



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A content analysis of violence in Turkish primetime television shows

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Violence has a great impact on society, as is often the case with television programs. This study aims to assess how the violence is portrayed on television channels that reach a large audience of children, adolescents, and adults in Turkey.

**Method:** This study is a media content analysis (28 television shows and 84 episodes) of the six most popular Turkish primetime television shows aired between November 18, 2019, and December 8, 2019. The violence types have been classified into one of the following five categories: verbal, physical, psychological, social, and economic. Besides, some vulnerable special groups, such as children and healthcare workers, have also been evaluated.

**Results:** Our findings indicate that each show has at least one violent behavior. Contrary to the perception in society, men are exposed to violence more than women (56.6% vs. 27.6%). The number of psychological violence content in television shows (median:16.5) was significantly higher than the number of physical (median:11.0) and verbal (median:13.0) violent content ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Our findings have significant consequences as exposure to popular media affect the behaviors and perceptions of the entire society, not just children.. Our study has the potential to shed light on the need to create new content in television shows watched by the Turkish society with educational messages on the risks and consequences of violent behavior.

**Keywords:** Aggression, psychological, TV series, verbal violence

## INTRODUCTION

American Psychological Association defines violence as 'immediate or chronic situations that result in injury to the psychological, social, or physical well-being of individuals or groups' (1). Violence on television (TV), which is an essential part of the mass media, is presented extensively as a critical part of the global marketing system (2).

Exposure to media violence could be a public health threat as it leads to increased aggression in real life. The media is also a role model for the audience (3-6). TV

and other media organs play a considerable role in society and character development by providing ideologies, attitudes and behavioral patterns. The existing relationship between watching violent programs and showing violent behavior suggests that TV and media increase the tendency to violence (7). Viewing violence on TV causes fear and may increase anxiety through the threat experience. When watching violent movies, which seems highly rational, people may feel a sense of threat. Physiologically, threatening emotions activate the amygdala, which triggers the stria terminalis (the bed nucleus) for the secretion of the corticotropin-

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releasing hormone (CRH) to activate the HPA axis in the hypothalamus. High CRH levels trigger the release of adrenocorticotrophic hormone by the pituitary gland, which then stimulates the adrenal medulla to release catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline) and the adrenal cortex to release cortisol (8).

In Turkey, TV channels are often watched for an average of 3 hours 34 minutes per day between 6 p.m and 12 p.m.(9). In particular, although the internet technology has rapidly become very popular, the TV audience is growing as well thanks to this technology in Turkey.

Primetime is when the largest number of people watch TV in the evening. The primetime shows (e.g., TV series, movies) on Turkish TV channels are the second most-watched programs but most of them are reported to be violating the rules. A study of watching preferences on TV shows in primetime revealed that participants preferred to watch violent programs to other programs, although they are less entertaining (10).

Various theoretical predictions can be made about cross-cultural generality of the effects of violence in the media. Aggression is generally seen as a universal phenomenon based on the same social-cognitive mechanisms in all societies (11,12). In addition, the General Aggression Model tends to demonstrate that the underlying structure of aggression and its relationships to key risk factors (including media violence) should be at least similar across cultures, although there are significant differences in average levels of aggression between cultures (13). The main reason for this is that the basic emotional, social learning, cognitive and behavioral decision steps are seen as the same in all people.

On the other hand, violent media also can make people less vulnerable to violence, making them less susceptible to others' pain. Desensitization is a natural and defensive phenomenon that occurs spontaneously over time in response to crucial experiences, such as military surgeons operating on soldiers in war-time. The desensitizing steps for media violence are unnatural, unconscious progressive and automatic, as a result of their justified and entertaining presentations, such as repeated use of violence (14).

This study aims to make the content analysis of violence in Turkish national TV shows.

## METHOD

### Sample

Eighty four episodes of 28 Turkish prime-time TV shows (8 p.m - 11 p.m.), randomly selected by SPSS

Statistics version 15.0 (IBM), among the six of ten most-watched national TV channels between 18 November to 8 December 2019 were included in the study (Table 1). A total of 196 hours and 50 minutes of broadcasting was evaluated.

