

# Examination of Preschool Teachers' Opinions on Child Neglect and Abuse

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## Abstract

According to the World Health Organization emphasizes that children are the age group most in need of protection because of their vulnerability. However, studies show that millions of children are exposed to neglect and abuse every year in the world, which can leave lifelong scars neglect and abuse are accepted as a universal problem all over the world. This research was conducted to get the opinions of preschool teachers about child neglect and abuse. Phenomenology was used in this study. Convenience sampling method was used to collect the data. The research sample consists of 40 teachers. Teacher interview form was used as a data collection tool in the research. The data were analyzed by content analysis technique. As a result of the research, it was determined that the majority of the teachers explained the concept of child neglect based on 'emotional neglect'. According to another finding of the study, teachers evaluated child abuse mostly in terms of 'physical abuse'. Accordingly, teachers stated that the most important factor leading to child neglect and abuse is "family factors". In addition, teachers stated that trainings should be organized, social awareness should be increased, legal regulations should be reviewed and family-child communication should be ensured in order to prevent child neglect and abuse. Accordingly, the majority of teachers stated that the most important role of school stakeholders in protecting children from neglect and abuse is "to organize trainings". According to another finding of the study, the vast majority of teachers stated that they do not have enough information about the legal regulations for the protection of children from neglect and abuse.

**Keywords:** Child neglect, Child abuse, Preschool, Teacher opinions.



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## INTRODUCTION

The early childhood period, defined as the period from birth to age eight, is of critical importance for the acquisition of physical, cognitive, and language abilities, self-care skills and socio-emotional development areas (Dinçer Yavuz, 2019; Fernald et.al, 2017; Toprakçı, 2010). Children whose basic needs are adequately met during this period move on to become individuals with high self-confidence, self-esteem and positive behavior in human relations (Kaytaş & Öztürk, 2019; Şahin & Aral, 2012).

The World Health Organization (WHO) (1999) emphasizes that children are the age group most in need of protection because of their vulnerability. However, studies show that millions of children are exposed to neglect and abuse every year in the world, which can leave lifelong scars (Aktay, 2020; Gönültaş & Öztürk, 2020; Toprakçı, 2017; WHO, 2006). Child neglect and abuse are accepted as a universal problem all over the world (Akdaş, 2005; Can Yaşar, Şenol, & Akyol, 2015). While some definitions of abuse focus on the behavior or actions of adults, others emphasize that abuse occurs when there is harm or threat to the child (Straus & Gelles, 1990; WHO, 1999).

According to Koçtürk (2018), negligence refers to situations in which “a parent(s) or person(s) responsible for childcare does not adequately meet the basic needs of a child” while abuse denotes harm to a child as a result of emotionally, sexually and/or physically negative behavior towards the child.” According to another definition, child neglect and abuse can be defined as “actions or inactions towards children by the parent(s) or other individuals responsible for childcare, which are considered inappropriate or harmful by social rules and experts, and which hinder or limit the growth and development of the child”. As a result of these actions or inactions, children's physical, sexual, social and/or emotional development is damaged, and their health and safety are endangered (Kaya, 2017; Taner & Gökler, 2004).

Child abuse is one of the most difficult types of trauma to define and treat because it is repeated, committed usually by children's relatives, and has long-term effects on the children's lives (Johnson, 2007). The most basic factor that distinguishes abuse from neglect is that abuse is active while neglect is passive. In other words, in the case of abuse, the concern is the presence of negative and questionable behaviors towards children, while in the case of neglect, the predicament is the absence of adequate care as a result caretakers' failing to fulfill their basic duties and responsibilities towards children (Aktaş Altunsu, 2004; DePanfilis, 2006; Erermiş, 2001).

Child neglect can be categorized into five different types: 'physical neglect, emotional neglect, sexual neglect, educational neglect and medical neglect' (Aral & Gürsoy, 2001; Kara Doruk, 2012; Mennen et al., 2010). Abusive behaviors towards children generally occur in three different forms: 'physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse' (Aktaş Altunsu, 2004). Regardless of the type, duration and severity of neglect and abuse, it poses danger to every child. Exposure to abuse and neglect causes problems in many aspects, especially in children's social-emotional development (Aktay, 2020; Kefeli and Haktanır, 2018; Avdibegoviü & Brkiü, 2020). Some studies have shown that children's exposure to neglect and abuse causes long-term problems such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008; Powers et al., 2015) and academic problems (Trickett, Noll, & Putnam, 2011). Fantuzzo, Perlman, & Dobbins, (2011) reported that children exposed to neglect and physical abuse are more likely to have poor academic performance as well as health and social problems. Although there are many reasons for neglect and abuse, the most significant one are familial, social, cultural and economic factors (Bahçecik & Kavaklı, 1993; Belsky, 1993; Demirtürk Selçuk & Karadeniz, 2020). Solving this universal problem requires a much better understanding of the causes and consequences of neglect and abuse in various settings. In the process of raising children, both the family and the society may exhibit negligent and abusive behaviors knowingly or unknowingly.

Preventing child neglect and abuse, which has cognitive, emotional, physical and social effects on children, is a long and difficult process that requires effort. At the International Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop organized by the Turkish National Pediatric Association in 2018, evaluations were made about the situations of child neglect and abuse in Turkey and in the world. At the meeting, it was shared that although there are many articles directly related to children in the laws regarding child abuse and neglect in Turkey, many cases do not reach the judicial authorities in Turkey. In addition, it was stated that there

are limited number of informative studies on child abuse and neglect in Turkey. In order to prevent child neglect and abuse, joint efforts of many institutions such as family, school and state are required.

