

# Domestic Violence Exposure and Related Factors in Children Working in an Industrial Complex: A Qualitative Study

Bir Sanayi Kompleksinde Çalışan Çocukların Aile İçi Şiddete Maruziyetleri ve İlgili Faktörler: Niteliksel Bir Araştırma

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to understand the factors related to domestic violence of the working children in the Industrial Complex in a district of Istanbul. **Method:** This qualitative study was carried out with children working in the Industrial Complex of Pendik using a convenience sample. These children were working in this Complex under the supervision of Community for Helping the Working Children. Three focus group discussions were held to collect the data each composed of 10 children with one moderator and one reporter. The focus group discussions were held at the work places of these children and during their working hours. In this study, phenomenological approach and thematic analysis was used. **Results:** In our sample, all the children were males, aged between 14-18 years. The majority of them were coming from the low income families who were not able to finish elementary school. Nine themes emerged from the data: perception/explanation of violence at home; to be misinterpreted by the parents, deserving the punishment, feelings towards parents, thoughts about the financial issues and violence, aggression defined by the children, thoughts about being a parent and how to discipline their own children, thoughts about their education, and reasons for violence. Children admitted that they became aggressive outside the home after they experienced violence at home. Some of the children believed that the reason for domestic violence was financial problems and agreed that they may apply corporal punishment to discipline their children. **Conclusion:** Acceptance of corporal punishment as a norm would be a risk for domestic violence. As some of the participants of this study mentioned that they may apply corporal punishment to discipline their children. So whole community may use their sources to change the norms.

**Key words:** Qualitative, working children, abuse, violence

## ÖZET

**Giriş :** Bu çalışmanın amacı, İstanbul'un bir ilçesindeki bir Sanayi Kompleksi'nde çalışan çocukların aile içi şiddete maruziyetleri ve bununla ilgili faktörleri anlamaktır. **Yöntem:** Bu niteliksel çalışma Pendik Sanayi Kompleksi'nde çalışan çocuklar ile yürütülmüştür. Bu çocuklar Çalışan Çocuklara Yardım Topluluğu gözetiminde bu Kompleks'de çalışıyorlardı. Veri toplamak için her biri 10 çocuktan oluşan üç odak grup görüşmesi, bir moderatör ve bir raportör eşliğinde yapılmıştır. Odak grup tartışmaları bu çocukların iş yerlerinde ve mesai saatlerinde gerçekleştirildi. Fenomenolojik yaklaşım ve tematik analiz kullanılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Bizim örnekleminiz, 14-18 yaş arasındaki erkek çocuklardan oluşmakta idi. Çoğunluk ilkokuldan mezun olamamış düşük gelirli ailelerin çocuklarıydı. veri analizi sonucunda dokuz tema elde edildi: Evde şiddet algısı / açıklaması, ebeveynler tarafından yanlış anlaşılma, cezayı hak etme, ebeveynlere yönelik duygular, mali konular ve şiddet düşünceleri, çocuklar tarafından tanımlanan saldırganlık, ebeveyn olma ve kendi çocuklarını nasıl terbiye edecekleri ile ilgili düşünceleri, eğitimleri ile ilgili düşünceleri ve şiddetin sebepleri. Çocuklar evde şiddete maruz kaldıktan sonra, ev dışında da agresif olduklarını itiraf etmişlerdir. Çocukların bazıları aile içi şiddet nedeninin maddi sorunlar olduğuna inanıyordu ve kendi çocuklarını disipline etmek için fiziksel ceza uygulayabileceklerini belirtmişlerdir. **Sonuç:** Fiziksel cezayı bir norm olarak kabul etmek aile içi şiddet için bir risk oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın katılımcılarının bazıları kendi çocuklarını disipline etmek için fiziksel ceza uygulayabileceklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu yüzden, bütün toplum normlarını değiştirmek için kendi kaynaklarını kullanabilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler :** Nitel, çalışan çocuklar, istismar, şiddet

