

ASSERTIVENESS SKILL OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS: A CASE OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Assertiveness can be defined as a skill of one's ability to freely express and defend views about a subject, needs and demands without invading the boundaries of others. Assertiveness is increasingly attracting attention recently and catching eye as an important concept in human relations. Assertiveness which is a skill that can be learned is being highly emphasized during social work education; it has been desired for social work students to have this skill. However in Turkish literature there is no scientific research which addressed the assertiveness of social work students. In this context this research has been conducted with 1st and 4th grade students (n: 198) who are studying in Social Work Department at Hacettepe University. The assertiveness skills scale of Rathus has been used to obtain data. According to summed results it has been noticed that the social work education has not increased the assertiveness skills, 1st grade students are being more assertive than 4th grade students, male students are being more assertive than female students and assertiveness level of students is reduced when the income of their families increased. Consequently, this research is considered to contribute to the social work literature.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Quantitative Research, Social Work Education, Social Work Student, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Assertiveness is getting attention as a concept with increasing popularity in recent years. Increases in personal freedom, strengthening persons who use assertiveness skill, effecting mental health positively are some of elements for increasing its popularity (Eggert, 2011). There are many definitions in literature about assertiveness. According to Towned (2007) assertive communication is a person's his own and others physical, emotional, mental and intellectually aware. In social work cyclopedia assertiveness is being defined as 'a behavior characterized as communicating of a person with self-confidence while being aware of his rights and values' (Barker, 1995). Schwartz (2006) on the other hand defined assertive communication of a person feeling responsible for his emotions, belief and thoughts most honest, direct and appropriately expression. In another source assertive communication is defined as expressing ones needs, feelings and demands clearly without violating others rights (Pfeiffer, 2010).

When the definition for assertiveness examined it can be seen that these definitions are not too different from each other. In this context if we have to make a general definition assertiveness can be defined as a person while aware of himself and others own feelings, expressing thoughts and needs clearly. Assertiveness can be thought in the society generally as a way to be social and easily establishing communication with everybody. But assertiveness is not just about establishing communication. To be assertive requires having a certain consciousness. An individual is not acting assertive if he is not respecting his own and others rights, not expressed his demands in an appropriate way, does a thing he doesn't want

in order not to worry other people. From this point of view it's not correct to evaluate assertiveness as only to be able to be social and communicate with everybody.

Self-esteem is related greatly to how a person can defend himself. If a person is shy and hesitant other people can take advantage of it. On the other hand if this person is a bully or offensive others would try to stay away, keep distance. In this context self-esteem can be established by maintaining a balance between these two extreme points. The balance which can be established between obeying and being aggressive is a basis for assertiveness (Thompson, 2002).

According to Thompson (2002) when discussing assertiveness it's been stressed that gender, culture and class factors should be taken into account. The male assertiveness could be regarded as a male behavior; female assertiveness is regarded as disturbing. From this point of view feminist movements can be regarded closely related to assertiveness. In some cultures there would be different factors and expectations among people. For example in some eastern cultures to obey because of cultural rules can contradict with the definition of assertive concept and expectations. From this angle the cultural past should be carefully regarded in assertiveness. One another argument suggests that middle class norms cannot be used effectively in working class societies.

Assertiveness is a skill that can be thought, it is not a skill inherited from birth. Nobody is assertive constantly. For example a person can easily be assertive with people he doesn't know, while he can find it difficult to be assertive with his parents. A person who chooses to be assertive with his friends in one situation can be passive in another situation. To learn to be assertive is related to be able to decide when and where to express himself (Pheiffer, 2003).

ASSERTIVENESS AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Social work improves social change, to solve problems in human relations, to strengthen and free humans to increase their good behaviors. By benefiting from human behavior and social systems, interferes with the effectiveness between human and environment. Human rights and social justice concepts are the foundation of social work (<http://ifsw.org/get-involved/the-future-of-social-work>). Social work implementations depend on various information, skill and value foundation. One of the goals of social work education is to teach students these foundations and how to make these foundations to be used.

Social work depends on the eclectic knowledge foundation. Social work students take classes in sociology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, human behavior and social environment, theory of social work and social work management. These classes are important for student to develop a professional identity. It shouldn't be ignored the effect of students' own personalities as the classes they take during their studies.

Social work skills carry a big importance from the angle of effective social work applications. In this context it's been aimed that social work students to acquire skills in various areas such as time management, stress management, verbally or non-verbally communications, listening, decision making, problem solving, to conquer with duality or planned interference periods during their studies. Assertiveness is a skill which should be had by social work students.

Assertiveness is one of the skills that can be used when working with various group, network or organization. In this context assertiveness has a very large area of use (Thompson, 2002, s. 45).

It has been pointed out in the work named as 'The Study of Social Studies Faculty Students Self-esteem and Assertiveness Levels Relation with the Socio-demographic Properties' that

there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and assertiveness level (Top, Kaymak, Göllü, & Kaya, 2010).

