

INVESTIGATING SENSITIVITY OF FATHERS TOWARDS VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

AIMS: The study was carried out for determining fathers' sensitivity towards violence against children.

METHODS: The study in descriptive quality was carried out with 534 fathers with children aged 0-18 between November and December 2020. The "Descriptive Question Form" and "Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale" were used to collect the data. The data were collected online from fathers. Percentage, average, independent T-test, Mann-Whitney U-test and multiple regression analysis were used to interpret the data.

RESULTS: The mean age of the fathers participating in the study was 36.95±6.66, 61.6% had a university degree or higher, 67.2% had an income equal to their expenses, 71.7% lived in the city center, 84.6% had a nuclear family, and 38.8% It was found that ten had only one child. It was determined that 51.1% of the fathers had witnessed violence before, 70.2% had not been exposed to violence before,

55.6% did not smoke, 86.9% did not use alcohol, and 57.9% perceived their family relations as normal. In the study, it was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables of educational status, employment status, fathers' place of residence and family type, and the mean scores of the Susceptibility to Violence Against Child Scale ($p<0.05$). It was determined that 53.2% of the fathers showed moderate sensitivity to violence and the mean score of the Susceptibility to Violence Against Child Scale was 43.70±5.07. It was determined that 53.2% of the fathers were sensitive towards moderate violence and the average score of the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale was 43.70±5.07.

CONCLUSIONS: As a result of the study, it was determined that fathers showed moderate sensitivity to violence against children, education status, employment status, place of residence of fathers and family type were effective variables on the level of sensitivity to violence against children.

KEYWORDS: father, child, nursing, violence, violence sensitivity

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INTRODUCTION

In terms of frequency and impact, violence and exposure to violence are among the most serious forms of victimization in the context of the immediate family [1]. Violence includes overwhelming behaviors of an individual over another aiming to be strong or dominant [2]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “causing or the possibility of causing injury, death and psychological harm to individuals as result of committing intentional physical force or power to another person as a threat or reality” [3]. The fact of violence is a multidimensional concept that includes all kinds of behaviors and attitudes that result or possible to result in physical, psychological, social, economic or sexual harm or suffering from individuals, sometimes personally and sometimes from the social environment [4]. When considering violence, a classification is made according to the groups that are exposed to and experiencing violence. According to this classification, violence is classified as against women, children, elderly, disabled, self-mutilative, siblings, peers, dating, refugee, etc. [5].

Violence against children can be defined as any kinds of behaviors and attitudes from the immediate or distant surrounding of children that are committed as physically, emotionally, sexually, economically and cyber, and created destructive effects upon the development of children [6,7]. Children can be exposed to physical, sexual, verbal, relational and psychological violence especially at home and school where they should be safest, in their workplaces and environments, in institutions where they receive care, and in juvenile detention centers, and this negatively affects their development [8,9]. The majority of violence against children stems from the people immediate to children, namely parents, teachers, schoolmates, employers and babysitters [10,11]. The prevalence of violence against children is high in our country as well as all over the world. In a study carried out in our country in 2013 interviewing with 4100 parents, the participants have been asked how they behave to “teach the child what is right” and how they approach the situation “if the child behaves beyond their tolerance limits”. As result of the interviews, it has been noticed that 74% of the children have been subjected to at least one form of violence (physical or emotional) in the last 12 months, 23% of the parents have committed “mild” physical

violence (slapping, throwing something on the child, pushing, shaking, pulling hair/ear) [12]. According to the Global Status Report related to the prevention of violence against children last year, 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 have been exposed to violence, 300 million children between the ages of 2 and 4 have been subjected to emotional or physical violence by their parents or caregivers, and one out of every four children below 5 witnesses the violence parents commit to each other [13].

