

Children's Challenging Behaviors in an At-Risk Environment in Türkiye

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Abstract

The goals for the study were threefold. One was to screen for traumatic experiences and challenging behaviors in children who live in an at-risk, deprived environment in Eastern Türkiye. Using a projective technique, second goal was to explore how children in such an environment experienced trauma. Finally, the third aim of the study was to explore the relationship between traumatic experiences and challenging behaviors. The mixed technique, which uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods, was used in the present study. The traumatic screening inventory was distributed to the parents to screen for a range of traumatic events the children had experienced. The data about challenging behaviors of the children was obtained using the "Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire". Finally, children completed three unfinished short stories containing elements representing the risk factors of the region during one-on-one interviews. Ninety-five children living in an eastern Turkish city participated in the study, and the results showed that children's responses to story completion indicating high trauma were positively associated with challenging behaviors. Specifically, children's traumatic responses were associated with high levels of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems.

Keywords: Children, Challenging Behaviors, Trauma, Community Violence

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CHILDREN'S CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS IN AN AT-RISK ENVIRONMENT IN TÜRKIYE

Introduction

Although there are important advances in the fields of science and technology in today's world; despite the significant awareness in many areas such as human, child, environmental and animal rights, and many developments to increase the quality of life in general, unfortunately, even today, wars, various violence events, and terrorist attacks continue in different parts of the world. Moreover, although the prevention of all kinds of violence against children has been stated as a clear goal among the sustainable development plans, it is difficult to say that the circumstances are not even close (UNICEF, 2018). According to the "UNICEF Report, 2016-Assisting Refugee Children" 250 million children are living in countries which are affected by violence, various social, and political conflicts, and wars, and each year millions of children have been exposed to violence worldwide (David, 2009). Although domestic violence is the most common violence event, children are faced with violence in many social areas, and according to the report published by the World Health Organization in 2020, it is striking that one out of every two children in the world is affected by these acts of violence (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Seddighi et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of research published between 2010 and 2018 using the words "children, emergencies, violence, and disasters". At the end of their study, they found that the articles mostly deal with natural disasters, and the most important risk factors for violence against children are poverty, substance abuse, child labor, feeding and shelter problems, and a history of violence (Seddighi et al., 2021).

Researchers stated that the difficulties in accessing resources in areas where emergencies are experienced due to reasons such as conflict or disaster, as well as the disruption of efforts to protect children, as the reasons for the increase in violence, and stated that the ones that are the most responsible for violence against children are parents (Seddighi et al., 2021). When some disadvantages such as low socio-economic level and the high incidence of violence in the area come together, the probability of children being exposed to violence increases. In a study which was conducted with 123 early adolescents in a middle school which was in an urban district with common laborers in America, it was found that every one of three juveniles has witnessed domestic violence and the number of juveniles who have witnessed community violence is even bigger (Allwood & Bell, 2008). Similarly, studies conducted in Türkiye show that children are exposed to domestic violence both directly and as witnesses (Ustuner Top & Cam, 2020). Children and adolescents are more at the peril of having trauma related to community violence exposure at their homes, schools, and neighborhoods (Deane, 2014). Especially, a serious number of children are victims of violence, and a lot of children witness violence by seeing and hearing other people like strangers, family members or friends (Ulschmid, 2001).

Violence is a problem that has many negative effects on the physical and mental health of all subjects in the society and it hinders the social development of individuals, increases the feelings of hopelessness and pessimism in the society, also it threatens society as a whole (Çilitaş, 2019). Violence and the traumatic experiences that come with it cause significant disorders in the structure and functions of the brain, resulting in physical, mental, and neurological problems (Dye, 2018). In addition, exposure to violence has direct negative effects both in the period of exposure and in the long term, and also in almost every aspect of life,