'Family' and 'qualified preschool education institutions' are emphasized as the two most important factors in the healthy development of children (Erol, 2007). Therefore, the awareness of teachers, with whom children communicate constantly from the moment they start school, is effective both in detecting cases and in early intervention (Tugay, 2008). According to the Education Manual for Teachers and Families (2018) on Preventing Child Neglect and Abuse, the effective factors in reducing/preventing abuse and neglect can be listed as 'parental flexibility, love and compassion, social connections, knowledge on parent and child development, effective problem solving and communication skills, providing concrete support, social and emotional skills of children, and healthy marriages'. Since teachers have knowledge and experience in child development and education and are in contact with children at school, they can take an active role in identifying children who are exposed to neglect and abuse by their families (Karaman, 1993). As a matter of fact, in a study conducted with primary school teachers in Greece by Vitalaki (2013), the importance of guiding teachers on child abuse issues, enabling them to discover their perceptions about these issues and supporting them in making changes in schools were emphasized.

However, studies have shown that teachers generally have insufficient knowledge on child abuse and neglect (Alim Doğan, 2019; Barlık, 2018; Briggs & Potter, 2004; Demircioğlu & Işık, 2021; Feng, Huang & Wang, 2010; Kürklü, 2011; Pala, 2011; Sarbaş, 2013; Tugay, 2008). Since preschool children spend most of their time at school with their peers and teachers and apart from their families, it is important for especially preschool teachers to identify children who are exposed to neglect and abuse and to be knowledgeable about the necessary legal procedures. Increasing teachers' awareness of this issue will make it easier to identify cases of neglect and abuse towards children. According to Kenny, (2004), if teachers are supported to identify certain social and psychological characteristics of child abusers, they can take an active role in protecting and ensuring the safety of children who are at risk. With increased knowledge and awareness, teachers can identify children who have been exposed to neglect and abuse and inform the authorized institutions and organizations to intervene in the early period (Turkey Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Research, 2010).

From this point of view, the general purpose of this study is to examine the views of preschool teachers on child neglect and abuse. For this purpose, answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. What are the views of preschool teachers on the concept of child neglect?
2. What are the views of preschool teachers on the concept of child abuse?
3. What are the views of preschool teachers on the factors that lead to child neglect and abuse?
4. What are the views of preschool teachers on how to prevent child neglect and abuse?
5. What are the views of preschool teachers on the roles of school stakeholders in protecting children from neglect and abuse?
6. What are the views of preschool teachers on the current legal regulations in protecting children from neglect and abuse?

## METHOD

### Research Design

In this study, phenomenology was utilized. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach, which aims to reveal individuals' perceptions and thoughts on a certain phenomenon (Yildirim & Şimşek, 2005). Phenomenological research tries to explain how people piece together the facts they experience in understanding the environment (Patton, 2014). Therefore, phenomenology was preferred in this study as researchers aimed to examine the perceptions of preschool teachers on child neglect and abuse, in detail.

### Study Group

Convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Convenience sampling relies entirely on items that are available, quick and easy to access (Patton, 2005). The research sample consisted of 40 preschool teachers, which included 20 teachers working in Meram, Selçuklu and Karatay districts of Konya province center and 20 preschool teachers working in Aksaray city center during the 2020-2021 academic year.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of preschool teachers in the research sample

	Variables	(f)	(%)
Gender	Woman	35	87,5
	Man	5	12,5
Age	20-25 ages	6	15
	25-30 ages	16	40
	30-35 ages	10	25
	35-40 ages	6	15
	40-45 ages	1	2,5
	45 ages and above	1	2,5
Education Level	Vocational High School	3	7,5
	Associate Degree	5	12,5
	Undergraduate Degree	24	60
	Master Degree	8	20
Duration of work experience	1-5 years	18	45
	5-10 years	10	25
	10-15 years	10	25
	15-20 years	1	2,5
	20-25 years	0	0
	25 years and above	1	2,5
Type of Preschool	Kindergarten	14	35
	Preschool Affiliated to Primary School	8	20
	Preschool Affiliated to Secondary School	3	7,5
	Private Kindergarten	15	37,5
Status of Taking Courses on Child Neglect and Abuse	Yes	26	65
	No	14	35
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 provides demographic information on the preschool teachers who participated in the study. As Table 1 presents, 35 of the participants are female. 15% of teachers are 20-25 years old, 40% are 25-30 years old, 25% is 30-35 years old, 15% is 35-40 years old, 2.5% is 40-45 years old, 2.5% is above 45 years of age. 7.5% of the teachers are at vocational high school, 12.5% are at associate degree, 60% are at undergraduate level, and 20% are at graduate level. 45% of teachers have 1-5 years of experience, 25% have 5-10 years of experience, 25% have 10-15 years of experience, 2.5% have 15-20 years of experience, 2.5% have over 25 years of experience. 35% of the teachers work in an independent kindergarten, 20% in a kindergarten attached to a primary school, 7.5% in a kindergarten attached to a secondary school, and 37.5% in a private kindergarten. According to Table 1, 65% of the teachers in the study group took lessons on child neglect and abuse during their undergraduate education; 35% of the teachers stated that they did not take any lessons about child neglect and abuse during their undergraduate education.

