

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Awareness levels of primary school teachers about child abuse and neglect: A survey in Istanbul

İremsu İlksen Uçar 

Undergraduate Student, MEF University, Türkiye, e-mail: ucarir@mef.edu.tr

Abstract

Cases of child abuse are frequently encountered both in our country and in other countries. It is thought that increasing the awareness level of people who work with or have close relationships with children will be effective in reducing abuse cases. Based on this idea, the data of the survey study conducted with primary school teachers are included in the article.

The results of the survey conducted with primary school teachers who work with children and have close relationships reveal the awareness levels of primary school teachers on this issue.

The result of this study; it has been seen that the number of training given should be increased, the quality should be improved and the scope should be expanded. The study also revealed that it is believed that increasing trust in the judiciary will increase the reporting of abuse cases.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect

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Corresponding Author/ Sorumlu Yazar:
İremsu İlksen Uçar
E-mail: ucarir@mef.edu.tr



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1. INTRODUCTION

Child abuse and neglect is a global and major problem seen in all developed and undeveloped countries, it is also the most serious violation of children's rights.

It is thought that increasing the awareness level of child abuse and neglect among professional people who are constantly with children in a working environment, such as teachers, will be an effective factor in reducing cases of neglect and abuse.

The purpose of the survey on the basis of this article is to measure and analyze the knowledge and awareness of primary school teachers who work with children and actively pursue their profession.

1.1. Definitions

1.1.1. Children and Children Right's

According to the first article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on November 20, 1989, everyone is considered a child up until the age of 18, except for the condition of becoming a minor at an earlier age. From a biological point of view, a child is a developing individual who has not yet matured physically, spiritually and socially. (Erkut, Balci and Yildiz, 2017).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most important guarantees in terms of children's rights. The Convention was adopted in September 1989 and entered into force on September 2, 1990. Turkey became a signatory shortly after September 14, 1990. Today, there are 196 countries that are parties to the convention.

Equality, justice, the best interests of the child, the prevention of discrimination, the participation of the child in the processes related to himself, tolerance and love for the child are among the principles delineated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Convention, the right to life, development, care, protection and participation are fundamental rights of the child and are protected under the convention.

1.1.2. Child Abuse

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child abuse is behavior that is intentionally or unknowingly committed by an adult, society or the state and negatively affects a child's health, physical and psycho-social development. Emotional, cognitive and developmental effects that will not go away for a long time are observed in children exposed to abuse. Children who are subjected to abuse show characteristics such as exhibiting a secretive attitude, a tendency to violence and an abusive personality. Research conducted reveals that there is a very clear relationship between the case of abuse suffered as a child and behavioral disorders and guilt that occur at an advanced age.

Child abuse is divided into four groups as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect.

1.1.2.1. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can be defined as non-accidental injury of a child. These non-accidental injuries are usually carried out by the child's parents in order to punish, discipline the child. Beating and shaken baby syndrome can be counted as examples of physical abuse. (Kara et Al.,2004)

Situations such as cigarette burns, hot water burns, human bites, bone fractures (encountered during physical examination), unexplained delays in going to the hospital, or discrepancies between medical history and physical findings give rise to suspicion of physical abuse. (Aksoy et al.)

Physical abuse causes children to have poor social skills, experience difficulty making friends with their peers, feel unsafe towards people, and be prone to violence. According to the research carried out, it has been revealed that children who have been subjected to physical abuse have a more aggressive attitude than their peers who have not been subjected to physical abuse.

1.1.2.1.1. Shaken Baby Syndrome

It is the shaking of the baby by holding it by the arms or body in a hard way. It is a type of physical abuse that can cause brain injuries, retinal bleeding and death. (Akkuzu et al., 2017) It is more common in children under 2 years of age

due to the fact that the neck muscles have not yet developed and the skull is larger than their body. (Aksoy et al.)

1.1.2.2. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the exposure of a child to degrading attitudes and behaviors that are inflicted by the people responsible for caring for him, depriving him of the love and attention he needs. Humiliation, rejection, leaving alone, incitement to crime and intimidation are cited as examples of emotional abuse.

Although it is one of the most common types of abuse in daily life, its impacts are quite hidden and difficult to decipher. The damages caused as a result of emotional abuse are as damaging as physical abuse. (Kara et al.,2004)

The consequences of emotional abuse in children can be extensive: nail-biting, thumb-sucking, hyperactivity, aggression, eating disorders, lying, theft, distraction, sleep disorders, excessive introversion, excessive dependency, and depression have all been observed.

Emotional abuse can occur alone, but it can also occur in conjunction with other types of child abuse.

