

Examining Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect

Esra Tekel^{1*}, Nuray Yıldırım²

¹Afyon Kocatepe University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences

²Afyon Kocatepe University, Sandıklı School of Applied Sciences, Department of Child Development

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to reveal the level of awareness of teachers regarding child abuse and neglect and understand the reasons of their awareness levels. To achieve this purpose, this research was designed in mixed methodology. The sample of the quantitative part of the study was 206 teachers working in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of Turkey determined by the snowball sampling method, and 9 teachers for the qualitative part of the study. The Scale of Diagnosing the Signs and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect developed by Uysal (1998), and semi-structured interview form were used as data collection tools. According to the findings, teachers' awareness levels of child abuse and neglect were medium or low. The reasons of this level stem from teachers themselves or schools' features. And according to some teachers, their awareness was not low, there are some reasons preventing them to report the cases.

Keywords: Child abuse, child neglect, teacher awareness, mixed methodology

INTRODUCTION

Beyond being a part of the physical development period, childhood is a much broader phenomenon shaped by poverty, war, migration, diseases, and urbanization in a society. Throughout history, child abuse and neglect have been on the agenda in every period, with children severely affected by poverty, war, migration, diseases, and even pushed to diseases and deaths because they are employed in harsh working conditions (Özbesler & İçağasioğlu Çoban, 2013). The definitions of child abuse and neglect, which is common to many fields such as medicine, law, psychology, sociology, and social work, differ according to the perspective of the branch of science that deals with this concept (Özbesler & İçağasioğlu Çoban, 2013). For instance, jurists evaluate child abuse and neglect within the framework of the law, doctors evaluate child abuse and neglect with lesions on the body, and psychologists evaluate child abuse and neglect with deep wounds in the psychology of the child (Polat, 2007).

The number of social survey studies on the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Turkey is quite small, and the reason for this is considered the difficulty in determining the incident and inability to report it (Bahar, Savaş, & Bahar, 2009). In addition, if the child does not have a serious health problem because of abuse and neglect, or unless it is examined within the scope of a judicial event, child abuse and neglect may not be considered as important (Ataç, Altundal, Karakuş, Firidin & Hayran, 2022). According to the research, the fact that child abuse and neglect is accepted by parents or society prevents the determination of the events. In particular, the

use of physical abuse by parents as a disciplinary tool prevents notification (Ağırtan, Akar, Akbaş, Akdur, Aydın, Aytar et al., 2009). According to the Summary Report on Child Abuse and Domestic Violence in Turkey (2010) by the Social Services and Child Protection Agency in Turkey and UNICEF, one in four children between the ages of 7 and 18 experience neglect, 43% of children are subjected to physical abuse, 51% are subjected to emotional abuse, and 10% witness sexual abuse. Similarly, according to Bektaş and Öztürk (2007), 36% of parents and 32% of fathers are violent towards their children; especially daughters are more exposed to domestic violence. It is seen that not only physical or emotional abuse, but also sexual abuse occurs within the family. For instance, according to Gençdoğan, Hekimoğlu, Mutluer, Özdemir, Gümüş, Durmaz et al. (2016), it is observed that 21,1% of

Corresponding Author e-mail: Esracakmak88@hotmail.com

https://orcid.org/1 0000-0003-4600-9900

How to cite this article: Tekel E, Yıldırım N. Examining Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect. Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2025, 200-212

Source of support: Nil.

Conflicts of Interest: None.

DOI: 10.47750/pegegog.15.01.17

Received: 15.08.2024

Accepted: 26.10.2024

Published : 01.01.2025

children are sexually abused by a family member in Turkey. In this context, reporting cases of child abuse and neglect to the relevant places is of great importance for the rights and future of the child who has been abused and neglected.