### Data Collection Process

The data were collected through the Teacher Interview Form created by the researchers. Data were collected between December 5, 2020 and January 30, 2021. Due to the pandemic-related issues during the period of data collection, interview questions were sent to the participants via Google Form and answers were received from the participants.

### Data Collection Tools

This study used the Teacher Interview Form as a data collection tool in order to determine the views of preschool teachers on the concepts of child neglect and abuse. The form has two parts. The first part consists of demographic information to obtain information on teachers' gender, age, education level, years of experience, type of work institution, whether or not they have taken courses on child

neglect and abuse. The second part of the form consists of 13 open-ended questions designed to gather teachers' views on the concept of child neglect and abuse. The questions on the interview form were prepared based on the literature review carried out by the researchers. Expert opinion about the form was obtained from three academicians working in the field of pre-school education.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of organizing the collected data and then presenting the results by summarizing (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Content analysis technique was used in the analysis of the data. During the interviews with the teachers, the answers were recorded in writing by the second author. In order to get a general idea on the coding of the data, the transcripts of the interviews were firstly examined by the two authors. Then, categories were created based on the risk factors for child neglect and abuse as determined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and studies on child neglect and abuse (Dubowitz, & Blavk, 2004; Erickson & Egeland, 2002; Leeb, et al., 2007 and Mennen, et al., 2010). Results are presented in tabular form after consensus was reached by the researchers.

### **Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure credibility in the research, one-to-one quotations about the data are included. For the dimension of consistency and confirmability, two different researchers independently coded the data, and then the rate of agreement between these codings was calculated. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), consistency between coders is expected to be higher than 80%. As a result of the calculations made in this study, 89% agreement was calculated between the encoders.

## **FINDINGS**

Table 2 presents the findings obtained from the views of preschool teachers on the concept of 'child neglect'. Based on the findings derived from the interviews with the research participants, the majority of the teachers explained the concept of child neglect by basing it on 'emotional neglect' (47.7%). Additionally, some teachers also mentioned 'physical neglect' (38.6%), 'educational neglect' (11.4%) and 'medical neglect' (2.3%), while defining the concept of child neglect.

**Table 2.** *Preschool teachers' views on the concept of child neglect*

	<b>Categories</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Views on the Definition of Child Neglect</b>	Emotional neglect	21	47,7
	Physical neglect	17	38,6
	Educational neglect	5	11,4
	Medical neglect	1	2,3

Sample statements reflecting the views of the teachers on the definition of child neglect are presented as follows:

*Child neglect is depriving children of many positive stimuli by using their parents' work life as an excuse for not being treated with respect and love in the school environment. This can be added to not meeting their physical needs. (Teacher-15)*

*A child's innate equipment is hindered by adults. (Teacher-24)*

*The family deprives the child of the attention, love, trust, and compassion that the child needs, and makes fun of the child and says bad words. In addition, factors such as violence to the child, not showing the necessary care for his health, not providing adequate cleaning and nutrition are considered within the scope of neglect. (Teacher-40)*

Teachers' views on the concept of 'child abuse' are reflected on Table 3. Based on the interviews with the teachers, it was found that their definition of child abuse incorporated 'physical abuse' (40%), 'emotional abuse' (32.9%), 'sexual abuse' (25.7%) and 'financial abuse' (1.4%).

**Table 3.** Preschool teachers' views on the concept of child abuse

	Categories	f	%
<b>Definition of Child Abuse</b>	Physical abuse	28	40
	Emotional abuse	23	32,9
	Sexual abuse	18	25,7
	Financial abuse	1	1,4

Some of the statements reflecting the teachers' perspectives on child abuse are provided as follows. In the first quote, the teacher refers to sexual abuse while defining abuse. In the second quote, the teacher refers to emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In the final quote, the teacher refers to sexual and physical abuse while defining abuse.

*It is the use of children for personal gratification. This abuse is done by ignoring the child's feelings and privacy. (Teacher-10)*

*The child's mother, father or caregivers do things that should not be done to the child. There are types of emotional, physical or sexual abuse. (Teacher-4)*

*Any kind of violence against children includes emotional violence. Also, sexual harassment is abuse. (Teacher-3).*

Table 4 includes teachers' views on the factors that lead to child neglect and abuse. Accordingly, the teachers stated 'family factors' (34%) to be the most important factor leading to child neglect and abuse. Based on their descriptions, family factors denote risk factors such as 'lack of love and trust in the family, the children being left alone with strangers for a long time, presence of domestic violence and substance use, insufficient family planning, and having disabled people in the family'. Family factors are followed by 'age-related factors' (23%), 'social factors' (22%), 'personal factors' (9%), 'gender-related factors' (9%) and 'environmental factors' (3%) respectively.

