

An Investigation of The Relationship Between Childhood Trauma Experience of Adolescents and Perceived Social Support¹

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between childhood traumatic experiences and perceived social support in adolescents. The research was carried out in the high school located in the districts of Osmangazi and Yıldırım in Bursa. The study conducted on 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade students, the age range 15-18 ($X=16.37$, $Ss=1.06$). The sample consisted of 348 female (%58), 219 male (%36,5) total 567 adolescents. To collect data "Childhood Trauma Questionnaire" and "Scale of Perceived Social Support" have been applied to the students. T test and Pearson Product Momentum Coefficient statistical techniques have been calculated in the analysis of the data. The results of the research show that there is significant difference in physical, emotional and sexual abuse in favour of male adolescents by gender. All variables correlations coefficients were significantly correlated at $p<.001$ negative direction moderately level significant relation.

Key Words : Childhood traumatic experience of adolescents, child abuse, social support, adolescents

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Ergenlerde Çocukluk Örselenme Düzeyleri ile Sosyal Destek Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi²

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Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, ergenlerde çocukluk örselenme yaşıntıları ve algılanan sosyal destek arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesidir. Araştırma Bursa ili Osmangazi ve Yıldırım ilçelerinde bulunan liselerde yapılmıştır. 9,10, 11 ve 12. sınıfı devam eden, 15-18 yaş arasındaki ($X=16.37$, $Ss=1.06$) 348'i kız (%58), 219'u erkek (%36,5) toplam 567 ergen üzerinde yürütülmüştür. Verilerin toplanmasında Çocukluk Örselenme Yaşıntıları Ölçeği Ergen Formu ve Algılanan Sosyal Destek Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde t testi ve Pearson Korelasyon Katsayısı istatistik teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları fiziksel, duygusal ve cinsel istismarın cinsiyete göre erkek ergenlerin lehine anlamlı olarak farklılığı göstermektedir. Ergenlerde fiziksel, duygusal ve cinsel istismar yaşıntıları ile aile, arkadaş ve öğretmenden algılanan sosyal destek düzeyleri arasında $p<.001$ düzeyinde negatif yönlü orta düzeyde anlamlı ilişkiler bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocukluk örselenme yaşıntıları, çocuk istismarı, sosyal destek, ergenler

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Introduction

Abuse is an important social problem that can be encountered for various reasons in every environment (at home, school, street and playgrounds) since the birth of the child (Çağlarırmak, 2006). Child abuse is the result of physical, sexual, and emotional harm to the child under the age of 18, in a way that is perceived to be damaging to his or her development in every way, by the person or institutions responsible for him (Yavuzer, 2000). Abuse can be classified as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect (Bilge, 2006). Child abuse is the most difficult type of trauma to be diagnosed and treated because it is usually carried out by the closest people to the child, because of repeatability and the long-term effects that will affect even the later years of life on the child (Yıldız, 2007).

Physical abuse is the physical harm of children, namely it is the deterioration of the physical integrity of them in the hands of those responsible for taking care of them (Polat, 2001). In the broadest sense, physical abuse is defined as a child's injury except for accidental, which includes a wide range of activities ranging from simple slapping to using a tool that may injure or kill the child (Atamer, 2005; Hilal, 2005, Polat, 2001). A great deal of physical abuse is observed in infants and pre-school. It is because at that time period, children are defenceless and cannot express their troubles. Approximately two-thirds of physically abused children are the ones under three years of age (Byers, 1999). Story telling is very important in child abuse cases, yet a child rarely can tell it by himself. Therefore, it is usually tried to be kept as secret most of time by saying that was just an accident (Büke, 2006).

Emotional abuse is a condition in which children are exposed to negative attitudes and behaviours of those who care for them and deprived of the love that they need (Büke, 2006). Emotional abuse includes verbal abuse that will cause the psychological development of children and adolescents to stop, depriving them of the interest, love and care they need, attitudes that impair the child's identity. Emotional abuse collects all other forms of abuses as an umbrella. Emotional abuse can exist alone; furthermore, it can continue even if the damage of physical and sexual abuse disappear (Polat, 2001). Behaviors considered as emotional abuse include: re-

jection of child, disavowal of child, excessive protection, showing no emotional reaction, discrimination and comparison, communication based on violence and fear, demand of over capacitive things and using the child for self-interest, humiliation, making child turn into crime, isolation, neglect (Kars, 1995). Emotional abuse has more bad effects than physical abuse on children and it is seen as depression, sense of self, aggression, guilt and interpersonal problems which occur especially in adulthood (Arıcıoğlu, 2003). In addition to psychopathological disorders such as social phobia, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviours and anxiety, eating disorders and suicide, emotional abuse cause personal, social and general non-conformity, academic failure, low sense of self, and decrease in self-acceptance level (Özcan, 2009).