According to the Child Protective Service (CPS), which conducts the investigation of children who have been abused and neglected in the USA, the reported cases are just the top of the iceberg (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Research carried out in Turkey support the iceberg. Reported cases are usually cases that are reported in hospitals as severe injuries or deaths, and a lack of information about reporting by medical personnel prevents reporting. A study by Gölge, Hamzaoglu & Türk (2012) find that 70,9% of doctors and 54,3% of nurses do not know what procedure to follow when face with child abuse or suspicion. However, as it concerns every individual who is aware of the situation, it is obligatory for teachers and other civil servants as well as health personnel working in public institutions to report cases (Şahin & Beyazova, 2001). Similarly, 84,5% of teachers in Turkey state that they have insufficient knowledge of child abuse and neglect, and they obtain information about this subject from the internet or television (Yıldız, Kaçar, Albayrak, Çalaboğlu, Çakmak & Bayraktar, 2017). However, a very large part of the lives of individuals are spent in schools which are living and learning areas (Açıkalın, Şişman & Turan, 2011). Teachers have an important role in preventing abuse and neglect and supporting the social and emotional development of children with the activities they do during the day at school and the training they prepare (Gönültaş, 2022). Teachers are the key to monitoring behavioral changes such as introversion, unhappiness, depression, inability to focus, decrease in school achievement, aggravation, aggression, and so on, recognition, prevention, and reporting of child abuse and neglect (Şahin & Beyazova, 2001). Additionally, as mentioned above, it is understood that the importance of the teacher in case recognition and reporting is significant, given that abuse and neglect are mostly committed by family members. Gönültaş (2013) found in his study that 48% of the children who participated in the research and who were exposed to sexual abuse emerged thanks to the teachers at the school. The fact that students can tell their problems to their teachers by establishing close relationships with their teachers, that the teacher is able to notice the behavioral changes in the child and that they are obliged to report this situation to the relevant institutions shows that teachers have a key role in determining and preventing child neglect and abuse (Koçtürk, 2018). When research on child abuse and neglect awareness is examined, the fact that 72% of the research were conducted in the field of health sciences (Bakır & Kapucu, 2017) shows that the importance of the school has been ignored. In this context, the aim of this research is to reveal the awareness of teachers regarding child abuse and neglect. For this purpose,

the research questions of the research are below:

1. What is the level of teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect?
2. Do the levels of teachers' awareness differ according to their age, marital status, parental status, and branches?
3. What are the reasons of teachers' low/medium awareness levels?

METHOD

Research Design

This research was designed in the mixed methods design. Explanatory sequential design was applied as a design of the study. In the explanatory sequential design quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, and qualitative phase follows from the quantitative results to help to explain (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this research, first quantitative data was collected and analyzed. To be able to explain the quantitative results, qualitative data was collected and analyzed. The overall results of both quantitative and qualitative were discussed.

Study Group

Since this study designed as mixed method, two different study group was participated in the study. First, quantitative data was collected, and the sample of the study was 206 teachers working in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of Turkey determined by the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a useful type of sampling to determine the sample group that is difficult to determine or reach because the subject of the study is sensitive or the participants do not trust the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Schutt & Check, 2012). Snowball sampling is a very useful sampling because there is a relationship and a connection between the researcher and the participants. The researcher a) trusts his friend, friend's friend, friend's friend's friend, b) trusts his acquaintance, acquaintance of his acquaintance, acquaintance of his acquaintance, c) trusts personally or unknown contact, contact of his contact, contact of his contact (Cohen et al., 2011). For this reason, snowball sampling reduces the unbalanced power relationship between the researcher and the participant, and sometimes even makes this situation disappear. Since the subject discussed in this study was a sensitive subject such as child abuse and neglect, the snowball sampling method was preferred to ensure the trust of the researcher-participant so that the participants could reflect their true thoughts. Information about the participants' gender, age, marital status, branches, and whether the participants have children are given in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, a total of 206 teachers, 157 females and 49 males, participate in the research. While 78 of the participants are between the age of 22-32, 95 of them

Table 1: Demographic Information of Quantitative Sample.

Variables	Categories	f	%
Gender	Female	157	76.2
	Male	49	23.8
	Total	206	100
Age	Age between 22-32	78	37.9
	Age between 33-43	95	46.1
	44 age and above	33	16.0
	Total	206	100
Marital status	Married	142	68.9
	Single	64	31.1
	Total	206	100
Whether they have a child or children	Yes	124	60.2
	No	82	39.8
	Total	206	100
Branches	Primary Education	67	32.5
	Teaching	21	10.2
	Pre-school Education Teaching	32	15.5
	Mathematics and	20	9.7
	Science Teaching	37	18.0
	Turkish Language and Social Science Teaching	29	14.1
	Foreign Language Teaching	206	100
	Other branches		
	Total		

are between the age of 33-43, 33 of them are 44 years old and above. Additionally, 142 of them are married and 64 of them are single; 124 of them have children and 82 of them do not have any child. And finally, 67 of the participants are primary

education teachers, 21 of them are pre-school teachers, 32 of them are mathematics and science teachers, 20 of them are Turkish language and social sciences teachers, 37 of them are Foreign language teachers, 29 of them are in other branches such as psychological counseling and guidance, music, religious culture and ethics, art, and physical education. Due to the small number of participants in these branches, the participants in these branches are combined and this group is named as other branches.

