



TV news induced fears of Turkish children: Reports from mothers and children

Nasibe Kandemir-Özдің^a *, Özgür Erdur-Baker

^a Ministry of National Education (MoNE), Afyonkarahisar, Türkiye

^b Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract

This study examined children's fear responses to everyday TV news with regards to the following: a) the consistency between mothers' observations and children's reports on TV induced fears, b) the relationships between TV news contents that frighten children with regards to their age and gender, and c) the most common fearful coverage of TV news for children. In the study a quantitative research design was adopted. Television News Induced Fright Scale (TNIFS) and a demographic information form were administered to 186 mothers and their 186 children (ages from 8 to 13). Findings revealed inconsistency between responses of mothers and their children about children's TV news induced fears. Mothers overestimate their children's TV news induced fears regarding in terms of news coverage of interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents and fantasy characters. Gender but not age differences were found. "Children and animals who get hurt", "kidnapped children", and "starving children in poor countries" were reported by children as some of the most fearful news coverages.

Keywords: Children; childrens' fear; TV news induced fears; gender; age

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1. Introduction

Today, children live in a media-saturated environment more than ever. Although technology has progressed, TV is still the main source for news rather than web- and print-based newspapers also in Turkey (RTÜK, 2018) since the combination of visuals and verbal messages make television more attractive and powerful (Eveland, Seo, & Marton, 2002; Gunter, Furnham, & Griffiths, 2000). In Turkey, the result of a study showed that the most frequently watched program type is "news" with an average of 24 days per month (RTÜK, 2018). On the other hand, despite differences on age, average exposure time of children to TV is about 2.5 (Valkenburg, 2004) to 8.5 hours a day

* Corresponding author Nasibe Kandemir-Özдің ORCID ID.: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2864-242X>
E-mail address: nkozding@gmail.com

(Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005), and elementary school children who are in the stage of personality development and socialization are the most effected segment of the society by TV broadcasts (RTÜK, 2006). The annual reports of Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK, 2012) also showed that 97.9 % of children between the ages of 6 and 18 have television in their homes, and 81.3 % of them watch TV with their parents. In weekdays, people (65.1%) mostly watch TV between the hours of 21.01 and 24.00 and they (75.7 %) also frequently watch TV between the hours of 18.01 and 21.00. These hours coincide with TV news times and these percentages increase at weekends (%70.2 and %57.1, respectively). Therefore, children are inevitably exposed to TV news (Riddle, Cantor, Byrne, & Moyer-Guse, 2012), either by choosing on their own or by accidentally while their parents are watching (Riddle, 2012).

Researchers along with parents and educators have been concerned about children's exposure due to violent content of TV (e.g. child abductions and violent crime). In fact, substantial amount of research focus on children's exposure to entertainment media or violent content of various TV programs. Children's exposure to violent content was found to be related to aggression (e.g. Verlinden, et. al., 2014) and related to development of fears and/or exacerbation of existing fears (e.g., Bond & Harrison, 2008; Calvert & Wilson, 2008; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). However, exposure to TV news and also TV news induced fright has been relatively less studied (Abdu-Glass, Fremont, Pataki, & Beresin, 2019). For example, the recent study showed that news cover violent content results in negative responses of children (Kleemans, Janssen, Anschütz, & Buijzen, 2021). Therefore, the motivation for this study comes from the possibility that TV news with its violent content have close links with children's fear acquisitions.

Although related literature contains discussions on biological preparedness and/or genetic characteristics of fears, several learning pathways have also been suggested as substantial amount of variation in childhood fears which may be attributed to the environmental factors. Several researchers proposed that individuals may acquire fears in various ways; as a result of personal experiences, observing others' fearful reactions or just simply hearing or reading about threatening situations or stimuli (e.g. Olsson & Phelps, 2007). Rachman (1977), in his classic work, formulates how fears are socially transmitted through three pathways; conditioning (direct experiences with a fearful thing/event), modeling (vicarious learning), and negative information transmission (exposure to negative information about a fearful thing/event). According to LoBue and Rakison (2013), the general learning model with its three pathways focuses on the socially transmitted aspects of fear development and has been supported with research findings.

