



Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Young Women Reported in Turkish Newspapers, Before One Year and in the First Year of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Although the negative health consequences on human being caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is reported by the news media globally, its role is not well understood in countries like Turkey. This study provides an assessment over time of the events of Turkish newspaper media reported physical, sexual and lethal violence against adolescent girls and young women. Data for the study was collected through newspaper media reports on physical, sexual and lethal violence that published between March 2019 and March 2021, before one year and in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 483 (15.3%) of 3165 newspaper media reports the victims were under the age of 18 and the mean age was 13.0±4.5 years. During the study period, physical violence caused by an intimate partner has significantly raised (from 32.6% in 2020 to 40.6% in 2021). Logistic regression analysis also showed that being an intimate partner was the only factor associated with physical violence (OR = 8.1, 95% CI 5.21-12.60, p < 0.001). Given the prevalence of intimate partner violence in Turkey, newspaper media reports highlighting vital issues that may arise during the Covid-19 pandemic can be a good monitoring tool in a low-resource setting. In raising of the public and policymakers' awareness about the danger consequences of violence against adolescent girls caused by an intimate partner, capacity building of the news media might be a useful approach on this issue.

Keywords: Adolescent girl, Covid-19 pandemic, Intimate partner violence, Turkey

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Introduction

Violence against women and young girls has been recognized as a priority health issue and a human rights violation (European Commission Directorate-General for Justice, 2011). Globally, one third of women in their lifetime have experienced either sexual and/or physical violence (World Health Organization, 2019). As predicted by United Nations (UN) and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), countries with the highest levels of gender inequality are associated with the highest prevalence rates of intimate partner violence and vice versa (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017; United Nations, 2018).

Existing literature in Turkey suggests that 10%-40% of adolescent girls and young women under 18 years of age have experienced sexual and/or physical violence (Orsel et al., 2011; Tıraş et al., 2009). In fact, the experience of victimisation remains pervasive in Turkey despite the huge efforts either at the national or international levels to eliminate it (Ustuner Top & Cam, 2021).

Many young children may experience physical, sexual, and psychological violence in their communities or in their homes, schools and workplaces. Childhood exposure to violence in these places has devastating consequences for their health, well-being and safety, now and in the future (Felitti et al., 1998).

The fragility and vulnerability of young children in the context of their dependency on adults for their growth and development make an unassailable case for priority prevention from any form of violence. Based on the ongoing relationship that is its context, a variety of violent acts including death, rape and injuries inflicted by intimate partners (Calikoglu et al., 2021; Ramabu, 2020).

The newspaper media can draw public attention to the issue of violence against young women and adolescent girls, and raise awareness about it (Fairclough, 2001). Of course, the circulation and size of the newspaper media, the interests of the newspaper media audiences, the uniqueness of the cases, the availability of details and sensational nature of the events, likely influence the frequency, nature, and accuracy of newspaper media reports on the adolescent girls and young women who experience physical and sexual violence (Fairclough, 2001). However, there is a little literature to review and to estimate the frequency of violence against adolescent girls and young women over time, which leaves newspaper media reports as one means of estimating how often these types of violence are at least reported and known to the public (Saewyc et al., 2013).

While the issue of violence against adolescent girls and young women has not received much attention until recently, the full scale and spectrum of many types of

violence against them is now becoming visible, especially due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, in order to assess victim and perpetrator characteristics and the frequency of events, the study was aimed to present an assessment of sexual, physical and lethal forms of violence against adolescent girls and young women covered by newspaper media in Turkey, before one year and in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Material and Methods

The population of Turkey, unlike the Western world, has a heterogeneous socio-cultural structure which have been derived from the various traditional norms and values that affect the role of women. As a result, women's social life directly affected by male dominance structure (Erman, 2001).

Setting

For the current study data was collected through newspaper media reports on physical, sexual and lethal violence against girls and young women that published between March 2019 and March 2021, before one year and in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic (March 11, 2020, the first confirmed case of the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey). Purposeful, three national daily newspapers with the highest circulation, namely, Sabah, Hürriyet and Sözcü were selected. The newspaper-based event were evaluated by means of internet archive searching. If they covered the topics of physical, sexual and lethal violence against adolescent girls and young women.

Selection of the Sample

The only criterion in the selection of the events included in the study is the coverage of the violence against women in the newspaper articles in Turkey. Newspaper articles that reporting such incidents from overseas were excluded. In addition, violent incidents for which there was insufficient information about the perpetrators were also excluded. Using the inclusion criterion, trained final-year medical students were tasked to daily read and check the stories in selected newspapers to capture events related to violence against women. Trained medical students ensured that duplicate reports for the same incident were removed.