In the qualitative part of the study, 9 teachers participated in the study. During the quantitative data collecting process, participants were asked whether they want to participate in qualitative part of the study or not. 16 teachers informed us that they were volunteer for interviews. 9 teachers who are selected as a convenience sampling method, participated in the qualitative data collecting process. The demographic information of the study group was presented in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, 5 participants are female, and 4 participants are male. Participants are working in different branches in different grades. In addition, participants' seniorities are between 4-18 years. By this way, researchers try to provide diversity for the interview. Lastly, all the participants except Frances are married and have at least one child. Since the teachers' awareness levels do not differ according to their marital status and having a child in quantitative data findings, researchers do not need to provide diversity in terms of these variables in qualitative participants' demographic.

Data Collection Tools

For the quantitative part of the research, a personal information form was prepared by the researchers to examine whether the awareness of the teachers participating in the study regarding child abuse and neglect differed according

Table 2: Demographic Information of the Qualitative Sample

Participants	Gender	Branch	Grade	Seniority
Ann	Female	Science teacher	Elementary school	13 years
Yasmin	Female	Primary teacher	Primary school	18 years
Yolanda	Female	Turkish Language teacher	Elementary school	16 years
Frances	Female	Psychological counselor	Elementary school	4 years
Madison	Female	Primary teacher	Primary school	7 years
Leo	Male	Art teacher	Elementary school	10 years
Orlando	Male	Math teacher	Elementary school	15 years
Brandon	Male	Chemistry teacher	High school	18 years
Omar	Male	Primary teacher	Primary school	7 years

to some variables. Using the personal information form, information about the participants' gender, age, marital status, branches, and whether the participants had children was obtained. In order to reveal the awareness of teachers regarding child abuse and neglect, the Scale of Diagnosing the Signs and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect developed by Uysal (1998) was used. The 5-point Likert-type scale consisted of 67 items under six dimensions: (i) physical signs of abuse and neglect in children, (ii) behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children, (iii) signs of neglect, (iv) parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect, (v) characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect, and (vi) familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated .92 for the internal consistency of the scale. Within this research, the Cronbach Alpha value of the tool was determined as .91.

For the qualitative part of the study, researchers prepared semi-structured interview form. Since this research was designed as an explanatory sequential design, open-ended questions were generated according to the quantitative results. This means that the interview questions are formed to understand the reasons of quantitative findings. As a result, an interview form consisting of 8 open-ended questions, including 3 basic questions and 5 probing questions related to these basic questions, was obtained.

Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected via Google form and data was collected using the snowball sampling method on the internet. In the line with this method, the links of the data collection tools were sent by the researchers to certain e-mail addresses and WhatsApp groups, and then the participants were reached by sharing them with their own communication groups.

In the quantitative data collection tool, the participants were asked whether they want to participate in qualitative part of the study. Therefore, volunteers who were recruited by convenience sampling, included for the qualitative part of the study. Focus group interview was conducted on Zoom. Since the group consisted of 9 people, only one focus group

interview was scheduled. A focus group interview is an interview with a maximum of 10 people with similar past experiences (Patton, 2014). The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and to protect the privacy of the participants they were given code names. The focus interview lasted 64.34 minutes.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed with the SPSS package program. In the study, skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined in order to examine the normal distribution of data. If the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis are between +1 and -1, it can be said that the data shows normal distribution (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2013). Within the scope of this study, when the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined, it was seen that the data showed normal distribution in all factors. In this context, parametric tests were used in the analysis of the data, independent samples t-test was applied to determine whether the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect differ according to gender, marital status, and having a child variable, and One-Way ANOVA test was applied to determine whether teachers' awareness differ according to age and branch variables.

For the qualitative part of the study, the interview was transcribed first. Then, qualitative data analysis method which was suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) was followed. The data was coded which means the researchers divided the text into small units such as phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. After that codes are grouped into broader themes and themes were grouped into larger dimensions or perspectives. Therefore, the qualitative data of this research has two themes as (i) reasons of low awareness, and (ii) barriers to reporting.

FINDINGS

Findings Regarding First Sub-Problem

The descriptive statistics of the data obtained to reveal teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect was presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *n, \bar{x} and SD Values of Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect.*

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Physical signs of abuse and neglect in children	206	3.00	4.28	3.60	.27
Behavioural signs of abuse and neglect in children	206	2.73	4.13	3.32	.26
Signs of neglect	206	2.57	4.86	3.93	.44
Parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect	206	2.58	4.25	3.35	.32
Characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect	206	1.67	4.00	2.90	.46
Familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect	206	2.38	4.38	3.42	.38
Total	206	3.00	4.09	3.44	.18

Table 3 displays the average values for the scale and dimensions of teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect. As shown in Table 3, the average response of teachers to all scale items is 3.44 (which is between quite true and unsure). This value indicates that teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect is relatively low, compared to the requested value of 5.0. When teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect is examined on the dimension, the highest average is signs of neglect ($\bar{x} = 3.93$, $SD=.44$), and respectively, physical signs of abuse and neglect in children ($\bar{x} = 3.60$, $SD= .27$), familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect ($\bar{x} = 3.42$, $SD= .38$), parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect ($\bar{x} = 3.35$, $SD= .32$), behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children ($\bar{x} = 3.32$, $SD= .26$), characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect ($\bar{x} = 2.90$, $SD= .46$).