**Table 4.** Opinions of preschool teachers on the factors leading to child neglect and abuse

	Categories	f	%
<b>Factors Leading to Child Neglect and Abuse</b>	Family factors	34	34
	Age-related factors	23	23
	Social factors	22	22
	Personal factors	9	9
	Gender-related factors	9	9
	Environmental factors	3	3

Sample statements regarding the factors leading to child neglect and abuse are provided below:

*The lack of attention and love by the family, leaving their children alone enough to come into contact with deviant people lead to abuse. (Teacher-28)*

*Excessive adaptation of situations such as excessive use of technology by children, and family members leaving children alone when they refuse to play games by themselves... (Teacher-24)*

*As the child gets older, he/she can express himself/herself more easily, and as he/she gets older, at least, the child can prevent abuse to some extent on his/her own. I think that abuse is more common in the younger age group because young children do not fully grasp the right and wrong. (Teacher-13)*

*Many factors such as the society in which the child lives, the social environment in which he/she was born, the people responsible for the child, the situations related to the child (being a disabled person, etc.) can lead to neglect and abuse. (Teacher-9)*

Table 5 includes teachers' views on what can be done to prevent child neglect and abuse. Accordingly, the answers given by the teachers were gathered under the categories of 'organizing trainings (65.2%), increasing social awareness (17.4%), legal regulations (13%) and providing family-child communication (4.3%)'.

**Table 5.** Opinions of preschool teachers on what can be done to prevent child neglect and abuse

	Categories	f	%
<b>Actions to Prevent Child Neglect and Abuse</b>	Organizing trainings	30	65,2
	Increasing social awareness	8	17,4
	Legal regulations	6	13
	Providing family-child	2	4,3



Sample statements reflecting the actions to prevent neglect and abuse are given as follows:

*The most important factors are the attitudes and behaviors of the parents. Trainings for them can provide this. In addition, trainings can be given to children so that they can gain awareness. (Teacher-10)*

*Children, especially children in the younger age group, can be given sexual education by teaching special parts of their bodies through games. In addition to this, (they can be taught) what is good and bad touching and people who can touch their private parts, when necessary, and when to say "No!" We can teach him to shout. (Teacher-40)*

*Families of neglected children should receive support, the causes of neglect should be investigated, families and children should be made aware of abuse, laws that protect children should not be kept silent and strengthened. (Teacher-22)*

*Awareness-raising activities, legal regulations, social media regulations, the formation of adult-child distinction in the minds, family trainings, teacher trainings. (Teacher-5)*

Table 6 includes the views of preschool teachers on the roles of school stakeholders in protecting children from neglect and abuse. Accordingly, majority of the teachers (58.1%) stated that the most significant role of school stakeholders in protecting children from neglect and abuse is 'organizing trainings'. Among the educational factors, protective factors such as 'giving privacy education to children, training both families and teachers about child neglect and abuse, which institutions and organizations to apply to when these cases are encountered, and frequent inspections' were emphasized. 'Organizing trainings' is followed by the other roles of 'raising public awareness (18.6%), providing legal control (16.3%), detecting cases of neglect and abuse (7%)', respectively.

**Table 6.** Preschool teachers' views on the roles of school stakeholders in the protection of children from neglect and abuse

	Categories	f	%
<b>Roles of School Stakeholders in Protecting Children from Neglect and Abuse</b>	Organizing trainings	25	58,1
	Raising public awareness	8	18,6
	Providing legal control	7	16,3
	Detecting cases of neglect and abuse	3	7

Sample statements on the roles of school stakeholders in protecting children from neglect and abuse are given below.

*To organize training programs by experts in the field in all institutions of the state. I think that sexual education should be given to both educators, caretakers and children, and this issue should no longer be a taboo. (Teacher-9)*

*Stricter controls should be made, (even) in cases of the slightest neglect and abuse, the family or the person who caused neglect or abuse should receive heavy penalties. (Teacher-2)*

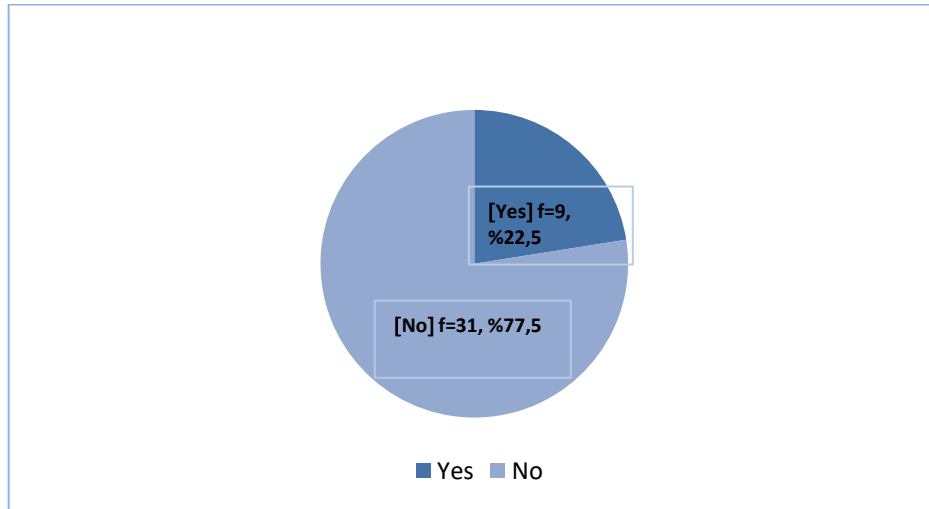
*Non-governmental organizations have important duties in raising the awareness of the society. In terms of the existence of the child and its acceptance, state institutions and non-governmental organizations should create a new understanding and defend the childhood rights of the child without compromising on this issue. (Teacher-5)*

*Raising public awareness is very effective. I think that if we react together as a society to such events, abuses will decrease. Or, for example, if the school managements are always in positive communication with children, we can encourage children to tell such incidents easily, and we can support children or the abusers can receive the necessary punishment. (Teacher-13)*

