

*Media Violence and Children, A Case Study on Primary and Secondary School Students in Konya, Turkey*

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**Abstract**

In World Report on Violence and Health, published by World Health Organization, violence is described as “the intentional use of physical force of power against oneself, another person, or against a group of community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation”. There are multiplicity of variables that independently or interdependently affect the existence of violence in a society. It has been shown in various studies that media has strong negative impacts on youngsters, and it could be associated with one of the causal agents of violence. This study aims to understand the impact of media violence on primary and secondary school students. The research is conducted in a private primary and secondary school located in Konya, Turkey. A survey is prepared and questions about media violence such as; violence exposures on media, students’ media preferences, effectiveness of warning labels and negative impacts of these media violence are asked to the students. The results are interpreted in terms of media type, respondents’ age, grade and gender. Suggestions are made according to the results of the study.

Keywords: violence, media, primary school, secondary school, private school, Konya

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## **Introduction**

World Health Organization describes violence as “the intentional use of physical power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation”. As it is seen in the definition, it can be in self-directed, interpersonal or collective form according to victim-perpetrator relationship and its typology can be classified as physical, sexual, psychological and deprivation or negligence ([www.who.int/violence-prevention/approach/definition/en](http://www.who.int/violence-prevention/approach/definition/en)). Violence can be witnessed in screen entertainment media (such as television, video games, cinema and internet) by all of us every day and its negative effects especially on youngsters attracts the attention of various governing and scholar groups. Several measurements have been taken like raising awareness activities such as discussion forums and setting some limitation precautions. Under the public and governments’ pressures, warning labels have been used in order to decrease the possible negative impacts of programs having violence content. However, these labels’ impacts have been questioned by several studies.

In this study, firstly the possible harmful effects of media violence was mentioned and a brief literature review on the subject was summarized. Later, results of the survey regarding media violence and its impacts on primary and secondary school students were presented and in the final part a brief summary and recommendations were given.

## **Media Violence**

It is known that with the development of digital world, people spend more and more time on television, video games and internet so that this may even lead some addiction problems. These problems may be more serious in youngsters when compared to elder people because of their high adaptability level to accept and use new technology. When we have been talking about TV addiction for less than a century ago, with the rapid developments in digital world, new addictions have been added to literature such as video games addiction, internet addiction and social media addiction. Apart from problems caused by those addiction such as being unsociable, having more inactive life and aggressiveness, it is not difficult to infer that if such media is violence contented, its harmful effects will be much more worrisome. According to the results of various experimental studies, media violence increases aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, physiological arousal, hostile appraisals, aggressive behavior, causes violence desensitization and decreases prosocial behavior (helping others) and empathy (Anderson et al, 2017:142). Smith and Donnerstein (1998: 176) classified the results of four decades’ research on undesirable effects of media into three categories: (a) learning aggressive thoughts, attitudes and behaviours, (b) emotional decentralization to real world aggression and its victims and (c) fear of becoming victim of violence.

Tuzun (2002:46-47) reported the results of a study conducted in U.S. as follows:

- Of all TV programs, 2/3 was violence contented.
- Children programs contained aggression.
- Aggressors usually weren’t punished.

- Of all music videos, ¼ contained aggression or gun.

Media Education Foundation gathered some facts and statistics undertaken by various organizations regarding media violence and some prominent ones were: ([www.mediaed.org/handsouta/ChildrenMedia.pdf](http://www.mediaed.org/handsouta/ChildrenMedia.pdf)):

- Media violence increased in quantity and became more graphic, sexual and sadistic.
- 80% of “R” rated movies, 70% of restricted video games and 100% of music with “explicit content” warning labels were being marketed to children under 17 according to a report dated 2000.
- An average child witnessed 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders by the age of 18.
- Because the difference between reality and fantasy could not be easily understood by children under 8, media violence was more dangerous to them.
- 82% of Americans thought movies as too violent

Not only TV or movie contents, but also games have important negative effects. A game called “Blue Whale”, which was believed to be responsible from the deaths of 142 people, requested violence contented tasks from their players (<http://www.bbc.com/turkce/41281200>) and those tasks brought its victims to suicide. After that, another dangerous play named “48 Hour Challenge” was strongly associated with the dragging life of the players into danger (Yilmaz and Biricik, 2017:182).