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence is a major threat to the welfare and prosperity of any society and is a particular area of concern as to how violence related events are increasing among children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup> Using physical punishment to control, guide or correct the behavior of children has long been practiced in Western culture.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, child care experts, health care practitioners and parents have begun questioning the practice of physical punishment and considering its role in child abuse.<sup>1</sup>

Each year in the United States a considerable number of people are estimated to be murdered at work and an unknown number of nonfatal injuries due to workplace violence occur.<sup>2,3</sup>

In Turkey, 15.6 % of 15-17 age group children are reported to be working children<sup>4</sup>. The public health law in Turkey states that children below age 12 must not be allowed to work. Also the law numbered 4857 determines the least age allowed to work as 15 years; in light works being 14 years<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, by itself, working can be considered as a type of child abuse. The families of these children might carry the risk of being potential source of child abuse, since most of the time they are socioeconomically disadvantaged group of families.

Understanding that youth violence often is rooted in a set of adverse social conditions that are identifiable and potentially modifiable is a fundamentally optimistic message<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of this study was to understand the factors related to domestic violence of the working children in the Industrial Complex in a district of Istanbul.

## METHODS

This qualitative study was carried on children working in the Industrial Complex of Pendik, Istanbul. These children were working in this Complex under the supervision of Community for Helping the Working Children. This Community was reported to be established to terminate the work produced by children in year 1999. Three focus group discussions were held to collect the data. Each group was composed of 10 children with one moderator and one reporter. Discussions were held after the researchers' introducing themselves and explaining the aim of the study. The children were assured that these data would not be given to their families nor to their employers and that their names will not be reported by any means. They were left free to participate in the study. Their permission was also recorded by a tape-recorder. Each discussion lasted 50-60 minutes. Children were brought together by the Community for Helping the Working Children for the discussions getting the permission of the employer during a free hour.

Discussions were held at the Center of Health of the Community where children would feel comfortable and easily participate in the study. This Center of Health of the Community was presently being used for private interviews between the members of the Community and the children. Children and the researchers were seated in a circle with the moderator and the reporter sitting one next to the other. At the end of the discussions, children were asked if there is anything that researchers or the Community could do for them to promote their physical, psychological and social health and assure that the Community continues to be always near to them. The study was also approved by an ethical committee.

## Data collection

After a literature review, questions were decided by the consensus of the researchers. The questions discussed in focus groups are as follows: "Have you ever witnessed violence at home?" "What might be the reason for violence?" and "What do you think about violence, how did your violence experience affect your life?"

## Analysis

The recordings were decoded into text after each focus groups, and the notes interviewers had taken during the focus groups were correlated. Each transcript was read separately and during a meeting to extract codes. Three investigators read, identified, and assigned codes for the major themes of the data. These codes were assigned to lines of text, in the data analysis recalling relevant codes from the text was used. In our study, we used "phenomenological approach and thematic analysis." Eight (Nine????) themes emerged from the analysis.

## RESULTS

Twenty-four children came from the low income families living in Pendik while 6 of them came from the very low income families (father was not working). Children were aged between 14-18 years. Six of them was 14 years old, 8 of them were 15, 12 were 16 years old, 2 of them were 17 and 2 of them were 18 years of age. Fourteen of them were not able to graduate from elementary school, 10 of them were graduated from middle school, 6 were high school drop-outs. They were all in apprentice status. The child having the highest degree of education was 'could not finish high school' in his own words. All children were males.

The results of this qualitative study are presented in the form of main ideas supported by the group with typical phrases stated by children given in italics.

### Theme: Perception/explanation of violence at home

Children admitted that they were exposed or had been exposed to some kind of violence at home:

"My father hit me once with his belt, it gave terrible pain"

"My father frequently drinks and beats me or my mother when he comes home"

"I don't want to stay at home because my father beats me"  
"My parents had beaten me when I was a small child; it was necessary then because they had to discipline me"  
"My parents had beaten me when I ran away from school"  
"Once my mother slapped on my mouth so strongly that my tooth was broken and my lips bleed. I did not talk to her for two days"  
"My father beats my mother, my brother and me often by kicking or by hitting with his fist"  
"My elder brother hit my head once so strongly that they had to take me to a hospital. The reason was that I had lost his watch".