leading to important health problems, stress and failure in education for children, adolescents and adults (Fry et al., 2017; Overstreet & Mazda, 2003; Dunlap, 2010). Violence can cause certain negative outcomes and some of these outcomes are main effects that include anxiety, depression, or PTSD symptoms. Then, these main effects cause derivative negative events by damaging children's development and affect children's social abilities (Margolin, et al., 2000; Rivara et al., 2019). In many researches, it has been found that traumas that were caused by various negativities experienced at an early age, induce depression (Blum et al., 2019; Humphreys et al., 2020; Rivara et al., 2019), eating disorders (Kong & Bernstein, 2009; Messman-Moore & Bhuptani, 2017; Monteleone, 2015), psychotic disorders (Fisher, 2010; van Winkel, 2013, as cited in Altun, Demir, Ünübol, 2019). Moreover, depression, decreased academic performance, PTSD, problems with peer relations are some of the possible negative effects of community violence exposure (Reyes, 2010). It was found that being exposed to community violence is linked to high levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Hardaway et al., 2012) and low levels of the ability of self-control and cooperation (Oravec et al., 2008). It has been pointed out that children who are exposed to great degree of community violence have conflicts in their relationships with peers (Lynch, 2003). Moreover, poor peer relations cause children who are exposed to violence to become more susceptible to adverse effects of community violence (Reyes, 2010). It was found that violence victimization and witnessing violence are related with ADHD symptoms (Lewis et al., 2015). Moreover, many problems based on violence, seen at an early age, revealed by research, and listed above, especially behavioral problems, have the power to reproduce numerous physical and mental problems that continue throughout life.

The population in Türkiye, especially on the East side of Türkiye, has been facing violence which can be considered as human induced disaster for a long time. Specifically, Türkiye has lived through comprehensive and severe conflict with terrorism for almost forty years, and this struggle costed Türkiye for more than \$ 100 billion and 35.000 people's lives since 1984 (Gok, 2010). Even if there have been times when violence has diminished over the years, the local population has nonetheless had to deal with bombs and armed battles (Drakos & Kutun, 2003). Mus is one of the provinces in the Eastern Anatolian Region, where the study's data collection took place. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (2022), the rate of urbanization, per capita income, industrialization, employment, and population growth in this city is lower than the national average. It is thus not surprising that Mus is ranked lower than Turkey's average when civilizational factors like the number of hospitals, doctors, schools, and classrooms per thousand people are considered (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2013). These facts about the area show that its residents have had to struggle with substandard living conditions, poverty, a lack of industry, unemployment, and a host of other detrimental social and economic issues. In addition, in Bulanık, Muş where the data collection took place, there were a number of major violence acts happened such as bomb blasts that had exploded in 2015, a school was set on fire, in 2014, a major soldier was murdered in his own car 2015, a car with bombs ready to explode was found in 2016. There were the sounds of fireworks and gunshots in many nights in Bulanık, Muş regularly.

Conceptual Framework

As in the Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), the environment has a crucial role in the development of children. Community violence which happens in the surrounding environment of the child influences the child directly within the microsystem as well as via the other systems. Thus, based on ecological theory, community violence would have significant impacts on children's social, emotional development and general well-being.

Cicchetti and Lynch (1993) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological/transactional viewpoint and suggested a model explaining how community violence affects children's development. In this model, the union of outcomes from culture, community, family, and prior development combine in order to impact developmental issues in children. Furthermore, contributing and offsetting factors come together with violence and exist at each level of the environment.

Internal and external behavioral problems are those that are observed in the mood and behavior of children in their early periods, causing problems that can be observed especially in their peer relationships, their relationships with their physical and social environments, and causing maladaptive behaviors and problems that can be directed against both themselves and the outside world, such as depression, anxiety, and aggression (Akcinar & Baydar, 2016; Metindoğan, 2022; Rothenberg et al., 2020). Internalizing behaviors show children's internal distress like emotional problems such as anxiety, depression (Metindoğan, 2022; Oldehinkel et al., 2004). In addition, peer problems, lack of anxiety, emotional symptoms are some of the behavioral problems that can be counted as internal behavior problems. In this study, internalizing behavioral problems refer to children's emotional symptoms and problems in managing their emotions. On the other hand, externalizing behaviors include externalizing problems like fighting with others are aggressive, rule breaking attitudes and ADHD (Oldehinkel et al., 2004). In this study, externalizing problems were conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, and anger aggression.

It is extremely essential to understand the outcomes of community violence exposure since it has negative effects on cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional functioning (Sharma, 2014). Exposure to violence is closely associated with many negative consequences, as well as internal and external behavioral problems in children. (Mckelvey et al., 2011). There is very few research about the relationship between community violence exposure and externalizing and internalizing problems (Deane, 2014).

Understanding the experiences of children exposed to violence has the potential to provide extremely important information to help professionals working in this field, as well as providing familial, social, and school-based support that can be offered to children who are exposed to violence to overcome their negative experiences (Grethel, 2004). Moreover, such research will be beneficial to develop better intervention programs for children living in similar conditions (Grethel, 2004). In addition, little is known about children's well-being experiencing disaster conditions in developing countries (Inka et al., 2008), thus, this present research is designed to shed light on the understanding children's experiences in developing countries where violence has been experienced for a prolonged period of time and even at a day-to-day basis.