In a work among Iranian students' assertiveness and anxiety relation it's been concluded that there is a strong relation with assertiveness and anxiety. However in this work there is a negative correlation between assertiveness and anxiety, during the education year or working while educating factors is related the assertiveness level, the level of education of the father or the income level of the family is related to students anxiety is another important conclusion (Larijani, Aghajani, Baheiraei, & Neiestanak, 2010).

In the research about mobbing and assertiveness among nurses concluded that there is a negative correlation between mobbing and assertiveness. When the assertiveness level increased mobbing rate is reduced. This is because of the nurses having passive behaviors is a conclusion supporting this argument (Okanli, Karakaş, & Özkan, 2011).

Social workers can face various problems or dilemma during their career. In solving these problems and dilemma correctly and effectively by expressing feelings, thoughts and needs can make problem solving easier and faster. This is also closely related to social worker having assertiveness skill.

Social workers work with multidiscipline teams while doing career applications. In these teams there are different personnel depending on the area of work. In these teams with different employees the skill to work with a team is a skill which a social worker should have but it cannot be thought the progress of this skill separately from assertiveness.

Social workers as application group work with mostly with poor, children and homeless, disabled people and disadvantaged groups. The social workers use advocacy role while working with these disadvantaged groups. Un-doubly to use advocacy role requires being assertive.

In this context it's important to learn assertiveness skill during undergraduate education in order for social worker candidates to make effective use during their career. In our country there is no research about the social work education is effective for students gain assertiveness skill. In other disciplines there is research in this subject, in social work literature there is no research in the fields of assertiveness skills.

In summary the goal of this study is to research if the social work education is effective in gaining assertiveness skills for students and evaluate it regarding various variables.

METHODS

Model

As a method the research has been conducted by quantitative research method general survey model. For general survey model single research model has been preferred and the period carried out with taking cross section technic (Karasar, 2005).

Collecting data

This research has been realized with Hacettepe University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Department of Social Work 1st and 4th grade students. The research has been conducted among 198 students (101 in 1st and 97 in 4th grade).

Questionnaire

At the beginning of the research survey some defining information has been asked. These are age, gender, the grade of the student, the location of longest residency, the level of education of mother, the mother's employment status, the education status of father, the father's employment status and monthly average income. Then Rathus Assertiveness Scale took place to measure the assertiveness skills of social work students.

Rathus Assertiveness Scale

To obtain data Rathus Assertiveness Scale has been used. This scale has advantages such as of applying to different cultures, being short, easier to evaluate. It is a Likert type scale which is consisted of 30 articles pointed between 1 and 6.

There are six choices for each article and choices varied between -3 and +3. For example -3 doesn't apply to me, -2 doesn't apply to me a lot, -1 doesn't apply to me little, +1 applies to me little. +2 apply to me a lot, +3 apply to me very most. Rathus is explaining the the absence of 0 choices as this: 'It can have some from a material minus or plus, it cannot take 0 from a material.'

The pointing has been done in two different ways. The questions in the test divided into two ways and the pointing has been done in opposite direction from each other.

Positive statements: 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29 there are (13 articles).

Negative statements: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30 there are (17 articles).

The point scored varies between -90 and '90. The most shy as -90 the most assertive +90 as it has been shown.

The scale's application in Turkey, validity and reliability analyze has been done by Nilüfer Voltan Acar in 1980.

Statistics

In the research independent variables; age, gender, the grade of the student, the location of longest residency, mother's education status, mother's employment status, father's education status, father's employment status, and monthly average income. Dependent variable is students' assertiveness skill level.

In analyzing data SPSS 15.0 package program has been used. In statistical analyses of data t test, correlation, F analysis and descriptive statistics have been used.

Ethical Considerations

Before the research started permission obtained from Hacettepe University Department of Social Work. Also students were given freedom to involve in the research and they been informed that the involvement in the research would not affect their grade whatsoever.

RESULTS

According to Table 1 the defining data of the students participated in the research can be summed up like this: the average age of students participated in the research are 21. Approximately %60 of students is female. The distribution of 1st and 4th grade students is almost equal. The place of longest residency is in the city by % 55.6. If looked in the mother's education level nearly half is elementary school. The university graduate is % 8.1. There is no mother with a masters or doctorate degree. Most of the mothers don't work (%80.8). Fathers of the students' education level are better than mothers. The number of

middle school, high school, and university graduated fathers are more than mothers with the same level of education. Also there are some fathers with masters and doctorate degrees.