### Materials

The shows were viewed from the TV channels' websites and analyzed by the researchers with a data collection form and multiple timers. The data collection form included the duration of TV shows, perpetrators, victims, type of violence, place of violence, characteristics of violence, and the representation of weapon were included.

### Procedure

We used one-minute interval coding, which had previously been shown to be a sensitive way of detecting certain habits, (15,16) to quantify violence and weapon content in all 84 episodes. This coding allowed showing different portrayals of the same type of violence in one minute. TV shows were evaluated separately by the two researchers (public health specialists) to ensure accuracy and reliability in the coding method. Reliability across coders was conducted by double coding a random sample of 10% of the episodes, with  $\kappa$  estimates ranging from 0.75 to 0.92. Multiple instances of the same category in the same period per minute were considered as a single event. A different character representation within the same minute was counted once again. In case of an opposed violence, or a different type of violence, it was entered as a new violence incidence to the data collection form. If there was more than one person in the same period, this was considered as a single incidence of violence. While counting the acts of violence in TV shows; the data was obtained as a violence code in the event of a change of perpetrators,

**Table 1: Rating rates of TV channels between November 18 and December 8, 2019 (TIAK)**

Channel	Prime time (8 p.m – 12 p.m.)	
	Rating %*	Share**
ATV	4.43	10.79
FOX TV	5.41	13.16
KANAL D	3.09	7.51
SHOW TV	3.77	9.17
STAR TV	2.23	5.44
TRT 1	3.15	7.67

TIAK: TV Audience Research Company, \*The average audience per minute of the program or commercials over a period of time. \*\*Share of total viewing

mutual violence, or multiple types of violence in the same period. For example, during a strife, after a woman insulting a man, within a minute, the man threatens and pushes the woman. This situation was accepted and recorded four times as verbal violence from women to men and also verbal, psychological, and physical violence from men to women. If more than one person is subjected to violence or resort to violence at the same time, this was considered a single act of violence. Violence and weapon assessments were made according to the definitions in Table 2.

Statistical analyses were performed by a biostatistician using SPSS Statistics version 15.0 (IBM). The descriptive statistics were reported as mean±standard deviation, medians, and ranges (min-max). The distribution of violence type among categorical groups was tested with a chi-square test. All comparative analyses were 2-tailed, and  $p=0.05$  was set as the statistical significance threshold.

## RESULTS

While the content of violence was included in all episodes, the content of weapons was included in 61 (72.6%) episodes. The verbal violence content was found in 83 (98.8%), physical in 82 (97.6%), psychological in 83 (98.8%), sexual in six (7.1%), and economic in one (1.2%) of 84 episodes. The violence of couples-only only toward each other, sibling violence, violence against health professionals, and violence against children are evaluated under violence against distinct groups. When violence is examined in these distinct groups, violence against siblings was observed

in 36 (42.9%) episodes, whereas violence against children in 14 (16.7%), and violence against health workers in 6 (7.1%) episodes. When the number of weapon presentation in the TV shows episodes is categorized and analyzed, 23 (27.4%) episodes showed no weapons, while 15 (17.8%) showed more than 50 weapons in one episode.

Analyzing all the violent events in TV shows, men were the most perpetrators (resorting to violence) and victims (exposed to violence). Besides, 40.5% of the all violence occurred at home. The most common type of violence in our study is psychological violence, with 40%. Among all violence, the rate of violence against wives or girlfriends is 6.7%, against husbands or boyfriends is 5.3%, against siblings is 5.9%, and against violence on health professionals is 0.9% (Table 3).

For each episode in 84 TV shows, the total number of violence and the number of violence types were analyzed. In each episode, the total violence mean was  $50.40\pm 32.78$  times and the psychological violence was mean was  $19.77\pm 14.33$  times. The groups resorting to and subjected to violence for all events in the TV shows are shown in Figure 1.

The most frequent type of violence was among men (38.3% of all violence). Violence against to opposite sex (29.2% of all violence) is the second most common type. This was followed by violence among women (9.1%), and among more than one person (6.5%) (Table 4).