With the effect of the fact that the traces of the patriarchal family structure have continued even today, fathers have the position of implementing the preventive and punitive decisions at home. This tendency, after a while, enables fathers to become the judge of the house and the individual who runs the penal system. The fathers who play this role at home cannot communicate with their children as it should be, and the negative consequences of this unhealthy communication negatively affect the communication between father-child and father-other family members [14]. According to Social Learning Theory, fathers are a critical role model in the lives of their children [15]. While children learn sexual identity which has an important place in their developmental period, especially the boys who learn sexual roles from their fathers socialize unhealthily learning unhealthy communication and, the girls who learn the unhealthy communication with his father perceiving as normal will prepare the base for future generations to continue these behavioral patterns adopting this extremely unhealthy form of communication [14].

Violence that appears in various different ways is a phenomenon that is frequently encountered both in individual and social dimensions. The perception of violence as a way of discipline in our country and its being considered as legitimate both in the family and public life causes violence both to be repeated and hidden [16]. The family is of great importance both for the development of the children’s personality and for their mental and physical health. Father, as one of the family members, is a childhood role model and an important person for many concepts. Therefore, this study was carried out descriptively in order to determine the sensitivity of fathers who shape the future life of children towards violence against children.

METHODS

Type of Research

The research was conducted as a descriptive and cross-sectional study.

Time and Place of the Research

The research was carried out in seven regions of Turkey, which were reached via electronic media, between November and December 2020.

Sample and Population of the Research

The population of this study included fathers who had children between the ages of 0-18 in Turkey at the time when the research was carried out. The sample included fathers who lived with their children, were literate, had internet access, and were volunteer to participate into the study. The “G.Power 3.1.9.2” software was used to determine the sample size in the study. In the literature review, the total sample size was calculated to be $n=370$ using the G-POWER software with 0.3760 effect size, 95% power and 0.05 margin of error depending upon the percentage measurement values related to the methods to be studied [17]. It was determined that 534 data collected with the power analysis were at adequate size.

Data Collection Tools

In the study, the Question Form and the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale were used as data collection tools.

Question Form: In this form, the fathers’ age, employment status, educational status, family type, income perception, residential area, region of residence, number of children, witnessing of violence and their exposure to violence were questioned

Sensitivity to Violence Against Children Scale (SVACS): It was developed by Özyürek in 2017 to determine the sensitivity of adults towards the violence against children. The scale included 19 items and one dimension. It was a 3-point Likert-type scale indicating 1: Disagree, 2: Partly Agree, and 3: Agree. The items of 3, 6, 12, 14 and 18 in the scale were scored reversely. The minimum and maximum total score possible to be taken from the scale varied between 19-57. When the total score was considered, the high score obtained from the scale indicated high

sensitivity towards the violence against children. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated to be 0.82 [9]. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.71.

Data Collection

After obtaining the necessary legal permissions, the Question Form and the questionnaire link including SVACS were created by the researchers via Google Forms. For collecting the data, the questionnaire link created with the snowball method through Google forms was sent to the participants via social media, WhatsApp groups and e-mail, and the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire link completely. The participants were asked to share the questionnaire link with other fathers using the snowball method. Completing the questionnaire forms took 10-15 minutes as average.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

SPSS 25.0 package software was used for the statistical analysis of the data. Percentage, average, independent T-test, Mann-Whitney U-test and multiple regression analysis were used to evaluate the data. The statistical significance level of 0.05 was regarded in all tests. For obtaining the statistical results, the appropriateness of the data to the normal distribution was interpreted using Shao method. According to this, it was found that the Skewness value for SVACS was -0.504, the Kurtosis value was 1.428, and the scale indicated a normal distribution between -3 and +3.

Ethical Principles of the Research

In order to carry out the research, firstly, the ethics committee approval dated 01/09/2020 and numbered 09-01 from the Human Research Ethics Committee, and written permission was obtained from the Ministry of Health were primarily taken; and before starting the questionnaire, the participants were stated they were free to participate into the research and the informed consent was obtained electronically from the participants stating that their information would be kept confidential fulfilling the principle of “Confidentiality and Protection of Confidentiality “ and “Respect for Autonomy”. The participants who were volunteer to participate were included in the study.