1.1.2.3. Sexual Abuse

Any kind of sexual behavior committed by an adult towards a child in order for the adult to achieve sexual satisfaction constitutes sexual abuse. The concept of "sexual behavior" has been examined in various headings according to the sexual act and the age of the child from the point of view of criminal law and these headings have been linked to different provisions.

Genital bleeding, sexually transmitted diseases, and unexpected sexual behavior from a child are considered signs of sexual abuse.

The diagnosis of sexual abuse is usually made with the history taken from the child. Even if there is genital penetration, physical examination alone is not enough to diagnose sexual abuse, as mucous membrane injuries heal very quickly. (Kara et al., 2004)

It has been observed that behavioral disorders,

low self-esteem, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, anger, tantrums, feeling of guilt, suicidal ideation and attempted self-injury all occur in children exposed to sexual abuse.

1.1.2.3.1. Sexual Abuse of Children

Sexual abuse of children is included in Turkish law under Article 103 of the Turkish Criminal Code No. 5237. It is defined in the article. As:

- a) All kinds of sexual attempts against children who are under the age of fifteen or against those who have attained the age of fifteen but lack the ability to understand the legal consequences of such act,
- b) Sexual behaviors carried out against children who have completed the age of fifteen based solely on compulsion, threats, cheating or any other reason affecting the will.

1.1.2.3.2. Sexual Intercourse with a Minor

For a person who has sexual intercourse with a child who has completed the age of fifteen without compulsion, cheating and threats, the provisions of sexual intercourse with a minor are applied, not the provisions of sexual abuse.

1.1.2.3.3. Sexual Harassment

Although the concept of sexual harassment and actions that constitute sexual harassment are not fully specified in the Turkish Criminal Code, in practice it is accepted that sexual harassment can occur with sexual behavior that does not constitute a violation of a person's bodily integrity.

1.1.2.4. Neglect

The failure of the persons who are obliged to take care of the child to fulfill this obligation properly; the failure to fulfill the needs of the child in matters such as nutrition, health, education, the failure to show the necessary attention, the neglect of the child physically and emotionally. (Yılmaz)

Neglect is regulated in the section "Crimes Against Family Order" in Article 233 of the Turkish Criminal Code. Article 1. states that, the crime of violation of the obligation to provide care, education or support is regulated. According to

Article 233/1, "A person who does not fulfill the obligation to provide care, education or support arising from family law is punished with a prison sentence of up to one year upon complaint." According to Article 233/3, "Although custody rights have been abolished, parents or fathers who seriously endanger the morality, safety and health of their children due to drunkenness, the use of drugs or stimulant substances, or lack of material and moral care as a result of humiliating attitudes and actions are punished with a prison sentence of three months to one year."

1.2 Methodology

A survey study with 27 questions was conducted with the participation of 61 primary school teachers living and actively teaching in Istanbul province. The questions were prepared using three different types; yes/no/I'm not sure, open-ended and multi-option. The questions were sent to the participants electronically. It was preferred to conduct the survey electronically for several reasons, including that the survey was conducted in the summer, the fact that schools are closed in the summer semester, and it was therefore easier to reach teachers in an electronic environment. Various social media tools were used in the transmission of the survey to the participants.

The population consists of primary school teachers in Istanbul. As a sampling method, the incidental sampling method was used. Participation was based on voluntariness.

As a result of the survey; findings were obtained regarding issues such as whether teachers have received previous training on child abuse, whether trainings have been given on this subject in the institution where they work, which findings may raise suspicion of abuse in them, and to whom they will report this situation first if they are faced with an abuse case. The findings obtained were evaluated according to criteria such as age, gender, mother/father status and the institution studied.

2. FINDINGS

When the gender distribution of the participants participating in the survey study was examined, it was seen that 58.2% of the participants were

female and 14.8% were male teachers. 78.7% of the participants, that is, the largest proportion of them stated that they work in a public institution. 70.5% of the participants stated that they are the parents of a child.

Following the demographic questions, we asked questions about whether the teachers participating in the study received any training on child abuse, and whether various trainings on child abuse were given in the institutions where they worked.

2.1. Question: Are there trainings for teachers about child abuse in your institution?

While 50.8% of the participants stated that no trainings were given to teachers about child abuse in their institutions, 49.2% stated that trainings were given to teachers about child abuse in their institutions.

Table 1. The rates of providing education to teachers about child abuse in the institutions where the participants work

	Yes	No
Are there trainings for teachers about child abuse in your institution?	49.2%	50.8%

2.2. Question: Are there trainings for students about child abuse in your institution?

39.3% of the participants stated that no trainings were given to students about child abuse in their institutions, while 60.7% stated that trainings were given to students about child abuse in their institutions.

