

# **CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF VIOLENCE**

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## 1-INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcomes of a research project that was carried out at Tarlabası Community Center and was funded by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. The study aimed to investigate children's perception of violence in their daily lives. It involved holding workshops for children between the ages of 7-15 where they could discuss their daily experiences related to various forms of violence and express themselves through artistic mediums of drawing, story writing and photography. This project had the double aim of both empowering children and raising their awareness about different forms of violence that they are exposed to in their daily lives and also gaining insight into how children experience and perceive violence. Through sharing children's thoughts and feelings on violence via social media this project also had the larger aim of raising public awareness on the subject and giving voice to children's perspective on violence.

Turkey affirmed United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994. However, a study conducted by UNICEF (2011) showed that Turkish society had difficulties in internalizing the fact that violence against children is unacceptable. The main reason that makes violence against children remain unseen and unreported is the fact that particular types of violence are perceived as acceptable on societal and juridical levels in Turkey (UNICEF, 2007).

Literature reveals that most of the perpetrators of violence were victims of violence themselves in their childhood. This phenomenon that is known as the cycle of violence underscores how violence is transferred from one generation to another (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990). Thus, violence against children needs to be investigated on multidimensional levels. Research about violence has been mostly conducted by investigating adults' perspectives. However, children should be considered and treated as a different subculture (Lloyd-Smith &

Tarr, 2000). Therefore, this study aims to investigate violence from the perspective of children and to make children's perception visible to adults.

### **1.1. Prevalence of Violence in Turkey and Worldwide**

Based on the analysis and estimates of thirty-eight reports from 96 countries on children aged 2- to 17 years old, it was concluded that 64% of children in Asia, 56% in Northern America, 50% in Africa, 34% in Latin America, and 12% in Europe were exposed to violence in 2014 (Hillis, Mercy, Abomi, & Kress, 2016). The UNICEF study that collected data from 190 countries revealed grave statistical facts about violence against children. In 2012, 1 in 5 children (95,000) under 20 years of age became victims of homicide. Four in five children aged 2 to 14 years had experienced violent discipline that included psychological aggression and physical punishment at home. Worldwide approximately 6 in 10 children were exposed to physical punishment by their caregivers regularly. Approximately, 120 million girls under the age of 20 were exposed to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts (UNICEF, 2014). Child maltreatment and domestic violence research in Turkey suggested that 51% of children aged 7 to 18 were subjected to emotional abuse, 45% of them experienced physical abuse, 25% of them were exposed to neglect in family and 3% of them were exposed to sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2010). Genç Hayat Vakfi (2012) conducted a study with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Istanbul from 50 different schools. Results showed that 73,4% of children experienced domestic violence at least once. Children reported that they most frequently witnessed adults shouting and arguing each other and adults physically harming each other (beating, slapping and etc.) to the degree that made them frightened. The experimenters argued that parents might not be aware of the fact that their children witness and experience violence between adults and are affected by those negative events. In 2013, a study that was conducted in 26 provinces of Turkey found that 74% of the subjects reported

that their children who were aged between 0 to 8 years were exposed to at least one type of violence (Bernard van Leer Vakfı, 2013).

In recent years in Turkey, in addition to children being exposed to violence at home and at school, children are exposed to ever increasing doses of violence at the societal level. War, immigration, refugees, and increasing political tension lead to an increase in children's exposure to violence on the streets and in media. The subjects of this study were residents of Tarlabaşı, a disadvantaged area of Istanbul. Tarlabaşı is inhabited mainly by families who immigrated from Eastern cities and refugees. Currently it is also undergoing urban transformation. In addition to deficiencies in physical conditions, children living in Tarlabaşı were exposed to the Syrian refugee crisis and political tensions due to Tarlabaşı's central location. This project aimed to give the children of Tarlabaşı a space to express their experiences and to raise public awareness into their experiences.

## **1.2. Developmental Influences of Violence on Children**

Experiences of violence interrupt children's emotional, social, cognitive, and biological developments on multiple levels. Witnessing or being exposed to violence may damage children's sense of security which has a fundamental function in socio-emotional development, and may affect children's brain development (McCrory, De Brito, & Viding, 2010). Ongoing exposure to violence increases stress hormone release, disrupt physical development, and damage the limbic system. As a result emotion regulation, attention, memory, and learning functions may be affected. It is also known that children exposed to violence may misread or become hyper vigilant to the environmental cues for threats that lead to difficulties in the interpretation of emotions (Carpenter & Stacks, 2009).

Witnessing violence may also lead to significant developmental problems. Children who witnessed violence between their parents in early childhood were observed to develop insecure

attachment to their parents (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). Witnessing violence also has a negative impact on children's development of positive and strong sense of self, capacity of mentalization (an ability to understand the mental state of others' and themselves), and capacity to develop secure relationships later on in life (Fonagy, 2003; Carpenter & Stacks, 2009). Children who are exposed to violence might perceive the inner and outer world as disruptive and insecure (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001; Pelendecioğlu & Bulut, 2009). Being exposed to violence and/or witnessing violence in family may also lead children to believe that they are responsible for causing the violence between parents. This may in turn increase children's self-blame and lower their self-esteem (Singh, 2001). In severe cases where their caregivers' well-being is under threat children may develop post-traumatic stress disorder. (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 1995).

In general, children who are exposed to or are witnesses of violence are at risk of experiencing deficiencies in memory and language development, emotional difficulties (phobias, tic disorder, and etc.), problems with toilet training, sleeping, and difficulty being alone (Bayat & Evgin, 2015; Ybarra, Wilkens, & Lieberman, 2007).

## 2-METHOD

### 2.1. Description of the Project

Children living in Tarlabası aged 7 to 15 were the participants of this project. Separate meetings were held for the age groups of 7-9; 10-12 and 13-15. The groups had on average 7 to 10 participants and each had a total of 4 meetings. The first meeting had the aim of providing information to the parents about the project and getting their consent. The parents also filled out the Demographic Form and the survey about Children's Experiences in different environments. The same questionnaires were also filled in by the children in the next meeting.

Following this meeting a total of three meetings were held with the children. In the first meeting children discussed the negative experiences they had in various environments. In the second one they produced a drawing (7-9 –year-olds), wrote a story (10-12 –year-old group) or shot photographs (13-15-year-old group). In the third meeting they produced slogans against violence and a poster.

As part of this research the content of children verbal expressions and artistic expressions were analyzed. The emerging themes were examined for each age group in order to understand how children experience and conceptualize violence.

In addition the demographic forms and the Children's Experiences Survey that were filled out by the parents and the children were examined statistically.

The Children's Experiences Survey was a 9-item brief survey that was developed for this study in order to assess the frequency of children's negative and positive experiences at home, school and the neighborhood. Survey included three-point Likert Type questions on how often children felt bad/tense, peaceful/relaxed, and frightened at home, at school and neighborhood. 'Usually', 'occasionally', and 'never' were three choices for each question.

This study had the aim of answering these following questions:

- 1) How is violence experienced and perceived by children and adolescents?
- 2) How do children and adolescents define violence, which acts are defined as violence?
- 3) According to children what kind of an impact does violence have on the victim and the perpetrator?
- 4) Are there examples of violent acts that are seen as acceptable by children?
- 5) Are there significant differences in the way violence is experienced by the school aged, preadolescent and adolescent groups?

## **2.2. The Format of the Group Meetings**

As the concept of violence may be too triggering for children in the first meeting this concept was not verbalized initially. Instead children were asked what kind of positive and negative experiences they have in their Daily lives and interactions. Children were asked to give different examples relating to contexts of home, school, neighborhood, and media. Afterwards they were asked which one of these examples could be defined as violence, what might its impact be and if these behaviors are acceptable.

In the second meeting children were reminded the topics that were discussed and they were asked to engage in an artistic production about a negative event they chose (art, story writing or photography depending on the age group). Afterwards children were asked to describe their art work. In the third meeting children were asked to produce slogans and a poster against violence. This activity had the aim of empowering children against violence and to provide a closure.

## 2.3 Research Methodology

For this study the Demographic Form and the Children's Experiences Questionnaire filled in by the parents and children were analyzed statistically. The verbal expressions and the drawings, stories and photographs produced by children were analyzed qualitatively.

All the meetings of the children were videotaped and transcribed. All the utterances in the meetings were coded for violence related categories through the use of the MAXQDA 12 software. The coding categories were formed through the conference of three coders. In the beginning certain coding categories were defined based on research questions. Emerging new categories were added based on the content of the meetings.

All utterances were coded for all the violence categories they corresponded to on the MAXQDA 12 program. For example the sentence: 'At school my friend hit me and swore at me' was coded for both physical violence and verbal violence. It was also coded for the context of violence (school and relational domain of violence (among peers). The emerging categories were evaluated for their frequency and their content for each age group.