In this study, the objective was to find out what kind of traumatic events children living in an at-risk region experienced in terms of community violence in Türkiye, as well as the levels of children's internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. In addition, with this research, it was aimed to examine how much children are affected by the traumatic events they have

experienced and the relationship between the rate of being affected by trauma and the challenging behaviors of children. It was expected that using a projective technique, the subjective traumatic experiences of the children could be better identified and the link between challenging behaviors and the level of trauma children have could be better captured.

Method

Design of the Study

In this research, a mixed research technique in which qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied together was used. In the quantitative part of the study, the traumatic events that children were exposed to were assessed by the Trauma Screening Inventory filled by the families of the children, and the behavioral problems of the children were assessed by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire distributed to the teachers. In the qualitative part of the study, the children were interviewed face to face by the researcher, and the children completed 3 unfinished stories. These stories which were completed by the children were analyzed and the level of children's exposure to trauma was found.

Participants

The sample for this study included children aged between four and eight years old, who live in Bulanık, Muş. There were five schools in Bulanık which was the small part of Muş province. Three schools' administration were eager to take part in this study. Consent forms were distributed to all the parents who have children between the age of 4 and 8 years old. As it was a convenient sampling, the children whose parents volunteered to give consent participated in the study. There were fifty (52.6 %) girls and forty-five (47.4 %) boys, and 24 (25.3 %) children were eight years old, 17 (17.9 %) children were seven years old, 36 (37.9 %) children were six years old, and 18 (18.9 %) children were five years old in current study.

According to the income rates of the parents two of them were very poor, five (5.3 %) of them were poor, sixteen (16.8 %) of them were average, fifty-five (57.9 %) of them were good and eight (8.4 %) of them were very good. Thirty-three of the fathers (34.7 %) had graduated from high schools, twenty-nine of the fathers (30.5 %) had graduated from university, five of the fathers (5.3 %) had graduated from middle school, and ten of the fathers (10.5 %) had graduated from primary school. Two of the fathers were disabled, and one of the fathers were not working, one of the fathers did not have a regular job. Five of the fathers were military officer (one of them was lieutenant), five of the fathers were police officer (one of them captain), three of the fathers were doctors (specialist), nine of the parents were teachers, two of the fathers were judge, eight of the fathers were government employee, one of the fathers were principal and twenty-four of the fathers (25.3 %) were tradesman in the study. The education level of the mothers is different from the fathers. Eleven of the mothers did not know how to read and write, twenty-eight of the mothers had graduated from primary school, three of the mothers had graduated from middle school, twenty-nine of the mothers had graduated from high school and eleven of the mothers had graduated from university. Sixty-five of the children (68.4 %) were born in Muş and twenty-four of the children (25.3 %) were born outside of Muş.

Instruments

Quantitative measures

Three different quantitative measurement tools were used in the research, these are the Demographic Information Form which was developed by the researchers that included questions such as family education, socio-economic status, the Trauma Screening Inventory, and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The Trauma Screening Inventory, which consists of 25 “Yes-No” questions developed by Ippen et al. in 2002 and simplified and adapted by researchers. The parents of the children were asked to fill out this questionnaire in which they were asked whether their children had been exposed to a large variety of violent events. The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a tool which was developed by Goodman has twenty-five items divided into five scales. Each of the 25 items is rated as being Not true (0), Somewhat true (1), or Certainly true (2). The Turkish adaptation, validity, and reliability of the SDQ were made by Guvenir, Ozbek, Baykara, Arkar, Şentürk, İncekaş (2008). The Emotional Symptoms subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .75$), the Conduct Problems subscale consisted of 5 items and the Cronbach Alpha for the 3 items was .73, the Hyperactivity subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .69$), the Peer Problems subscale consisted of 4 items ($\alpha = .66$), the Prosocial competence subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .83$). The emotional symptoms score of children were normally distributed, with skewness of 1.18 ($SE = 0.29$) and kurtosis of 0.19, ($SE = 0.57$). The conduct problems score of children were normally distributed after log transformation, with skewness of 1.08 ($SE = 0.25$) and kurtosis of -0.19, ($SE = 0.50$). The hyperactivity score of children were normally distributed, with skewness of 0.95 ($SE = 0.29$) and kurtosis of 0.77, ($SE = 0.57$). The peer problems score of children were normally distributed after log transformation, with skewness of 1.17 ($SE = 0.25$) and kurtosis of -0.12, ($SE = 0.50$). The prosocial competence score of children were normally distributed, with skewness of -1.25 ($SE = 0.29$) and kurtosis of 0.44, ($SE = 0.57$).