Table 2. The rates of providing education to students about child abuse in the institutions where the participants work

	Yes	No
Are there trainings for students about child abuse in your institution?	60.7%	39.3%

When comparing the results of the two questions asked to participants, it can be concluded that more training is given in public institutions than private institutions, for both teachers and stu-

dents, about providing education on child abuse. It is seen that education for students in both public and private institutions is more common than education for teachers.

2.3. Question: Have you received any training on child abuse before?

60.7% of the participants stated that they had previously received an education on child abuse, while 39.3% stated that they had not received it.

Table 3. The proportion of participants who have previously attended training about child abuse

	Yes	No
Have you received any training on child abuse before?	60.7%	39.3%

In the next section of our survey, we asked questions related to signs of abuse, indicating that participants received training about this before; 16,2% fully correct, 13,5% of 93%, and 11% to 85% gave the correct answer.

In this part of our survey, we presented various findings to the participants and asked them to identify which of these situations might arouse suspicion of abuse in them.

2.4. Question: Mark the situations that arouse/ may arouse suspicion of abuse in you.

2.4.1. Could it be a sign of abuse if the child does not want to come to school or if there is a decrease in school achievement?

To our first question, 52.5% of the participants answered yes, 29.5% no, 18% I'm not sure.

2.4.2. Can the appearance of a learning disability in a child be a sign of abuse?

To our second question, 46.5% of the participants answered no, 29.5% were not sure, 28% answered yes.

2.4.3. Could the child's reluctance to take part in physical education classes be a sign of abuse?

To our third question, 51% of the participants

answered yes, 34% were not sure, 15% answered no.

Table 4. The rates of marking of situations that arouse/may arouse suspicion of abuse by teachers

	Yes	No	Not sure
Could it be a sign of abuse if the child does not want to come to school or if there is a decrease in school achievement?	52.5%	29.5%	18%
Can the appearance of a learning disability in a child be a sign of abuse?	28%	46.5%	29.5%
Could the child's reluctance to take part in physical education classes be a sign of abuse?	51%	15%	34%

When we examined the responses to all the questions in this section; in the presence of unexplained bumps and burns on the child's body, the child's physical symptoms such as difficulty in walking and sitting, we saw a clear separation according to the mark with psychological symptoms.

Another question we asked our participants was who they would contact first if there was an obvious case or strong suspicion of abuse.

2.5. Question: If you find out that your student has been abused / if there is a suspicion of abuse, who do you report this situation to first?

77% of the participants stated that they would report to the school administration, 8.2% to the guidance counselor, 4.9% to the parents, 4.9% to the police and 3.3% to the Social Services Directorate. 85.2% of the participants stated that they would inform someone from within the school about this situation first. While 4.9% stated that they would inform the student's parent about this situation first, all of the participants who stated that they would inform the student's parent about this situation first were parents.

Table 5. The persons/institutions to which the participants will apply first if they encounter a case of abuse

School administration	77%
Guidance counselor	8.2%
Parents	4.9%
Police	4.9%
Social Services Directorate	3.3%

In the event of a case or suspicion of abuse, it would be incorrect to report to any place or person, so it would not be correct to say that there is a wrong answer in this question. However, it should not be ignored that the person who abuses the child may often be one of the family members and parents.

The other question we asked the participants was aimed at measuring the level of knowledge of the participants regarding the notification obligation.

2.6. Question: Do you think that if you do not report a case of abuse or delay in reporting it, there may be a criminal sanction for this?

While 73.8% of the participants ticked the "Yes" option, 26.2% of them ticked the "No" option. If we need to talk about the correct answer; 6 of the Child Protection Law Article 1. according to the paragraph "Judicial and administrative authorities, law enforcement officials, health and educational organizations, non-governmental organizations are obliged to report a child in need of protection to Social Services and the Child Protection Agency." For those who do not fulfill this obligation; To report a crime, located at Article 278 of the Turkish Penal Code, Article located at 279 public officials to report a crime, Article 280, located in Article 257 of the medical staff to report a crime in the crime of misconduct and will be addressed.

Table 6. Table about the level of knowledge of the participants regarding the notification obligation

	Yes	No
Do you think that if you do not report a case of abuse or delay in reporting it, there may be a criminal sanction for this?	73.8%	26.2%

In another question, we asked what the reasons could be for this abstention of teachers from reporting in some cases.