The drawings, stories and photographs were also evaluated for their structural elements, the elements they included and the themes they depicted.

## 2.4. Research Ethics

As the subject of violence is a very sensitive issue several safeguards were taken in both conducting the meetings with the children and in the data collection process. Both parents and children were informed about the confidentiality of the study. It was explained that their identities would not be revealed at any point during the Project. They were also informed that they could discontinue participating in the Project at any point they wished.

In order to ensure that the workshops would not be too stimulating for children rather than bringing up the concept of violence they were first asked about positive and negative experiences they had during their interactions with different figures in different context such as school, neighborhood, home etc. Each art workshop began with a warm up exercise and after producing a drawing based on a negative experience the workshop ended with making a drawing of a positive experience. This last experience had the aim of strengthening the children through helping them tap into their resources.

The fact that the workshops were held by the staff psychologist at the Tarlabasi Community Center who knew the children and their families, and the fact that TCC had worked in this community for many years were also important safeguards while handling this fragile subject. It was also planned that attending children who were affected negatively by the workshops could be followed up by the psychologist at the center but such an instance did not occur. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul Bilgi University.

## **2.5 Demographics of the Participants**

The participants of the research study were 67 children who resided in Tarlabasi. The children were between the ages of 7 to 15. 28 Children (15 girls, 13 boys) comprised the 7-9 – year-old group, 27 children (15 girls, 12 boys) were in the group of 10-12 –year olds and 13 children (12 girls, 1 boy) formed the group of 13-15 –year-olds. In addition, there were two groups of Syrian children including 8 girls and 11 boys.

In total 87 children participated in this Project (50 girls, 37 boys). This report will only focus on the work with the children from Turkey. The verbal meetings conducted with Syrian children could not be videotaped and was therefore not available for coding. Furthermore as the previous experiences of Syrian children were very different the children residing in

Tarlabası it was decided that it would be more appropriate to examine their drawings in a separate report.

According to the parents' responses on the demographic survey families had a minimum of 1 (4 families) and a maximum of 9 children (5 families). Mean number of children was 4 ( $SD= 2$ ). All children except one were attending school. 73 % of the mothers indicated that their children did not have developmental problems but 23 % reported some problem. These problems included early birth, speech problems, failure to thrive and asthma. 8 % of the children were reported to have emotional difficulty which included being introverted, anger management problems and enuresis.

**Table 1.** Demographic Variables of Families

Family Demographics				
	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Mother's Age	35,55	4,93	26	45
Father's Age	38,58	4,95	27	57
Years of residence at Tarlabası	13,30	5,38	0	29
Years of residence In Istanbul	13,52	4,44	7	26

Most of the families had migrated from Southeastern provinces and they had been living in Istanbul between duration of 1 to 29 years.

The tables below present information about the education level of mothers and fathers as well as the family income.

**Table 2.** Mothers Level of Education

	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	40	58,8
Basic Literacy	9	13,2
Primary School	10	14,7
Middle School	2	2,9
High School	3	4,4

**Table 3.** Fathers' Education Level

	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	15	22,1
Basic Literacy	7	10,3
Primary School	30	44,1
Middle School	3	4,4
High School	8	11,8

Other than one child's mother all mothers reported being married to the father of their children and living together with them. Nine percent of the families reported that they had other relatives residing with them at home. Sixty-eight percentage of the children reported having participated in a previous Project at Tarlabasi Community Center.

**Table 4.** Monthly Family Income

	Frequency	Percentage
0-1000 TL	24	35,3
1000-2000 TL	37	54,4
2000-3000 TL	4	5,9

## 3-RESULTS

### 3.1 Results of the Survey

The Children's Experiences Survey that was prepared by fort his study was filled in by both the mothers and the children. This 9-item brief survey asked the participants to rate the frequency of children's negative and positive experiences at home, school and the neighborhood. Survey included Likert Type questions on how often children felt bad, comfortable, and frightened at home, at school and neighborhood. 'Usually', 'occasionally', and 'never' were the three choices for each question. Assistants aided in the filling out of the survey. It was observed that particularly the 7-9 year-old children had some difficulty in understanding some of the questions.

Table 5 summarizes the frequencies of children's experiences in the contexts of home, school and neighborhood. According to the results the most frequently reported experience by children in all three contexts was comfortable. Feeling fearful was reported most frequently for neighborhood.

**Table 5.** Mean scores for children's self-reports on different feelings in three environments

	Home		School		Neighborhood	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Feeling bad	1.55	.64	1.54	.50	1.57	.66
Feeling frightened	1.74	.68	1.34	.54	1.40	.52
Feeling comfortable	2.70	.47	2.75	.43	2.76	.43

The variables of ‘feeling bad’ and ‘fearful’ were combined for all environments and three new variables of ‘total negative’ were obtained for the three environments. Table 6 presents the frequencies of feeling negative for the three environments separately for boys and girls. Even though there were no significant statistical differences in the negative experiences across the different environments a visual examination of the means reveals that negative experiences are mostly reported for the neighborhood ( $M= 3.27$ ,  $SD= 1.15$ ). The mean negative experiences were compared for girls and boys and no statistically significant difference was observed. However, examination of the mean values reveals that girls reported higher level of negative experiences.

**Table 6.** Negative Experiences for Girls and Boys

	<b>School</b>		<b>Neighborhood</b>		<b>Home</b>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Girls (n=41)	2,92	8,62	3,34	1,30	2,95	0,87
Boys (n=26)	2,89	0,91	3,20	0,94	2,73	0,83
Total (N=67)	2,90	0,87	3,27	1,15	2,86	0,85

Analysis of Variance was conducted to see whether there were differences among age groups in the reported negative experiences across the three domains. No significant difference was observed. (For school environment  $F (2,62)= 1,16$ ,  $p>0.05$ ; Neighborhood  $F (2,62) = 0,11$ ,  $p >0.05$ ; Home  $F (2,62) = 1,70$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 7.** Negative Experiences for the three age groups across different environments

	School		Neighborhood		Home	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
7-9 (n=26)	2,96	0,82	3,34	1,01	3,03	0,94
10-12 (n=27)	2,72	0,89	3,24	1,2	2,84	0,85
13-15 (n=14)	3,17	0,94	3,17	1,4	2,5	0,52
Total (N=67)	2,90	0,87	3,27	1,15	2,86	0,85

In addition in order to examine whether there were any age group differences in the amount of feeling comfortable across different environments Analysis of Variance was conducted. The only significant difference was observed for the home environment ( $F(2,65) = 6,55, p <0.05$ ). The age group of 13-15 year-old reported higher amount of feeling comfortable in comparison to the age group of 7-9 year-olds. (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** Feeling comfortable across different age groups and environments

	Feeling comfortable across different age groups and environments					
	School		Neighborhood		Home	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
7-9 (n=26)	2,38	0,57	2,48	0,65	2,52	0,65
10-12 (n=27)	2,40	0,63	2,62	0,56	2,88	0,32
13-15 (n=14)	2,64	0,50	2,57	0,51	3,00	0,00
Total (N=67)	2,45	0,58	2,56	0,58	2,77	0,49

Mothers' evaluation of their children's experiences across the three domains was evaluated separately. Table 9 below presents the mean values.

**Table 9.** Mothers' Evaluations of Their Children's Experiences Across three Domains

	School		Neighborhood		Home	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Bad	1,56	0,66	1,55	0,64	1,54	0,50
Fearful	1,36	0,51	1,74	0,67	1,34	0,54
Comfortable	2,76	0,42	2,69	0,46	2,75	0,43

The variable of 'Total Negative Experiences' was also calculated for the mothers.

When mothers' and children's evaluations were compared it was seen that neighborhood was the context that was seen to be related to the highest level of negative experiences for both mothers and children (see Table 10)

**Table 10.** Total Negative Experiences Across Three Context According to Children's and Mothers' Evaluations

	School		Neighborhood		Home	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Child (N=63)	2,90	0,87	3,26	1,15	2,85	0,85
Mother (N=63)	2,94	0,91	3,28	1,14	2,87	0,85

### 3.2 Analysis of the Verbal Expressions

In order to evaluate how children perceived and experienced violence in daily life the experiences they talked about in the verbal discussions that related to violence were coded.

Certain coding categories were determined in the beginning of the study. There were: The type of violence, the context of violence, relational domain of violence, the effects of violence, acceptable acts of violence, and solutions for violence. As the content of the meetings were evaluated new coding categories emerged. Three of these were subcategories of the type of violence; environmental violence, cyber violence and political violence. Apart from these it was seen that there were certain experiences that could not be defined as violence but still had an important impact for children. These were coded under the main category of 'Negative Experiences'. Positive Experiences that were described by the children were also coded under the Main Category of 'Positive Experiences'. These coding categories were evaluated both for their frequencies and their content.