*For example, we visited the homes of our parents one by one and discussed the privacy education for the family in private areas along with other issues. They wanted us to do this to the parents in the form of a meeting held at the school, but we learned that almost no other institution did it, but simply received signatures from the parents. Because our operation is just a formality; Children die in the fire, formalities emerge, news of abuse occurs in nurseries, formalities emerge immediately, until this news fall from the agenda. As a result, we are in a process where even sexual abuse can be invisible with political or economic power. (Teacher-15)*

*The teacher is responsible for notifying the school administration and applying to the necessary non-governmental organizations as soon as he/she notices the neglect and abuse. Home visits can be made in cooperation with the school administration. Municipalities can bring experts in their fields and inform the society about the issue. (Teacher-40)*

Graph 1 shows the ratio of teachers who were informed versus uninformed about the legal regulations in regards to child neglect and abuse. The graph was designed based on the teachers' answer to the following question: 'Do you know about the current legal regulations on the protection of the child from neglect and abuse?' As the graph demonstrates, nine teachers (22.5%) stated that they were informed about the current legal regulations on the protection of children from neglect and abuse, while 31 teachers (77.5%) did not know about such legal regulations.



**Graph 1.** Preschool teachers' knowledge about current legal regulations in protecting children from neglect and abuse

Following quotes by the participants reflect their knowledge on the legal regulations on protecting children from neglect and abuse.

*Our country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and legal arrangements have been made regarding it. However, it is a fact that existing laws are not sufficient to prevent neglect and abuse. The law requires a complaint about neglect and abuse. This condition should be removed and necessary interventions and deterrent penal sanctions should be applied when negligence and abuse are determined. (Teacher-9)*

*The information I learned in the children's law course I took is that children have rights. The right to education, the right not to be abused, the right to have their physical and emotional needs met are some of them. (Teacher-10)*

*I do not have enough information about current legal regulations. I know that children cannot be employed. I know there are prison sentences for child abuse. But I think the real problem is not in the legal regulations, but in the implementation of the laws. (Teacher-5)*

These answers by the teachers reflect that they have limited knowledge about children's rights, however, they find the legal sanctions regarding neglect and abuse in Turkey insufficient.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aimed to examine preschool teachers' perspectives on child neglect and abuse. Based on the findings derived from the data, it was determined that teachers referred to 'emotional neglect, physical neglect, educational neglect and medical neglect' when defining the concept of child neglect. Particularly with regard to emotional neglect, they stated that parents deprived their children of adequate love, trust, affection and respect, while mocking and not supporting their children's abilities as much as they should. Regarding physical neglect, they stated that they do not pay attention to the child's health, hinder self-care skills such as cleanliness, and do not provide adequate support for healthy nutrition.

In the study conducted by Barlık (2018), it was determined that teachers referred to 'emotional neglect' and 'educational neglect' in their categorization of types of neglect. In a similar study conducted by Erdoğan and Aslan (2020), teachers' perceptions of emotional neglect denoted depriving children of



love and treating children with an overprotective attitude. [Wekerle et al. \(2006\)](#) defined physical abuse as 'deliberately damaging any part of the child's body by using force'. According to the United States Fourth National Child Neglect and Abuse Incidence Study (NIS), it was estimated that almost half of the neglected children suffered from educational neglect, 38% suffered from physical neglect, and 25% were emotionally neglected ([Sedlak, et al., 2010](#)).

According to another result of NIS, preschool teachers mostly mentioned physical abuse when defining the concept of child abuse. They also mentioned emotional abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse. As a matter of fact, according to the results of the Domestic Violence Research published by UNICEF and the Social Services and Child Protection Agency in 2010, 51% of children aged 7-18 in Turkey was exposed to emotional abuse, 43% to physical abuse, and 25% to neglect (Child Abuse Report in Turkey, 2018). [Briggs and Potter \(2004\)](#) examined Singaporean early childhood teachers' responses to myths about child sexual abuse and emotional abuse and determined that teachers did not have enough information to recognize, address and report child abuse. As another result of the study, preschool teachers emphasized that violence against children related to physical abuse harms the development and psychological well-being of the child.

In our study, preschool teachers reported that the most important factor leading to child neglect and abuse was family factors, which was exemplified by children living in loveless and insecure environments, the presence of disabled individuals in the family, spending long and uncontrolled time with technology, and inadequate family planning. In addition, they stated the factors leading to neglect and abuse as age-related factors (the risk of exposure to neglect and abuse increases as the child gets older), social factors, personal factors, gender-related factors and environmental factors. [Duman et al. \(2019\)](#) indicated that teachers were able to recognize the obvious signs of neglect and abuse (physical injuries, fractures, overt sexual behaviors, and so on) more clearly, while they were less able to recognize the more abstract abuse symptoms (silence, indifference, fear and phobias, and so on). In a similar study conducted by [Erdoğan and Aslan \(2020\)](#), it was concluded that preschool teachers were sensitive to child abuse and neglect, however, they had insufficient set of information or knowledge on neglect and abuse. According to another result of this study, teachers stated that one of the factors that cause neglect and abuse was gender-related factors. Similarly [Erol \(2007\)](#) stated that, the gender of the child is a risk factor for the emergence of neglect and abuse. Especially in cases of sexual harassment, the rate of sexual abuse of girls is higher. [Koc et al. \(2012\)](#) found no gender difference in physical abuse, but more than half of children who were sexually abused were girls.