Conditioning, describes a one shot exposure to frightening stimuli. This is the well-known model for fear acquisition that goes back to the Little Albert experiment by John Watson (Watson & Rayner, 1920). Although the direct experience (also called classical

conditioning) has been helpful to develop the basic principles of clinical interventions, it has been criticized based on the findings that many people do not recall their conditioning experiences, and many people with traumatic experiences may not display any fearful response (e.g., Poulton & Menzies, 2002).

Vicarious learning model postulates that fear may be learned through observing how others respond to frightful stimuli (e.g. Bandura, 1971; Mineka & Zinbarg, 2006). Especially, youngsters take adults around them as reference to evaluate and react to any given ambiguous circumstances (LoBue, 2013). Even infants engage in social referencing in terms of searching emotional information from their caregivers' emotional expression (happy, fearful, angry etc.) when they are faced with uncertain circumstances (Berk, 2012).

Negative information transmission as a third pathway, may not only set basis for beliefs about what is frightening but also results in maintaining such beliefs (Muris & Field, 2010). Children may become fearful when they hear or read about threatening stimuli or situations. That is, fear may be transformed via just being informed or instructed especially by adults about fear invoking objects or situations (Field & Lawson, 2003).

Consequently, expectations would be set via information transmission which may prevent one from interacting with the dangerous stimulus (LoBue, 2013). Due to such expectations/beliefs, avoidance behaviors may occur by leaving no chance to test whether such expectations are valid (Field & Lawson, 2003). LoBue and Rakison (2013) add that these learning pathways should be considered in the light of the variable of attention which results in rapid detection of various threats. Past experiences along with visual attention create perceptual biases. Due to these biases, threatening information may become even more salient and facilitate fear learning.

In the same way, media-induced fears can also occur (1) via a direct experience as in reality with a mediated danger (e.g., Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2008); (2) via observational learning of fears from media characters (e.g. by observing the emotional responses of eye witnesses and surviving relatives of victims); and (3) through negative information transfer via media characters (e.g. via newsreader or eye witnesses) (Valkenburg, 2004; Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2008). According to Cantor (2002), through stimulus generalization (concept of classic conditioning theory), when individuals are faced with situations, such as attacks by dangerous people/animals, physical mutilation, earthquakes, in the media, they experience fear similar to the one in reality but show less intense emotional responses. In other words, direct experiences with mediated dangers may arise fear in the same way as direct experience with dangers in real life. Furthermore, by observing the emotional responses of the main characters or victims to dangers in media productions, media induced fears responses may also develop. According to Cantor (2002), the reason for this fear experienced via others is empathy,

and Wilson (2008) added that especially if the content is perceived as realistic by the child, empathetic child becomes more frightened. In television news, direct observation of wars, crime, and other dangers mostly takes part; however, information also largely transferred by verbal information of the newsreader or the reports and eyewitness accounts qualify as mediated negative information transfer (Calvert & Wilson, 2008). Therefore, the present study based on especially these two fear acquisition pathways; observational learning and negative information transfer.