### 3.2.1 The Types of Violence

The examples children gave while describing the negative experiences in their lives that fit into a category of violence were coded for the type of violence, the relationship in which it occurred and where it occurred. When all of the participants' utterances were evaluated together it was found that the type of violence that was described most often was physical violence. This category comprised 35% of all the total utterances. This category included a variety of actions ranging from pulling someone's hair or slapping them to beating someone or injuring someone with a knife. This category was mostly mentioned by the age groups of 7-9 and 10-12. These actions were described as occurring mostly among peers as well as from teachers to students.

*"For example one time I was late for class coming from the toilet and I was beaten because I was late. He is hitting me. I don't want this. I can't stand it."*

Examples of physical violence directed from parents to children were also frequently shared by the age groups of 7-9 and 10-12.

*“They force me to do things and when I refuse they beat me up.”*

**Table 11. Frequencies of Categories of Types of Violence**

Types of Violence	Frequency	Percentag
Physical Violence	123	35,04
Environmental Violence	68	19,37
Relational Violence	61	17,38
Verbal Violence	43	12,25
Cyber Violence	28	6,67
Sexual Violence	14	3,99
Neglect	6	1,71
Violence against animals	4	1,14
Political Violence	3	0,85
Other	1	0,28
Total	351	100,00

Environmental Violence: The second most frequently discussed type of violence was environmental violence. This category was mostly discussed by the age group of 13-15-year-olds and it comprised of examples of their living environments such as school, streets and home being dirty, old and unsafe. Examples included lack of infrastructure in the neighborhood and schools, garbage in the streets, lack of safe playgrounds, lack of street lamps, streets being full of drug dealers etc.

At school not having enough rooms for music and art classes, gyms, and labs; the play ground being too small were frequently shared examples. Other examples included the toilets being dirty, not having locks, not having enough garbage bins.

Children particularly complained about the neighborhood not being safe due to the Street lamps not working properly, having to play in the middle of parked cars and the fire extinguisher not being able to come into the neighborhood due to parked cars. One child's statement about not having safe play spaces was particularly moving.

*“For example our house is on a slope. I bring my younger brother with me when I go out to play. My mother tells us not to play on the street because cars go by. We go into the side streets but the girls and boys there say this is our neighborhood. They don’t want us to play there. They throw us out. We go to the other side. They don’t want us there too. We are forced to go back to our Street but it isn’t safe.”*

It seems that children are not able to play and socialize safely in their neighborhoods. Additionally their comments that while other neighborhoods have parking lots theirs don't and the fact that garbage trucks don't come by as often to their neighborhood leads us to the conclusion that they are feeling neglected.

**Relational Violence:** This category comprised 17% of the utterances and they mostly occurred at school or in the neighborhood. This category comprises of various acts of bullying such as making fun of someone, ridiculing someone, forcing someone to do something, discriminating against them or gossiping. It appeared that particularly feeling excluded by a group of friends or parents acting in a cold and distant way were experiences that had a deep impact on the children.

*“I learned something today; nobody likes me in our class anyway. I try to make friends with them but they keep moving away from me.”*

The age group of 13-15 year-olds also talked about feeling forced by their boyfriends or feeling under the constant surveillance of the neighborhood community.

**Verbal Violence:** This category comprised 12% of all the experiences shared by children. It included actions of shouting, insulting, swearing and occurred mostly at school or at home. Teachers, school principals' and parents actions of yelling at and insulting children were frequently recounted.

*“I was only late for class but the teacher was yelling. Yelling a lot.”*

**Cyber Violence:** This category was particularly talked about by the age groups of 10-12 and 13-15 and it comprised 18% of all the utterances. Some of the examples given included their photographs being shared without their permission in social media and being abused through fake social media accounts. Teenagers were also complained about their families violating their privacy through looking at their phones and their social media accounts without their permission.

**Sexual Violence:** This category was mostly mentioned by the 13-15 year-olds and it comprised of experiences that occurred at school, in the neighborhood and through media. It consists of unwanted physical contact in public transportation and at school, or being stared at by ‘older men’. They were also sensitive to the fact that disabled youngsters were particularly vulnerable in this domain.

*“For example there are disabled people. They can’t see or they can’t speak. They are abused a lot. Because they can not say anything they are abused a lot.”*

The adolescents also talked about movies being provocative in this respect. It was seen that the examples of abuse children witnessed at public transportation or on the streets were rather scary and confusing for the children. They seemed to lack the vocabulary to describe these abusive experiences which contributed to their difficulties in talking about and processing these experiences.

*"Child1: For example a woman is walking down the Street. This is what I really don't like. Two men are walking behind her. I can't say its name.*

*Child 2: Abuse.*

*Child1: Rape*

*Group Facilitator: I don't understand what it is that you don't like.*

*Child1: For example a woman is walking down the Street. This is what I fear the most. 2 men come beside her. They say pervert things to her."*

Neglect: Children utterances about their physical and emotional needs not being met were categorized under the heading of 'neglect'. This category comprised 1,7% of all utterances. Even though its frequency was low it was observed that these experiences had much emotional weight. Children particularly complained about their parents and their teachers not spending enough time with them or not showing enough care.

*"They don't give me much attention. For example they should ask how my day went or if I have any homework. At least they could walk me to school. I walk alone in the streets in a pitiful way."*

Two children complained about their teachers not showing them enough care:

*"A: They don't call us when we are not well. They don't care.*

*B: When something happens to us, they want us to die."*

Political Violence: One of the most impactful experiences for children was incidents of political violence they had witnessed in the streets. Examples of these were being exposed to

tear gas, witnessing clashes between the police and protestors and seeing armored police vehicles in their neighborhoods and being scared of using public transportation due to fear of bombs. It was clear that these experiences led to feelings of fear, anger and helplessness in children and they experienced much confusion about how to make sense of these experiences.

*“For example when there is a demonstration they use tear gas and many people are affected other than the ones they want to impact. They throw tear gas and little babies, older people, sick people get affected. I think this is very wrong.”*

*“This disturbs me a lot. For example when I come home from school I don’t need to see the armored police vehicle and feel intimidated.”*

Another child expressed the fear of bombs in public transportation:

*“It has come to a very dangerous place. I can’t go into subway, I go in with much fear.”*

**Violence Against Animals:** Another type of violence that children were concerned about was violence against animals. This category comprised 4% of the utterances. Children seemed to have very strong feelings against violence against animals.

*“For example someone is driving his car. He doesn’t see the cat, runs over the cat. The cat dies and he drives on without looking back. I can’t look at it. I saw a bird the other day. I couldn’t look at it.*

### 3.2.2 Relational Domain of Violence

The relationship in which the act of violence was occurring was also coded. The following table shows the frequencies of the codes under this category.

**Table 12. Relational Domain of Violence**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Peers	73	29,20
Family members	58	23,20
Teacher-principal	40	16,00
Other adults	30	12
Syrians	16	6,40
Security guards	1	4,40
Politic	10	4,00
Illegal	6	2,40
Neighbors	6	2,40
Total	250	100,00

Considering all the age groups together, it is seen that children describe violence experiences mostly in their peer relationships. Twenty-nine percentage of all the coding about relational domain of violence belonged to the category of peers. This was particularly significant for the age groups of 7-9 and 10-12. Relational violence examples such as mocking, belittling, exclusion as well as experiences of physical violence were the frequently described experiences in this domain.

Interactions which occur among family members were the second most frequently reported category (23%). More than half of the examples in this area consisted of violent behaviors directed from mothers toward children. Beside acts of verbal violence such as getting angry and yelling, acts of physical violence and neglect were significant. Following mothers, fathers were also stated to exhibit violent behaviors as well as siblings. One tenth of

the reported examples of acts of violence that took place at home related to children witnessing arguments and fights among their parents. It was concluded that those experiences caused an intense feeling of insecurity in children.

*"They are arguing between each other. They may beat us too.*

*No violence!"*

Considering all the age groups together, one of the most frequently mentioned actors of violence were teachers and school principals (16%). In this field, verbal violence behaviors such as yelling, insulting and physical violent behaviors such as hair pulling, throwing books and desks were common examples. It has been understood that those behaviors which cause feelings of intense fear and anger may leave significant marks in children's inner world.

*"There is the school principal but we dislike this. You see school principal you see.... We were at school. We were there, the school principal called for us. Afterwards, he threw down the desks, yelled and yelled. We were scared because it was unexpected. There was a parking lot in that corner, boys stepped up on it. Afterwards, they blamed us for it. The principal threw down the desks. He screamed at us. I hate him. "*

Other significant actors of violence in children's descriptions were strangers, adults that children met on the streets and public transportation. These actors were coded under the heading of "other adults" (12%). These adults were described as damaging the environment, preventing children from playing on the street or deceiving children, kidnapping and abusing them. These behaviors that children witnessed or were told about seems to cause intense fear and anger in them. Apart from that, children mentioned adults being engaged in illegal activities such as drug dealing and theft (6%).