Findings Regarding Second Sub-Problem

a) Findings about Gender Variable

Independent sample T-tests were performed to determine whether teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect differ by gender. The results of the t-test were presented in Table 4.

When the data in Table 4 is examined, teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ significantly according to the gender of the teachers ($t(204) = 1.91$, $p>.05$). In other words, the awareness of male and female teachers regarding child abuse and neglect is similar. When examined on the basis of the dimensions of the scale, it is found that the level

of teachers' awareness of physical signs of abuse and neglect in children differ significantly according to the gender ($t(204) = 2.45$, $p<.05$). The female teachers' average awareness of physical signs of abuse and neglect in children ($\bar{x} = 3.63$) is higher than the average of male teachers' awareness of the same dimension ($\bar{x} = 3.53$). In other words, female teachers are more aware of the physical symptoms of child abuse and neglect than male teachers. However, teachers' awareness of behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children, signs of neglect, parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect, characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect and familial characteristics in child abuse, and neglect do not differ significantly according to the gender of teachers ($t(204) = .058$; $t(204) = .487$; $t(204) = 1.94$; $t(204) = .695$; $t(204) = .003$, $p>.05$). In other words, the awareness of male and female teachers in dimensions other than the physical symptoms of child abuse and neglect are similar.

b) Findings about Age Variable

One-way ANOVA was used to test whether the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect showed a significant difference according to age. The results of one-way ANOVA analysis were presented in Table 5.

When the results in Table 5 are examined, it is revealed that the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ significantly according to the age of the teachers ($F_{(2-203)} = .181$, $p>.05$). In other words, teachers in different ages have similar awareness of child abuse and neglect. When the results are examined on the basis of the dimensions, it is found that teachers' awareness of characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect differ significantly according to the age ($F_{(2-203)} = 4.095$, $p<.05$). Hochberg's GT2 test was used to determine between which groups the difference occurred, and it is determined that there is a significant difference between teachers aged 22-32 years and teachers aged 44 and above. It is observed that the average awareness of teachers aged 44 and above for the dimension of characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect ($\bar{x} = 3.04$) is higher than the average of teachers aged between 22-32 years regarding the same

Table 4: The T-Test Results of the Differentiation of Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect According to the Gender Variable.

Dimensions	Gender	n	\bar{x}	SD	df	t	p
Physical signs of abuse and neglect in children	Female	157	3.63	.26	204	2.45	.015*
	Male	49	3.53	.28			

Table 5: ANOVA Test Results of the Differentiation of Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect According to Age Variable.

Dimensions	Ages	n	\bar{x}	SD	F	p	Difference between
Characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect	22-32	78	2.79	.48	4.095	.01*	1-3
	33-43	95	2.94	.44			
	44 and above	33	3.04	.41			

Table 6: ANOVA Test Results of the Differentiation of Teachers' Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect According to the Branch Variable.

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Branches</i>	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Difference between</i>
Signs of neglect	1.Primary Education	67	3.91	.45	3.091	.01*	3-4
	2.Pre-school Education	21	3.91	.47			
	3.Mathematics and Science	32	3.74	.46			
	4.Turkish Language and Social Science	20	4.19	.36			
	5.Foreign Language	37	4.02	.36			
	6.Other branches	29	3.90	.43			
Familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect	1.Primary Education	67	3.49	.34	3.368	.01*	3-5
	2.Pre-school Education	21	3.42	.35			
	3.Mathematics and Science	32	3.58	.34			3-6
	4.Turkish Language and Social Science	20	3.41	.44			
	5.Foreign Language	37	3.28	.42			
	6.Other branches	29	3.29	.35			

dimension of the scale ($\bar{x} = 2.79$). In other words, teachers aged 44 and above are more aware of the characteristics of children prone to child abuse and neglect than teachers aged between 22-32 years. On the other hand, it is found that teachers' awareness of physical signs of abuse and neglect in children, behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children, signs of neglect, parental characteristics prone to abuse, and neglect and familial characteristics in child abuse, and neglect do not differ significantly according to the age of the teachers