Sexual abuse is defined as the use of a child or adolescent who has not yet completed sexual development, by an adult to meet sexual desire and needs using force, threat or deception. Sexual abuse is the sexual activity between a child and an adult; however, when the age difference is 4 years or older, it is also called sexual abuse in situations where the young child is subjected to forced or convicted sexual pleasure-intentional activities (İşeri, 2008). Childhood sexual abuse is a kind of violence that has psychological and physiological effects that can reach to the child's illness or even death and whose negative process can last until adulthood (Atamer, 1998, Keskin and Çam, 2005).

One of the crucial points of the abuse is that it is transferred from generation to generation. Even though it is not certain that children who exposed to violence in the family will become violent partners or parents in their adulthood, most of the violent adults have history of exposure to violence (Unal, 2008). This is called "generation hypothesis" (Kars, 1996). Factors that cause the child to be neglected and abused can be grouped as Internal and External Stress Factors:

1. Internal Stress Factors: This can be categorized as the parent's personality, the characteristics of the child and over-demanding from the child depending on the environment. Neglect and abuse by parents, witnessing the violence between father and mother, having a broken family or emotions created by different family problems may significantly affect

the child's lifestyle and relationships and thereby can cause the child to be an abusive personality (Bal, 2010).

2. External Stress Factors: Some economic, social, environmental, and cultural features can cause disruption to the family and lead to neglect and abuse of the child. Economic inadequacy is one of the most important stress sources for the family and can manifest itself in the form of poverty, unemployment and borrowing. At the same time, it may bring problems such as poor nutrition, inadequate house conditions, and unhealthiness (Deniz, 2006). Child-rearing attitudes and discipline methods applied to their children are also vary in parents with different socio-economic levels. It has been observed that the families in the lower socio-economic level use penalties such as, physical punishment, reprimanding, mocking, shouting, deprivation of their rights as discipline methods (Aral and Gürsoy, 2001).

Adolescence requires the presence and help of other people in order to share experiences and to find solutions to the problems encountered during adolescence. The most important of these people are the adolescent's family, friends and teachers. The adolescent tries to cope with the difficulties faced in this period thanks to their support (Expert, 2001). Social support is a multidimensional concept seen in the form of social attention, giving advice and giving information, emotional support, financial assistance, appreciation, helping an individual to cope with problems, modelling an individual (Yıldırım, 2004). Social support, on the other hand, can be defined as social, psychological and economic support such as information and financial assistance in addition to the interest from the environment, love, respect, appreciation, trust (Traş and Arslan, 2011).

While trying to be independent on the one hand, the adolescent does not want to be deprived of the support of its immediate surroundings on the other hand. Family, friends, relatives, neighbours, teachers, ideological and ethnic groups constitute the sources of social support during this period when adolescent's life based on struggling and making important decisions. The main source of social support is the family (Montenegro, 2007). Social support can be a powerful source for the individual to cope with difficult life events (Budak, 1999). Children who are abused learn that they are less likely to be harmed when they are not heard or seen.

As a result, they begin to stay behind, to deny their own feelings and ideas, and to show more insensitive reactions (Kirimsoy, 2003).

It is argued that social support systems help individuals in three ways: They help individuals by partially or wholly buffering the effects of environmental stressors, by eliminating or diminishing some of the items that negatively affect an individual's life situation, by increasing an individual's stamina in the face of adverse life situations and thus contributing to a better health condition (Yıldırım, 1997).

In this context, it is considered that adolescents will contribute to the understanding of the psychological reflections on adolescents by examining the traumatic experiences and social support perceptions they had during their childhood and adolescence period. In response to the information given above, the following questions were tried to be answered in the study:

1. Are the mean scores of childhood traumatic experiences (physical, emotional, sexual abuse) differed significantly by gender?
2. Are the perceived social support levels of family, friends and teachers of adolescents significantly differentiated according to their experiences to physical, emotional, sexual abuse?
3. Is there a significant relation between childhood trauma experiences (physical, emotional, sexual abuse) and perceived social support levels (family, friends, teacher support) by gender?