Another significant adult figure who appeared as an actor of violence was security guards (4%). Security guards were described as using tear gas against protesters and chasing

them. During public demonstrations, acts like the protesters' starting fire, throwing rocks at the police were among other acts of violence that were depicted by children and seemed to have an impact on them.

Syrians also came up in children's discussion. Syrian refugee children who shared the same neighborhood with the children who lived in Tarlabaşı were sometimes depicted as the actors of violence and sometimes as its victim. While children complained about Syrian children's stealing simple goods and throwing stones, they also were disturbed about the level of discrimination Syrians suffered from.

*"For example, they are ridiculed and disrespected because they came from Syria. But we could be in their shoes."*

In the adolescent age group of 13 to 15-year-olds, Syrians' situation was discussed with regard to the larger socio-economic system that victimized them.

*'R: Syrians are made to work for long hours but they are paid less as compared to other people.*

*K: How do you know?*

*S: I know.*

*S: For example, I have an uncle. Because there are Syrian workers they are paid less."*

### 3.2.3. Domains of Violence

When the context in which violence occurred was evaluated it was seen that neighborhood was the most frequently mentioned environment when all age groups were combined (34%). Neighborhood particularly appeared in the environmental violence descriptions of the age group of 12-15 with regard to absence of the absence of safe and clean

playgrounds and deficiencies in the infrastructure. Besides, acts of physical and verbal violence which children witnessed in the streets, illegal acts such as drug trafficking were other experiences that made their living spaces insecure.

**Table 13. Domains of Violence**

Domain of Violence	Number	Percentage
Neighborhood	98	34,88
School	94	33,45
Home	43	15,30
Media	32	11,39
Public Transportation	8	2,85
Other	6	2,14
Total	281	100,00

The school environment was another domain mentioned as frequently as the neighborhood (33%). The school was the most frequently mentioned by the age groups of 7-9 and 10-12. Relational violence examples such as exclusion and humiliation among peers at school were the most frequently cited examples. Teachers and principals also appeared with acts of physical and verbal violence.

*“Our English teacher sometimes pulls our hair. Our teacher is doing like that, taking (the child is standing up and demonstrating. Movements as if messing up, pushing objects), pulling his hair. ‘Sit down and do your work!’ It hurts so much.”*

In the third rank, there are violence examples at the home setting (15%). Especially, physical violence acts from mothers to the children were significant. It seems that physical

violence is still widely used as a discipline method. Children also described that they were punished by beatings if they did not do the housework their mothers expected them to.

*'My mother thinks we are not tired. I am lying down, watching television. She is shouting at me and saying; 'why do not you do this, do that... Then, she beats me up.'*

Another important domain of violence was the media. In this domain, especially, events about invasion of privacy such as instances of fraud in social media setting, sharing of photos without consent were mostly stated. Examples about getting swindled via social media accounts and being abused were also shared. Children also expressed how much they were bothered about violent images shared on television or social media.

*"For example, they make people mentally depressed. They show wars. Things like ISİD they are cutting heads. They are telling about them."*

*"There was a child at the hospital, there is nothing like that... Dead people... They posted them on Facebook. Do not show such things."*

### 3.2.4 Reasons of Violent Acts and Justification of Violence

According to the children's expressions, children not meeting parental expectations, anger management problems of parents and their own life stress were among the reasons for parents' applying corporal punishment. Children were aware that even if they do nothing wrong their parents could direct the anger they had towards others to them and beat them up.

Children labeled most of those behaviors as an injustice toward them. On the other hand, they also saw some acts as justifiable. In particular, children thought that their parents or teachers may have the right to beat them if they disobey them.

“ The light bulb in the room was broken. My father couldn’t fix it because he was working. I leave the light open so that light will come into the room. Then my mother beats me. She says that it gets cold inside. She is beating. For example, she is right in this instance.”

Violence in response to violence was also seen as acceptable by children. For instance, hitting a boy who was hitting others could be seen as acceptable. Physical violence was also often seen as an acceptable form of punishment towards a child who was being violent himself.

*‘He is beating me and I am beating him as well.’*

### 3.2.5 Effects of Violence

The emotional, physical and cognitive effects of violence were also analyzed based on children’s expressions. There were dramatic physical effects of violence such as being injured, dying or becoming ill.

*“For example, children cannot live in dirty places. For example a child who has asthma cannot live there, she can’t tolerate the smell.”*

It was observed that experiences of violence lead to intense feelings in children. Emotional experiences of feeling afraid, feeling bad, crying, not being able to forget about a scene and having nightmares were some of the experiences shared by children. Children also talked about the negative effect their living environment was having on them:

*“K: We don’t want to see helicopters, scorpions and anti-riot water cannon vehicles around us and go into that psychology.*

*E: Which psychology? There is no such thing as an anti-riot vehicle psychology.*

*K: But there is the visual effect, the psychological effect it leaves on your body.”*

Children also talked about experiencing anger towards those who used violence against them. Some children also talked about gaining resilience and improving their coping mechanisms after being exposed to violence.

*"I feel afraid, O feel bad but I also get encouraged. Because I lived through all that, I feel myself a bit braver."*

A common behavioral effect of violence was avoidance behaviors. Not wanting to go into subway, avoiding certain streets in the neighborhood, not being friends with certain children etc. In the adolescent group some girls talked about not being able to act so freely after encountering with certain acts of sexual violence.

Perhaps one of the most alarming effects of violence was the fact that at times it became an acceptable problem solving method for children. It was particularly satisfying for some children to see someone who was physically violent toward them being physically punished.

*"There was a boy in another class; he made me fall down on purpose. If my teacher is beating him up, I say to myself, 'thank you god for giving his punishment.'*

Actually during some meetings children could exhibits acts of verbal or physical violence towards each other. These observations point to the fact that violence can be very quickly internalized and it is very easy to become part of a cycle of violence. Perhaps one of the most concerning effects of violence was it becoming common place and being taken granted for. This situation was expressed by a boy as:

*"I got used to being beaten. Because of my teacher."*

### 3.2.6 Negative Experiences

Various experiences which children express during the sessions are important for them and annoying for them are categorized under the heading of “Negative Experiences”. There are experiences which are not under the definition of violence though but which occupy an important place in the children’s lives and which are significant for them under this heading. We think that those experiences provide an important window to understand the children’s world.

**Table 14.** Distribution of Codes of Negative Experiences

Negative Experiences	Frequency	Percentage
Discrimination	66	26
Education System	50	19
Being restricted	41	16
Injustice	37	14
Disrespect	22	8
Being Forced	21	8
Not being represented	7	2
Deprivation	6	2
Developmentally inappropriate	3	1
Inadequate services	3	1
Total	253	100

The experiences mentioned in this category differed among age groups widely. The above table shows the percentages and frequencies of all the utterances when all age groups were combined.. According to this table, the most frequency mentioned theme is discrimination which children and adolescents experienced in different domains (26%). This category was particularly stressed by the 13-15-year-olds.

Under the heading of discrimination, the most frequently mentioned issue was gender discrimination. In this area, approximately half of the children's utterances were about gender. Particularly girls feel this in every domain of their lives, starting from how they can dress to the level of autonomy that is allowed in social media ('*family members' checking their social media accounts*'), to the sports they can play ('*girls play volleyball, boys play football*'), how they should sit ('*you cannot cross your legs next to your father*') and the responsibilities that they have at home.

'T: '*My girl, help your mother. My boy, sit next to me.*'

*...Girl, tidy up there, do that when you get up in morning. Tidy up beds, make food, breakfast; boy, come on my boy, wash your face, come in and the breakfast is ready.*

,

"A: *Movies always depict women in a certain way for example. They make food, stay at home, look after children; they give birth of a child. Men go to work, come home, do whatever they want.*"

It was apparent that girls who participated in the study felt valued to the same degree as boys.

"Ö: *For example, there is such a thing in my family. There is such thing in we-Easterner; you will give birth until you have a boy. There are always girls and the last one is always a boy.*

*They stop when they have a boy. The boy is crown prince.*"

Boys were bothered by sexism particularly in the context of school. Particularly boys in the age group of 10 to 12 described being labeled as 'naughty' and 'lazy' much easier by teachers compared to girls. They stated that boys were punished more severely and beaten up

more frequently and they received poorer grades. Other than gender discrimination against handicapped, economic and ethnic discrimination were mentioned.

Education System: The second most frequently discussed negative experiences were about the education system. ( 19%). Particularly the 13-15-year-olds stressed these experiences. They particularly complained about the frequent changes, uncertainties and inequalities in the system. The age group of 10-12 was also very much bothered the frequent exams and the pressure they created on them.