($F_{(2-203)} = .611$; $F_{(2-203)} = .619$; $F_{(2-203)} = .271$; $F_{(2-203)} = 1.687$; $F_{(2-203)} = 1.050$, $p > .05$). In other words, the awareness of teachers of different ages about child abuse and neglect is similar in all the dimensions other than the characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect.

c) Findings about Marital Status Variable

Independent samples T-test was performed to determine whether the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect differed according to their marital status. When the results is examined, it is revealed that the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ significantly according to their marital status ($t_{(204)} = .078$, $p > .05$). In other words, married and single teachers have similar awareness of child abuse and neglect.

d) Findings about Having a Child Variable

Independent samples t-tests were performed to determine whether the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect differed according to having a child. When the results are examined, it is revealed that the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ significantly according to having a child ($t_{(204)} = .060$, $p > .05$). In other words, the awareness of teachers with and without a child about child abuse and neglect is similar.

e) Findings about Branch Variable

Whether the teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect showed a significant difference according to their branches was tested with one-way ANOVA. Results of one-way ANOVA analysis were presented in Table 6.

When the results in Table 6 are examined, it is revealed that teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ significantly according to the branches of teachers ($F_{(5-200)} = .659$, $p > .05$). In other words, teachers in different branches have similar awareness of child abuse and neglect. When it is examined on the basis of the dimensions, it is revealed that teachers' awareness of signs of neglect differed significantly according to the branch variable ($F_{(5-200)} = 3.091$, $p < .05$). Tukey HSD test was conducted to determine between

which groups the difference occurred, and it is determined that there is a significant difference between teachers in Turkish language and social science branches and teachers in mathematics and science branches. It is observed that the mean of awareness of the signs of neglect dimension of the teachers in Turkish language and social science branches ($\bar{x} = 4.19$) is higher than the average of the teachers in the mathematics and science branches ($\bar{x} = 3.74$). In other words, teachers in Turkish language and social science branches have higher awareness of the signs of neglect than teachers in mathematics and science.

It is revealed that the teachers' awareness of the dimension of familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect differed significantly according to the branch variable ($F_{(5-200)} = 3.368, p < .05$). Tukey HSD test was performed to determine between which groups the difference occurred. It is determined that there is a significant difference between teachers in mathematics and science branch and foreign language teachers. Also, there is a significant difference between mathematics and science teachers and other branch teachers. It was observed that the mean awareness of teachers in mathematics and science for the dimension of familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect ($\bar{x} = 3.58$) is higher than the average of foreign language teachers' awareness of the same dimension ($\bar{x} = 3.28$). Similarly, the average of teachers in mathematics and science branches is found to be higher than the average ($\bar{x} = 3.29$) of teachers in other branches (psychological counseling and guidance, music teaching, religious culture and moral knowledge teaching, art teaching, and physical education teaching) regarding the familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect dimension. In other words, teachers in mathematics and science have higher awareness of familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect than teachers in foreign languages and other branches. Additionally, it is found that teachers' awareness of physical signs of abuse and neglect in children, behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children, parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect and characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect do not significantly difference according to teachers' branches ($F_{(5-200)} = 2.049; F_{(5-200)} = .296; F_{(5-200)} = .761; F_{(5-200)} = 2.048; F_{(5-200)} = .659, p > .05$). In other words, the awareness of teachers in different branches is similar in dimensions other than the signs of neglect and familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect.

Findings Regarding Third Sub-Problem

According to the quantitative findings of the research, teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect was lower than expected. The reason for their low awareness was tried to be revealed by conducting focus group interviews with teachers.

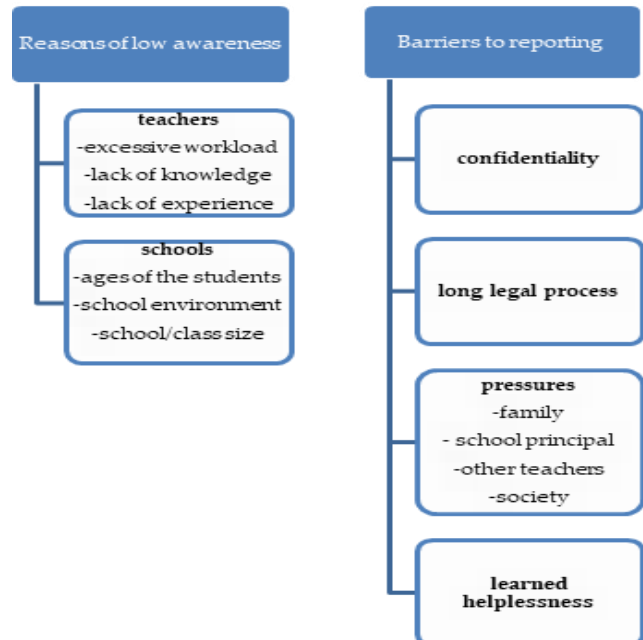


Fig. 2: Themes of qualitative findings

The findings obtained from the interviews were grouped under two themes: (i) reasons of low awareness, and (ii) barriers to reporting and are presented in Figure 2.

a) Reasons of Low Awareness

Participants stated that the reason for teachers' low awareness of child abuse and neglect is due to (i) the teacher and (ii) the school.