A spreadsheet was created to document the details so that it can be used for analyses, and the following variables were coded for all events selected in the study: Type of violence (physical, sexual or lethal), community where the violence occurred, victim demographic information (e.g., age, sex) and relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Definition of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" by the United Nations (United Nations, 1993).

Data Analysis

Data from 3165 newspaper media reports on physical, sexual and lethal violence published between March 2019 and March 2021, prior to the year before and in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, were analysed. Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) for Windows version 20.0. were used for the analyses. Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution were calculated for categorical data. Using the chi-square test, differences in the characteristics between two years (2020 and 2021) were assessed. Furthermore, to assess which variables were significantly associated with violence, as dependent variable, logistic regression analysis was also performed using adjusted odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals (CI). Independent variables such as perpetrator's age and the relationship between victim and perpetrator (variables with significantly different in bivariate analysis) were included in the model. All differences were considered statistically significant when p-value was less than 0.05.

Ethics Statement

Since the data were obtained from newspaper news, there was no need to obtain an ethics committee.

Results

A total of 3165 newspaper media reports were identified during the study timeframe between March 2019 and March 2021, in which the study was conducted. In 483 (15.3%) of 3165 cases, the victims were under the age of 18 and the mean age was 13.0±4.5 years. As demonstrated in Table 1, during the study period of two years, there were differences in terms of victim's age and perpetrator's age as well as sexual, physical and lethal violence. However, there were no significant differences in terms of the perpetrators of the violence and the community in which the violence occurred. As presented in Table 1, reported cases of victims under 18 years, slightly increased between March 2019 and March 2021 (13.8% versus 17.0%; $p < 0.001$), while the cases of perpetrator under 18 years, decreasing between the same time period (4.9% versus 2.0%; $p < 0.001$). In addition, within two years, there was a slight increase in victims of physical and lethal violence (46.3% versus 51.8%; $p = 0.002$ and 22.0% versus 24.9%; $p = 0.049$, respectively), while a slight decrease in victims of sexual violence was observed (18.1% versus 14.9%; $p = 0.016$).

Table 2 demonstrated the reported cases of victims under the age of 18, between March 2019 and March 2021. According to the Table 2, perpetrators who are under the age of 18 years decreased within two years (7.1% vs. 1.6%; $p = 0.003$), while reported violence cases caused by intimate partners increased during the same time period (32.6% vs. 40.6; $p = 0.037$). In addition, the only statistically significant increase was observed in physical violence between March 2019 and March 2021 (21.8% vs. 37.7%; $p < 0.001$).

As shown in logistic regression analyses (Table 3), being an intimate partner was the only factor associated with physical violence (OR = 8.1, 95% CI 5.21-12.60, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Characteristics of incidents of violence against women from Turkish newspapers by years (n = 3165).

Characteristics	Years		P value
	2020 (n, %)	2021 (n, %)	(Chi-square test)
Victim's age groups (in years)			
<18	239 (13.8)	244 (17.0)	<0.001
≥18	1487 (86.2)	1195 (83.0)	
Perpetrator's age groups (in years)			
<18	84 (4.9)	28 (2.0)	<0.001
≥18	1632 (95.1)	1425 (98.0)	
Perpetrators of violence			
Intimate partner†	786 (45.5)	633 (44.0)	0.383
Unknown	940 (54.5)	806 (56.0)	
Community where violence occurred			
Urban	1267 (73.4)	1069 (74.3)	0.575
Rural	459 (26.6)	370 (25.7)	
Sexual violence			
Present	313 (18.1)	215 (14.9)	0.016
Absent	1413 (81.9)	1439 (83.3)	
Physical violence			
Present	800 (46.3)	745 (51.8)	0.002
Absent	926 (53.7)	1439 (48.2)	
Lethal violence			
Present	379 (22.0)	359 (24.9)	0.049
Absent	1346 (78.0)	1439 (75.1)	

†This category includes husband, partner or ex-partner and family member such as sibling, father, uncle, cousin as well as father-in-law or brother-in-law.

Table 2. Distribution of characteristics of the adolescent girls by years in Turkey (n = 483).

Characteristics	Years		P value
	2020 (n, %)	2021 (n, %)	(Chi-square test)
Perpetrator's age groups (in years)			
<18	17 (7.1)	4 (1.6)	0.003
≥18	222 (92.9)	240 (98.4)	
Perpetrators of violence			
Intimate partner ††	78 (32.6)	102 (40.6)	0.037
Unknown	161 (67.4)	142 (59.4)	
Community where violence occurred			
Urban	174 (72.8)	178 (73.0)	0.971
Rural	65 (27.2)	66 (27.0)	
Sexual violence			
Present	107 (44.8)	90 (36.9)	0.078
Absent	132 (55.2)	154 (63.1)	
Physical violence			
Present	52 (21.8)	92 (37.7)	<0.001
Absent	187 (78.2)	152 (62.3)	
Lethal violence			
Present	14 (5.9)	25 (10.2)	0.077
Absent	225 (84.1)	219 (89.8)	

††This category includes husband, partner or ex-partner and family member such as sibling, father, uncle, cousin as well as father-in-law or brother-in-law.