Regarding the role of school stakeholders in preschool teachers' protection of children from neglect and abuse, they expressed their opinion in the direction of 'organizing trainings for families and teachers, raising social awareness, providing legal supervision, detecting cases of neglect and abuse'. In addition, it was stated that in-service training should be provided by experts in the field, home visits should be made to attract families' attention to this issue, frequent inspections should be made by authorized units, and individuals who neglect and abuse children should be punished. As a matter of fact, in a study conducted by [Alim Doğan \(2019\)](#), it was determined that teachers who attended the seminars/conferences were more knowledgeable about the family environment where the risk of exposure to neglect and abuse increased compared to those which did not. In the study conducted by [Toros and Tiirik \(2016\)](#), it was concluded that training teachers on child neglect and abuse contributed to the detection of cases. In addition, the opportunity for teachers to train children and their families on preventing abuse is considered an important opportunity to protect children ([Sanderson, 2004](#)).

Another finding of this study was that the vast majority of teachers did not know the current legal regulations on the protection of children from neglect and abuse. However, some teachers had dealt with legal regulations mostly within the scope of children's rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. [Barlık \(2018\)](#) also found that vast majority of teachers stated that they were legally and conscientiously obliged to report cases of neglect and abuse. On the other hand, [Aksoy and Çoban Sural \(2018\)](#) stated that pre-service teachers have an idea about the symptoms and causes of neglect and abuse, but they can communicate with the child who has been neglected and abused. In another study conducted by [Taşkın, Erdemli and Güner Demir \(2019\)](#), teachers stated that current regulations were insufficient to protect children from neglect and abuse. As a matter of fact, [Sainz,](#)

González-Sánchez, and Ruiz-Alberdi (2020) found in their research that the level of knowledge that teachers have about child abuse is effective in knowing how to treat children and taking remedial measures. There are studies in the literature that support the conclusion that teachers and teacher candidates did not know the legal regulations regarding the protection of children (Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Sağır & Gözler, 2013). Kanak (2015) found that that the training program contributed positively to the knowledge and awareness levels of teacher candidates about emotional neglect and abuse. Considering the results of all these studies, it is thought that it is necessary to organize in-service training programs in order to increase teachers' legal knowledge about child neglect and abuse.

When the results of the research are evaluated in general, it can be determined that the preschool teachers in the study group had limited knowledge on the concepts of neglect and abuse, especially that they did not have sufficient knowledge on the duties and responsibilities of school stakeholders and legal regulations. Thus, it is expected that organizing in-service trainings on child abuse and neglect for preschool teachers, increasing the number of courses such as child neglect and abuse and child law at the undergraduate level will contribute to the development of preventive interventions for child neglect and abuse, which will contribute to eliminating the deficiencies in this regard.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that public service announcements can be made, especially through government channels, to raise awareness on child neglect and abuse in the society. Secondly, duties of social service institutions with families should be increased, with the aim of identifying children at risk and providing the necessary support. Third, compulsory courses/compulsory elective courses on child neglect and abuse can be included in the preschool education undergraduate curriculum. Finally, the number of scientific studies on child neglect and abuse should be increased and research results should be shared with relevant stakeholders.

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## Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Çocuk İhmal ve İstismarına İlişkin Görüşlerinin İncelenmesi

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### Özet

Dünya Sağlık Örgütü'ne göre savunmasız olmaları nedeniyle çocukların korunmaya en çok ihtiyaç duyan yaş grubu olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Ancak araştırmalar, dünyada her yıl milyonlarca çocuğun ihmal ve istismara maruz kaldığını ve bunun ömür boyu sürecek izler bırakabileceğini göstermektedir. Çocuk ihmal ve istismarı tüm dünyada evrensel bir sorun olarak kabul edilmektedir. İstismarın bazı tanımları yetişkinlerin davranış veya eylemlerine odaklanırken, diğerleri istismarın çocuğa zarar veya tehdit olduğunda gerçekleştiğini vurgulamaktadır. Çocuk istismarı, tekrarlanması, genellikle çocukların yakınları tarafından işlenmesi ve çocukların yaşamları üzerinde uzun süreli etkileri olması nedeniyle tanımlanması ve tedavisi en zor travma türlerinden biridir. Bu araştırma, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmal ve istismarına ilişkin görüşlerini almak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmada fenomenoloji kullanılmıştır. Verilerin toplanmasında kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma örneklemi 40 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak öğretmen görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Veriler içerik analizi tekniği ile çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda öğretmenlerin büyük çoğunluğunun çocuk ihmal kavramını 'duygusal ihmal'e dayandırarak açıkladıkları tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bir diğer bulgusuna göre, öğretmenler çocuk istismarını daha çok 'fiziksel istismar' açısından değerlendirmiştir. Buna göre öğretmenler, çocuk ihmal ve istismarına yol açan en önemli faktörün "aile faktörleri" olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca öğretmenler, çocuk ihmal ve istismarını önlemek için eğitimler düzenlenmesi, toplumsal farkındalığın artırılması, yasal düzenlemelerin gözden geçirilmesi ve aile-çocuk iletişiminin sağlanması gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Buna göre öğretmenlerin çoğunluğu okul paydaşlarının çocukları ihmal ve istismardan korumadaki en önemli rolünün "eğitimler düzenlemek" olduğunu belirtmiştir. Araştırmanın bir diğer bulgusuna göre öğretmenlerin büyük çoğunluğu çocukların ihmal ve istismardan korunmasına yönelik yasal düzenlemeler hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çocuk ihmal, Çocuk istismarı, Okul öncesi, Öğretmen görüşleri.