In the analysis of violence types in the TV series by gender, a comparison has been made by excluding the economic and sexual violence criteria and also the incidents that not allowing a gender-based classification with regard to resorting to violence and being exposed to

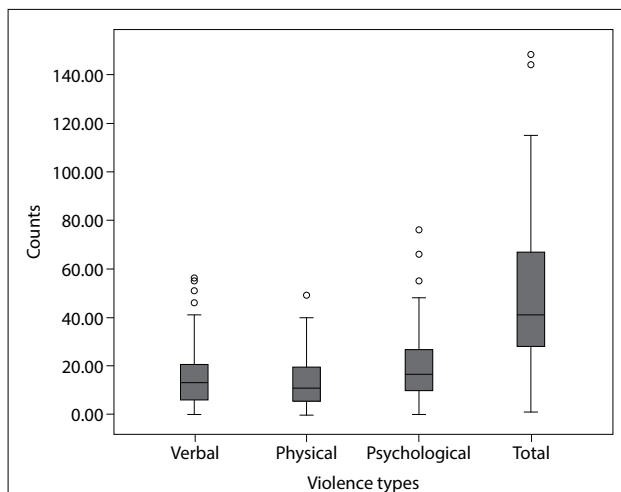
**Table 2: Definitions of key variables**

Variable	Definition
<b>Violence</b>	The explicit, intentional use of force or abuse against self, other, object, or collectivity (a group or community)
<b>Verbal violence</b>	Shouting, swearing, insulting, using a bad nickname
<b>Physical violence</b>	Punching, kicking, slapping, shaking, biting, pushing, pulling, pinching, poking, burning, strangling, poisoning, killing, injuring with a tool or weapon, attempting to strangle, throwing objects
<b>Psychological violence</b>	Ridiculing, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, offending, ignoring, showing weapons, taking hostage, leaving the victim alone
<b>Sexual violence</b>	Sexual assault and rape, coercion, touching, verbal sexual harassment, voyeurism, exhibitionism
<b>Economic violence</b>	Restriction on spending money
<b>Violence to health professionals</b>	The violence that healthcare professionals exposed to in connection with their profession.
<b>Child</b>	Children and adolescents portrayed under the age of 18
<b>Weapon</b>	Edged and bladed weapons, firearm, chain, poison, rope, household furniture, explosives etc.

**Table 3: Violent content in TV shows**

	n=4154	%
<b>Perpetrators</b>		
Men	2585	62.2
Women	967	23.3
Group	575	13.9
Children	27	0.6
<b>Victims</b>		
Men	2350	56.6
Women	1147	27.6
Group	445	10.7
Children	61	1.5
Self	16	0.4
Object-environment	129	3.1
Unknown	6	0.1
<b>Place of violence</b>		
House	1681	40.5
Workplace	372	9.0
School	51	1.2
Other	2050	49.3
<b>Type of violence</b>		
Verbal	1318	31.7
Physical	1164	28.0
Psychological	1661	40.0
Sexual	9	0.2
Economic	2	-
<b>Characteristics of violence</b>		
Against wife/girlfriend	280	6.7
Against husband/boyfriend	218	5.3
Against sibling	247	5.9
Against health worker	38	0.9
Other	3371	81.2

violence. Men resorted to psychological violence at a higher rate (42.1%), whereas women to verbal violence at a higher rate (45.2%) ( $\chi^2=58.13$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). It was



**Figure 1.** Counts of violence in Tv shows (box plot).

observed that both men (41.5%) and women (43.7%) experienced the most psychological violence. There was a statistically significant difference between gender and types of violence in the groups resorting subjected to violence ( $\chi^2=32.69$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) (Table 5).