Methodology

In this study "relational screening model" was used (Karasar, 1994). The study's study group consists of adolescents who are in six different high schools selected by random sampling from different classes of high schools in Bursa Osmangazi and Yıldırım districts.

In the research, 600 students were applied to the scale and statistical analyzes were carried out considering the scales filled by 567 students, as the scales of the 33 students who were found to have undergone incomplete marking were eliminated, 348 female students (61.4%) and 219 male students (38.6%). The study was carried out with the permission of Bursa Provincial National Education Directorate in 2012-2013 academic year.

Adolescents who were included in the study were in 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grades and 147 (%25.9) of 15-18 ($M=16.37$ $Ss=1.06$) age group adolescents were 15 years old, 167 (29.5) of them were 16 years old, 147 (%25.9) of them were 17 years old and 106 (%18.7) of them were 18 years old.

Data Collection Tools

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

The scale was made by Bernstein, Fink, Handelsman, Foote and Lovejoy (1994). The adaptation of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire to Turkish was done by Aslan and Alparslan (1999). The Turkish version of the scale consists of three subscales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the Physical Abuse subscale was 0.94, Emotional Abuse subscale was 0.95, Sexual Abuse was .094 and the total scale was .096. The scoring of the scale was done with 1-5 likert-type assessments corresponding to "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "frequently" and "very often" answers (Aslan and Alparslan; 1999).

Scale of Perceived Social Support

The purpose of the development of the perceived social support scale is to draw attention to the relationship between the individual's social support system and functioning and to help the client cope with the problems within the social support system and, if so, to change the negative elements in the social support system and to develop the system (Yıldırım, 1997). The scale consists of a total of 50 items consisting of family support subscale 20, friend support subscale 13, and teacher support subscale 17 items. The scale was prepared by writing three total likert type grades (suitable for me = 3, partially appropriate = 2, not suitable for me = 1) and three reversed items, one for each subscale. The validity and reliability studies of the scale were conducted on 660 students aged 14-17 years, who were randomly selected from two primary school and five high school in the central districts of Ankara. In order to examine the structure of the scale and its subscales, a reanalysis factor analysis was performed on the

data and the factors, and the factor structure of each subscale was examined and the factors were named. Besides the factor analysis, validity of the scale were tested with similar scales as well (Yıldırım, 2004). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the Social Support from Friends subscale was 0.74, Social Support from Family subscale was 0.79 Social Support from Teacher subscale was 0.75, and the total scale was 0.93 (Yıldırım, 1997).

Analysis of Data

SPSS 16.00 package program was used for statistical analysis of the data. The t test was used for independent groups to investigate status of physical, emotional and sexual abuse about traumatic experiences whether family, friends and teacher support differed according to gender and experiencing or not and Pearson Moments Product Correlation Coefficient methods were used to calculate the relations between variables. The significance level of .05 was taken as the criterion for the meaningfulness of the results. Accordingly, the "never" response to the scale items indicates that the child / adolescent has not been abused and "rarely, sometimes, often, and often" answers were coded as having been abused (Korkut, 2012).

Findings

Childhood Trauma Experiences: Physical ($X = 17.77$, $Ss = 6.88$) Emotional ($X = 27.19$, $Ss = 11.87$), Sexual ($X = 5.96$, $Ss = 2.90$) abuse subscales, Perceived Social Support Family ($X= 53.21$; $Ss=8.29$), Friend ($X= 35.08$; $Ss=4.86$), teachers ($X = 40.85$; $Ss = 9.21$). The data were analyzed with one-factor ANOVA and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of t Test Analysis on Average of Scores of Physical, Emotional and Sexual Abuse Subscales by Gender of the Adolescents

Social Sup- port Sub- scales	Gender	N	X	Ss	t	P
Physical Abuse	Female	348	16.77	4.75	-3.89	.000** p<0,01 sig- nificant
	Male	219	19.36	9,11		
Emotional Abuse	Female	348	26.28	11.38	-2.24	.025* p <0,05 sig- nificant
	Male	219	28.62	12.51		
Sexual Abuse	Female	348	5.324	1.32	-2.24	.025* p <0,05 sig- nificant
	Male	219	6.98	4.16		

*p<.05, **p<.01

When Table 1 is examined, the average of physical abuse subscale scores of female students was 16.77 and male students was 19.36. Whether the difference between the average of points is meaningful or not was examined by t test and the obtained value of -3,89 t was found significant at the level of 0,01 significance. According to this result, physical abuse subscale of male students is significantly higher than that of female students.