(i) Reasons Arising from Teachers

It was revealed that the reasons for their low awareness due to the teacher were (i) the teacher's excessive workload, (ii) the teacher's lack of knowledge and (iii) the teacher's lack of experience. According to the participants, teachers have many responsibilities in schools. Especially teachers who try to complete the curriculum on time do not have time to notice the changes in students' behavior and psychology. Teachers who focus on academic success by following an intensive curriculum and showing success in central exams naturally fail to realize whether children are being neglected or abused. Regarding this, one of the participants, Madison expressed her thoughts as follows:

Madison, primary teacher: *For example, I am currently a third grade teacher. I spend so much time running around at school. It's about doing homework during breaks, this and that... I mean, I don't have time to sit with the kids and ask them "What are you doing at home?" How are you spending your time? What are you doing?" I am a primary school teacher, so I guess we are the ones who spend the most time with the child.*

But even I don't have that kind of time. I can't think of elementary school and high school teachers at all. We are probably the ones who can notice the most when such a situation (child abuse and neglect) happens. But even I can't notice it.

As a primary school teacher who spent the longest time with children, Madison said she did not have time to observe children at school. As a middle school teacher, Ann summarized similar conditions as follows:

Ann, science teacher: We are in a rush to complete a curriculum on time. The science teacher teaches 4 hours... We have time in terms of hours of lessons. On the other hand, we have a curriculum rush, crowded classes, central exams, pilot tests, etc.

In addition to the excessive workloads of the teachers, the fact that they are not sure whether the behavior and actions of the students really reflect neglect and abuse or whether they are done to attract attention causes teachers to ignore neglect and abuse. Participants emphasized that students at different school levels, especially in elementary school and high school, students may lie to attract attention. Participants stated that they did not have enough knowledge to verify this situation. Ann stated that in older classes, students may lie to attract attention as follows:

Ann: ...we seem to have low awareness, actually... I wonder if this child is telling the truth or lying. I cannot clearly measure the child's reaction or attitude. But since primary school students are more innocent, the child should already tell you about the event, his hand-arm movements, his look, his mouth, etc. You know what this child is telling you or what he wants to tell you, what he is covering up, what he expressed. But 7th and 8th graders may be honest or make up. We hesitate because we have doubts about this... This may be completely out of the child's imagination to get all the attention.

Participants stated that they did not have enough knowledge to understand the changes in the behavior and psychology of students who were neglected and abused and to distinguish whether these differences were real or a lie. Leo, art teacher, expressed his views on this as follows:

Leo: ... I think the education given to us is insufficient... Experts should come and teach us how to understand this (child abuse and neglect) in more detail and how to understand from a child's statement that he or she has been sexually abused. I think this awareness can be further increased through training... In other words, I think that primary school students do not lie, as one of the participants said. But once we get to elementary school, especially 6-7-8th grade, it may seem like a lie. High school is also completely different. I think it would be more appropriate if we were given training appropriate to the grades.

And finally, one of the participants Orlando, Math teacher, explained that teachers' lack of experience in this regard may cause their awareness to be low:

Orlando: The reason we are not aware of it is a lack of experience. If we have not seen such a student, it is not easy for us to be aware of such a thing.

(ii) Reasons Arising from Schools

According to the participants, teachers' failure to recognize child abuse and neglect is also due to the schools' features. Accordingly, the reasons are grouped under 3 basic themes: (i) ages of the students, (ii) school environment, and (iii) school/class size. According to the participants, especially children in primary school tell the truth, while children in elementary school and high school may lie to attract attention. Therefore, especially elementary and high school teachers may be less likely to notice child abuse and neglect. In short, the nature of the school type affects teachers' awareness. Ann, one of the participants, expressed her views on this situation as follows:

Ann: When you talk to the parent about this issue without disturbing him, it turns out that there is no such person in the house. I don't mean the child's dream world. This is not a dream, this is something else. Higher classes such as 7-8, there are different situations within them. Or they may be influenced by any news they watch or read and interpret and express different behaviors in a different way, even though there is no such situation about them. Frankly, I am talking about a period when that innocence was lost.