*“We have 10 exams in 5 days. All one after another.”*

*“Students are threatened by grades, we fear report cards”*

Adolescents were also unhappy about having to wear uniforms and the different standards that boys and girls were held up to in this respect. Additionally they complained about sport and art activities being restricted and exams ruling their lives. For young people the way the school administration handled the relations with themselves and their parent was also a problem. They felt that they were not addressed with respect and as individuals by their teachers.

*“In parent-teacher conferences it is as if the teachers found the opportunity to complain about us. “*

*“ In the parent-teacher conferences they talk about the student. Why don’t they talk about this problem first with the student? When there is a problem you first talk to the source of the problem not with its parent.”*

Being Restricted: This category that formed 19% of the utterances included different experiences. For the age groups of 7-9 and 10-12 it mostly included experiences such as their parents not letting them play, not being able to go out or not being allowed much autonomy. It

seemed that some of these restrictions were related to their neighborhoods being unsafe. For the adolescent group most of the restrictions related to the way girls were allowed to dress and behave in the neighborhood.

Injustice: The age group of 7-9-year olds and 10-12-year olds were particularly bothered by being blamed and punished unfairly by their teachers and parents. They expressed that they could not defend themselves in these situations.

Not being respected : Another theme that seemed to be important for children was not being respected as a person or with regard to their rights (8%). The examples given in this category included teachers not following up on their promises, not taking children's ideas seriously, not trusting children. They were also unhappy about older children not respecting the younger ones' rights at schools. Adolescent group also talked bout instances where students were disrespectful towards teachers.

To be Forced: Another significant experience for children was the experiences of being forced to do certain things in different environments. At school they protested having to wear uniforms, to attend ceremonies and at home being forced to do housework was bothersome for children.

Being deprived of certain things was also important for children. Thei families' economic hardship seemed to be reflected in children's inner world as experiences of deprivation.

*" You know there are holidays. They distribute candies. My mother doesn't buy us new clothes. But other children brag about their new things. I don't like that at all, they don't buy us new clothes."*

Not being represented in the media was theme that appeared in the discussions of the adolescent group. The fact that women were represented in a gender-biased way in the TV

series, only particular political opinions being represented and the fact that their lives were not represented were experiences they criticized.

Developmentally inappropriate: Another point that was deduced from children's expressions was that children were exposed to certain materials that were not appropriate for their age or those they were given some responsibilities that were not age-appropriate. It seemed that they were exposed to content in the media that included violence. They were also expected to housework that felt heavy for them.

Inadequate Services: The adolescent group also expressed concern about the public services such as transportation or health services being inadequate.

### 3.2.7 Positive Experiences:

The most frequently described positive experiences were to receive love and care from their parents and teachers. Their parents spending time with them, taking them out, helping with their homework were frequently given examples. Teachers saying them 'well-done', kissing them were also experiences that left their mark. Other frequently mentioned positive experiences included parents giving those gifts and pocket money and throwing birthday parties for them. It seemed that these experiences signified being valued for children.

Teachers participating in extracurricular activities with children were also very significant for children. Going to site visits, teachers doing sports with them were among significant experiences for children. Another important significant experience was about building good friendships. Friends treating children nicely, inviting them to play together were important for children.

### 3.2.8 Solutions for Violence

One of the most common solutions children could of against violence was to seek help from an adult such as teacher, a parent or a security guard. Other solutions included: to warn the violator, to explain them and to give them a punishment. In the adolescent group not being passive in the face of violence, to verbalize and express the experience was another solution that came up.

*“There is a girl in our work place. They yell at her a lot. I wish they yelled at me. I would have responded back. They yell at her a lot because she doesn’t respond.”*

Responding with violence was also a commonly expressed solution and it was significant how it was seen as a right. Another significant observation was that many children could not come up with an active solution against violence and had a passive sense of helplessness.

*“Once I was playing ball at home. I hit it with my head and I broke the window. I was afraid, and I went and pretended to be sleeping before my father came home at night. He didn’t beat me.”*

### **3.3 Analysis of the Drawings**

The second meeting of the 7-9-year-old group included art making. Art is one of the most natural ways for children to express themselves and for us to have an understanding about their inner lives. Children can express the feelings and thoughts that they don’t have the vocabulary for through the use of art. Art also provides them a safe container to express difficult experiences that they can not make sense of. (Malchiodi, 1998; 2008).

In this Project the children were asked to make a drawing about one of the examples they gave about violence. The meeting first started with a warm up exercise where the children were asked to do quick drawings about basic emotions such as happiness, fear,

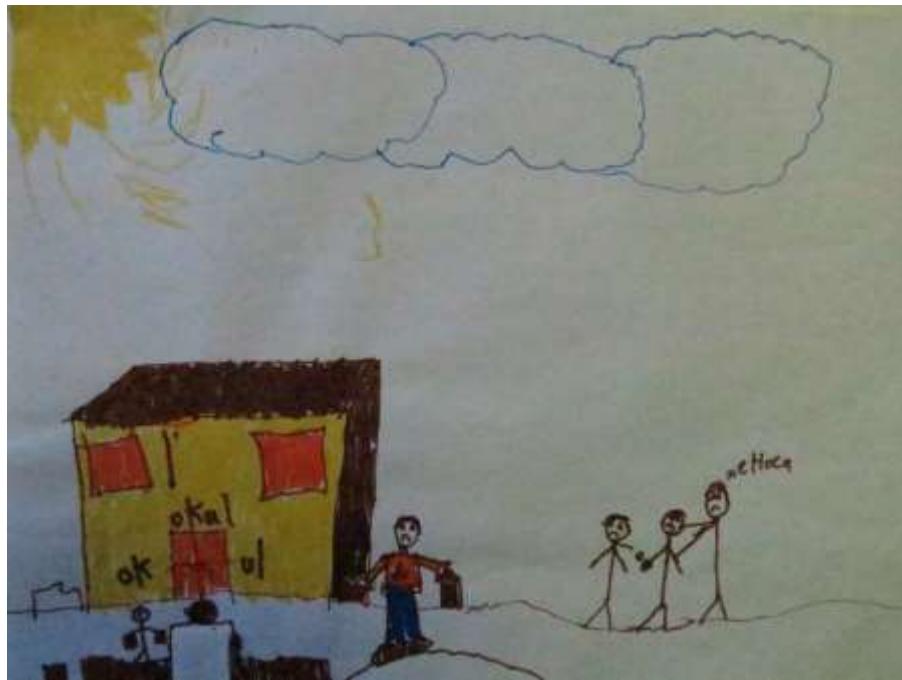
sadness. After depicting a negative experience that they had talked about in the previous meeting, they were asked to depict a positive experience through art. At the end of the meeting children talked about both of their drawings and described them to the group.

The evaluation of the structural elements of the drawings as well as their descriptions provides us insight into how children experience violence.

Some children were observed to be avoiding to picture negative experiences while others depicted dramatic scenes of violence. While some children could depict an act of aggression and talk about it without becoming disorganized, other children struggled to convey an integrated narrative in their drawings and their verbalizations.

The most frequently depicted form of violence in the drawings was physical violence. These acts included two children hitting each other, teachers beating up students or very dramatic events such as someone being shot in the street etc. Acts of beating frequently occurred between friends and also from teachers to students. In some drawings security guards also became part of this cycle of violence. In some drawings Syrian children were depicted as the victim or the perpetrator.

Physical violence was often pictured with images of bodily boundaries being violated.



*'They came out of school. One boy came, hit another boy. The other boy beat him up then the other one beat this one. Then the teacher came and he beat the child.'*

More serious acts of violence were generally depicted as being committed by stranger adults.



*"There is a man. He has a gun, he killed a man. The girl says to herself: 'I wish they didn't kill people and they didn't kill me. Then there in front of everyone. Everyone turned off their lights. So that the thief won't see them."*

Another example depicted a detailed 'war scene' among two groups of friends. It was remarkable how children described very lively scenes and how some drawings included guns and knives as instruments of violence.



It was clear that these scenes led to much anxiety and fear in children. The description of the girl who drew the previous drawing about the girl in the Picture was quite moving:

*"This is a girl. She is walking around, she is going out but when she sees the thief she says 'I wish they didn't kill people, they didn't kill me'. Then she runs home. I couldn't draw her running. And this girl's heart beats bum bum as if it is going to stop. As if it is going to stop."*

Expressions of anxiety also appeared in the form of black clouds, images of rain and scribbles in other drawings.



"I am playing with my friend at the park. Then everywhere is filled with war. War turned the whole World into black."