Since individual rights must be protected in the research, the Human Rights Declaration of Helsinki was regarded during the study.

RESULTS

The distribution related to the descriptive characteristics of the fathers included in the study was presented in Table 1. It was determined that the average

age of the fathers was 36.95 ± 6.66 , 61.6% of them had graduate or postgraduate degree, 67.2% of them had income equal to expenses, 71.7% lived in the city center, 84.6% have a nuclear family, and 38.8% had single child. It was also determined that 51.1% of the fathers witnessed violence before, 70.2% was not subjected to violence before, 55.6% did not smoke, 86.9% did not use alcohol, and 57.9% perceived family relationships as normal.

Tables 1. Comparison of SVACS Scores According to Descriptive Features (n=534)

	n	SVACS				Test p
		%	X	SS		
Age	26 years and under	20	3.7	43.05	5.07	F: 2.149 p: 0.093
	27-35 years old	227	42.5	43.81	5.15	
	36– 45 years old	227	42.5	43.28	5.15	
	Over the age of 45	60	11.2	45.08	4.23	
Working Status	Working	474	88.8	43.91	4.77	t: 2.024
	Not Working	60	11.2	42.06	6.85	p: 0.047
Education Status	Primary education ^a	52	9.7	41.82	6.70	F: 16.082 p: 0.000* Tamhane's c>a c>b
	High school ^b	153	28.7	42.04	6.23	
	University and above ^c	329	61.6	44.77	3.73	
Income Status	Good	149	27.9	44.16	5.05	F: 1.476 p: 0.230
	Middle	364	68.2	43.59	4.91	
	Bad	21	3.9	42.33	7.48	
Place of Residence	Put ^a	17	3.2	40.94	5.30	F: 19.752 p: 0.000 Tamhane's c>a c>b
	District ^b	134	25.1	41.41	5.77	
	City ^c	383	71.7	44.62	4.48	
Family Type	Nuclear family ^a	452	84.6	44.12	4.71	F: 7.790 p: 0.002 Tamhane's a>b>c
	Extended family ^b	65	12.2	41.90	6.14	
	Broken Family ^c	17	3.2	39.41	6.52	
Family Relations	Normal	309	38.8	43.55	4.91	F: 0.582 p: 0.559
	Conflict	53	36.9	43.47	5.70	
	Supporting	172	17.0	44.04	5.18	
Number of Children	1	207	7.3	44.10	4.56	F: 1.150 p:0.328
	2	197	51.1	43.51	5.30	
	3	91	48.9	43.02	5.16	
	4 and above	39	29.8	44.10	6.13	
Witnessing Violence	Yes	273	70.2	44.07	4.67	t:1.721
	No	261	44.4	43.31	5.44	P: 0.086
Exposure to Violence	Yes	159	55.6	43.91	4.95	t: 0.616
	No	375	13.1	43.61	5.13	p: 0.538

	n	SVACS				Test p
		%	X	SS		
Smoking Status	Yes	237	86.9	43.45	5.67	t: -0.969
	No	297	57.9	43.89	4.53	p: 0.333
Alcohol Use	Yes	70	9.9	43.25	5.80	t: -0.790
	No	464	32.2	43.77	4.96	p: 0.430
X±SS						
Age						36.95±6.66

