

# The Effects of School Violence on Child and Adolescent Mental Health and the Need for a Holistic Approach: The Kahramanmaraş Example

## *Okul Şiddetinin Çocuk ve Ergen Ruh Sağlığı Üzerindeki Etkileri ve Bütüncül Bir Yaklaşımın Duyulan İhtiyaç: Kahramanmaraş Örneği*

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### Özet

Okullar çocukların ve ergenlerin sosyo-duygusal ve akademik gelişimini destekleyen temel güvenli alanlardır. Ancak eğitim kurumlarındaki şiddet olayları bu güvenlik duygusunu zayıflatarak okul şiddetini kritik bir halk sağlığı sorununa dönüştürmektedir. 15 Nisan 2026'da Kahramanmaraş'ta yaşanan okul şiddeti olayı, bu tehdidin güncel ve şok edici bir örneğidir. Bu tür travmatik olaylar sadece birincil mağdurları değil, aynı zamanda akranlar, öğretmenler ve medya aracılığıyla olaya maruz kalan daha geniş bir nüfusu da etkileyerek ikincil travmatizasyona yol açmaktadır. Literatür, okul şiddetine doğrudan veya dolaylı maruz kalmanın kaygı, depresyon, travma sonrası stres bozukluğu (TSSB), akademik başarısızlık ve intihar eğilimleriyle ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu gelişimsel açıdan hassas dönemde güven kaybı, bireylerde uzun süreli psikolojik hasara yol açmaktadır. Bu kronik sorunu ele almak için, psikolojik dayanıklılığı artıran proaktif ve önleyici yaklaşımların yanı sıra olay sonrası kriz müdahaleleri de hayati önem taşımaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Kahramanmaraş'taki olay, okul güvenliğinin yalnızca fiziksel önlemlerle sağlanamayacağını göstermektedir; bu durum, bütüncül ve biyopsikososyal bir yaklaşımın gerekliliğini ortaya koymuştur. Gelecekteki çalışmalar, "algılanan okul güvenliği" kavramını standartlaştırmalı ve etkilenen toplulukları izleyen uzunlamasına araştırmalara odaklanmalıdır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Okul şiddeti, Okul güvenliği, Ruh sağlığı, Travma

### Abstract

Schools are fundamental safe spaces that support the socio-emotional and academic development of children and adolescents. However, incidents of violence in educational institutions undermine this sense of security, transforming school violence into a critical public health problem. The school violence incident in Kahramanmaraş on April 15, 2026, is a current and shocking example of this threat. Such traumatic events affect not only the primary victims but also the wider population exposed to the event through peers, teachers, and the media, leading to secondary traumatization. The literature shows that direct or indirect exposure to school violence is associated with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), academic failure, and suicidal tendencies. Loss of trust during this developmentally sensitive period leaves long-term psychological damage in individuals. In addressing this chronic problem, proactive and preventive approaches that enhance psychological resilience, as well as post-incident crisis interventions, are vital. In conclusion, the incident in Kahramanmaraş demonstrates that school safety cannot be ensured solely through physical measures; This has revealed the necessity of a holistic and bio-psycho-social approach. Future studies should standardize the concept of "perceived school safety" and focus on longitudinal research monitoring affected communities.

**Keywords:** School violence, School safety, Mental health, Trauma

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Dear Editor,

School environments are considered safe spaces where children and adolescents build a sense of security, supporting their social and emotional development as well as their academic progress. However, recent incidents of violence in educational institutions have both undermined this perception of safety and had profound negative impacts on students' mental health. In this context, school-based violence emerges as a critical public health issue that concerns not only the education system but also public health in general (1,2). The violent incident that occurred in a school in Kahramanmaraş on April 15, 2026 (3) is a concrete, shocking, and current example of this problem. The incident created multi-dimensional psychological effects on the victims, as well as on the witnesses and the large masses who were exposed to the news through mass media.

The traumatic effects of school-based violence are not limited to the primary victims. Peers, teachers, school staff, and parents who witness the events are also indirectly and significantly affected by this process. Review studies in the literature show that direct exposure to or witnessing school violence is associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress symptoms, sleep disturbances, and significant impairment in academic functioning (2,4,5). In addition, students' perception of the school environment as unsafe is directly associated with increased levels of general mental distress, depressive symptoms, and suicidal thoughts (1).

Childhood and adolescence are critical stages in the psychosocial development of individuals and the shaping of their fundamental sense of security towards the world. Therefore, acute acts of violence or mass armed attacks occurring in the school environment, which is inherently expected to be safe, can fundamentally damage young people's basic sense of security and lead to long-term psychological consequences. Although the reactions of young people to such mass violence events vary according to individual risk and protective factors or levels of exposure, it is known that they lead to serious mental health consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies (6). Especially today, the rapid and unfiltered dissemination of such events to the masses through media and social media increases secondary traumatization even in individuals who are not directly victims (2,6). This situation necessitates addressing school violence on a spectrum ranging from the micro level to the macro (social) level.

In addressing this chronic problem, it is essential to develop proactive (preventive) approaches as well as post-event crisis interventions. Currently, programs developed in this direction generally adopt a phased public health approach (6). Increasing mental health literacy at the community and school levels, institutionally strengthening school guidance and psychological counseling services, early identification of risky behaviors, and supporting students' emotion regulation skills are fundamental preventive practices that will increase

school safety (1,4). Furthermore, multidisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations established between education, health, and safety institutions will play a key role in preventing similar tragedies.

However, the literature shows a lack of cross-cultural and empirical studies on the mechanisms of "perceived school safety"; therefore, future research should primarily focus on establishing a clear and standardized definition of school safety (1). While current studies reveal the acute impacts of school shootings on the mental health of survivors, further longitudinal research is needed that will encompass affected communities beyond students, integrate qualitative methods, and monitor mental health outcomes over time (2). We believe that academics and field practitioners should continuously strive to better understand the dynamics of mass violence events and prevention strategies, and to best meet the chronic needs of survivors.

In conclusion, this unfortunate incident in Kahramanmaraş has once again demonstrated that school safety cannot be ensured solely through physical security measures (security guards, cameras, barriers, etc.); it must be addressed through a holistic, bio-psycho-social approach that also encompasses child and adolescent mental health. Psychosocial support services must be rapidly activated immediately following violent incidents, and preventive mental health practices must be systematized.

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