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## Genişletilmiş Özet

**Problem:** Doğumdan sekiz yaşına kadar olan dönem olarak tanımlanan erken çocukluk dönemi, fiziksel, bilişsel ve dil becerilerinin, öz bakım becerilerinin ve sosyo-duygusal gelişim becerilerinin kazanılması açısından kritik bir öneme sahiptir (Dinçer Yavuz, 2019; Fernald vd., 2017; Toprakçı, 2010). Bu dönemde temel ihtiyaçları yeterince karşılanan çocuklar özgüveni yüksek ve insan ilişkilerinde olumlu davranışlar sergileyen bireyler olma yolunda ilerlerler (Kaytaç ve Öztürk, 2019; Şahin ve Aral, 2012). Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (WHO) (1999), savunmasız olmaları nedeniyle çocukların korunmaya en çok ihtiyaç duyan yaş grubu olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Çocuk ihmal ve istismarı tüm dünyada evrensel bir sorun olarak kabul edilmektedir (Akdaş, 2005; Can Yaşar, Şenol ve Akyol, 2015). Yapılan araştırmalar dünyada her yıl milyonlarca çocuğun yaşam boyu iz bırakabilecek ihmal ve istismara maruz kaldığını göstermektedir (Aktay, 2020; Gönültaş ve Öztürk, 2020; Toprakçı, 2017; WHO, 2006). Çocuk ihmal ve istismarı tüm dünyada evrensel bir sorun olarak kabul edilmektedir (Akdaş, 2005; Can Yaşar, Şenol ve Akyol, 2015). Bazı istismar tanımları yetişkinlerin davranış veya eylemlerine odaklanırken, diğerleri istismarın çocuğa zarar veya tehdit olduğunda gerçekleştiğini vurgulamaktadır (Straus ve Gelles, 1990; WHO, 1999). Çocuk istismarı, tekrarlanması, genellikle çocukların yakınları tarafından işlenmesi ve çocukların yaşamları üzerinde uzun süreli etkileri olması nedeniyle tanımlanması ve tedavisi en zor travma türlerinden biridir (Johnson, 2007). İstismarı ihmalden ayıran en temel unsur istismarın aktif, ihmalin ise pasif olmasıdır. Başka bir deyişle, istismar durumunda çocuklara yönelik olumsuz ve sorgulanabilir davranışların varlığından endişe duyulurken, ihmal durumunda ise bacakların temel görevlerini ve çocuklara karşı sorumlulukları aksatmaları düşünülebilir (Aktaş Altunsu, 2004; DePanfilis, 2006; Eremiş, 2001). Çocuk ihmali beş farklı tipte sınıflandırılabilir: "fiziksel ihmal, duygusal ihmal, cinsel ihmal, eğitim ihmali ve tıbbi ihmal" (Aral ve Gürsoy, 2001; Kara Doruk, 2012; Mennen vd., 2010). Çocuğa yönelik istismar davranışları genel olarak fiziksel istismar, duygusal istismar ve cinsel istismar olmak üzere üç farklı şekilde ortaya çıkmaktadır (Aktaş Altunsu, 2004). İhmal ve istismarın türü, süresi ve şiddeti ne olursa olsun her çocuk için tehlike arz eder. İstismar ve ihmale maruz kalma başta çocukların sosyal-duygusal gelişimlerinde olmak üzere birçok yönden sorunlara neden olmaktadır (Aktay, 2020; Kefeli & Haktanır, 2018; Avdibegoviü ve Brkiü, 2020). Bazı araştırmalar, çocukların ihmal ve istismara maruz kalmalarının depresyon, travma sonrası stres bozukluğu gibi uzun vadeli sorunlara (Fergusson, Boden ve Horwood, 2008; Powers vd., 2015) ve akademik sorunlara (Trickett, Noll, ve Putnam, 2011) yol açtığını göstermektedir. Fantuzzo, Perlman ve Dobbins, (2011) ihmal ve fiziksel istismara maruz kalan çocukların sağlık ve sosyal sorunlarının yanı sıra düşük akademik performansa sahip olma olasılıklarının daha yüksek olduğunu bildirmiştir. İhmal ve istismarın birçok nedeni olmakla birlikte en önemlisi ailesel, sosyal, kültürel ve ekonomik faktörlerdir (Bahçecik ve Kavaklı, 1993; Belsky, 1993; Demirtürk Selçuk ve Karadeniz, 2020). Buradan hareketle bu araştırmanın genel amacı, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmal ve istismarına ilişkin görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına yanıt aranmaktadır:

1. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmali kavramına ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
2. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk istismarı kavramına ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
3. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmal ve istismarına yol açan faktörlere ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
4. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmal ve istismarının nasıl önleneceğine ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
5. Okul paydaşlarının çocukları ihmal ve istismardan korumadaki rollerine ilişkin okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin görüşleri nelerdir?
6. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocukları ihmal ve istismardan korumaya yönelik mevcut yasal düzenlemelere ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?