According to the above table, the average scores of female students' emotional abuse subscale were 26.28 and male students 28.62. Whether the difference between the averages of the points is meaningful or not was examined by t test and the obtained value of -2,242 t was found to be significant at the 0.05 significance level. According to this result, male students' emotional abuse subscale scores are significantly higher than female students.

When Table 1 is examined, average of sexual abuse subscale scores of female students was 5,32 and that of male students was 6,98. Whether the difference between the averages of the points is meaningful or not was examined by t test and the value obtained at -5.72 t was found to be significant at p<0.01 significance level. According to this result, sexual abuse

subscale scores of male students are significantly higher than female students.

Table 2: Results of t Test Analysis on Average of Perceived Social Support Subscales Score by Adolescents with and without Physical Abuse Experience in the Past

Social Support Subscales	Physical Abuse	N	X	Ss	t	P
Family Support	Experienced	244	33.61	5.806	-6.09	.000** p<0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	323	36.19	3.65		
Friend Support	Experienced	244	49.36	9.92	-9.70	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	323	56.13	5.18		
Teacher Support	Experienced	244	38.14	9.49	-6.16	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	323	42.89	8.46		

*p <0,01

When Table 2 is examined, when the scores of family, friends and teacher support subscales of adolescents are checked, the difference between the arithmetic mean of the groups of the students in the study group according to their physical abuse experience was found to be significant at p <0.01 in favor of those not having experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the past.

Table 3: Results of t Test Analysis on Average of Perceived Social Support Subscale Scores of Adolescents with and without Emotional Abuse Experience in the Past

Social Support Sub-scales	Emotional Abuse	N	X	Ss	t	P
Family Support	Experienced	376	34.41	5.11	-5.074	.000** p<0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	191	36.40	4.03		
Friend Support	Experienced	376	51.28	8.65	-9.221	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	191	57.01	5.95		
Teacher Support	Experienced	376	39.56	9.17	-4.816	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	191	43.38	8.79		

When Table 3 is examined, when the scores of family, friends and teacher support subscales of adolescents are checked, the difference between the arithmetic mean of the groups of the study group students who experienced emotional abuse and not was found to be significant at $p <0.01$ in favor of those not having experienced emotional abuse.

Table 4: Results of t Test Analysis on the Average of Perceived Social Support Subscale Scores of Adolescents with and without Sexual Abuse Experience

Social Support Sub-scales	Sexual Abuse	N	X	Ss	t	P
Family Support	Experienced	99	32.40	6.54	-4.73	.000** p<0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	468	35.65	4.22		
Friend Support	Experienced	99	47.26	11.47	-6.03	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	468	54.47	6.83		
Teacher Support	Experienced	99	36.10	10.43	-5.12	.000* p <0.01 Significant
	Not Experienced	468	41.85	8.62		

*p <0,01

When Table 4 is examined, when the scores of family, friend and teacher support subscales of adolescents are checked, the difference between the arithmetic mean of the groups of the students in the study group according to their sexual abuse experience was found to be significant at the level of p <0.01 in favor of the ones not having experienced sexual abuse in the past.

Table 5: Results of Pearson Correlation Coefficients Related to Perceived Social Support among Childhood Trauma Questionnaire Subscales

		Family	Friend	Teacher
Physical Abuse	R	-.557**	-.443**	-.267**
	P	.000	.000	.000
	N	567	567	567
		Family	Friend	Teacher
Emotional Abuse	R	-.562**	-.401**	-.270**
	P	.000	.000	.000
	N	567	567	567
		Family	Friend	Teacher
Sexual Abuse	R	-.320**	-.324**	-.244**
	P	.000	.000	.000
	N	567	567	567

The results in Table 5 reveal that there is a negative mean significant relationship ($p < .001$) between physical, emotional, sexual abuse and social support perceived by family, friends and teachers.