Development of fear with its level and types may differ by gender and age (Wilson, 2008). Girls are reported to display more fear reactions to violent TV news content than boys (Smith & Wilson, 2002). Yet, in terms of age, the related literature presents a somewhat complicated picture. Overall, age is a critical determinant of source and intensity of TV induced fears and the content and the intensity of children's fears appear to be changing with increasing age (Burnham, 2007). By increasing age, fear reactions from TV news of children also increase (Riddle et al., 2012; Smith & Wilson, 2002). Basic cognitive abilities: the abilities of verbally presented information interpretation, fantasy-reality distinguishing, and processing conceptual-rather than perceptual-information of children should be developed for comprehending television (Smith & Wilson, 2002). Actually, older children (e.g. ages 8+) are more likely to show more and enduring, long-term fright reactions to television news than younger children (Riddle, 2012). In terms of representations, among first to eleventh graders, younger children show more fear than older children when exposed to the news stories representing concrete scary graphic visuals of war such as weapons, explosions, and physical harm (Kennedy, Charlesworth, & Chen, 2004), whereas older children are affected by complex and abstract content such as threats of conventional and nuclear war (Kennedy et al., 2004; Wilson, 2008) and some societal or political consequences of the events on the news (Wilson, 2008). Cantor and Riddle (2014) stated ages and fears of children more specifically. They mentioned that children cannot grasp fantasy-reality distinction until 8 years old, and they may differentiate fantasy from reality whereas they have limited capabilities for abstract thought between 8 and 12, and they have ability of abstract reasoning at 13 years old age and older. Therefore, until age of eight, animals, dark, supernatural beings (ghosts, monsters, and witches etc.) may be frightening for children; whereas, 9 to 12 year olds may be frightened by personal injury and physical destruction much more (Cantor, Wilson, & Hoffner, 1986). The age range of present study (8-13 ages) is based on these developmental differences of children on fear.

It should be noted that the majority of existing research such as the ones mentioned above examines children's fear responses by focusing on specific event news such as the Gulf War or 9/11 terrorist attack; yet children's fear responses to everyday disturbing TV news have been studied less but growing (e.g. Riddle et al., 2012). Therefore, this study focused on children's fear responses to everyday TV news with regards to their age and gender. Similarly, the majority of previous studies used different data sources. As Riddle

et al. (2012) summarized, the majority of studies relied only on children's (e.g., Walma van der Molen & Konjin, 2007) or parents' (especially mothers') reports (e.g., Wilson, Martin, & Marske, 2005). Only a few studies gathered data from both children and parents (for extensive discussion see Riddle et al. 2012). However, these studies appear to reveal inconsistencies (mostly mothers underestimate their children's fears) between the children's and their parents' reports about children's TV induced fear (e.g. Saylor, Lipovsky, Jackson, & Finch, 2003).

Therefore, the present study uses both data sources (children and mothers) to investigate whether there is an inconsistency between mothers' and children's responses as suggested in the literature, and if yes, at which points these inconsistencies occur. Although the caregivers may be someone other than the mothers, the present study selected mothers as participants due to the fact that the main caregivers in Turkey are still especially mothers (Yalaki, Taşar, Kara, & Dallar, 2010).

In sum, this study explores children's fright reactions to TV news based on children's own and their mothers' reports. The research questions of the study are "What is the nature of the children's TV news induced fears based on mothers' observations and children's own reports?", and "Are there age and gender differences in TV news induced fears of children?" Additionally, the present study investigates "the most common fearful coverages of TV news for Turkish children".

2. Method

In the study, quantitative research design was adopted and the details about the method is as in the following:

2.1. Participants and Procedure

The participants of the study were 186 volunteer mothers and their 186 children (one child for each mother) from the cities of Ankara, Konya and Bolu in Turkey. After obtaining permission from The Human Subjects Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University, 8-13 year old children and their mothers were reached by means of purposive sampling methods, and home visits were done by the researcher to get data. Three inclusion criteria for mother participants were as follow: to have a child(ren) between 8 and 13 years old; and to have at least a basic education (to able to read and answer the questions). If the participating mothers had more than one child, they were asked to think of one specific child while answering the questionnaire. The mothers were not directed about how to decide the child to participate in the study. Finally, the mothers were asked whether the child they preferred to talk about could be a participant of the study as well. If they met these criteria and agreed to participate in the study, the

questionnaires were independently administered to both children and their mothers in their houses.

Mothers ranged in age from 27 to 53 ($M=36.39$; $SD=4.73$). 43% of the mothers have completed their elementary education. 28.5% of the mothers had a high school graduation, 25.3% of the mothers had a university degree, and 3.2% of them were graduated from others (postgraduate or institution of higher education).