#### **Theme: To be misinterpreted by the parents**

Children believed that their parents could not understand them:

"My parents cannot understand me. We think differently, even the music we listen to is different."  
"My parents tell me 'you are young; you don't understand these things'"  
"We think differently"

#### **Theme: Deserving the punishment**

Children believed that their parents punished them for their inappropriate behaviors or mistakes by beating them:

"My parents beat me when I deliberately do something they have banned me from doing it, for example when I smoke"  
"My parents beat me when I make mistakes"  
"I am used to being hit by my parents that is why I run away from home; if I run away from home they cannot beat me".  
"Beating is the only way parents can discipline their children or establish authority over them"

#### **Theme: Feelings towards parents**

Some children declared that their love for their parents diminished due to the violence they showed towards them; whereas others thought they would continue loving them because they were the people most close to them:

"Maybe I love them little now, but I know they are my parents and that they will go on protecting me"  
"I sometimes hate them"

#### **Theme: "Aggression defined by the children"**

Children told that they became aggressive outside home after they experienced violence at home:

"My parents beat me. I go out and I can beat anybody if they make me angry"  
"I can hit people especially during football matches"  
"I get along well with my friends but I fight with others"

#### **Theme: Thoughts about being a parent and to discipline his children**

Most of the children admitted that they would also punish their children if necessary by using violence in case they made mistakes; whereas some of them thought they would never use violence at home:

"I would punish my children maybe by beating them or by any physical punishment for example standing on one leg"  
"If my child made a mistake, first I would give him advice and tell him not to do it again. If he repeated his wrong behavior I would beat him or throw him out of home"  
"If my child made a mistake first I would talk to him if he repeated his wrong behavior. I would throw him out of home and allow him to come home again when he comes to his senses"  
"You can beat your children just a little, not like most people do; for example, they beat to such an extent that you have to take the child to a hospital"  
"All problems can be solved by talking to each other but I cannot talk with my parents"  
"Violence should never exist at home"  
"There can be no condition or excuse for violence at home"

#### **Theme: Thoughts about their education**

Most of them feel sorry for having left their school education:

"First I felt sorry because I left school but now I think there is no difference schooling would make"  
"I am pleased with the way I live; maybe I would not be successful at school."

#### **Theme: "Thoughts about the financial issues and violence"**

Children believed that the reason for violence at home (between all members of the family) was financial problems:

"My parents are poor that is why I had leave school and work"  
"If I don't abide by what my parents tell me to do I know they will cut my salary".  
"My brother's telephone was stolen he told me to find it; we started to beat each other when I could not find the telephone".

Children are pleased by the services provided by The Community for Helping the Working Children in Pendik, they think their employers should support The Community. The children expect support from the public and think that people should be aware of there are children working to earn their lives. The children expect more understanding from their families; they think they are worth being loved and protected since they work a lot for a little salary and most of them work for the welfare of their families.

#### **DISCUSSION**

In our study the children admitted that they were exposed or had been exposed to some kind of violence at home. In a qualitative study carried out in children attending elementary school in İstanbul, 73.41 % of the children reported at least one domestic violence event <sup>7</sup>