Projective Measure

Story completion was a projective technique used to examine the effects of trauma exposure. How much children were affected by community violence exposure was measured with incomplete stories. Three incomplete stories used in another study in order to identify the effects of the 1999 Turkish earthquake on young children (Oncu and Metindogan, 2010) in this study. Although the short and incomplete stories were originally designed to examine the effects of an earthquake, words and descriptions used in the stories were similar to violence exposure. These themes were to remind children of the incidents and feelings which are related to community violence exposure. For instance, being scared, fear of being hurt, and desperation because of inexpugnable negative events such as an awful storm, big train coming towards or a very large vehicle approaching. None of the stories explicitly contained violence or harm and children were supposed to complete the stories based on their free associations. Animals, and plants were used in the stories as main characters and these were a cat, an ant, a tree. Each story was written in a language appropriate for children who were between the ages four and eight. Each child was separately interviewed. After the stories were presented to the children, follow up questions were asked to them to explore children’s responses to what happened to the main character, how the story ended and what the main character should do while the event was happening.

Analysis of the Data

For the quantitative part of the study, the data that was obtained from the measurement tools were transferred to the SPSS 21.0 package program and correlations and independent t-tests were used for the analysis.

Data obtained from the Story Completion Task were analyzed using content analysis and various themes and codes were revealed. The categories and codes obtained from the qualitative data were combined with the quantitative part of the research and scored for analysis. A score was obtained from each story according to the positive or negative completion of the stories by the children. For example, if the child answered very negatively to all 4 questions about the tree story (such as the tree died, the tree died, the tree cut off), the trauma score was 2 for the tree story, if it started slightly negative (the branches of the tree broke, then healed, it was fine) ended the story in a positive way, the trauma score was 1, if he gave very positive answers to all questions (such as no damage to the tree, the tree lived very happily), the trauma score was 0. However, since only 4 children had a trauma score of 0, they were divided into 2 groups as those who were most affected by the trauma and those who were less affected by the trauma. In order to increase the reliability of the study, the coding process of the qualitative data was carried out by the researchers independently at first. In this study, the intercoder reliability was 93.7 % initially. After the first round of independent coding was complete, the researchers came together and reviewed the coding sheets and children’s responses to reach a consensus to finalize coding children’s responses.

Findings

1. Findings about community violence exposure and traumatic events

One of the purposes of this study to find out what kind of traumatic incidents those children had experienced. In order to get that the Trauma Screening Inventory was distributed to parents of the children. The traumatic experiences children experienced reported by parents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The Traumatic Incidents that Children Had Experienced

Traumatic Incidents	N	%
See attacks that were associated with terrorism on television	60	63.2
Lost someone close in their family	24	25.3
Serious life-threatening accidents	10	10.5
Attacked by a dog or other animal	9	9.5
See or hear outside of the family fighting, hitting, pushing, and attacking each other	8	8.4
Live other stressful situations	7	7.4
See or hear about people in their family physically fighting, hitting, slapping, kicking or pushing each other or using gun, knife or any other weapon.	5	5.3
Directly exposed to war, armed conflict or terrorism.	4	4.2
Repeatedly told s/he was no good, yelled at in a scary way, or had someone threaten to abandon, leave or send him/her away.	4	4.2

See or hear people in their family threaten to harm seriously each other.	3	3.2
Victimized by physical assault such as hitting, getting throttled, and biting.	2	2.1
Mugged or witnessed someone close to them were being mugged.	1	1.1

As seen in the Table 1, many children have experienced various serious traumatic events. However, it should be kept in mind that many families may not have reported all those negative events children experienced openly as evidenced by fewer parental agreements to children being exposed to war, armed conflict and terrorism.

2. The Findings about Children’s Internalizing and Externalizing Problem Behavior Scores

Another research question was to explore the levels of children's internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. Reports obtained from teachers included children’s emotional symptoms and conduct problems as internal behavior problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems as external behavior problems. The internalizing and externalizing challenging behaviors scores of children are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Children’s Internalizing and Externalizing Problem Behavior Scores

	n	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{x}	SD
Emotional Symptoms	95	0	8	1.27	1.89
Conduct Problems	94	0	6	0.93	1.38
Hyperactivity	95	0	9	2.81	2.35
Peer Problems	92	0	6	1.48	1.42
Total SDQ Score	91	0	21	6.31	4.64

In Table 2, it can be seen that the average scores of hyperactivity and peer problems are higher than other behavioral problems that are indicators of internalizing challenging behaviors.