2.7. Question: What do you think are the reasons why teachers are reluctant to report in some cases?

The three most selected answers were as follows:

1. Teachers' fear of being involved in the incident -57%
2. Distrust of the judiciary (feeling that they will not get results from the notification) - 44%
3. School administration's failure to support teachers - 41%
3. Insufficient level of knowledge of teachers about identifying and reporting child abuse - 41%
3. Teachers' concerns about interfering in family relationships -41%

Table 7. The reasons why the teachers flagged by the participants did not report the abuse case

Teachers' fear of being involved in the incident	57%
Distrust of the judiciary	44%
School administration's failure to support teachers	41%
Insufficient level of knowledge of teachers about identifying and reporting child abuse	41%
Teachers' concerns about interfering in family relationships	41%

The answers we received from the participants regarding this question revealed that the inadequacy of legal regulations, distrust of the judiciary, the failure of the school administration to support teachers and the insufficient level of knowledge of teachers about child abuse are considered important factors for teachers to abstain from reporting.

3. DISCUSSION

Although there were some different results obtained when our data are compared with other studies in this vein, it has been seen that similar results mostly occur. We will examine these re-

sults in this section.

When the answers given to the question “When you detect a child neglect and abuse situation, who do you report this situation to first?” were examined it was observed that the most common answer given in other studies and in our study was “school management”.

When the answers in other studies related to the legal notification obligation were examined, most of the teachers stated that they were legally obliged to report child abuse and neglect. In Sağır and Gözler’s study (2016), 84.4% of teachers stated that there is a notification obligation, while in Kürklü’s study (2011), 85.9% of teachers stated that there is a notification obligation. As a result of the survey study we conducted, it was found that 73.8% of our participants think that there will be a criminal sanction if they do not fulfill their notification obligation.

In the research conducted by Sağır and Gözler (2016), 89.7% of the teachers stated that they did not receive education on child abuse and neglect, while in the research conducted by Kürklü (2011), 95% of the teachers stated that they did not receive education on this subject. In our study, unlike other studies examined, the majority of teachers (60.7%) stated that they had received training on child abuse and neglect. In the research conducted by Bülbül, Çakıcı and Türkkkan (2019), in parallel with our research, it was determined that 55.3% of teachers received education related to the subject and 44.8% did not receive education.

In Kürklü’s study (2011), when teachers were asked the reasons for not reporting they suspected abuse and neglect, the two most preferred reasons were the lack of sufficient evidence on the subject (39%) and ignorance of legal processes (23.7%). In our study, the answer most frequently given to the same question was “Teachers’ fear of being involved in the incident”. “Insufficient level of knowledge of teachers about the subject” was the third most frequently given answer. In Can’s research (2016), when the answers to the same question were examined, it was found that 63.6% of the teacher candidates expressed the opinion “Because I think the social services will not be interested in the subject”.

4. CONCLUSION

Child abuse is the most severe form of violation of children’s rights, which affects children physically, psychologically and socially, causing traumas that are difficult to heal. Abuse is a reason for the formation of an abusive personality in children exposed to abuse and a factor in the continuity of the cycle of violence.

Child abuse can occur in many different ways. With physical abuse, there may be findings that are visible and easier to detect; however in emotional abuse, there may be findings that are invisible and difficult to detect.

The study shows significant majority of the teachers surveyed (85%) would inform someone from within the school first if there was a obvious case or suspicion of abuse, which accordingly revealed that the school administration and teachers are very important actors in this process. In other similar studies examined, the fact that the majority of teachers stated that they would report the abuse case to the school administration first supports this conclusion.

The study shows that providing the necessary support from the school administration to the person who made the notification enacting legal regulations that protect the person who made the notification, successfully implementing legal regulations, and strengthening trust in the judiciary will increase the notification of abuse cases.

4.1. Solutions

Although the vast majority of the teachers participating in our research stated that they had received education on the subject before, a significant part of them stated that they had not received education. In addition, when other studies on the subject were examined, it was found that the majority of teachers did not receive training on the subject. Based on this, the fact that universities teach prospective teachers about child abuse and neglect during their undergraduate education will enable teachers to be more knowledgeable about this issue. In addition, awareness levels of teachers from various age groups can be increased by providing various trainings in cooperation with municipalities and non-go-

vernmental organizations. Schools can increase the level of knowledge and awareness of their teachers by providing various trainings on this subject to their teachers working within their own structures.

Most of the teachers who participated in our research as well as in the other studies examined stated that when they detect child abuse and neglect, they will notify the school administration first. Due to the fact that the first place to make a notification is the school administrations, the responsibilities of administrators in this regard are increasing. For this reason, it is necessary to inform administrators as well as teachers by providing trainings on the subject.

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