*SVCAS: Sensitivity to Violence Against Children Scale *p<0.05*

Also in Table 1, the average scores of SVACS were compared according to the descriptive characteristics of the fathers included in the study. One-way variance analysis test was used to compare the average scores of the fathers' age, education status, income status, place of residence, family type, family relations and number of children and Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale. According to the results of the analysis, it was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores of the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale in terms of the education level of the fathers ($p<0.05$). The Tamhane test as one of Post Hoc paired comparisons was used to find the group that created the difference. According to the Tamhane test results, it was found that the average score of fathers with a graduate or postgraduate degree from SVACS was higher than the fathers with primary and high school graduation. It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores of the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale according to the place where fathers lived ($p<0.05$). The Tamhane test as one of the Post Hoc paired comparisons was used to find the group that created the difference. According to Tamhane test results, it was determined that the average score obtained by the fathers who lived in the city center from SVACS was higher than the fathers who lived in villages and districts. It was noticed that there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores of the SVACS in terms of the family type of fathers ($p<0.05$). The Tamhane test as one of the Post Hoc paired comparisons was used to find the

group that created the difference. According to Tamhane test result, it was found that fathers with nuclear families had higher average scores from SVACS than fathers with extended families and the fathers with extended families had higher scores rather than the ones with fragmented families. It was found that there was no statistically significant difference between income level of fathers, family relationships and number of children and their sensitivity towards the violence against children ($p>0.05$). The dependent t-test was used to compare the average scores of the fathers' employment, witnessing violence, exposure to violence, using alcohol and smoking and Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale. According to the test results, it was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the employment of fathers and their sensitivity towards the violence against children ($p<0.05$). It was observed that fathers who worked in a job were more sensitive towards the violence against children rather than the ones who did not work. It was also found that there was no statistically significant difference between fathers' witnessing violence, being exposed to violence, using alcohol and smoking and their sensitivity towards the violence against children ($p>0.05$) (Table 1).

In Table 2, the general average score of the fathers in the COASES is presented. It was determined that 1.9% of the fathers showed low sensitivity, 44.9% high sensitivity, and 53.2% moderate sensitivity to violence against children according to the CSWS. It was determined that the minimum and maximum scores obtained from the scale were between 19-57 and the overall mean score was 43.70 ± 5.07 .

Tables 2. Average Score of Fathers from SVACS

Scale		n	%	Min-Max	X±SS
SVACS	Low (19.00 – 31.65)	10	1.9	19-57	43.70±5.07
	Middle (31.66 – 44.31)	284	53.2		
	High (44.32 – 57.00)	240	44.9		

SVCAS: Sensitivity to Violence Against Children Scale

According to the regression analysis results in Table 3, it was noticed that the model established was statistically significant ($F=6.902$; $p<0.05$) when the

significance level corresponding to the F value was analyzed.

Tables 3. Multiple Regression Results Regarding the Effect of Descriptive Characteristics on Total Scores (n = 534)

Model	β	Std. Error	Beta	t	p	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	37.105	2.526		14.689	0.000*			37.105	2.526
Age	0.319	0.304	0.046	1.050	0.294	0.859	1.164	0.319	0.304
Working Status	-0.379	0.691	-0.024	-.548	0.584	0.894	1.119	-0.379	0.691
Educations Status	1.318	0.355	0.173	3.712	0.000*	0.760	1.315	1.318	0.355
Income Status	-0.102	0.426	-0.010	-0.240	0.810	0.901	1.110	-0.102	0.426
Place of Residence	1.943	0.421	0.202	4.618	0.000*	0.861	1.161	1.943	0.421
Family Type	-1.683	0.484	-0.154	-3.477	0.001*	0.847	1.180	-1.683	0.484
Number of Children	0.276	0.258	0.050	1.068	0.286	0.757	1.321	0.276	0.258
Witnessing Violence	-0.219	0.494	-0.022	-0.443	0.658	0.698	1.432	-0.219	0.494
Exposure to Violence	-0.009	0.539	-0.001	-0.017	0.987	0.702	1.424	-0.009	0.539
Family Relations	0.222	0.226	0.040	0.982	0.327	0.995	1.005	0.222	0.226
Smoking Status	-0.157	0.444	-0.015	-0.354	0.724	0.875	1.142	-0.157	0.444
Alcohol Use	-0.273	0.636	-0.018	-0.429	0.668	0.925	1.082	-0.273	0.636