Huesmann (2007: 11-12) analyzed several studies and reported that children’s exposure to violent electronic media led long term increase in aggressive and violent behavior. Then he searched the question whether the size of the effect was large enough to threaten public health; and he answered this question positively. And in the final part of his research he tried to evaluate the effect size of the media violence to public health when compared to other recognized threats; and he showed that its effect size was larger than many other recognized threats. Anderson and Bushman (2002:2377) reported the results of meta-analytical studies investigating the relationship between media violence and increased aggression. Results showed that regardless to the study type (laboratory experiments, field experiments, cross sectional studies and longitudinal studies) there was a clear positive link between these two variables. Anderson et al (2017: 986) examined media violence effects on aggression in seven countries, namely Australia, China, Croatia, Germany, Japan, Romania and United States with a total of 2154 respondents. They showed that exposure to violent screen media was associated with aggression in all nations.

On the other hand, there are also some other studies questioning the correlation between violence in media and aggressive behaviors. Olson (2004:144) indicated that there was a little evidence of a substantial link between violent interactive games and real-life violence and crime and further studies should be done to prove that. Ferguson and Kilburn (2009:759) conducted a meta-analytic study and investigated peer-reviewed articles on about media violence effects; they concluded that media violence should not be blamed for presenting significant public health risk. Again, in another study Ferguson (2009:103) emphasized that in contrast to common belief, the current literature did not provide enough support for the media violence’s cause to aggressive

or violent behaviors. In another study Ferguson et al (2009:904) surveyed 603 predominantly Hispanic children aged 10-14 to examine risk factors of youth violence and found that violent television contents and video games were not predictive of youth violence and aggression when compared to other factors such as delinquent peer influence, antisocial personality traits, depression, parents'/guardians' using psychological abuse in intimate relationships.

For harmful contents, rating system was introduced especially to parents for their selection of suitable content for their children. Games and films have warning labels on it and it was believed that it would provide protection to children against harmful contents. However, there existed some studies showing ineffectiveness of this system. For example Bushman and Stack (1996:207) conducted a study having sample of 360 psychology students and showed that warning labels increased interest in violence contented TV programs. In another study Bushman (2006: 2073) tested totally 900 people including youngsters between ages 12 and 20, and adults older than 21 years old. Respondents were requested to read the descriptions (including a warning label, information label and no label) of violent and non-violent TV programs and asked to rate how much they wanted to watch them. According to the results, violent programs with warning labels attracted more attention and respondents wanted to watch violent TV programs more than information label and no label groups. Another prominent result was male wanted to watch more violent programs when compared to females and children under 18 had the greatest interest to those violent program (Bushman, 2006:2076-2077). A similar study which was performed by Bijvank et al (2009:870) conducted a study with 310 participants, aged between 7 and 17. Participants read video game descriptions and were asked to rate how much they wanted to play each game. It was shown that restrictive age labels and violent content labels increased attractiveness of those video games. The results were also true for even 7-8 years of age and girl participants.

### **Case Study on Primary and Secondary School Students**

*Aim and Scope of the Study:* Every day, we witness lots of violence on TV and internet and perhaps its most negative impacts would be on children. The aim of the study was to understand the impacts of primary and secondary school students' exposure to media violence. In this study primary and secondary school students of a private school in Konya, Turkey were selected. The school was among the top successful schools in the city according to national student selection exams for high schools and the school administrators indicated that percentage of university degree-holder parents was one of the highest ones when compared to other schools in the city. School also held several awards in various academic and non-academic events.

*Methodology:* The school had 4-5 classes in each grade and in order to provide the equal distribution, one class in each grade was selected, so sample represented every age group with nearly equal proportion. In the school the classes were not formed by taking into consideration the success or sex. Therefore no differentiation between classrooms in each grade was expected. Questionnaire forms were distributed to the teachers with necessary explanations and they gave the forms to their students in selected classrooms. Totally 172 students participated in the study and the questionnaires were evaluated by SPSS program.

## Findings

By taking into consideration that sample should represent the whole primary and secondary school students, one class in each grade was selected and questionnaires were distributed to each selected class. Totally 172 students participated in the study and the 44,2% of them were boys and 55,8% were girls. Number of participants in each class was ranged between 19 to 23 students (11%-13,4% of sample size). The demographical features were shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographical Features

Demographical Features of Participants												
	Sex	%	Distribution of Participants									
			Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Girls	96	55,8	Freq.	23	21	21	21	19	22	22	23	172
Boys	76	44,2	%	13,4	12,2	12,2	12,2	11,0	12,8	12,8	13,4	100,0
Total	172	100,0										

Table 2 summarized media and TV program preferences. It could be said that TV was the most preferred media since only 6 students (3,5%) never watch and the rest (96,5%) watch it. Students mainly spent 1-2 hours on TV. The most preferred TV programs are Cartoons, Reality games, Sports and Serials with close percentages (50%, 45%, 43,6% and 41,4%, respectively). Documentary (35,5%) and News (25,0) followed those programs. Other programs were namely educational, talk-show, magazine, health and travel that constituted lower percentage in preference. Social media was being used by majority of students (68%) and again, they mainly use it approximately 1-2 hours a day. 52,9% of students stated that that never played computer games. Students who played it mainly spend 1-2 hours a day like previous media selections.