According to the participants, another factor affecting teachers' awareness is the school environment. The fact that child neglect and abuse is accepted in the culture of the environment where the school is located causes this situation to remain unspoken and therefore teachers do not notice it. Regarding this, primary teacher Yasmin express her feelings as follows, based on her experiences:

Yasmin: For example, at that point, the mother immediately steps in. She says "no, sir, you shouldn't look at him (kids' father). My kids are exaggerating. We're from the East. My husband hasn't gotten used to this culture yet. He's a bit of an angry person." So, one thing that stops the teacher is actually the culture of the family.

In addition to the culture of the environment where the school is located, participants stated that crowded classes reduce teachers' awareness. Leo, one of the participants, explained the situation as follows:

Leo: For example, let me tell you from my perspective; I teach for 1 hour to each class. Whether I should observe that child, focus on the lesson, or try to silence the class. As you already know, the average number of classes in city centers is 30-35 students, in most schools. 20-25 students in village schools. So the teacher may not notice this (child abuse and neglect). As a result, the participants stated that there are many factors related to the

school and that these factors can reduce teachers' awareness. Yasmin, one of the participants, briefly summarized all these factors as follows:

Yasmin: So, this situation related with the culture of the school where it located, the school population, the class size, the teacher's own psychological state...

b) Barriers to Reporting

Another important point for participants is reporting. Because participants stated that even if they noticed a case of child neglect or abuse, they had problems reporting it or witnessed similar situations. Accordingly, (i) to ensure their own confidence, (ii) long legal process, (iii) pressures, and (iv) learned helplessness prevent teachers from reporting. For example, one of the participants, Frances, explained that they had no security after reporting:

Frances: (When we report) Our name is mentioned everywhere. Frankly, I think everyone pulls themselves back in such a situation. Because when we report... They can also be confronted in court. And I know that there are many colleagues of mine who are victimized by this threatened situation... When we report it, our names are mentioned in the report and we inevitably get worn out in the process.

Especially in big cities, cosmopolitan cities where no one knows each other, teachers feel more insecure. Yolanda, one of the participants, explained that for this reason they may hesitate to report:

Yolanda: Especially in cosmopolitan city places where there are many mixed cultures and many cultures together, if you do not know many people and do not know where and what danger will come from, the teacher can set a barrier in front of you.

In addition to teachers not feeling safe, the long legal process that awaits them after reporting also prevents them from reporting. As mentioned before, teachers' workload is already quite high. In addition, a long and tiring legal process in which they do not know what to expect scares them. In fact, at this point, it can be said that all teachers want is for their names not to be mentioned clearly in reports or legal texts. Regarding this, Frances said:

Frances: At every stage, we have to be in close contact with the administration, the parents and the institution we report to... It is not like "I reported it and the case is over". So we are intertwined at every stage of the process. We have a hard time realizing it (child abuse and neglect), but even if we realize it, this process scares us... I think teachers are taking a step back because they have to deal with everyone one-on-one and there are many people who are threatened and have difficulty in this sense. Do they have legitimate reasons? There is... I think the process should change. I don't think it's right that people who

reports should be taken into consideration so much. Frankly, it is inevitably scary for all of us.

Another problem confronts the teacher who risks all kinds of dangers and long legal processes and reports child abuse and neglect: pressure. These pressures are shown to the reporting teacher by other teacher colleagues, the school administrator, the parent of the neglected or abused student, or the society. One of the participants, Yasmin, explained how she felt pressure from her colleagues, saying, *"Why are you interfering? Are you going to save or change the world? I remember them saying this, especially in the first five years of the profession."* or Frances says, *"Administration says 'Why are you making trouble for us? Maybe (the student) is making things up or lying. You know, it is a legal responsibility to report the case of negligence and abuse, but we can figure it out inside the school. It should not be reported, should not be heard (by the society).'"* Leo, one of the participants, said, *"In small cities, as the other participants said, pressure, social pressure, and prejudice may be restraining teachers (from reporting) a little."* Finally, Frances expressed how the parent puts emotional pressure on the teacher when a case of child neglect and abuse is noticed and reported:

Frances: The parent is calling for example; he makes statements such as "Our house will fall apart, our family will fall apart, please do not report it. It will be more difficult for my child. We will handle it within the family" etc. How can we explain it to the parents? He makes comments such as "The unity of our family is in your hands", and there may be conversations that leave us dilemma...

And finally, participants stated that even if they noticed child abuse and neglect, they might give up reporting because they thought that nothing would change as a result of reporting and that the criminals would not be punished. Stating that there is a kind of learned helplessness among teachers on this issue, Yasmin explained her experiences as follows:

Yasmin: I don't think awareness is low. I mean, I don't think it's low for my colleagues and myself. But the situation of "don't say what you know everywhere" is valid in ninety percent of the teachers. Because we are a community of teachers who believe that they cannot change anything and have experienced learned helplessness.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to reveal the awareness of teachers regarding child abuse and neglect. For children who spend two-thirds of their time in school, teachers and other employees in educational institutions are at a crucial point in detecting and preventing child abuse and neglect (Baginsky, 2003).

