



Social supports preferred by the teachers when facing school violence

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims at examining whether the social support sources of teachers differ depending on the variables of gender and seniority when they encounter violence at school and investigating their opinions on precautions against school violence.

Methods: Data was collected via a questionnaire from a sample of 179 female and 166 male Turkish teachers. Chi-square and Mann-Whitney U tests were used for data analysis.

Results: Male and female teachers preferred to share the experience of exposure to verbal ($\chi^2(5) = 22.81, p < .01$), physical ($\chi^2(5) = 36.64, p < .01$), emotional ($\chi^2(5) = 26.13, p < .01$) and sexual violence ($\chi^2(5) = 37.43, p < .01$) at school with different social support sources. Male teachers preferred their colleagues as social support sources whereas female teachers preferred their spouses/families. Social support sources which teachers prefer when they face any type of violence other than sexual violence differ due to the length of teaching experience. School administrators and counselors are not among the social support sources of teachers when they were exposed to violence.

Conclusions: Turkish teachers' preferences related to their victimization experiences indicate a need for prevention program encompassing teachers, school counselors and administrators.

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1. Introduction

School violence is a pervasive and an ongoing problem worldwide. Most studies on school violence have focused heavily on students. However, teachers compose a high-risk group for violence so this group should not be overlooked. For example, in USA between 1996 and 2000, 599,000 acts of violence against teachers were determined (*Violence against teachers, n.d.*). It is reported that every year almost 234,000 teachers become the victims of school violence (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007).

Despite the seriousness of the issue, studies on violence against teachers (e.g. Daniels et al., 2007; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Fox & Stallworth, 2010) are limited. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the sex and experience differences related to the issue, since female and male teachers may face different types of violence and what's more they may prefer different support sources. Similarly, teaching experience may also be effective when dealing with the issue. Within this context it is thought that any information gathered by studies on exposure to different types of violence and social support sources preferred by the victims will make important contributions to the prevention and remediation of the problem of teacher and student victimization. Further research considering year of experience of teachers would shed light on the needs of the target

group when preparing programs for them. Therefore, this study aims at investigating teachers' preferences of social support sources when they face violence at school.

1.1. Teachers and school violence

Most of the of studies, including the key words of 'teacher' and 'school violence' has a perspective that accepts the teacher as a professional power, who can be effective in solution of the problem mentioned. For example, these studies address teachers' awareness and reactions to violence (Meyer, Astor, & Behre, 2002; Stone, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2009), tendency towards violence (Wei, Williams, Chen, & Chang, 2010), roles in preventing violence (Alvarez, 2007), and effect on their professional disengagement (Galand, Lecocq, & Philippot, 2007). Some researches (e.g. Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; Stone et al., 2009) focus on how teachers can be made to perceive themselves self-efficient in solution of the problem of violence at school. Nevertheless, these studies do not deal with the effects of teachers' perceptions, changes in their perceptions, their innate and acquired skills on protecting themselves from violence or recovering after exposure to violence.

Certainly teachers have very important responsibilities in students' academic and personal developments. However, when teachers, as individuals with their strengths and weaknesses – as in the case of school violence – face troubles and problems they experience stress (Laugaa, Rasclé, & Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Findings reflect that violence has a negative effect

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on the well-being and life satisfaction of teachers (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007), and most of the teachers do not receive professional help after being exposed to violence (Daniels et al., 2007).

With regard to the sources of victimization of teachers at school, teachers are exposed to violence by their students, colleagues, and school administrators. Physical and verbal violence are observed as predominant among the students' violent acts against teachers (Malek, Chang, & Davis, 1998). Violent acts of teachers' colleagues and administrators include mainly emotional and verbal attacks (Schuster, 1996). This type of violence has come up with the concept of mobbing at work and involves aspects such as exclusion of an individual, others' reluctance to talk with him/her, oppression of others interacting with him/her, provoking others against him/her, exhausting him/her, not talking with him/her, shouting at, bowling out, scolding him/her, evaluating his/her struggle and success as unfair, undervaluing his/her success, making him/her fail by giving him/her tasks irrespective of his abilities and not giving him important tasks.