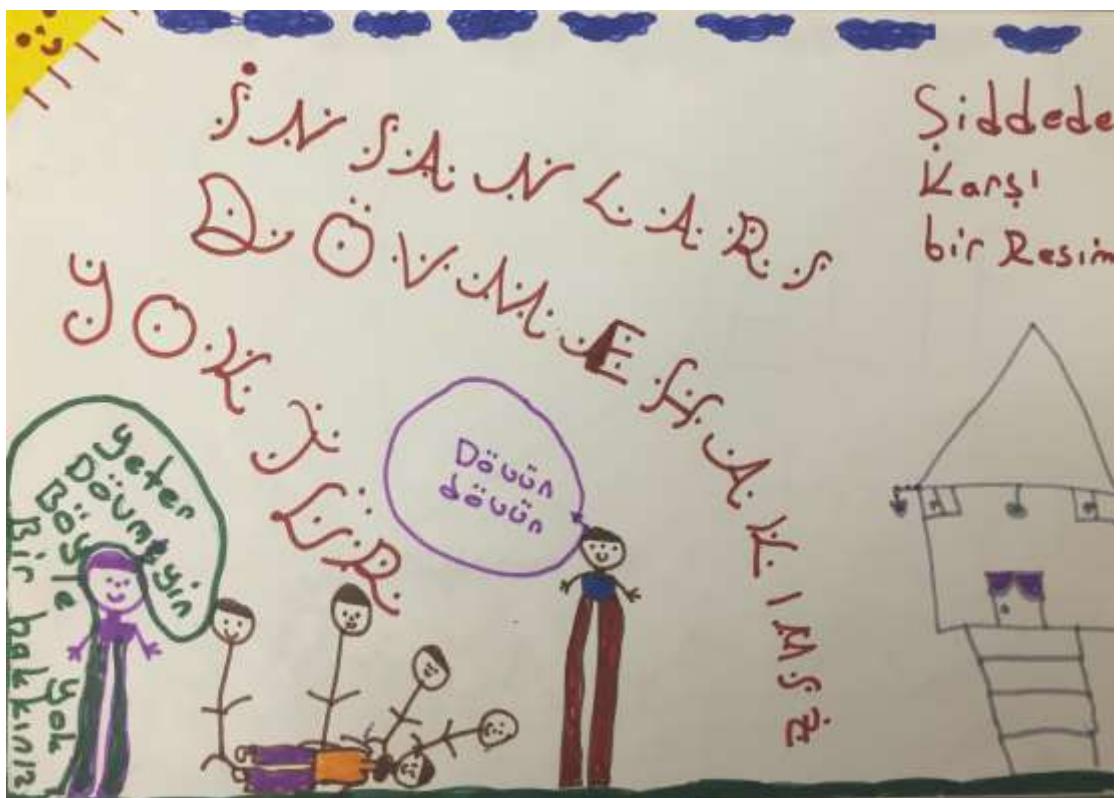
"There is a house. Then men came and attacked it. Nothing happened to the house. Guns came into the house. Men attack men and men died."

For some children the intense excitement that the story of violence triggered in them spiraled up and expanded. It seemed that the experience of violence was too stimulating for these children, it hampered their emotion regulation abilities and they had difficulty in forming a coherent narrative about the event. In fact in certain instances children were starting off describing a positive event but their descriptions were turning into negative ones. In the example below we can see how the initial scene of picking up fruits from a tree turns into an unstoppable spiral of violence:

*“ We went to a park. We saw a prune tree. We were picking up prunes. Then the police came and had their dog attack us. Then a boy comes and ouches us. Then the police came and hit us, they chase the boys away. We were running from them. They were chasing us.”*

Apart from physical violence examples of verbal violence and relational violence were depicted such as making fun of, not accepting someone into the games. Some children were observed to refrain from defining an actor for the violence and instead described accidental situations (someone tripping on a stone and falling down or the rope of the kite suddenly breaking off).

Another interesting point was that in many drawings apart from the victim and the perpetrator there was also a witness of the violent act. These witnesses sometimes became part of the cycle of violence (such as the teacher who beats up the child who hits a friend). In some instances these bystanders showed sympathy to the victim or intervened and stopped the violence. It seemed that the fact that the act of violence was witnessed by someone and the fact that there was an adult figure who intervened had a protective effect.



"This is the house of this boy. This Syrian boy walks by the house. This boy didn't want him to walk by his house. He calls his friends. Four of them beat him up. His father says: 'That is enough, you don't have the right.' They say; 'why is he passing by our house?' The father said; 'Everyone can go wherever they want'.

The drawings of positive events had more intense and livelier colors.



*'His friends preparing a birthday party for the boy'*

In addition these drawings were observed to be better organized on the paper. The most frequently depicted positive event includes birthday parties. Having a party, many friends coming to the party, receiving gifts were the themes that were depicted in a very colorful and lively way. It seemed that these themes corresponded to the needs of feeling special, to be valued and celebrated. Apart from this going to the park, being together with friends were the other frequently depicted positive experiences.



*'It is this girl's birthday. Her friends came to throw a party. They put up decorations. They gave her gifts.'*

### 3.4 Analysis of Stories

Story writing method was used for children between 10 to 12 years in the project.

Writing a story could provide a space for children in order to project their anxieties and worries through using metaphors. Making a story out of a difficult experience gives the opportunity to have a distance, gain a different perspective and process that experience. Especially writing about difficult experiences might help children for understanding their emotions and experiences better, and for finding new solutions about them (Waters, 2002).

In order to prepare children ready for story writing the second session started with a warm-up activity. Firstly, children were asked to describe their favorite movie/cartoon or novel character. Afterwards the structure of a story was discussed. Children were told that they would be writing about the negative experiences that were discussed in the previous

session. Before starting to write, they were encouraged to think about and decide the elements of their stories. Each child thought about the content, context, and characters in their story. They were asked to write a story with introduction, development and conclusion parts.

A total of 19 stories were collected in the story writing session of the project. 8 children from the total of 27 children did not attend this meeting. Although 19 stories were collected, 18 stories were available for the analysis. One child's handwriting was unreadable and it was not written in a story format. Word count of children's stories showed a wide range in the sample with a minimum of 23 words and a maximum of 471 words ( $M = 124.57$ ,  $SD = 106.02$ ). We observed that some children, who were using fewer words, did not detail their stories and give a clear resolution. However, in general most of the children had no difficulty in following initial directions or writing their stories. Children's stories were analyzed and coded in the categories of type of violence, relational and environmental domain of the story. In addition, emerging conflicts, emotions and resolutions of violence in stories were qualitatively analyzed. Children's stories mostly contained examples of physical violence (41.2%), psychological violence (41.2 %), verbal violence (14.7 %) and sexual violence (2.9 %). School environment (%41.2) was the most prevalent context in which violence took place. Similar to that neighborhood environment (%41.2) was frequently described as a dangerous and threatening place in which violent acts occurred. We found that majority of the stories involved violence from adults to children. These adults in the stories were strangers (%9.5) drug abusers (%9.5), tradesmen (%9.5), policemen (%9.5), teachers (%9.5) and parents (%9.5). Children's stories also included violence acts between peers (%33.3) and violence between adults (%9.6).

Analysis of stories highlighted children's sensitivity to physical violence. Some stories included strikingly severe instances of physical violence such as killing people, war, and being exposed to tear gas, and kidnapping. The others included beating, hitting, getting injured in a car accident. Similarly, mental/psychological violence seemed to be an important issue in children's

world as many stories included name-calling, mocking, being slandered and rejected by friends and getting swindled or cheated by tradesman in their plots. There were also examples of verbal violence as yelling and swearing. Two of the stories included tradesmen's deception of his customers.

A noteworthy point revealed in children's stories was the pattern of one example of violence giving rise to another instance of violence. This pattern was similar to the cycle of violence in that victims turned into perpetrators later in their lives. In most of the stories, we observed that being exposed to verbal or physical violence resulted in becoming the perpetrator of violence. For example in one of the stories, a child character who was exposed to mocking of her friends yelled at her mother and mistreated her friends further in the story line.

We found that characters who were exposed to violence in the stories mostly had a passive role in the face of violence and the effects of violence were crying and being upset. Resolutions of violence in these stories were varied. In some of the stories, the resolution of violence was detailed, while in others violence was resolved with a quick change that had no clear reason. In general, resolution of violence in stories was accomplished through perpetrator's understanding of the outcomes of his/her violent behaviors. Noteworthy, in many stories perpetrators came to an understanding about their mistakes only after being subjected to violence themselves. For example, one story was about a child who was threatening her friends. She regretted her violent acts after she was exposed to harassment by drug abusers at street.

*"Gamze returned home safely and she took a lesson from this experience.*

*"She would never misbehave anybody again. She apologized to Esma."*

In some of the stories, perpetrators of violence changed the way he/she behaved suddenly and without a clear reason.

*“... And then it became tomorrow. Sevda became good. Sevda did not tease anyone and nobody teased Sevda. And then, they became good friends.”*

Characters who were exposed to violence had active role and were able to help for violence resolution in some of the stories. Examples from the stories about this theme were victim's doing favor to perpetrator, warning perpetrator and putting an effort to reintegrate perpetrators into the society.

