

## Turkish Secondary School Students' Perceptions of Violence and Crime, and the Relationship between Their Perceptions and Demographics

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**Abstract:** Violence in schools in Turkey shows an enormous increase in recent years. As it is becoming a serious problem in secondary schools, many violence cases are lasting in courts. In the current study, the aim is to examine and understand how secondary school students perceive violence and crime in schools. The study also aims to see if there is any relation between demographics and perceptions of students. In the current study, this relation is examined and understood through using descriptive statistics, such as mean and frequency analysis. The sample group of the study is composed of secondary students who live in different regions throughout the city, Kutahya. The results of the study show that students, who come from families with low socio-economic status (SES), perceive violence and crime differently than students, who come from families with middle or high socio-economic status

**Key words:** Violence, Secondary School,

### INTRODUCTION

Violence is one of the serious problems in many cultures. Although people seek for tolerance, peace and happiness in their lives, relationships among people are getting worse in each year. Violence, which is increasing each year, is defined as forcing somebody to do something. It is also defined as hurting somebody physically (Aral, 1997). Walker, Colvin and Ramsey (2002) state that violence is an aggressive behavior, which hurts emotionally or physically (Williams, Myers, 2004). Anderson and Bushman (2002) indicate that violence is not only an aggressive behavior, but also a directed brutal act. Reasons for violence are usually found as physical, psychological or ignorance indeed (Krug et al., 2002). On the other hand, according to Fromm (1999), the reason for violence is just a conflict that a person experiences within himself/herself.

In general, schooling aims to teach students life skills and knowledge, and to help them to gain good characteristics as a person. However, school has become a place where violence is occurring and growing among young people. As those young people experience violence in schools, they might grow misconceptions or a negative life perspective. Violence in school might not last in school but continue outside and become a part of daily life.

Violence in school might cause new problems in schools. Many students do not know how to solve problems in socially accepted ways, so they feel anxious and act aggressively. Such situation means that students will face hidden obstacles instead of solving their own problems in a supported way (Ataç, 1995, Stein, 1997, Anderson, Bushman, 2002). Stanley states that having a desire to control others, accusing others for something, being selfish, feeling poor are some of the characteristics

of violent people. Such kind of characteristics start growing in early ages and it is not known if intervention in later ages works well (Yavuzer, 1993, Morgan, 1993).

Violence among students causes a decrease in school success, miscommunication and disrespectful behaviors (Ellickson, Saner, 1996, Herrenkohl et al.; 2000, Dahlberg, Potter, 2001, Cillessen, 2002).

Students who are bullied by other students in school usually become aggressive and hurt himself/herself and/or others. Those violent students are usually not liked by other students and they do not get along with other students. They tend to fight with others and do not want to accept older people as an authority. As they get punished frequently because of their violent behaviors, punishment does not affect them any more. They act aggressively as they want, and they stop acting aggressively after they get satisfied. However, being bullied by other students is not the only reason for them to be violent. Some other characteristics of them are as follows: Being oppressed, being punished, having low self-esteem, experiencing ignorance, having problems at home, lacking of rules, and lacking of a role model. If students experience some of those, they may tend to use them as a reason to be violent. In terms of expressing himself/herself, students- especially young teenagers- tend to identify themselves with their own behaviors and attitudes. As it is a kind of conditional reflex, negative experiences cause negative behaviors. In other words, students start solving their problems by using familiar methods, such as fighting. (Yavuz, 1994).

Violence in school is a kind of aggressive act and crime that inhibits students' healthy development and education, and it creates a negative atmosphere in school (Furlong, Morrison, 2002). If student develops an idea that s/he cannot resolve his/her problem any

more, the problem might get worse. As the student does not carry any hope in terms of resolving the problem, new problems, such as psychological problems, might occur. Accordingly, the student might gain low self-esteem and bad self-respect, and feel poor and weak. Having no solutions to problems in schools might give students an idea that they do not have a control on their lives. Violence along with oppression, ignorance, and bad communication might affect students negatively and might have even a traumatic effect on them ([www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/116199.asp](http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/116199.asp)). On the other hand, similar situation might have a different effect on another student. For example, while many students react aggressively when they are bullied, other students might feel anxious, afraid, and depressed, develop low self-esteem and withdraw completely. Students, who are oppressed in early ages, might behave aggressively in later ages. (Onursal, Sayıata, 2002)

Violence, which is a social act, might turn into a crime and crime needs punishment. If crime does not result with punishment, whole society might be affected negatively (Yücel, 2003, Görmez, 1991). Social sciences define “crime” as an act which is shaped by cultural and social factors (Özsever, 1979) and separates a person from the rest of the society. According to law, crime is an act which requires punishment (Yavuzer, 1998). Crime exists in any society (Uluğtekin, 1985). Society is a place where people need each other to satisfy their needs and a place where people become violent toward each other and act crime as well. There might be many factors in societies that trigger violence or even force people to act crime (Erkan et al., 2002).