Discussion, Conclusion And Suggestion

First, as a result of statistical analyzes made in response to the question whether childhood traumatic experiences differ according to sex, it was determined that physical, emotional and sexual abuse subscale scores were significantly different according to sex. This study reveals that the levels of physical, emotional and sexual trauma experiences during childhood significantly differ in favor of male adolescents. According to some researches, the level of physical abuse differs according to sex, and the level of physical abuse of male students is higher than that of female students (Çağlarırmak, 2006; Bekçi, 2006; Yenibaş, 2002; Kulaksızoğlu, 1993; Ziyalar, 1993; Kars, 1996; Karaca, 2001). However, according to some studies, physical abuse subscale does not show any significant difference according to sex (Kaya and Çeçen-Eroğlu, 2011; Yılmaz-Irmak, 2008). In this study, it was found that male adolescents were significantly exposed to childhood emotional abuse experiences more than females. Some studies

have shown that emotional abuse makes a meaningful difference in favor of males (Bulut-Ateş and Çeçen-Eroğul, 2011), while some researches show that emotional abuse in females shows a significant difference (Siyez, 2003). Since emotional abuse and neglect are not easily recognised problems, it is stated that the rate of incidence is not definite, that the rates of girls and boys are equal, and that such abuse is enforced to children between the ages of six and eight and remains at a certain level until adolescence (Taner and Gökler, 2004). The results of this study revealed that the levels of sexual abuse experiences, in favor of male adolescents, differed significantly. Some research results (Bulut-Ateş and Çeçen-Eroğul, 2011) reported that sexual abuse experience of male adolescents differed significantly compared to female, in the research conducted by Aydemir (1994), it was stated that 57.6% of those exposed to sexual abuse were female and 42.4% were male; in the study conducted by Atamer (1998), it was stated that 82% of the students who were exposed to sexual abuse were female and 18% were male. Sexual abuse is often hidden because of the reactions such as guilt and shame caused by abuse, and sexual abuse is four times more common in females than in males (Topcu, 2009). However, revealing the abuse for male children can be less frequent than in females (Finkelhor, 1993). Significant results of exposure of male adolescents to physical, emotional and sexual abuse experiences compared to females emphasizes that male children should also be protected like female children because of abuse suspicion. The fact that less attention is paid to the abuse of male children in the society than females might be one of the reasons for bringing about more abuse experiences for male children. According to the researches, the incidence of domestic abuse in Turkey is higher than the incidence of abuse outside the family. The average age of family abuse varies between 5 and 7 years, and outside of the family it is between the ages of 7 and 10 years. It is pointed out that especially male children are exploited to abuse at younger ages than females, but female children are more often exposed to abuse in general (Tokay, 2013).

Secondly, in the study, the answer was sought in the question of whether there was a significant difference in the level of social support perceived by family, friends and teachers according to whether they have physical, emotional and sexual abuse experience in childhood. As a result of the analysis, the social support scores perceived by family, friends and

teachers of students who haven't experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse have been found significantly higher than the ones who experienced. When the related literature is examined, Dayioglu (2008) found that adolescents who have high level of perceived social support scores of adolescents prepared for the university entrance examination have also higher indomitableness scores.

Finally, in the study, the question of whether there is a significant relation between physical, emotional, sexual abuse and perceived social support from family, friends and teachers is tried to be answered. According to this, there is a moderate negative relation between physical, emotional, sexual abuse and social support perceived by family, friends and teachers. If the developmental periods and developmental tasks of the children and adolescents are taken into consideration, adolescents who perceive the support of family, friends and teachers in the immediate surroundings have less physical, emotional and sexual abuse experiences. It is understood that the social circle is the primary protective function here. It is submitted that social support systems help individuals in three ways: By eliminating or reducing the effects of certain items that adversely affect the life situation of the individual, increasing the endurance of the individual in the face of adverse life situations and thereby contributing to the improvement of the health condition it helps individuals by partially or totally buffering the effects of environmental stressors (Yıldırım, 1997). The perception (Güngör, 1996) that individuals are loved and valued by those whom they care and value their opinions may protect individuals from the experience of abuse.

When all these results are checked, it is understood that social support perception of adolescents can be an important reason which affects childhood abuse experiences. Another consequence is that unlike what is known, male children are more exposed to abuse than females, so male children also need to be protected from abuse. In this context, it can be stated that the perceived social support is has a vital importance; therefore, it can be said that living in a safe environment with family, friends and teachers during childhood and adolescence can be an important barrier to abuse experiences.

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1. Psychosocial support programs can be prepared and implemented as protective, preventive and interventional primary, secondary and tertiary protection.
 2. Family education activities for parents can be given by non-governmental organizations, school psychological counsellors, and other practitioners to prevent childhood traumatic experiences seen in adolescents and to be able to cope with it.
 3. Adolescents, parents and teachers can be informed by the school counselor about child rights and abuse and when they encounter such a situation, they can be elucidated what kind of way they need to follow.
 4. Students at risk can be identified by doing researches about abuse in schools.

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