Teachers try to cope with violent acts of students and school personnel besides vocational difficulties. These difficulties may lead to teacher burnout. In some researches teachers' perceptions of burnout are examined with regard to the variables of social support sources (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987), feelings of existential fulfillment (Loonstra, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2009), perceived self-efficacy in classroom management (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000), school climate (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008) and professional development (Özer & Beycioglu, 2010). These researches prove that teachers are a group who requires a special attention due to the difficulties they live. Yet, it should not be ignored that studies on teachers encountering violence are carried out predominantly in Western countries (e.g., Duffy, 2009; Eisenbraun, 2007; Laugaa et al., 2008). When the universality and cultural specificity of the violence problem is taken into account, it can be said that functional solutions to this problem can be found based on the specific cultural characteristics (Dumas, Printz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007).

1.2. Teachers and violence at school in Turkey

Turkey, where the study is carried out has cultural characteristics of both the East and the West. Thus, both problems and efforts to solve these problems reflect the characteristics of both cultures. For example, researches on school violence in Turkey (Deveci, Acik, & Ayar, 2007; Sümer & Aydın, 1999), focusing on students indicate a parallel case with the ones in the world. But there are a limited number of studies dealing with teachers suffering from school violence (Çiçek Sağlam, 2008; Ocak, 2008; Ortaöğretim Kurumları Şiddet Araştırması, n.d.). In Turkish culture, teachers are empowered to shape the behaviors of children and teenagers and students are expected to obey and respect teachers. It seems that this situation suppresses potential physical violence against teachers. In other words, this cultural environment, different from the cases in the West (Malek et al., 1998), results in the limited number of physical violent acts committed by students against teachers (Öğülmüş, 1995). Nonetheless, the fact that teachers accept beating children as a disciplinary tool is a serious problem (Gözütok, Er, & Karacaoğlu, 2006).

On the contrary to the western cultures, Turkish culture, where respect for and obedience to elders are common attitudes, seem to trigger the elements of emotional and verbal violence among teachers at different ages and years of teaching experience as well as the other segments of the society. It is observed that teachers experience mobbing by administrators and colleagues (Çiçek Sağlam, 2008; Ocak, 2008). When we consider women teachers, most of them are also exposed physical violence apart from a verbal violence both at school and outside school (Ortaöğretim Kurumları Şiddet Araştırması, n.d.) Research findings about burnout levels of teachers (Dağlı & Gündüz,

2008; Maraşlı, 1995; Polat et al., 2009) reflect that teachers should receive professional support and precautions in a corporate dimension should be taken in Turkey.

Although there are legal regulations to protect individuals from violence in Turkey, people generally prefer not asking for help because exposure to violence is accepted as a shameful situation. This situation not only prevents the real level of violence from being revealed but also prevents violence victims from receiving professional help. When the teachers who are exposed to violence cannot receive necessary professional help in time, they experience difficulties in protecting their well beings and both their social environments and students – children and teenagers – may be damaged.

Based on the limited literature as stated above, it can be seen that there is a need for information about the intensity of effect on teachers suffering from violence, their skills of coping with violence, their ways of coping with violence and personal and social support sources they apply after exposure to violence.

1.3. Study goals

The main goal of this study is to examine whether the social support sources of teachers differ depending on the variables of gender and year of teaching experience when teachers encounter violence at school. Moreover, this study investigates whether teachers' opinions on precautions against school violence differ based on variables of gender and seniority.

2. Method

2.1. Model

This study is a quantitative and relational study that aims to investigate the relations between the variables. The data of the research is acquired through a questionnaire. In the analysis of the data, chi-square test and Mann-Whitney U test are used.

2.2. Participants

The research was realized in a middle-sized city of Turkey. The participants were chosen from the schools in the districts which are samples of three socioeconomic status groups, low, middle and high. The participants were composed of 360 teachers who were at schools visited at pre-determined dates and who accepted to participate in the research, 4.2% of teachers provided incomplete data of "gender" variable and 1.1% of teachers provided incomplete data of "seniority" variable. These participants were left out of the analysis. As seen in Table 1, 179 of the teachers (%51.9) who participated in the research and provided valid data was female and 166 of those participants (% 48.1) was male. As for the year of experience of teachers 7.3% of the sample has been working for five or less than five years, 16.0% of the sample has been working for 6–10 years, 35.7% has been working for 11–15 years, and 18.5% has been working for 16–20 years whereas 22.5% has been working for 21 or more years. A vast majority of

Table 1
Frequency distribution of the variables of gender, seniority and field variables.

	Number	Missing	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Gender		15		
Female	179		49.7	51.9
Male	166		46.1	48.1
Seniority		4		
1–5 years	26		7.2	7.3
6–10 years	57		15.8	16.0
11–15 years	127		35.3	35.7
16–20 years	66		18.3	18.5
21+ years	80		22.2	22.5

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