It has been determined that the most frequent type of violence used by husbands or boyfriends to their partners is psychological violence (40.4%), and the most frequent place of violence is home (70.0%). The distribution of the location and type of violence in certain groups in TV series is shown in Table 6.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the violent content was featured in all episodes and TV shows. Considering the quantitative findings of the study, the verbal and psychological violence content was primarily observed in 83 (98.8%), followed by the physical violence in 82 (97.6%) of 84 episodes. In the literature, it has been observed that studies on violent content analysis on TV are limited, and most of these studies describe the effects of TV violence superficially. In the content analysis studies literature,

**Table 4: Distribution of violence perpetrators and victims in TV shows**

Perpetrators	Victims							Total
	Men (%)	Women (%)	More than one person (%)	Children (%)	An object (%)	Oneself (%)	Unknown (%)	
<b>Men</b>	1590 (38.3)	704 (16.9)	136 (3.2)	41 (0.9)	99 (2.3)	15 (0.3)	0	2585
<b>Women</b>	514 (12.3)	379 (9.1)	35 (0.8)	4 (0.01)	28 (0.6)	1 (0.01)	6 (0.01)	967
<b>More than one person</b>	240 (5.7)	61 (1.4)	274 (6.5)	0	0	0	0	575
<b>Children</b>	6 (0.01)	3 (0.01)	0	16 (0.3)	2 (0.01)	0	0	27
<b>Total</b>	2350	1147	445	61	129	16	6	4154

**Table 5: Distribution of violence types according to gender in TV shows**

	Violence types							
	Verbal		Physical		Psychological		Total	
	n	%*	n	%*	n	%*	n	%**
<b>Perpetrators</b>								
Men	811	31.5	677	26.3	1087	42.2	2575	72.7
Women	437	45.2	204	21.1	325	33.7	966	27.3
<b>Total</b>	1248	35.2	881	24.9	1412	39.9	3541	100
								$\chi^2: 58.13, df: 2, p<0.001$
<b>Victims</b>								
Men	777	33.1	597	25.4	975	41.5	2349	67.4
Women	446	39.2	194	17.1	497	43.7	1137	32.6
<b>Total</b>	1223	35.1	791	22.7	1472	42.2	3486	100
								$\chi^2: 32.69, df: 2, p<0.001$

\*Percent of the row, \*\*Percent of the column, df: Degrees of freedom

**Table 6: Distribution of types and places of violence in TV shows by specialized groups**

	Husband/ boyfriend		Wife/girlfriend		Sibling		Children		Healthcare workers	
	n=280	%	n=218	%	n=247	%	n=61	%	n=38	%
<b>Violence types</b>										
Verbal	110	39.2	102	46.7	111	44.9	20	32.8	19	50.0
Physical	55	19.6	47	21.6	63	25.5	19	31.1	7	18.4
Psychological	113	40.4	69	31.7	73	29.6	22	36.1	11	29.0
Economical	2	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sexual	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.6
<b>Violence places</b>										
House	196	70.0	131	60.1	135	54.7	13	21.3	-	-
Workplace	13	4.6	11	5.0	10	4.0	-	-	32	84.2
School	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6.6	-	-
Others	71	25.4	76	34.9	102	41.3	44	72.1	6	15.8

violence was defined in different ways, and many studies addressed violence only as physical violence. In a survey conducted in the United States of America (USA), violence was identified as showing a threat of physical power to a living person. According to the findings of the aforementioned study evaluated 2.757 shows, 69% of the children’s programs and 57% of the other sort of programs contain violent behaviors (17).

In a study in which 323 shows on TV were examined, it was found that acts of violence appeared in 70 percent of the episodes and an average of 2.3 seconds per minute (18). In another study analyzing a total of 76 programs on mostly watched three TV channels, the average verbal violence per hour was 2.80, physical violence was 9.72, and indirect violence, which is defined as the

damaging reputation, social position, and relationships in a humiliating and convincing manner was on average 3.72 (19).

Investigating the physical and psychological violence on TV comparatively between 1993 and 2001, Canadian researchers found a total of 26405 acts of violence, although physical violence was more common (58.8%), there was a significant increase in the number of psychological act of violence since 1999 (20). In a study focusing on the time period when Turkish children watch TV most, it was found that approximately 1/3 of the total program duration contained violence, with the highest rate of physical violence (13.8% of the entire duration and 41.7% of the entire duration of violence) (21). In another study carried out in Turkey reported

that 30 (71.43%) of the 42 cartoons broadcast on children's channels contain at least one type of violence, and there were 26 physical, 24 verbal, and 11 psychological violence in total (22). According to Turkmen (23), 23 animation films from among the 100 highest box office feature films of all time were examined in the scope of verbal violence including taunting, bellowing, ignoring, and threatening, a total of 1245 violent acts were recorded. An average of 54 violent acts were detected in each film, and the most common physical (72.4%), verbal (21.7%), indirect (3.6%) types of violence were observed (23). Children exposed to violence in the media feel the world as a dark and wrong place (24). When children watch violence against good characters, and the same characters become the victims of violence, they may feel discouraged about nature, leading to fear and negative responses.