Table 2. Data on Media Preference

Average time per day spent on.....						
Average daily hours spent on.....	TV		Computer games		Social media	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Never	6	3,5	91	52,9	55	32,0
1	85	49,4	52	30,2	76	44,2
2	58	33,7	18	10,5	21	12,2
3	17	9,9	7	4,1	16	9,3
4	-	-	1	,6	3	1,7
5+	6	3,5	3	1,7	1	,6
Total	172	100,0	172	100,0	172	100,0

  

Top TV Programs Preferred (top 6 listed)						
	Films/Serials	Cartoons	Sports	Reality games	Documentary	News
Frequency	121	86	75	64	61	43
%	41,4	50,0	43,6	45,0	35,5	25,0

Samples were asked whether they witnessed violence on media with 5 Likert type scale questions (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always). The students who never watched TV, never played computer games and never use social media were excluded from this group of questions. It was seen that witnessing violence in each group of media was not in high averages. Results showed that computer games contained more violence with the average  $\bar{X}=2,9259$ , TV programs and social media visuals followed it with averages  $\bar{X}=2,5361$  and  $\bar{X}=1,9012$ , respectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Media and Violence

	Witnessing violence on TV	Witnessing violence on computer games	Witnessing violence on social media visuals
<b>Valid</b>	166	81	117
<b>Missing</b>	6	91	55
<b>Mean</b>	2,5361	2,9259	1,9012
<b>St. dev.</b>	1,14755	1,52297	1,26888
<b>Min</b>	1,0	1,0	1,0
<b>Max</b>	5,0	5,0	5,0

Based on the Anderson et al (2017:42-43)'s study, questions investigating acceptability of aggressive behaviors and tendency of physical /verbal aggression were asked and a question for empathy were directed. 5 Likert type scale questions (1=never, 2=seldom,3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always) were asked to students and it was seen that the aggressiveness averages were not very high. The highest score was for the sentence "If someone hits me, I hit him/her too" with mean 2,366 (more than seldom in average). The averages of the answers to the following questions "I may hurt people who behave in an unacceptable manner", "He is right if someone shouted back at the person who shouted at him first", "He is right if someone throws something against someone who does mean things to him", "I argue loudly with people who I disagree with" were ranged between 1,8895-1,5349 (close to seldom). However, the minimum and maximum points marked for these sentences were ranged between 1 and 5. So, it would provide us an opportunity to examine the answers with different criteria by crosstab analysis. Students mostly marked high grade to the sentence "I want to protect someone being taken advantage of", the average was 4,4012 (more than often, close to always) (Table 4).

Table 4. Accessibility of Aggressive Behaviors and Empathy

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Valid
<b>If someone hits me I hit him/her, too</b>	2,3663	1,30658	1,00	5,00	172
<b>I may hurt people who behave in an unacceptable manner</b>	1,8895	1,03985	1,00	5,00	172
<b>He is right if someone shouted back at the person who shouted at him first</b>	1,8837	1,10203	1,00	5,00	172
<b>He is right if someone throws something against someone who does mean things to him</b>	1,7674	1,01652	1,00	5,00	172
<b>I argue loudly with people who I disagree with</b>	1,5349	,84739	1,00	5,00	172
<b>I want to protect someone being taken advantage of</b>	4,4012	,88298	1,00	5,00	172

In the final section of the questionnaire, yes-no questions took part. Firstly questions about warning labels were asked. It was seen that 88,4% of students indicated that they saw the warning labels before and 37,2% of the respondents stated that those warning labels attracted their attention to the media content. Secondly, questions searching about the relationship between media and sleep disorders were asked to the students as Cantor' (2002:4-5) study. More than half of the students (60,5%) stated that they saw TV programs in their dreams. Nearly half of the students (41,9%) had lost sleep due to TV programs. Almost a quarter of the respondents (25,6%) saw the computer games in their dreams (Table 5).