*Dependent Variables: Sensitivity to Violence Against Children Scale (SVCAS) R: 0.370 R²: 0.137 F:6.902 *p:0.000 DurbinWatson:1.798*

When the beta coefficient value, t value and significance level of the independent variable were analyzed, it was found that the fathers' educational status, residential area and family type had a statistically significant effect upon the total score of SVACS ($t=3.712$, $p<0.05$; $t=4.618$, $p<0.05$; $t=-3.477$, $p<0.05$). The educational status of fathers, residential area and family type explained 11.7% of the change on SVACS total score (Regulated $R^2=0.117$). A 1-unit increase in the variable of educational status caused 1.318 ($\beta=1.318$) increase on the total score of SVACS, a 1-unit increase in the variable of residential area caused 1.943 ($\beta=1.943$) increase, and a 1-unit

increase in the variable of family type caused 1.683 ($\beta=-1.683$) decrease. There was no autocorrelation problem in the established model. Durbin W value was between 1.5 and 2.5 (DW=1.798).

DISCUSSION

Violence against children and young people is an important public health and human rights problem [7]. An increase has been noticed in psycho-social problems and violent behaviors associated with rapid social changes, rapid urbanization and impoverishment throughout the world and in our country

[10]. In society, the family is sometimes the source of close relationships, all satisfaction and developmental possibilities, as well as a being the source of the greatest emotional disturbances, tension and conflicts. Although violence against one of the family members as a mother, father or child has negative effects upon all individuals, it is known that the one who suffer the most indicates children [16]. Since the father, as one of the family members, is a role model in childhood and an important person for various terms, the sensitivity level of fathers towards the violence against children is remarkable in shaping the future life of children. For that reason, fathers' sensitivity towards the violence was discussed in this study, and the findings were discussed in line with the literature.

In the study, it was found that the majority of fathers were between the ages of 27-45, were employed, had a university degree, had a medium level income, lived in the city center, had a nuclear family structure, and had only one child. Furthermore, it was also found that approximately half of the fathers smoked, more than half did not have alcohol, and more than half perceived family relationships as normal.

In the study, it was determined that 51.1% of the fathers had witnessed violence before and 29.8% had been exposed to violence before. Lünemann et al. [19], this rate was found to be 47%, and in another study, 51.8% of university students witnessed violence and 21.4% were exposed to violence [18]. Experiencing the phenomenon of violence in a previous life may be an important factor in the individual's display of violence and decreasing his/her sensitivity.

In the study, it was determined that the overall score average of the fathers was 43.70 ± 5.07 and the sensitivity of 53.2% was moderate. In the study of Kula and Akbulut (2020), 49.19 ± 4.30 points; Özyürek et al. In the study of (2020), it was determined that the score was 43.30 at medium level. With this finding, it was seen that it could be caused by different groups and education levels, but there was sensitivity at the level of violence against children in both findings.

It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores related to the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale in terms of the education level of the fathers ($p < 0.05$). This difference was found to be higher for the fathers with graduate or postgraduate degree

rather than the ones with elementary or secondary education degree. As a result of the regression analysis, it was found that our significant variable in the model was the education level of the person. In a study carried out in Turkey, it was found that SVACS levels of the parents increased significantly as the educational status increased, as well [21]. In their study carried out in 3 different regions of Afghanistan, O'Leary et al. (2018) stated that the parents with higher education level used less violence against their children as a method of discipline [22]. In the family; Domestic violence, divorce, being a step-parent, being a minor mother, insufficient education of the parents, aggression in the father, a personality disorder, a restrictive social environment, and social isolation are among the situations that increase violence against the child [10].