3. The Findings about How much Children Affected from Trauma

Considering that trauma screening measures completed by parents may not represent children’s traumatic experiences truly, another purpose of the study was to reach children directly to explore how much trauma affected children based on their subjective experiences. After going through several steps of coding, children’s answers to the story completion task were eventually divided into 2 groups as those who were most affected by the trauma and those who were less affected by the trauma. Examples of children's answers and their categories are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
The Categorization of Children’s Answers

Category	Main Idea	Children’s Answers
Very Negative	Death, severe harm, extreme fear,	the roots of tree fell down, the tree got drown, the tree was broken, the tree was cut off, the ant was ran over, the ant was dead, the vehicle destroyed the forest/home of the ant, the ant got wet and the ant was afraid too much, the kitten was dead, the train ran over the kitten/home of the kitten, the kitten fell from window
Negative	Fear, harm, desperation, sadness,	One of the branches of the tree was broken, the tree was fainted, the ant was afraid of, the ant was sad, the home of the ant was damaged, the ant got wet, the vehicle tried to catch the ant, the kitten could not see, nobody could not do anything, everywhere was in the dark,
Positive	The end of the dangerous situations, not getting harm, going somewhere safe	The storm was over, the roots of the tree did not come off, the tree stayed its own place safely, the vehicle stopped splashing water, the and moved to another place, the took all its food and went somewhere else, the vehicle went away, the train stopped, the lights came back, nothing bad happened, the train went far away from the kitten, the kitten did not die.
Very Positive	Happy ending, recovery, strength, asking and getting help from others	The tree/ant/kitten lived happily ever after, the tree survived the storm, other people helped the tree, the ant and the kitten got well, the ant called all its friend, the ant talked with the driver of the vehicle and told him not to make noise, the ant became a hero, the kitten tried to fix the electricity, the kitten was good, the /ant/kitten fixed the broken things.

Children were divided into two categories based on their answers to the Story Completion Task. For instance, if a child gave all the negative answers in the category of very negative as in the Table 3, the child would be in the first group which means that child affected trauma more. In the second category, the child gave a negative answer for the first question or the second question, but the child ended the story positively. For example, the child said the main character in the story was upset or afraid too much for answers of first and second question but completed the story saying the main character lived happily lived ever after. Thus, when the children are considered in terms of those who ended the story negatively or positively were examined that it was found that 47.4% of the children who gave positive answers and 50.5% of the children gave negative answers for the stories.

4. Findings about the Relation between Children’s Trauma level and Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Another question of the study was whether there was a significant difference between the challenging behaviors of children who were more negatively affected by trauma and those who were not. For this analysis, children’s responses to the story completion task and teacher reports of challenging behaviors were explored using independent sample t-test. The results and mean scores of children’s challenging behaviors are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
The Relation between Children’s Trauma Level and Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Challenging Behaviors	Trauma Level	N	\bar{x}	Sd	T	P
Emotional Symptoms	High	48	1.47	2.18	-1.22	0.05**
	Low	45	1.00	1.50		
Conduct Problems	High	48	1.14	1.60	-1.51	0.01**
	Low	45	0.71	1.12		
Hyperactivity	High	48	3.35	2.57	-2.27	0.01**
	Low	45	2.26	1.98		
Peer Problems	High	48	0.87	1.20	-2.23	0.00**
	Low	45	0.38	0.81		

** $p < 0.05$

Results indicated that behavioral problems scores of children in all 4 domains were higher for children who showed more trauma inflicted responses to story completion suggesting that high trauma group had higher levels of emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems and conduct problems.