There are two important concepts related to violence. One of them is violence and unknown crime psychology (Kök et al., 1993, Özek, 1974). Şemin (1984) states that students at puberty ages (between 13-21 year old) experience a difficult time and conflict within themselves. Those teenagers need to gain prestige and status in the society. That is possible only if there is welfare and peace in the society. Accordingly, there is a strong relationship between the situation of the society and healthy development of teenagers (Zulliger, 1991, Erkan et al., 2002, Dönmezer, 1974).

It is known that law and psycho-educational and demographic (social, cultural, and environmental) rules determine if an act is a crime. The main difference between a crime which is happened during adolescence years and a crime which is happened at later ages is that teenagers are in a stage of growing personality. As their personality is not fully developed yet, teenagers are in a stage of obscureness. In addition to this obscure situation, negative demographic factors might lead young teenagers to behave inappropriately (Seber, 2002, Zeytinoğlu, Kozcu, 1987, Tüzün, 1995, Aykaç, 1993). Teenagers who come from low socio-economic and socio-cultural environments might develop hate towards other people. They tend to exclude others, who do not come from such environment. Such teenagers have a tendency for violence and to act crime. One of the intervention techniques to stop them from being violent is providing them an opportunity to satisfy themselves in legal ways. For example, sports is one of the best

ways for children and teenagers to spend their energy and satisfy themselves. (Ataç, 1995, Doğanay, 1994, Özgüç, Tümertekin, 2000, Aliağaoğlu, Alaeddinoğlu, 2005).

In the current study, the city of Kutahya is chosen to examine secondary school students’ perceptions of violence and crime, and the relationship between their demographics and their perceptions.

### Method

In the current study, survey method is utilized. The subject group was the students who attend secondary schools in the centre of Kutahya in 2007-2008. The subject group, who came from different environments, was interviewed and asked to complete a survey which is composed of questions about violence and crime. The questions focused on students’ perspectives of crime and violence, and the results are interpreted accordingly. The study is limited with study objectives, study problems, and the data, which is basically what students declared. The names and the identities of the subjects are disguised.

In order to identify secondary school students’ perspectives of crime and violence, the researchers collected data by utilizing the survey method, examined the data, looked for patterns, and interpreted the data from a macro point of view. In the current study, the researchers conducted descriptive statistical analysis.

### Findings

As seen in Table 1, 33,8 percent of students stated that TV heroes are the reasons for violence in schools. As seen in Table 2, 31 female students stated that it is TV show programs whereas 45 male students stated that it is TV heroes (see also Figures 1 & 2). When the data is examined in terms of the demographic factors (see Table 1), it is found that 20 percent of students, who maintain low socio-economic status (SES), stated that TV heroes are the reasons for violence in schools.

As seen in Table 3, 81,1 percent of students stated that they witnessed violence occurrences in their schools. Moreover, 51 percent of total students, who has low SES, indicated that they witnessed violence occurrences in their schools. It is followed by 20,2 percent of total students, who has middle SES, and 10,1 percent of total students, who has high SES.

As seen in Table 4, 55,4 percent of total students rated “Hitting and punching” as a violent act. Both female and male students rated “Hitting/ punching” high as a violent act (see Table 5). Moreover, the researchers found that 30,4 percent of total students, who has low SES, and 19 percent of total students, who has low-mid SES rated “Hitting/ punching” a violent act.

As seen in Table 6, it is found that 85,1 percent of students do not know what legal procedures to

**Table 1.** From students' perspectives the variables that encourage violence

	Fr	Percent	Low socio-economic status		Middle socio-economic status		High socio-economic status	
TV heroes	50	33,8	29	20,0	18	12,1	3	2,0
TV show programs	39	26,4	23	16,0	10	6,8	6	4,1
Computer games	31	20,9	7	4,7	11	7,4	13	8,8
TV news	9	6,1	2	1,4	4	2,7	3	2,0
Newspaper & Journal	19	12,8	2	1,4	9	6,1	8	5,4
Total	148	100,0						

**Table 2.** From students' perspectives the variables that encourage violence

		TV Heroes	TV show programs	Computer games	TV news	Newspaper & Journal	Total
Sex	Female	5	31	12	9	17	74
	Male	45	8	19	0	2	74
	Total	50	39	31	9	19	148

**Table 3.** Students witnessing violence cases in schools

		Frequency	Percent	Low SES		Mid SES		High SES	
Valid	Yes	120	81,1	75	51	30	20,2	15	10,1
	No	28	18,9	8	5,4	7	4,7	13	8,8
	Total	148	100						