Table 5. Warning Labels, Sleep Disorders

	Yes		No		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Have you ever seen these labels before?	152	88,4	20	11,6	172	100
Do these labels increase your attention?	64	37,2	108	62,8	172	100
Have you ever seen in your dreams the TV programs that you have watched?	104	60,5	68	39,8	172	100
Have you ever lost sleep due to TV programs that you have watched?	72	41,9	100	58,1	172	100
Have you ever seen in your dreams the computer games that you have played?	44	25,6	128	74,4	172	100

In cross table analysis the following conclusions were reached:

- In order to understand the sexual difference between boys' and girls' spending time on TV and computer, cross-tables were interpreted in descriptive way. It was seen that girls' and boys' time in watching TV and social media usages did not show any significant difference. However, it could be said computer games seem much more popular among boys (67,7% of girls never play computer games, but this percentage is only 34,2 for boys.) Table showing maximum hours in playing computer games is summarized below (Table 6):

Table 6. Computer Playing and Sex

	Playing Computer Games						Total
	Never	1 hour	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5+ hrs	
Boys	34,2%	34,2%	18,4%	7,9%	1,3%	3,9%	100,0%
Girls	67,7%	27,1%	4,2%	1,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%

- When sex and tendency/acceptability of verbal/physical violence questions were analyzed with independent t test, a statistically significant relation was found. Boys answered more positively to the question "if someone hits me, I hit back" ( $p=0,006$ ;  $df=149,318$ ;  $t=2,730$ )
- With correlation (Pearson) analysis, relation between amount of witnessing violence on TV programs/computer games/social media and tendency/acceptability of physical /verbal violence were tested, and some statistically significant relations were found. Weak but statistically significant positive relations were found between the answers:
  - o "Amount of witnessing violence on TV" and "if someone hits me, I hit back" ( $r=0,242$ ;  $p=0,002<0,05$ )
  - o "Amount of witnessing violence on TV" and "I argue loudly with people who I disagree with" ( $r=0,260$ ;  $p=0,001<0,05$ )
  - o "Amount of witnessing violence on TV" and "I may hurt people who behave in an unacceptable manner" ( $r=0,302$ ;  $p=0,000<0,05$ )
  - o "Amount of witnessing violence on computer games" and "if someone hits me, I hit back" ( $r=0,238$ ;  $p=0,032<0,05$ )
  - o "Amount of witnessing violence on computer games" and "I may accept if someone throws something against someone who does mean things to him/her" ( $r=0,231$ ;  $p=0,038<0,05$ )

- “Amount of witnessing violence on computer games” and “He is right if someone shouted back at the person who shouted at him first” ( $r=0,291$ ;  $p=0,008<0,05$ ).
- Exposure to violence in media and sleep disorders were analyzed in a descriptive method and the following conclusions were made:
  - As the duration of TV watching increased, the children increasingly saw those programs in their dreams and increasingly lost their sleep.
  - It could be said that as the duration of playing computer games increased sleep loss also increased among students

## **Conclusion**

Developing technology provided easiness and brought many advantages to our lives such as it became easier to share and reach information easily. For some parents, it could be advantageous for them if children spend time on visual media while they were doing their daily routines. However, its possible negative sides should be taken into account. Apart from TV, computer and internet, with the new mobile technology, it became very easy to reach every type of contents including violence all day long. Taking into consideration that those high tech devices were being used widely and even addiction to those devices became another concern for many people, the possible threats needed to be concerned.

This study tried to understand the violent-contented media usage of primary and secondary school students and see its impacts on them. Some outstanding results could be summarized as follows:

- Computer games contained more violence when compared to TV and social media. Moreover, they were more popular among boys.
- In overall, accepting aggressive behaviors was not in high average; however, boys answered more positive answers to some “accepting aggressiveness questions” in a statistically significant level. Besides, statistically significant relations were found between witnessing violence on media and accepting some aggressive behaviors.
- Duration of exposure to TV and computer games had impacts on sleep disorders.
- Warning labels may attract attention of a non-ignorable quantity of students (37.2% of the respondents stated that warning labels drew their attention to the media content).

These were the results obtained from a private school which had a highly educated parent profile and had successful students in academic and social activities in national level. Another study can be performed in schools in rural areas where education level of parents and academic success was relatively low; and comparing those results could bring this study in a more comprehensive level. Moreover, study could be furthered with greater sample size. Media content could be extended to all sorts of media in order to perform a more extensive study. However with all those limitations of this study, the results showed that violence in media might cause aggressive behaviors, sleep disorders, and cause acceptance of violence as ordinary thing. Additionally warning labels might attract more attention to the content. Therefore some measurements should be taken by a comprehensive study involving researchers

in different disciplines (like pediatricians, psychologists, educators) and policy makers. They can come together to increase consciousness of people on possible negative impacts of media violence and take some actions against it. Measurements like increasing family supervision, encouraging media literacy education, decreasing media exposure and supporting alternative activities to prevent media addiction can be discussed. Moreover selecting media contents more attentively, decreasing violence contents, punishment of violence in media and not showing the violence as heroism in media content could also be taken into consideration for building policies for decreasing negative impacts of media violence.

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