Discussion

Detecting Community Violence Related Trauma Effects on Children with Using Projective Techniques

In this study, the challenging behaviors of children who live in an-at risk environment were investigated using projective techniques. Also, the relationship between traumatic experiences and challenging behaviors was studied. Experiencing trauma has long lasting effects on children influencing their social, emotional, academic lives as well as their mental and physical health (Maynard et al., 2019). However, trauma and its effects on people, especially on children are not easy to detect. Children who experience trauma may act out and show challenging behaviors, both internalizing and externalizing as a symptom and outcome especially at school settings (Perfect et al., 2016). In this study we used three different types of data sources which were parents’ report about what kinds of traumatic incidents that their children had,

teachers' report about children's challenging behaviors and children's answers to the story completion tasks. Moreover, as we have seen in our findings that parent reports of trauma screening inventory resulted in with much fewer traumatic experiences listed and there was no association between number of traumatic experiences children had and their challenging behaviors. However, children's responses to story completion task showed that while some children responded more negatively to the story, others still had more positive happy ending story lines and endings. Furthermore, after placing children in high and low trauma groups, we found that high trauma groups of children showed both internalizing and externalizing challenging behaviors.

Trauma screening inventories are widely used to explore types and numbers of traumatic experiences children experienced. However, as we have seen in our results, only a handful of parents had reported that children were exposed to war, armed conflict and terrorism, even though not long time before the data were collected Kobani events had taken place where violence was witnessed and experienced in the entire region. Parents may not even count events in their communities where children are only witnesses of events as traumatic experiences. Although reporting traumatic experiences children experienced may not be easy for parents and they may not open up to researchers, we would at least expect to see more reports of children witnessing violence, when there was a recent armed conflict and bombings in the community they live in (See Kobani protests, Coşkun, 2015).

The Negative Effects of Trauma on Children

The most remarkable result of the study was to find significant differences in children's developmental outcomes based on story completion. Specifically, the present study showed that children who were affected more negatively by trauma had higher emotional symptoms scores, conduct problem scores, hyperactivity scores, peer problems scores. These results were supported the findings in other studies in the literature (Neal, 2003; Hardaway, et al., 2012; Mckelvey, et al., 2011; Wojciechowski, 2008; Reyes, 2010; Fowler, et al., 2009, Lynch, 2003; Georgsson, et al., 2011).

When the total score of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire were examined, it was found that 24 children were close to border line, 13 children were in the border line and 3 of the children were above normal scores and, totally there were 41 children who had almost severe levels of challenging behaviors. These numbers were also consistent with the number of the children who had higher trauma scores (48 children) and lower trauma scores (45 children) explored by the story completion task.

The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Community Violence

Living in deprived and at-risk communities where there is violence, there is also poverty, lack of education and community resources such as hospitals and schools and all these challenges combined together create many difficulties in children's development. Like many small provinces in Eastern Türkiye, like Bulanık, Muş, where the present study was conducted in, has adverse life circumstances. Since the environment has a crucial role in the development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is immensely crucial to investigate children's developmental outcomes in at-risk communities and environments. The present study aimed to identify and

describe how young children who live in Türkiye, in areas where there is community violence are influenced by such living conditions. Thus, results of this study are important providing insight for how children who do not receive extra services for them rather than attending schools and presenting challenging behaviors and perhaps seen as potential outcasts or drop-outs in the future may be suffering from trauma. With this new insight, intervention programs provided for children with challenging behaviors may consider trauma informed approaches as part of their curricula.

High and low trauma groups identified based on story completion task seemed to be compatible with teacher reports on challenging behaviors. It appears that results support the principle that “development should be considered as a whole”. If a child has been adversely affected by trauma, it means that the child may have many problems in various developmental areas as evidenced in the present study. Therefore, it is crucial that child developmental outcomes need to be explored with caution and factors leading to such problematic outcomes need to be explored at the community, family, schools and individual levels and help should also be provided within various settings. While one phenomenon may be seen as an outcome, in this case challenging behaviors, it may very well be a symptom of a much major risk factor residing in children’s lives in the heart of community they live in.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

One of the limitations of the study was the small sample size. A larger sample that consists of children from different parts of the region may give more generalized results. Moreover, since local people do not know the researcher, it is possible that some of the parents might have had trust issues and reported the traumatic experiences of the children superficially and to not give accurate accounts. Because most violent acts were terror related incidents in the region, the locals might also fear to be labeled based on their reports. Future research that uses more qualitative and ethnographic methods that have people from the region work as researchers could be beneficial to be able to get more accurate and detailed experiences of the children and their parents living in violence. Additionally, researchers can use projective techniques when the parents of the children were not being cooperative or accurate. The results of this study could be used while developing intervention programs in order to overcome the negative effects of living in an at-risk community. Also, the themes that emerged in the story completion task might be helpful for the researcher and policy makers what children feel, go through, and are afraid of. Moreover, the intervention programs can target those feelings.

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