Table 3. Relation between some socio-demographic variables and physical violence in logistic regression analysis, with odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals (n = 483).

Independent Variables	Physical Violence	
	OR	(95%CI)
Perpetrator's age groups (years)		
<18	1.00	
≥18	0.40	(0.10 – 1.49)
Relationship between victim and perpetrator		
Unknown†	1.00	
Intimate partner	8.1	(5.21 – 12.60)

All statistically significant P values are in bold type. †This category includes husband, partner or ex-partner and family member such as sibling, father, uncle, cousin as well as father-in-law or brother-in-law.

Discussion

Considering the difficulty of producing trustworthy data on violence against adolescent girls and young women in “normal times,” this research demonstrates how the Covid-19 pandemic increases the likelihood of physical, sexual and lethal violence against adolescent girls and young women using Turkish newspaper media coverage of violence issue. Regarding the information provided on violence against adolescent girls and young women in Turkey through the lens of Turkey's mainstream newspaper media, the results show that newspaper media cover areas such as the community in which the violence occurred, the type of violence and perpetrators and victims participating in the act. In order to assess their contributions to the violence against adolescent girls and young women's literature, the findings of the current study require further investigation particularly in terms of on how providing this information will contribute to shaping people's perception of violence as a massive global health crisis.

Generally, violence against women has been found to increase in the face of pandemics. Recent studies on trends in violence have found evidence of increased violence during the Covid-19 pandemic (Mittal & Singh, 2020). Violence hotlines in some countries reported a fivefold rise in calls after lockdown measures and other restrictions were introduced (United Nations, 2020). Based on the reports of mainstream newspaper media in Turkey, this paper is the first to document current knowledge about the characteristics of violence against adolescent girls and young women. As presented in Table 1 (Table 1), this is particularly important given the increased risk of physical, sexual and lethal violence in Turkey. It is possible that the increasing cases of violence in Turkey over the past two years are related to lockdowns and physical distancing due to Covid-19, which force victims to remain at same places with their abusers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, factors on reducing to access to health care facilities and stay-at-home orders, school closures, limitations on economic activity, have increased the likelihood of adolescent girls being exposed to any form of violence (Bhatia et al., 2020). As showed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), violence against adolescent girls and young women particularly that caused by intimate partners has intensified since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic (Boserup et al., 2020). For example, following the pandemic, France saw a 30% increase in reports of intimate partner violence (Taub, 2020). Align with that study, this newspaper review found a similar increase in incidents of intimate partner violence in Turkey over the same time period (Table 2).

Accordance with reports in the literature, the intimate partner, represented in this study by a family member such as father, uncle, sibling, cousin as well as brother-in-law or father-in-law, does appear to be responsible for a significant percentage of violence against adolescent girls (Blake et al., 2014). According to the current findings of

the study, physical violence caused by an intimate partner appears to have increased during the outbreak of Covid-19.

Notably, nearly all of the perpetrators of violence by an intimate partner were over the age of 18 years and have increased significantly during the outbreak of Covid-19 (Table 2). As a matter of fact, stress, loss of income, lack of community-based resources during the outbreak of Covid-19, have increased masculine aggression toward intimate partners (Memmi, 2015).

Limitations and Strengths

The strength of the current study is to elaborate analysis of data obtained from Turkish newspaper media coverage of violence against adolescent girls and young women. In Turkey, a country where there is no rigorous literature on violence against adolescent girls and young women, such reports can still provide useful information on the subject.

As newspaper media reports are being insufficient sources for such data as they do not report whole such cases and clearly conveying the same information (for example, perpetrators or/and victims' characteristics), in the current study data does not appear to accurately reflect the real number of cases in patterns of violence, following the argument that incidents of the violence against adolescent girls and young women are more common in Turkey.

Conclusion

In conclusion, given the physical, sexual and lethal forms of violence among adolescent girls and young women in Turkey, newspaper media reports highlighting vital issues that may arise during the outbreak of Covid-19 can be a good monitoring tool in a low-resource setting. To raise awareness of the public and policy makers about the dangerous consequences of violence caused by an intimate partner in Turkey, capacity building of the newspaper media could be a useful strategy for more credible reporting on this issue.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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