The majority of mothers (65.1%) were housewives, followed by government employees (25.8%), workers (7.5%), and women with other vocations (1.6%). Of the participant children, 16.1% of the children who participated were 8 years old, followed by 19.9% of those who were 9 and 10 separately, 19.4% of those who were 11, and 12.4% of those who were 12 and 13 separately. The gender ratio of children was 51.1% girls and 48.9% boys. According to the mothers' report, of the participant children, 61.2% ($n=114$) watched TV news at least for an hour in a day.

2.2. Measures

Television News Induced Fright Scale (TNIFS) was adapted through some changes on the Television Induced Fright Scale by Valkenberg, Cantor, and Peeters (2000). The original scale was designed to measure children's TV induced frights related to fictional and nonfictional threats (e.g., news, documentaries). For the purpose of this study, the content of the scale remained the same but the instruction was changed. The participants were specifically asked to focus and think about the TV news while responding to the scale's item. The scale consisted of 18 items with four-point Likert-type. There were four factors; Interpersonal Violence, War and Suffering, Fires and Accidents, and Fantasy Characters. In the scale, the score for each item (e.g. when I watch TV news, I have been frightened by children who get hurt or children who are kidnapped) was ranged "never (0)", to often (3)". An individual's TV news induced fright was determined by summing all of his/her responses. As a result, the possible highest score was 54 (indicating high TV news induced fright), whereas the possible lowest score was 0 (indicating no fear).

The mother and child versions of the TNIFS were identical. By the help of minor modifications, each question was changed from the first person for the child to the third person for the parent so that the main question for children as "When you watch TV news, how often have you been frightened by..." was changed to as "When your child watches TV news, how often has s/he been frightened by..." for mothers. Therefore, the word "news" was also put in the title of the scale.

Prior to the data collection procedure, the scale was translated and back translated by a group of psychological counselors with advanced levels of English. The translated questionnaires were examined for both face validity and cultural appropriateness of each

item by four experts in counseling psychology. Also, a pilot study with 15 mothers and their children was conducted to check the clarity of the items. Small changes were made to obtain clearer instructions for children and mothers.

Construct validity of the Turkish versions (both children's and mothers' TNIFS version) was tested via exploratory factor analyses. The results of the principal axis factoring with promax rotation indicated 4 factors explaining 65.36% of the total variance for mothers and 64.53% for children version. Apart from the item of "Wars in other countries" in the children's TNIFS, all of the factors and items in both mothers' and children's TNIFS were the same with the original TIFS (Valkenburg et al., 2000). Eighteen items were brought together under four categories; Interpersonal Violence, War and Suffering, Fires and Accidents, and Fantasy Characters.

Since the factor loadings of the items of TNIFS were not equal to each other, McDonald Omega (ω) coefficient as inter-item reliability coefficients were calculated. McDonald Omega (ω) coefficients were found as .87, .81, .89, and .91 (for interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters, respectively) for mothers' TNIFS, and as .85, .88, .88, and .91 (for interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters, respectively), for children's TNIFS.

Demographic Information Form. Age, gender, and duration of the exposure to the TV news of the children; age, educational level and occupation of the mothers were asked by a demographic information form.

3. Results

The results of the statistical analyses of the study showed that there is an inconsistency between the responses of children and their mothers about children's TV news induced fears, there is no significant age difference, whereas there is a gender difference among the responses of the children about their TV news induced fears. In addition, according to the results, the most reported fearful TV news contents were about suffering children. Details were given according to the order of the research questions.

