The participants expressed their opinions on subjects, which involved solving the problem by talking, listening without prejudice, building an effective communication, giving some time to student, forgiving the student for once, ignoring, and searching the reason. On the prevention of violence, in the literature, strategies such as improving self-sufficiency, building strong social skills, and developing good relationships with parents and teachers which require the usage of extensive anti-bullying strategies rather than the techniques alone which aim at suppressing are considered as helpful anti-violence strategies. Extensive strategies consisting of 6 elements which are basic in dealing with the violence in schools are defined as follows: long-term anti-bullying strategy and procedures, training of teachers and parents in handling school bullying, providing students with social skills and emotional-control training packages, adopting a multidisciplinary cooperation strategy, involving students in conflict resolution, and an adequate approach for monitoring the situation (Wong, 2004). In this study, the suggestions preferred by the students, parents, and teachers as the solution to the violence case in the scenario, indicate that the strategies discussed above are helpful in dealing with violence.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. As it was a study based

on qualitative analysis, a few working groups were formed. Moreover, the results cannot be generalized for larger groups since the remarks of the participants were recorded in a written form during the evaluation. The students, teachers, and mothers who participated in the study evaluated a purported scenario which was designed for this study and not a real situation. It must also be considered that their reactions might be different when they encounter a real situation.

Conclusion

The present study might contribute to educators to design programs and policies to prevent violence as it offers some insights into how students, teachers, and mothers evaluate a possible case of violence in school, the definition of the problems, and some recommendations as solution to the problem. The students and parents, in general, agreed on similar points in the scenario. This is seen as a significant result as the students can claim that they will get the support of their parents for their negative behaviors. These results are coherent with the explanations of the social learning theory which states that parents are the role models of their children. This finding indicates that it is also important to investigate the family background of the children who get involved in violent cases.

In this study, the teacher is expected to be more responsible, to give more appropriate reactions, and to be part of the solution to the problem in the violence case in the scenario. Furthermore, it reflects that the teachers play important roles in preventing violence; while the teachers pointed to the deficiencies in effective communication and displaying appropriate behaviors. In order for the teachers to handle the violent cases better, it is seen essential to implement positive coping strategies. In this study, the preference for more positive coping strategies as the solution to the problem including violence becomes more of an issue in terms of creating positive atmosphere at schools.

The results of this study provide additional information to the literature which investigates the multi-perspectives intended for a violence case in school. So as to prevent violence in schools, encouraging the active participation of mothers, students, and teachers in the design of intervention programs might increase the efficiency of the program.

The teacher is seen as a key player in solving violent cases in schools. Training the teachers on finding solutions, reflecting positive intervention strategies such as talking and listening, building a healthy communication, being sympathetic and tolerant might lead to the implementation of more effective solutions in possible violent cases or problem in schools.

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Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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