All in all, we observed that children perceived empathy as a solution to violence. One of the common themes revealed in stories was about perpetrator's regret and change in his/her behaviors when the victim of violence empathized and showed understanding to perpetrator.

*“ ...We were yelling at her too. The best way is to apologize from her and she would behave us well and we would behave well to her too. And they all gathered, apologized to her. Aysegül became sensitive and shed two tears. And all became best friends. ”*

Shame was an important emotion that appeared in the stories. In one story, perpetrator was maintaining her violent behaviors in order to avoid feeling shameful. In addition, in some stories we observed that apology from the perpetrators to the victims served to repair the conflicts.

*“The suspect was caught after two days. He was taken into custody. Sedat withdrew the complaint. The man felt bad when he was released. The first thing he did was to buy a flower bouquet and he went to Sedat. He told that he regretted a lot. He apologized. Sedat and he made peace and became friends.”*

Another common way of resolution was asking help from a trustable adult figure (policeman, mother, father). Active appeal of help from adults as a crucial coping behavior was remarkable. We observed that the attitudes of adult figures in the stories were critical in terms of

violence resolution. In the presence of adults' reliable and sensible behaviors, violent acts in stories were able to be resolved.

Calling police in case of being exposed to violence appeared as an adaptive and active coping behavior in the stories. In these stories, policemen were dependable and able to help the victims. Yet, it is important to note that there was also a story in which policemen perpetrated violence.

*"One day we went on a tour as a group. While we were walking policemen presumed us as activists and threw tear gas and everybody's eyes streamed. Devran, Burak and I protected girls and girls' eyes streamed a lot."*

In some cases witnesses of violence played a crucial role in violence resolution.

*"There was a girl in our neighborhood. Her father was being violent to her. Her father was beating both her and her siblings. One day, they came to our home and my father said that do not beat your children again because children have no fault. And then her father never beat his children again ..."*

Although mother and father figures were mostly seen as mature enough to resolve violence, in some cases they joined the cycle of violence. In such cases, children could not resolve the conflict. Their anxieties and worries increased and they were seen to carry the burden of the violent situation. For example, in the story mentioned above, child's father got into a fight with the teacher after he beat his son. As a result, the child felt responsible and instead of claiming his rights he excused the violent act of his teacher and apologized from his father and teacher. This story showed the crucial role of adult figures as role models especially in terms of anger management and problem solving without using violence.

*"Father:*

*- How could you beat my child...*

*Teacher:*

*- Mahmut became disrespectful and very mischievous . I couldn't control myself...*

*Mahmut:*

*- Father, I didn't call you to get into fight. I feel so bad.*

*Father (to teacher):*

*- You didn't have to beat him. You could have called me.*

*Mahmut:*

*- My teacher and father, I won't do any disrespect or misbehavior. I promise to you. "*

### **3.5 Analysis of the Photographs**

The group of 13 to 15 year-olds worked with photography in order to express their perspectives on violence. Photography is a method that is becoming widespread in social sciences and qualitative research. Especially in studies of children's and youth's perception, it helps to overcome the obstacles encountered in classical research methods, and the possibilities photographs open up make it attractive to use in studies. It becomes possible for both the researcher and the participant to participate actively in research and to break the hierarchy between "researcher" and "participant" that exists in traditional research methods. This allows for the clearance of a possible bias in working with children: Children and adolescents may tend to give answers to questions posed by an adult researcher in the way they think is expected from them. Especially in the types of collective cultures in which we live, they may have difficulty in revealing feelings and thoughts to an authority. The subject of violence in daily life is a difficult one to talk about. Therefore talking over a photograph taken in this context may be supportive to reduce the barrier of verbal expression. Photography also offers the possibility to embody abstract concepts related to the research

question. Photography is also a very productive tool for presenting the opportunity to "see what is less visible" in research. And perhaps most importantly, it gives children the opportunity to see, deeply think and discuss over what is happening in their living space. This opportunity overlaps with the main goal of the study, enables the child to re-examine his own habitat, as well as to make visible what the child sees and to share it with everyone, especially with adults.

In addition to these, photography is also an art form that technically gives frame: the person taking the photograph defines what to take into the frame of the photograph and what to leave outside. The photographer's frame offers us the possibility to see, where and from which position the photographer is looking from.

For this study 10 children who participated in the group meetings brought a total of 75 photos. Children chose the photos they wanted to submit from all the photos they took over the duration of 1 week. One of the children brought 4 photos in the beginning. Then added another 21 photos in another session delivering a total of 25 pictures. This was a good example of how photography can inspire children to explore the area they live in with different eyes.

Children's photographs and their statements about their own photographs were analyzed during the evaluation phase. Photographs were evaluated for their content, the overall themes and the impressions they left at the researcher.

77% of the photographs were in the category of negative experience and violence. 91% of these photographs depicted instances of violence in the neighbourhood. 79% of the photographs were in the category of environmental violence.

Common topics that were depicted in the photographs on environmental violence were pollution and garbage in the streets 26% (12 photos), parking cars in the streets 26% (12 photos), urban transformation 24% (11 images) and lack of playgrounds 17% (8

pictures). 15% of the negative experiences in the neighborhood were about the negative conditions of the Syrian and African migrants.



The statements about urban transformation included concerns about the multiplied vacant houses in the neighborhood, the danger caused by the dozers that parked in the streets and the decrease in safe places to play, the noise of the ongoing constructions and the danger of the construction for children again.



One of the participants' statements on urban regeneration:

*"Urban transformation made people do things, they get out of their homes, what they do now is building hotels. Remember they said that they will build new houses, but if they build two houses, they are building three*

*hotels. A very big problem I think, cheating the people ... And who will live in these houses they are building? It is not the people who have to move from there. ... We gave our home six years ago; it was demolished two years ago. No, it was demolished last year."*



5 photos of the participants were about negative feelings raised by empty houses in the neighborhood, streetlights that don't work, drug dealers, and people who were described as "strange guys" by children.

Negative living conditions of the Syrian and African population (7 photographs) living in the neighborhood were frequently mentioned as examples of negative experiences. The poverty of these groups, the basements they have to live in, the floods, rats in these basements and the overrated rents they had to pay were some of the issues raised by children and that appeared in their photographs. The bare foot photograph of a Syrian child was taken to represent poverty.



One of the most striking photographs on this subject represents both the economic difficulties of the Syrians and their relations with the neighborhood:



Interview on this photography:

*Participant: Well these are the houses where the Syrians stayed, for example, there is a lot of garbage there. There's no space to hang their laundry. The window is hooked from*

*there, hanging their clothes there, so it's hard. I wanted to mention it here. There are rats out there in the holes.*

*Moderator: Well, they live under difficult conditions.*

*Participant: Yes.*

*Moderators: Are the Syrians hanging their clothes parallel to the wall like this?*

*Participant: Yes, because there is no room. The apartments in the upper floors can hang from one building to the other. But the Syrians' have to hang their clothes parallel to the wall because their clothes are not anted by the neighbors.*

The 13-15 age group's interest in the subject animals was also visible in the photos.

A participant's comments on a photograph of a person who stroke a cat, included remarks about cruelty towards animals.



(Photo 35) Statement: "*This means that they are torturing animals, they look down on them, for example when they want to flout someone they use animal names... ”*

Sometime a photograph that could be viewed as depicting a negative situation could have a positive meaning for the child. One example is the photograph below. This picture of a restroom at school depicted a positive situation for the child as it showed the restroom having a garbage bin.



Statement about the picture :

*"I had said that I wished all the schools had bins in the toilets so the girls did not have difficulties in throwing away their pads. Here we had one. So I took a photo of it"*

In the category of environmental violence, a photograph was taken of a "stuffed mussel seller" which is typical for the district. The photographer pointed out that the stuffed mussel sellers were not working in hygienic conditions and they caused very bad smell. The children proposed that a place suitable for them could be provided and that hygienic conditions should be settled.

The photographs about the negative experiences in the schools focused on the lack of locker rooms, the playgrounds in the schools becoming smaller due the separation of the school area to make space for religious schools. (F No: 17)



Statement about this photo:

*"... they are discriminating. They give more space to them. For example, there are forty students in our class, twenty students in their class. They have prayer room, they have built private prayer room for them and they have built toilets. We cannot go in them. ,,"*

It was noteworthy that most of the negative experiences in the school were based on the inadequacy of physical conditions. In order to explain one of these difficulties, the participant who complained about lack of locker room and the difficulties about discomfort with changing clothes in the classrooms, draw a picture representing this situation because it was not possible to make a photo of it.