In the present study, it was found that violent behavior was shown higher and more intensely in TV series compared to other studies, mostly psychological violence. The psychological health status of the individual, sadness, hurt, shock, any pressure or attitude that cause him to feel threatened are considered as psychological violence (25). In our study, teasing, intimidation, threatening, humiliation, discrimination, resentment, ignoring, showing weapons, and holding hostage were evaluated within the scope of psychological violence. The frequent emergence of the threat theme in TV series, and long hostage-holding periods have been effective in increasing the psychological violence. Psychological violence often accompanied other forms of violence.

The weapon demonstration was categorized and analyzed according to the sections in our study. Weapons were shown at least once in 72.6% of episodes, more than ten times in 44%, and more than 50 times in 17.8%. Studies on weapon display on TV showed that weapon-showing content was present in 9% of children's programs and 31% of other programs in the USA, as well as 12.9% of a total 861 music videos in New Zealand (17,26). Many people watch the weapons on TV, the symbol of violence they have never seen in their daily lives, on TV and firearms accompany violent acts in different ways. The weapon is depicted quite a lot in the Turkish TV series. There is a need for studies on how the extreme weapon display on TV can affect people in social life.

The use of one-minute interval coding in our study not only provided the number of violence and weapon representation but also provided an opportunity to

evaluate perpetrators, victims, and places of violence. Examining the locations where violence is shown on TV, 40.5% of the violence was seen at home, 9% at work, 1.2% at school, while 49.3% was in other unclassified places. The prevalence of violence at home on TV reveals the importance of family structure and communication as a social reflection.

On the other hand, in this study, the violence of couples towards each other was examined. Recently, the National Research on Violence Against Women in Turkey (27) found that 36% of women were exposed to physical violence, 12% to sexual violence, 43.9% to emotional violence. In a study conducted among university students about dating violence in Turkey, 28.6% of students reported that they were exposed to partner violence, and 22.1% that they resorted to violence against his/her partner (28). In a study investigating violence against women on TV in Turkey, 5.8% of the 979 scenes (13 episodes) were found to contained violence against women. According to the findings of this research, 40.6% of the violence was verbal, 36.5% psychological, 12.5% physical, 3.1% sexual, and 2.1% was economic. It has been reported that 14% of those who use violence against women are husbands, and 8.8% are lovers, and violence against women is mostly (61.4%) at home (29). Consistent with the literature, in this study, women experienced psychological violence the most (46.7%), and violence mostly occurred (61.0%) at home.

The results of this study should be considered in light of the limitations of the research. The main limitation of this study was its sample size. Even though the number of episodes was considerable for the content-coding methodology approach, a new research with a more extensive, random sampling of TV shows over years would provide additional support for these findings. The TV shows in our study last for an average of 152.5 minutes, stay on screen during prime-time, and are presented to the audience with their synopsis and previous episodes. It is thought that violence and weapons are shown frequently on TV, especially in fictional programs such as TV shows, could increase aggressive behavior in real life. Considering that especially these shows are shown during the hours when adolescents watch TV most, their possible effects on this generation should be considered and some regulations should be made in this regard.

Instead of showing violence to society, channels are expected to take social psychology to a better level and act with public responsibility as TV is not just an

entertainment tool, and high ratings do not show that episodes are of good quality.

Contribution Categories		Author Initials
Category 1	Concept/Design	E.K.
	Data acquisition	E.K.
	Data analysis/Interpretation	E.K., M.O.
Category 2	Drafting manuscript	E.K., M.O.
	Critical revision of manuscript	E.K., M.O.
Category 3	Final approval and accountability	E.K., M.O.
Other	Technical or material support	E.K., M.O.
	Supervision	E.K., M.O.

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