Table 1. Main information

<i>Age</i>		<i>mean: 21</i>
<i>Gender (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	118	59.6
Male	80	40.4
<i>Grade (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1st grade	101	51.0
4th grade	97	49.0
<i>Place of longest residency (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
City	110	55.6
Town-Village	88	44.4
<i>Mother's level of education (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Illiterate	21	10.6
Elementary school	95	48.0
Middle school	22	11.1
High school	44	22.2
University	16	8.1
<i>Mother- employment status (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Unemployed	160	80.8
Employed	38	19.2
<i>Father- education status (n=198)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Illiterate	2	1.0
Elementary school	57	28.9
Middle school	38	19.3
High school	59	29.9
University	37	18.8
Master's degree	2	1
Doctorate degree	2	1
<i>Father- employment status (n=191)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Civil servant	52	27.2
Retired	40	20.9
Laborer	36	18.8
Farmer	22	11.5
Self employed	21	11.0
Trades	20	10.5
<i>Average monthly income</i>		<i>Mean 1815,23</i>

The research shows Turkey's patriarchal structure when this data thought with the mother's employment status. When looked at fathers' employment status, most of them are civil servants and retirees and followed by laborers. Finally the average income of students' families is 1815 liras (approximately 1000 US dollars).

Table 2. The assertiveness levels of social work students

<i>Level of assertiveness</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>		
Shy	38	19.2		
Medium	155	78.3		
Assertive	5	2.5		
<i>Total</i>	198	100.0		
<i>Level of assertiveness</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>S</i>
	1.83	,43	1.83	,43

According to Rathus Assertiveness Scale assertiveness levels: 30-80: Shy, 80-130: Medium, 130-180: Assertive

In the center of the research it has been defined as at social work students' assertiveness level; 19.2% shy, 78.3% medium assertive and only 2.5% assertive. The level of assertiveness of students being this low is worth attention.

Table 3. Assertiveness level according to main information

<i>Main information</i>	<i>Assertiveness</i>			<i>Statistics</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S</i>	
<i>Age</i>	198	21	2.217	$r = -.114$
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	118	92.16	15.92	$t = -3.032^*$
Male	80	99.20	16.17	
<i>Grade</i>				
1st grade	101		96.81	$t = 1.592$
4th grade	97		93.12	
<i>Place of longest residency</i>				
City	110		93.90	$t = -1.063$
Town	88		96.38	
<i>Mother's education status</i>	198	2.69	1.16	$r = ,0.18$
<i>Mother's employment status</i>				
Employed	160	95.28	16.39	$t = ,487$
Unemployed	38	93.84	16.36	
<i>Father's education status</i>	198	3.43	1.20	$r = ,028$
<i>Monthly income</i>	198	1815.23	972.9	$r = -,170^*$

In the light of above data the relation and effect in between the independent variables with depended variables can be summed up like this: there is no significant relation between age and assertiveness. Men are more assertive than women. Even though it doesn't have a significance 4th grade students have less assertiveness levels than 1st grade students. Without significance the assertiveness level of living in small town are higher than those living in cities. There is a significant relation between mothers' education level and assertiveness. There is no significant relation between mother employment statues and assertiveness. There is no relation between fathers' level of education and assertiveness. When the income level of student families is increased assertiveness level is decreased (negative relation).

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research is to investigate if the social work education is effective in gaining assertiveness skills and evaluate it regarding many variables.

The statistical data at the end of the research shows that the assertiveness level of social work students are average and without having a meaning the social work education doesn't increase the assertiveness skills. There is a statistically significant relation between gender and monthly income.

Male students have been found to be more assertive than female students. It would be correct to analyze this data in regards to gender. The patriarchal structure in Turkey and gender roles gives more value to men than women. When thought with the assertiveness skill male students being more assertive than female students was an expected situation.

The decrease in assertiveness level while the family income is increased is a significant data found in this research. The data expected by researches to this question was increase in assertiveness while the family income level increased. On the contrary it's been encountered exactly opposite situation. At this point it will be valuable to point out that it could be a short sided view to expect a direct relation between income level and assertiveness. The personal characteristics, the value given to a person by his family and rearing conditions could be effective in becoming an assertive person.

Moreover, the research data can be compared to similar data in the literature. Firstly there has been only one research encountered regarding assertiveness levels of social work students (the journals published abroad and databases). According to Pardeck and et al. (1991) in a study they conducted to establish social work students assertiveness skills concluded that social work education is not effective in gaining assertiveness skills for social work students. This data is in accordance with our research.

In another study in which the social work education effect on social work students personal development, it has been concluded that the social work education doesn't contribute to personal development of the students. This data is preventive in regards to the relation between assertiveness and personal development even though not direct assertiveness (Pardeck and McCallister, 1991).

It is a necessary skill for social work students to have assertiveness in their professional identity. In this research it has been determined that from the variables point the social work education doesn't increase assertiveness. In this foundation it could be correct to do necessary work to increase the students' assertiveness by the social work education institutions. In classes and extra curriculum activities it should be focused on communication and practice experiences.

The research about the social work education effect on students' assertiveness and personal development is very limited. There is a need for more research in this subject. In the focus of a new research the reasons behind students' assertiveness levels should be evaluated.

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