Similarly, one of the 2 photographs brought about the negative experience in the family was a photograph of the picture drawn to describe the situation (F No: 7)



Another one was a woman image having physical discomfort while hanging laundry on the balcony. The participating children did not share any image from their own home and also the woman who was photographed was not in the house but outside of the house, on the balcony.

The adolescent group in general refrained from taking pictures inside their homes and also did not share much about their home life. Most of the pictures were about their neighborhood. It may be that their negative neighborhood conditions were highly visible for the children and it was relatively easier to photograph. Photographing interior places such as the school and home seemed to be more complicated for the children. Children were also more reluctant about sharing their private home lives at this developmental stage.

One of the few photos about home life was the photograph of a woman hanging laundry.

The narrative about this photo was as follows: "*There is a woman here. I thought she is small. I tried not to show her face. She is hanging something and it is difficult for her. For example, his wife or children could help her. However, she has to do her work because she is a woman*".

A total of 14 photographs (18,6% of all photographs) with positive experiences were in context of neighborhood with exceptions of 4 photos (2 schools, 1 house, and 1 photo of the Taksim square). The topics included the qualities children appreciated about their neighborhood such as taking care of plants, the solidarity among neighbors, mutual trust of the neighbors, and acceptance of neighbors with different religions. The photo in Taksim square was about a social event organized by the city hall.

The photo below was the only photo in which the inside of the house was shown and it was about solidarity between family members.



In terms of framing, the photographs taken from the inside of the house, but that showed outside of the house were noteworthy. Children shot flowers on the balconies, people washing carpets on the streets or children who cannot play on the

street because of cars passing by. In these pictures children were looking at their own streets from their everyday positions. As such they offered us the opportunity to see how children perceive things in their own perspective. (F No. 6).



The use of photography as part of this project also gave the children a chance to explore the neighborhood they were living in each day and rediscover it with different eyes. In the photographs real moments from everyday life could be captured in a single frame. As such it opened up a very comprehensive area in terms of expressing the conditions of Tarlabası, the neighborhood where the children who participated in the research live.

In addition to all this, children's ideas were embodied in aesthetically appealing, acceptable and representable forms thanks to the use of art. Artistic expression made the topic of everyday violence and negative experiences "talkable" and "lookable".

## 4. SUMMARY and RESULTS

As noted in Unicef report in 2010, there is a need for conducting more research about violence against children in Turkey. Especially there are almost no studies regarding children's experiences and perceptions of violence. This study aimed to fill this gap and focus on how children perceive experience and conceptualize violence by using different expressive modalities. Through analyzing verbal and artistic expressions of children, we observed that children were exposed to different forms of violence in their daily lives. Especially the prevalence of children's exposure to physical violence at school, neighborhood, home and in the media was striking. As a consequence, these experiences made children feel frightened, frustrated and angry. More specifically, children's exposure to physical violence at school was overwhelmingly high. Unfortunately, this result showed that teachers and school principals continue to use violence as a discipline method. It should be noted that these experiences of violence is very destructive for children and they may also lead to an increase in bullying behaviors between peers. Children reported that experiencing physical violence make them feel very frightened, and anxious. These intense affects were reflected in disconnected story lines in the stories and powerful negative images in the pictures in addition to disorganization in children's narratives about their drawings.

This study also showed that psychological violence among peers in the form of teasing and humiliation was very frequent. These experiences were found to be prevalent especially in the schools setting. There were many negative experiences expressed about the school system. Especially, the 13-15 year-old group complained about the overemphasis on exams in the education system, insufficient social activities, discrimination, sexism and restrictions. Children perceived school as an insufficient setting for expressing themselves. They did not feel respected by their teachers. Negative experiences in puberty should be taken seriously as

this time period has a key role in the development of adult self and identity. Thus, these negative experiences might be perceived and experienced as a type of violence and they may in turn feed aggressive behaviors in adolescents.

Another important finding of the study was children's sensitivity about negative experiences in their life spaces that might be defined as environmental violence. Children were very concerned about insufficient infrastructure, dirtiness, lack of security and lack of playgrounds in their neighborhood. Children's reports were in line with McInyre's (2000) suggestion that environmental violence should be identified as one of the violence types. Deficiencies in the school and neighborhood environments were observed to lead to feelings of neglect in this group of children.

In general, neighborhood environment was described as a place related with fearful experiences by children. One significant factor was political demonstrations that took place in their neighborhood. Children witnessed many political demonstrations and intense use of tear gas. Issues related with Syrian refugees were also significant for children. It was observed that Syrian children were sometimes perceived as frightening figures by children whereas other times children empathized with Syrians' difficult conditions.

Children also reported physical, verbal and psychological violence experiences in the home environment. Experiences of physical and verbal violence against children from mothers were reported very frequently. This result suggested that physical punishment is still being used as a prevalent discipline method. Witnessing violence among other family members was also seen to affect children negatively. Another negative experience children mentioned was the expectations from parents about them doing housework. Children reported having difficulty meeting these expectations. In addition, children observed that their parents frequently directed their own stress and frustration onto them as anger and aggression. These experiences reveal that socio-economic difficulties and daily life stress of parents affect their

parenting capacities adversely. It also exemplifies how the cycle of violence works in the larger system and reaches to children. Other significant negative experiences related to home environment were feeling restricted, not being able to speak for themselves and lack of care.

In the older age groups, sexual violence examples were mentioned. Especially witnessing sexual violence on the streets, public transportation and in the media was in the agenda of the age group of 13-15 year-olds. Noteworthy, children were having difficulties in defining, expressing and giving meaning to these experiences of sexual violence.

Another important topic mentioned frequently in the age group of 13-15 years was sexual discrimination. Girls in this age group complained about experiencing sexual discrimination in different settings and being restricted in many facets of their daily lives. Housework, social and sport activities were examples of areas in girls' daily lives that were determined in line with gender norms. On the other hand, boys complained about being labeled as being 'lazy' more frequently in comparison to girls and being subjected to physical punishment more easily.

Children were also found to be sensitive about other types of discrimination (disabled, Syrians, and etc.). Being disrespected, not being listened to enough were other negative experiences mentioned by children. Especially in the younger age groups, children stated their negative experiences about unfairness, punishment, being forced to do work and not being able to speak for themselves at school and home.

However, experiencing care and love from their parents and teachers were described as one of the most important positive experiences by children. Doing special activities with teachers, having birthday parties and receiving allowance were other important positive experiences stated by children.

Children were aware of the physical, emotional, and cognitive effects of violence experiences on them. Feelings of anxiety and fear, feelings of being unloved and worthlessness especially in the face of relational violence were frequently mentioned. However, it was observed that children might also see violent behavior as being acceptable in certain circumstances. Especially mothers' and fathers' physical and verbal aggression was excused and interpreted as being deserved when children behaved wrongly. In addition, they also excused violence from teachers when children did not act in accordance with teachers' warning. These results suggested that children have already internalized the view that violence is an appropriate way of problem solving. This result showed the importance of and the need for raising awareness in public about violence.

Hopefully, the age group of 13-15 year-olds did not express any views on seeing violence as acceptable. It appears that with their growing intellectual capabilities adolescents are able to understand these issues in a more comprehensive way.

In children's stories and drawings, components related with the cycle of violence were apparent. In many stories a character who was first the victim of violence became the perpetrator. In order to break this cycle, children emphasized the importance of being nice to the perpetrator, empathizing with him or her, and explaining the faulty behavior. The presence of a protective adult figure who intervened seemed to have a curative effect. In the stories with protective adult figures, the conflict was able to be resolved and the children's narratives were observed to be much more coherent and organized. On the other hand, there were other stories where the adult figures failed to behave appropriately and became part of the cycle of violence. These results signify the importance of adult figures in children's life for emotion regulation and establishing the sense of security. The fact that adults are subject to major difficulties and socio-economic disadvantages create an important vulnerability in this respect. Children were well-aware that their parents directed their own life stress onto them as

aggressive interactions. The term of “normal abnormality” by Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) captured the essence of our samples’ perception of environment in which people got used to anticipating and living with different kinds of violence. Normalization of violence poses a risk for the majority of our community.

This study revealed the importance and necessity of relevant socio-economic policies along with suitable prevention programs in order to reduce violence in the society as a whole. Programs and studies conducted with children are important in terms of breaking the silence around violence and giving space for verbalizing negative experiences. In addition to verbalization, using art as a method gives the chance of expressing and transforming difficult experiences for children.

During this project it was observed that children had difficulties in conceptualizing certain kinds of violence, setting boundaries and finding a solution to it. It is important that prevention programs that are held should involve elements of empowering and giving voice to children. In addition, these programs should educate the adults about their important role in breaking the cycle of violence for their children. Raising awareness of parents and teachers about the devastating impact of violence, widening their repertoire for positive discipline methods, supporting adults’ emotion regulation and stress management skills are some of the important needs that can be targeted by future projects and programs.

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