Testing consistency between mothers and children's responses on children's TV news induced fears. Children's fear responses to TV news based on mothers' and their children's own reports can be seen in Table 1. Paired Samples t-Test was conducted with four (child-mother) pairs for four factors to test the consistency between the responses of mothers and their children about TV news induced fears of children. On the measurements of the four TNIFS factors of interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters, reports of mothers and children differ significantly [$t(185) = 5.47$, $t(185) = 3.57$, $t(185) = 3.06$, and $t(185) = 3.29$, respectively, ps for all $< .05$]. In addition, the average TV news induced frights were reported as $M = 28.25$ ($SD = 12.66$) by mothers and 23.56 ($SD = 13.05$) by children. These results indicated that

according to mothers' responses, children had higher levels of TV news induced fears than children's own responses.

Examining age and gender differences in TV news induced fears of children. Two 2 (gender) X 2 (age group) between-subjects MANOVA (one for children's and one for mothers' scores) were performed on four dependent variables of both children's TNIFS' and also of mothers' TNIFS' scores. The dependent variables were interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters. Related assumptions were checked prior to analyses.

In the results of children's responses, with the use of Wilks' criterion, the combined DVs were significantly related to gender (Wilks's $\lambda = .90$, $F(4, 179) = 4.89$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$, medium effect) but not related to age (Wilks's $\lambda = .95$, $F(4, 179) = 2.37$, $p = .06$). age and gender interaction (Wilks's $\lambda = .1$, $F(4, 179) = .25$, $p = .91$) was not significant. Additionally, the results indicated that whereas among girls ($M = 8.36$, $SD = 4.32$) the highest TV news induced fright was related to interpersonal violence news, among boys ($M = 6.49$, $SD = 3.67$) the highest TV news induced fright was related to war and suffering news. Additionally, girls reported higher frequency of fears in all factors than boys (for details see Table 1).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Four Dependent Variables of MANOVA (for children's responses)

		interpersonal violence		war and suffering		fires and accidents		fantasy characters	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Girls	Age								
	8-10	9.21	4.37	8.06	3.52	6.25	3.87	5.83	5.83
	11-13	7.29	4.06	7.26	3.57	5.40	3.67	4.64	4.46
	Total	8.36	4.32	7.71	3.55	5.87	3.79	5.31	5.28
Boys	Age								
	8-10	6.90	3.95	7.12	3.56	4.88	4.02	3.20	3.98
	11-13	4.98	4.62	5.70	3.71	3.48	3.59	2.53	3.66
	Total	6.05	4.34	6.49	3.67	4.26	3.88	2.90	3.83
Total	Age								
	8-10	8.08	4.31	7.60	3.55	5.58	3.98	4.54	5.16
	11-13	6.16	4.47	6.50	3.70	4.46	3.74	3.61	4.20
	Total	7.23	4.47	7.11	3.65	5.09	3.91	4.13	4.77

In the results of mothers' responses, with the use of Wilks' criterion, the combined DVs were significantly related to gender (Wilks's $\lambda = .92$, $F(4, 179) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$, medium effect) but not related to age (Wilks's $\lambda = .98$, $F(4, 179) = 1.16$, $p = .33$). Age and gender interaction (Wilks's $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 179) = .29$, $p = .88$) was not significant. In contrast to children's responses, mothers' replies revealed that the news of interpersonal violence caused the highest level of fear in both girls ($M = 9.83$, $SD = 4.07$) and boys ($M = 7.93$, $SD = 4.13$). In addition, as in the results of children's responses, responses of mothers also showed that girls reported higher levels of TV news induced fright in all factors than boys (for details see Table2).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Four Dependent Variables of MANOVA (for mothers' responses)

		interpersonal violence		war and suffering		fires and accidents		fantasy characters	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Girls	Age								
	8-10	9.98	4.03	8.42	3.36	6.45	4.08	6.70	5.83
	11-13	9.64	4.15	8.00	3.04	6.02	3.75	5.69	5.24
	Total	9.83	4.07	8.23	3.21	6.26	3.89	6.25	5.57
Boys	Age								
	8-10	8.00	3.93	7.88	3.33	5.65	3.70	5.31	4.77
	11-13	7.85	4.41	7.68	3.16	5.80	3.64	3.20	4.23
	Total	7.93	4.13	7.79	3.24	5.71	3.65	4.38	4.64
Total	Age								
	8-10	9.00	4.09	8.15	3.34	6.06	3.87	6.02	5.36
	11-13	8.77	4.35	7.84	3.09	5.91	3.68	4.48	4.91
	Total	8.90	4.20	8.02	3.22	5.99	3.77	5.34	5.21