Despite plenty of research, there is considerable disagreement about the definition of violence, its development, the consequences on victims and the most effective measures for intervention.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in our study, too, it was very hard to define or ask about violence at home. Violence was asked with different ways including, giving examples from child disciplining techniques or adolescent aggressiveness or mood changes or some socio-economic /cultural problems our children and youngsters could face. At first children admitted violence towards them as a way adults use to discipline children as if this was the only way. In the study held in Istanbul reported that, among the domestic violence against children physical violence preceded by psychological violence and followed by neglect.<sup>7</sup> In a study carried out in Finland, mild violence (slapping, pushing etc.) was 72%, severe violence (hitting with a fist, kicking and use of weapons) was 8%; violence was found to be committed by the parents sometime before children reached age of 14 and father committing violence more than the mother<sup>8</sup>. In China, minor violence was reported to be 42%, and serious violence 23%; whereas in Korea being 9% and 51% respectively.<sup>9</sup> As a result of a descriptive study which had investigated numerous children of immigrants and seasonal farm workers living in the rural parts of North Carolina, more than half of the children had been found to be exposed to domestic violence.<sup>10</sup> In our study we could not go deep enough with the children to learn about the types of domestic violence they were exposed to; we could only learn that the children were exposed to frequent beating and hitting. However, we believe if we could carry out in-depth interviews with each child at private settings we could learn more about other types of domestic violence. It was reported by a study carried out in France that different types of domestic violence (physical, sexual and psychological) often coexist within the same family.<sup>11</sup> Also, as far as domestic violence was concerned, the most important risk factor for violence in one situation was the presence of violence in another situation.<sup>12</sup>

When the children witness violence at home, especially maternal victimization, they would have internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems and these children may show violence for their offspring.<sup>13</sup> Chronic domestic violence was found to be associated with maternal depression, difficult child temperament, and internalizing or externalizing symptoms in the study of Martinez et. al.<sup>14</sup> In our study unfortunately some of the children admitted that their mothers were also the victims of domestic violence. In a study carried out in some middle and low-income countries, mothers who justify partner violence towards themselves were more likely to believe that corporal punishment is necessary to discipline children<sup>15</sup>. A victimized mother, most of the time, cannot act as a caring and positive parent which is essential to diminish the adverse effects of domestic violence on their children.<sup>16</sup> Countrywide norms regarding the acceptability of partner violence and advisability of corporal punishment

moderated the links between mothers' attitudes and their behaviors toward children.<sup>15</sup>

In our study children believed that their parents could not understand them, some of them declared that violence at home diminished their love for their parents. These two factors may lead them to leave their homes from time to time.

Some children believed that the reason for domestic violence was financial problems and that family members actually loved each other, and they were their family for better or worse. In many other studies it was reported that low-income poverty, social insecurity and unemployment were indeed among the major reasons of domestic violence.<sup>5,7,13-16</sup>

In a study, it is discussed that in addition to lack of social resources (lower income, lower educational attainment etc.) the parents who have been more likely to be socialized into the use of violence were also more likely to use severe corporal punishment.<sup>15</sup> Children in our study admitted that they became aggressive outside home after they experienced violence at home and they declared that they would also punish their children if necessary by using violence against them for the sake of disciplining them. However, some of them said that there could be no excuse for violence, and that all of the problems could be solved by talking within a family. Studies show that children exposed to or having witnessed violence are apt to show more disrupted and more aggressive behavior towards others in general and that these children have many socioemotional and behavioral problems, some having weapon carrying behavior<sup>5,9,13,17,18</sup> and they are of increased exposure to the presence of other adversities in their lives.<sup>19</sup>

Physically abused children are reported to have a tendency towards acquiring deviant patterns of processing social information and these may mediate the development of aggressive behavior even when the other ecological and biological factors were known.<sup>20</sup> In a study carried out in Brazil, significant relationship was found between violent behavior by teenagers and physical punishment by parents.<sup>21</sup> Domestic violence is reported to have the potential to disrupt typical developmental trajectories through psychobiological effects, post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive consequences, peer problems and sometimes outcomes that go beyond diagnosable disorders.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Acceptance of corporal punishment as a norm would be a risk for domestic violence. As some of the participants of this study mentioned that they may apply corporal punishment to discipline their children. So whole community may use their sources to change the norms.

Herein, it can also be recommended to give these parents the resources they need to implement alternative child disciplining strategies.

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