**Table 4.** Students' perspectives of violence

		Fr	Percent	Low SES		Low-Mid SES		Mid- High SES	
Valid	Aggressive behavior	24	16,2	14	9,5	8	5,4	2	1,4
	Swearing/ being rude	18	12,2	9	6,1	5	3,4	4	2,7
	Hurting physically	23	15,5	11	7,4	9	6,1	3	2,2
	Hitting/ punching	82	55,4	45	30,4	28	19	9	6,1
	Hand jokes (eg, touching inappropriately)	1	,7	-	-	-		1	0,6
	Total	148	100,0						

follow after acting a crime. In terms of demographic factors, only 7,4 percent of total students, who has mid-high SES, and 1,4 percent of total students, who has low SES, know what procedures to follow. On the other hand, 60,1 percent of total students, who has low SES, stated that they do not know what procedures to follow in case of acting a crime.

As seen in Table 7, while 67,6 percent of students stated that nobody gave them any information

about crime in school, 4,7 percent of students stated that they got information from school and 12,2 of

students stated that they gained information from their friends. In terms of demographic status analysis, it is found that 52 percent of total students, who come from low SES environment, stated that they are not informed about crime in school.

As seen in Table 8, 90,5 percent of students stated that they do not know the results of acting crime in school. 67,6 percent of total students, who stated that they are not informed of results of acting crime in school, has low SES.

**Table 5.** Students' perspectives of violence

		Violence					Total
		Aggressive behavior	Swearing/ being rude	Hurting physically	Hitting/ punching	Hand jokes	
SEX	Female	16	17	15	25	1	74
	Male	8	1	8	57	0	74
	Total	24	18	23	82	1	148

**Table 6.** Students' knowledge level of legal procedures (law) of acting crime ledge of students

		Frequency	Percent	Low SES		Low-Mid SES		Mid-High SES	
Valid	Yes	22	14,9	2	1,4	9	6,1	11	7,4
	No	126	85,1	89	60,1	18	12,2	19	12,3
	Total	148	100,0						

**Table 7.** Students' knowledge of crime

		Frequency	Percent	Low SES		Low-mid SES		Mid- high SES	
Valid	School	7	4,7	1	0,6	5	3,4	1	0,6
	Family	12	8,1	3	2,2	5	3,4	4	2,7
	Friends	18	12,2	8	5,4	5	3,4	5	3,4
	Literature	11	7,4	2	1,4	5	3,4	4	2,7
	Nobody	100	67,6	77	52	20	1,4	3	2,2
	Total	148	100,0						

**Table 8.** Students' knowledge of acting crime and related results

		Frequency	Percent	Low SES		Low-mid SES		Mid-High SES	
Valid	Yes	14	9,5	2	1,4	6	4,1	6	4,1
	No	134	90,5	100	67,6	20	15	14	9,5
	Total	148	100						

## RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result, it is found that there is not a big difference between the perspectives of female and male students. They both think that violence is hurting somebody physically. On the other hand, male students think that TV heroes are the main reasons for violence in school whereas female students think that TV show programs are the main reasons for violence occurrences in schools. Moreover, most of the students indicate that they witnessed violence events in school. Furthermore, many students state that they do not know about the legal procedures that people need to follow after acting/experiencing a crime. They also indicate that they are not informed about crime in school. The variables in the study are also examined in terms of the demographic backgrounds of students. It is found that demographic differences make a difference in students' perspectives of violence and crime. It is seen that students who come from low SES environments hold a different perspective than students who come from other environments (e.g., mid SES or high SES).

Home is the first place and school is the second

place where students get socialized. As an education institution, school should be a place where no violence act or crime exists. (Dubonoski, Inaba ve Gerkewicz, 1998). In order to stop violence in society, it is necessary to stop violence in the center of education institutions, namely in schools.

Students start school with a not fully developed personality, and school becomes an important place where their social and emotional skills get developed. Accordingly, the gained skills and emotion management skills might cause conflict and violence among students. Education should focus on the process of violence occurrences instead of products/results of violence. School should be a place where students gain life skills, such as good communication skills, problem solving skills, decision making and problem analyzing skills.

The findings from the current study suggest that students' perspectives of violence and crime should be brought beyond the idea of hurting someone physically. They should be taught that violence might affect people psychologically as well. Moreover, they should be informed about violence and crime in school and its negative effects. Intervention and prevention programs should be developed to stop violence in schools,

reinforce empathy among students, and to help them maintain good relationships with each other. Students should be informed that violence can be crime and result in courts; a person who acts crime might hurt himself/herself or others. When needed, students should be encouraged to get professional help and attend individual or group therapy sessions. Further research can be conducted to identify violence and crime problems in schools and contact with families of students who are involved with violence in schools, so intervention strategies can be developed to stop and control negative occurrences in schools.

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ISSN: 1306 3065