The most common fearful coverages of TV news for Turkish children. The most common fearful TV news coverage for children was examined. The highest frequency and percentage endorsement of "often" response choice to Television News Induced Fright Scale (TNIFS) was evaluated as it was suggested in Burnham and Gullone (1997) and

Gullone and King (1993). According to the children's responses to TNIFS, children who get hurt (n=84, 45.2%), children who are kidnapped (n=73, 39.2%), and starving children in poor countries (n=70, 37.6%) were the most commonly endorsed 3 fearful coverages of TV news. Mothers' endorsements were somewhat different that children getting wounded was coming in first (n=94, 50.5%), and followed by animals getting hurt (n=87, 46.8%), and kidnapped kids (n=86, 46.2%) (for details see Table 3).

Table 3. Most Fearful TV News Coverages for Children

	Responses of Children								Responses of Mothers							
	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Interpersonal Violence																
People who fight with knives	44	23.7	50	26.9	61	32.8	31	16.7	37	19.9	34	18.3	66	35.5	49	26.3
Somebody who gets murdered	37	19.9	39	21.0	48	25.8	62	33.3	20	10.8	35	18.8	61	32.8	70	37.6
Blood	77	41.4	40	21.5	31	16.7	38	20.4	36	19.4	44	23.7	52	28.0	54	29.0
People who shoot each other	78	41.9	40	21.5	34	18.3	34	18.3	48	25.8	47	25.3	51	27.4	40	21.5
Children who are kidnapped	37	19.9	38	20.4	38	20.4	73	39.2	17	9.1	27	14.5	56	30.1	86	46.2
War and suffering																
Children in poor countries who are starving	31	16.7	39	21.0	46	24.7	70	37.6	18	9.7	34	18.3	55	29.6	79	42.5
Animals who get hurt	32	17.2	41	22.0	47	25.3	66	35.5	18	9.7	28	15.1	53	28.5	87	46.8
Children who get hurt	22	11.8	35	18.8	45	24.2	84	45.2	15	8.1	21	11.3	56	30.1	94	50.5
Fires and accidents																
Wars in other countries	53	28.5	38	20.4	51	27.4	44	23.7	38	20.4	42	22.6	60	32.3	46	24.7
Houses or buildings on fire	61	32.8	44	23.7	37	19.9	44	23.7	41	22.0	50	26.9	50	26.9	45	24.2
Cars that run into each other	75	40.3	40	21.5	45	24.2	26	14.0	54	29.0	46	24.7	49	26.3	37	19.9
Air crashes	60	32.3	48	25.8	36	19.4	42	22.6	53	28.5	50	26.9	47	25.3	36	19.4
Car accidents	65	34.9	34	18.3	53	28.5	34	18.3	33	17.7	40	21.5	56	30.1	57	30.6
Fantasy characters																
Ghosts	92	49.5	29	15.6	24	12.9	41	22.0	70	37.6	25	13.4	35	18.8	56	30.1
Monsters	103	55.4	29	15.6	21	11.3	33	17.7	85	45.7	30	16.1	31	16.7	40	21.5
Witches	132	71.0	18	9.7	17	9.1	19	10.2	99	53.2	35	18.8	23	12.4	29	15.6
Dragons	126	67.7	26	14.0	17	9.1	17	9.1	103	55.4	32	17.2	27	14.5	24	12.9
Aliens	92	49.5	42	22.6	20	10.8	32	17.2	84	45.2	39	21.0	36	19.4	27	14.5

Note. 'Often' scores are reported under results part.