**Yöntem:** Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuk ihmal ve istismara yönelik görüşlerinin incelendiği bu çalışmada, fenomenolojiden yararlanılmıştır. Fenomenolojik araştırma, bireylerin belirli bir olguya ilişkin algı ve düşüncelerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlayan nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımıdır (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2005). Verilerin toplanmasında uygun örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Uygun örnekleme, tamamen mevcut, hızlı ve erişimi kolay ögelere dayanır (Patton, 2005). Araştırmanın örneklemini 2020-2021 eğitim öğretim yılında Konya il merkezine bağlı Meram, Selçuklu ve Karatay ilçelerinde görev yapan 20



öğretmen ve Aksaray il merkezinde görev yapan 20 okul öncesi öğretmeninden oluşan 40 okul öncesi öğretmeni oluşturmuştur. Veriler 5 Aralık 2020 ile 30 Ocak 2021 tarihleri arasında toplanmıştır. Veriler, araştırmacılar tarafından oluşturulan "Öğretmen Görüşme Formu" aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Formun iki bölümü vardır. Birinci bölüm öğretmenlerin cinsiyeti, yaşı, eğitim düzeyi, deneyimi, çalıştığı kurum türü, çocuk ihmal ve istismarı ile ilgili ders alıp almadıkları hakkında bilgi edinmeye yönelik demografik bilgilerden oluşmaktadır. Formun ikinci bölümü, öğretmenlerin çocuk ihmal ve istismarı kavramına ilişkin görüşlerini almak için tasarlanmış 13 açık uçlu sorudan oluşmaktadır. Görüşme formundaki sorular araştırmacılar tarafından yapılan literatür taramasına dayalı olarak hazırlanmıştır. Forma son şekli verilmeden önce okul öncesi eğitim alanında çalışan üç akademisyenden uzman görüşü istenmiştir. Uzman görüşleri sonrası forma son hali verilmiştir. Nitel araştırmalarda veri analizi, toplanan verilerin düzenlenmesi ve daha sonra özetlenerek sonuçların sunulmasından oluşur (Cohen, Manion ve Morrison, 2007). Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Öğretmenlerle yapılan görüşmelerde cevaplar ikinci yazar tarafından yazılı olarak kaydedilmiştir. Verilerin kodlanması konusunda genel bir fikir edinmek için öncelikle görüşmelerin dökümleri iki yazar tarafından incelenmiştir. Daha sonra Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (WHO) tarafından belirlenen çocuk ihmal ve istismarı risk faktörlerine ve çocuk ihmal ve istismarı ile ilgili araştırmalara (Dubowitz ve Blavk, 2004; Erickson ve Egeland, 2002; Leeb ve diğ., 2007) göre kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın güvenilirliğini artırmak için bazı yöntemlere başvurulmuştur. Bu amaçla katılımcıların görüşleri doğrudan alıntılarla desteklenmiştir. Ayrıca araştırmada görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler öncelikle her iki araştırmacı tarafından ayrı ayrı kodlanmıştır. Daha sonra iki araştırmacının kodlamaları arasındaki uyum oranını belirlemek için karşılaştırmalar yapılmıştır. Son olarak farklı kodlar üzerinde fikir birliğine varmak için görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler birlikte incelenmiş ve kodlar tartışılarak fikir birliğine varılmıştır. Daha sonra iki araştırmacının kodlamaları arasındaki uyum oranını belirlemek için karşılaştırmalar yapılmıştır. Miles ve Huberman'a (1994) göre kodlayıcılar arasındaki tutarlılığın %80'den fazla olması beklenmektedir. Bu çalışmada yapılan hesaplamalar sonucunda kodlayıcılar arasında %89 uyum hesaplanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Araştırma sonucunda öğretmenlerin çoğunluğunun çocuk ihmal kavramını 'duygusal ihmal' üzerinden açıkladıkları tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bir diğer bulgusuna göre, öğretmenler çocuk istismarını en çok 'fiziksel istismar' açısından değerlendirmiştir. Buna göre öğretmenler çocuk ihmal ve istismarına yol açan en önemli faktörün "aile faktörleri" olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca öğretmenler, çocuk ihmal ve istismarının önlenmesi için eğitimlerin düzenlenmesi, toplumsal farkındalığın artırılması, yasal düzenlemelerin gözden geçirilmesi ve aile-çocuk iletişiminin sağlanması gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Buna göre öğretmenlerin çoğunluğu, okul paydaşlarının çocukları ihmal ve istismardan korumadaki en önemli rolünün "eğitimler düzenlemek" olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Araştırmanın bir diğer bulgusuna göre öğretmenlerin büyük çoğunluğu çocukların ihmal ve istismardan korunmasına yönelik yasal düzenlemeler hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

**Öneriler:** Araştırma bulgularından hareketle, toplumda çocuk ihmal ve istismarı konusunda farkındalık yaratmak için özellikle devlet kanalları aracılığıyla kamu spotları yapılması önerilmektedir. İkinci olarak, risk altındaki çocukların tespiti ve gerekli desteğin sağlanması amacıyla sosyal hizmet kurumlarının ailelere karşı görevleri artırılmalıdır. Üçüncüsü, okul öncesi eğitim lisans müfredatına çocuk ihmal ve istismarı ile ilgili zorunlu dersler/zorunlu seçmeli dersler dahil edilebilir. Son olarak, çocuk ihmal ve istismarı ile ilgili bilimsel çalışmaların sayısı artırılmalı ve araştırma sonuçları ilgili paydaşlarla paylaşılmalıdır.