A statistically significant difference was determined between the average scores of the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale according to the place where fathers lived ($p < 0.05$). It was revealed that this difference was higher in fathers living in the city center from the fathers living in villages and districts. Gülbahçe (2018) stated in the study that the sensitivity of teachers living in metropolitan cities towards children was higher than those living in rural areas [23]. As result of the regression analysis, it was found that the sensitivity towards violence against children was at medium level, and the variable that was significant in the model was related to the place where the father lived. This finding could be arisen from the facts that the fathers living in the city center had quicker access to social opportunities, made use of these opportunities with their families, and coincided with awareness of violence more frequently.

It was noticed in terms of the family type of the fathers that there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores of the Violence Sensitivity towards Children Scale ($p < 0.05$). This difference was found to be higher for the fathers with nuclear families rather than the ones with extended families, and fathers with extended families had a higher average score from SVACS rather than the ones with a fragmented family. In their study in 2019, Gemiksiz et al., it was found that the level of sensitivity towards violence against children of the ones in the nuclear family structure was higher than those in the extended family structure [24].

As result of the regression analysis, it was found that the sensitivity towards violence against children was at a medium level, and the variable that was significant in the model was family type. With the rapid industrialization and urbanization, the factors such as transition from the traditional family to the nuclear family structure, the increase in the time family members spend with each other at home, parents' thinking to have few children and fulfilling their responsibilities and interests in their children, etc. were possible to cause fathers with a nuclear family to have higher sensitivity towards the violence against children.

In the study, it was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the employment status of fathers and their sensitivity towards violence against children ($p < 0.05$). It was observed that employed fathers were more sensitive towards violence against children rather than the unemployed fathers. In their study carried out in 3 different regions of Afghanistan, O'Leary et al. (2018) stated that there was no significant relationship between the father's profession and child violence or disciplinary measures whereas the violence tendencies of unemployed fathers had an increasing tendency when compared to employed fathers [22]. Cluver et al. (2020) reported in their study carried out including parents in the economic empowerment program that sensitivity towards violence increased [25]. This finding which was compatible with the literature revealed that unemployed fathers who could not bring income to their homes and had caring responsibilities had lower level of behaviors such as caring for their children, taking responsibility, playing games, and tolerating, and their sensitivity towards violence was possible to be lower.

In addition, this research includes some limitations. First; the scales used in the study are based on self-report. Latter; Google Forms provides rapid national data collection, but results are limited in generalizability as they do not include results for fathers without internet access. Third, analyzes are based on cross-sectional data, longitudinal studies are needed for stronger inferences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE

Creating a healthy and safe environment in the family can be achieved through effective implementation of violence prevention programs. Especially when conducting prevention programs, a multidisciplinary team (physician, nurse, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, guidance counselors, physiotherapists) should be approached. Nurses, who have an important role in the understanding of a multidisciplinary team, should first evaluate the structure of the society in prevention programs. With the roles assigned to girls and boys by the society, boys are taught to be aggressive, while girls are taught to exhibit calm, supportive behaviors. Considering the structure of the society, new studies should be conducted with different and larger sample groups and risky groups should be identified. In line with the researches, trainings should be organized for risky groups, especially in order to increase the knowledge and awareness of the parents of the people who are closest to the child. Learned behaviors such as violence and aggression can be changed or prevented by addressing the concepts of responsibility and behavior in the trainings on knowledge and awareness. Parents' family relationships can be strengthened and correct parental attitudes can be taught. In addition, nurses should follow the legal regulations regarding violence against children and legal regulations should also be included. When a case of violence develops, it should detect the situation at an early stage and take the necessary precautions.

CONCLUSION

According to the results obtained from the research, it was found that 53.2% out of 534 fathers had moderate level sensitivity towards violence against children, and employment, educational status, place of residence and family type were efficient upon fathers' sensitivity towards violence against children. In conclusion, whereas males have been taught to be aggressive with the roles assigned to females and males by the society, females have been taught to display

calm and supportive behaviors. Considering the structure of the society, it is possible to be suggested that further researches with different and larger sample groups can be carried out to raise awareness on this issue and conferences, seminars and various training programs should be organized to increase fathers' sensitivity towards violence against children.

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