4. Discussion

This research offers the first empirical understandings of the relationship between TV news and children's fear levels and it also contributes to growing literature related to children's fright reactions to television news by providing reports of both mothers and their children. Unlike the results of most of the studies in the literature (e.g. Muris, Merckelbach, Ollendick, King, & Bogie, 2001; Saylor, et al., 2003), the results revealed that Turkish mothers overestimate their children's TV news induced fears. Although the difference was statistically significant, it was rather small and mothers' scores across all four factors (interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters) were higher than their children's scores. Although, this study does not have data to explore its reason, a speculation can be made considering some ongoing campaigns in Turkey about the impact of TV and other media on children. For example, one of the campaigns uses the motto "Let's go to the bed": at 21.00, an alert is broadcasted on screens, and it reminds children to go to bed and not to watch TV after that time. Another campaign is about suggestion for parents about age restriction of each program. Now, it is mandatory for all TV channels to place an alert on the corner of the screen about age appropriateness of each program. Such campaigns may have increased the level of awareness of parents about the dangers of the TV but they may also have made some parents hypervigilant against the dangerous or negative effects of TV on children. Nevertheless, this result calls for further studies in terms of perceptions of mothers on both national and international levels. It can be interesting to understand whether the nature and severity of "fearful TV news" are perceived or judged univocally by people of different cultural backgrounds.

Parallel with the results of the previous studies (Riddle, 2012; Smith & Moyer-Guse, 2006), girls were found to report higher frequencies of fears across all types of violent TV news content regardless of their ages. That is, according to both mothers' and children's responses, girls are more likely to display frightening reactions to TV news coverage on interpersonal violence, war and suffering, fires and accidents, and fantasy characters. This result may be the reflection of the proposition that girls are born with greater susceptibility to fears (Walma Van Der Molen, Valkenburg, & Peeters, 2002) and/or girls tend to manifest and disclose their emotions more than boys do (e.g., Chaplin & Aldao, 2012). In addition, this difference may also occur because of pressure for socialization on girls to express and on boys to restrain their fears (Cantor & Riddle, 2014).

As mentioned above, the literature presents somewhat complicated results on age differences. Although the present study did not find any significant age differences, results exhibited that "interpersonal violence" on TV news was the most frightful coverage regardless of the children's ages. Considering the results of the present study, between the ages of 8 to 13 years old children, differences in TV news induced fear appears to be arising from gender rather than age. Perhaps, larger age differences might

be needed to be studied to observe at what age and/or cognitive development level differences in TV induced fear can be observed.

Similar to the findings of the present study, Walma van der Molen et al. (2002) categorized the most frightening content of news as a) interpersonal violence, b) fires, accidents and disasters, and c) explicit visual depictions of the consequences of violence (e.g. blood, death bodies, and people screaming/crying). The researchers used the interview (open-ended questions about what news content causes fear) technique with children in their study and along with specific news events, children reported explicit visual depictions of the consequences of violent events as fearful. The results of present study partially supported the aforementioned study results and showed that the most common fearful coverages of TV news were “children who get hurt,” “children who are kidnapped,” “animals who get hurt,” “starving children in poor countries,” “somebody who gets murdered,” “car accidents,” “houses or buildings on fire,” “ghosts,” and “blood”. “Air crashes” and “people who shoot each other”, and “people who fight with knives” were also common fearful coverages of news according to children and mothers respectively. In this study, the difference between the children’ and the mothers’ responses about most common fearful coverages of TV news (“people who fight with knives”) may be because of parents’ projection of their own fears onto children as stated in the study of Smith and Moyer-Guse (2006).

Contemporary fears may emerge by being exposed to global events (e.g., disasters, wars, diseases, etc. as occurs in Covid 19 pandemic) (Lee, et al., 2021), television/media, and societal changes (Burnham, 2009). Thereby, stated common television news related fears explored by this study may also be interpreted as contemporary TV news related fears in Turkey. Briefly, according to the findings of this study, the contemporary terrifying coverage of television news may be listed as “children who get hurt,” “children who are kidnapped,” “animals who get hurt,” “starving children in poor countries,” “somebody who gets murdered,” “car accidents,” “houses or buildings on fire,” “ghosts,” “blood,” “air crashes,” “people who shoot each other,” and “people who fight with knives.” However, there were no specific items (for example related to the Covid 19 pandemic) on the scale called TNIFS used in this study. Therefore, in the future studies, some specific items related to current universal events may be added to scale or another scale may be used to measure the current TV news related fears of the children.

In sum, the results of the study showed that children report frightful reactions to violent TV news content and their mothers also confirm their children’s such reports. In fact, mothers appear to be magnifying their children’s TV news related fears. The findings of the study indicated that by giving consideration to the frightening potential of TV news for children, parents should be well advised to be aware of their children’s fear of TV news and to avoid watching TV news programs while young children are present. Especially when there is a big event (e.g. national disaster) monitoring the amount of

children's watching TV news may be sufficient and meaningful because post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (related distress) of the 10 years old or younger children were found to be related to the amount of television viewing during the day of event 9/11 attacks (Otto, Henin, Hirshfeld-Becker, Pollack, Biederman, & Rosenbaum, 2007). This does not mean depriving the children of the news of the world; however, adults' awareness about TV news' negative effects on children should be increased. For future studies, it may be suggested that the relationship between the other emotions (e.g. aggression, anxiety) or behaviors (e.g. tendency to violence, sleep disturbances) of children and TV news can be explored. Examining the parents' TV news watching habits (e.g. sharing emotions/ideas) and the duration of children's exposure may also give some clues about the reactions of children to the TV news.

Nevertheless, the majority of the studies in this field report findings based on rather Western oriented samples. Culture was reported to be related to fears of children. A recent study reported that common fears may change from culture to culture; for example, fear of "God" for Turkish children, and fear of "ghost" for Chinese children are the most common fears (Serim-Yıldız, Erdur-Baker, & Bugay, 2013). It is very likely that TV news contents reflect the culture of the society. Therefore, we recommend for future studies that more international research findings may help to complement existing knowledge about culture and TV news induced fear relationship.

In addition, the current study provides important information for parents or caregivers and for counselors. Firstly, they all should be aware that TV news, especially some contents are fearful for children. Therefore, at home, parents have an important role and their children's TV news consumption should be guided by parents or caregivers (Walma van der Molen & Bushman, 2008). Findings of the research studies also showed that exposure to television arise some negative results such as cognitive and physical abilities development, obesity, sleep problems, depression and anxiety (e.g., Domingues-Montanari, 2017). When it is thought about the violence and fearful content of the TV news, it can be understood that in addition to arise of fear, TV news may cause some similar kinds of negative effects on children. Therefore, at schools, counselors should be aware that children can be exposed to TV news at home and this experience may underlie in some of their fear or fear result related problems. In addition, they also should be aware about the relationship between gender and TV news induced fears and also some common fearful coverages of the TV news. They may plan some meetings with parents or also with students about these negative effects of TV news exposure and they may suggest some controls or limitations for TV news hours to protect children. For example, educating parents about media literacy skills may be helpful because by having those skills, parents may be aware of the effect of the sound, image, video or text on TV news, and they can distinguish the messages given in the news and the target group for those messages (Erdem, 2018). Shortly, by the help of these skills they can protect their children not just form the negative effects of TV news but also negative effects of all types

of the programs on TV. Additionally, they may use these results for coping with some other problems of the children as mentioned. Media literacy education for children is also needed. Teachers also have responsibility here. Students may be informed about media effects in various lessons including life sciences, Turkish, Social studies etc.

Lastly, due to the study's limitation, the findings should be read with caution. The cross-sectional nature of the study and the sampling method, which limits the generalizability of the findings, are the study's two most significant limitations. Thereby, it is necessary to perform more research using different samples and methodologies in order to cross-validate the study's findings.

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