It is thought that this role of teachers has a wide-ranging effect because they are able to observe early signs of abuse, such as behavioral changes or typical growth deficiency (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997). In addition to identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect, teachers are the key to responding to the needs of child victims and teaching children prevention strategies (Walsh, Farrell, Schweitzer, 2005 & Bridgestock, 2005). According to the findings of this study, when teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect is examined on the basis of dimensions, it is seen that teachers are most aware of the symptoms of neglect, followed by physical symptoms of abuse and neglect in children, familial characteristics in child abuse and neglect, parental characteristics prone to abuse and neglect, behavioral symptoms of abuse and neglect in the child, and finally the characteristics of children who are prone to abuse and neglect. In the study conducted by Tugay (2008), the finding that teachers are more affected by the fact that a case has visible traces while determining whether a case is a case of neglect/abuse supports the findings of this research.

Additionally, while teachers' awareness levels of child abuse and neglect are expected to be high, the findings of this study show that the average of teachers recognizing signs and risks is between 3.44 out of 5 which is between unsure and quite true. In this context, it cannot be said that teachers' knowledge of recognizing the signs and risks of child neglect and abuse is sufficient. According to research conducted by Walsh et al. (2005), teachers are unsure about their ability to detect child abuse and neglect by getting 3.40 out of 5. Similarly, in the study conducted by Tugay (2008) with teachers, it was concluded that teachers were not confident in defining child abuse and neglect. McKee and Dillenburg (2009), who examine the child abuse and neglect awareness levels of teacher candidates, state that teacher candidates have some basic awareness, but their knowledge base is inconsistent and not at the required level for those working with young children.

Another finding of the study is that teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect does not differ according to the gender of teachers. In other words, male and female teachers' general levels of awareness of child abuse and neglect are similar. Similarly, when it is examined in terms of dimensions, it can be said that the awareness of male and female teachers about behavioural signs of abuse and neglect in the child, signs of neglect, parental characteristics prone to neglect and abuse, child characteristics prone to abuse and neglect, and familial characteristics in child neglect and abuse are similar. In the study conducted by Ataç et al. (2022), it was concluded that teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect did not differ according to gender. According to the results of research conducted by Walsh et al. (2005), there is no significant

difference between male and female teachers in diagnosing child abuse and neglect and reporting it to the necessary places. However, there is a significant difference in favor of female between male and female teachers regarding the physical signs of abuse and neglect dimension. Accordingly, female teachers' awareness of the physical signs of child abuse and neglect in children is higher than the awareness levels of male teachers. Other research findings reveal that female teachers tend to report child abuse and neglect more than male teachers (Crenshaw, Crenshaw & Lichtenberg, 1995; Kenny, 2001). This result is explained by Finlayson and Koocher (1991) that women pay more attention to the signs of victimization than men. In short, while female teachers are more active than male teachers in detecting the physical signs of child abuse and neglect which are more visible than the other dimensions, it can be said that the awareness of female and male teachers about behavioral signs of abuse and neglect in children, signs of neglect, parental characteristics prone to neglect and abuse, child characteristics prone to abuse and neglect, familial characteristics in child neglect and abuse which are relatively difficult to detect are similar.

In this research, it has been determined that there is a significant difference between teachers aged 22-32 and teachers aged 44 and above, in favor of teachers aged 44 and above, in terms of characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect. In other words, teachers aged 44 and above are more aware of the characteristics of children prone to abuse and neglect than teachers between the ages of 22-32. Similarly, in the study conducted by Tugay (2008) with teachers, the level of knowledge about child neglect and abuse increases as the experience of teachers increases. According to Kenny (2001), experienced teachers identify, report, and assist in the reporting process more than their other colleagues. This is because, according to Goebbels, Nicholson, Walsh, & De Vries (2008), teachers with more teaching experience are more likely to encounter child abuse and neglect than teachers with less experience, and this experience makes teachers more confident in detecting child abuse and neglect.

Additionally, the results reveal that teachers' having a child status do not differentiate their awareness of child abuse and neglect. However, when other research was examined, it was observed that teachers who have children detect and report child abuse and neglect to the necessary places more than teachers who have not any child (Karadağ, Sönmez, & Dereobalı, 2015; O'Toole, Webster, O'Toole, & Lucal, 1999). On the other hand, according to Walsh et al. (2005) the levels of teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect do not differ according to the status of having children. Similarly, in the study conducted by Ataç et al. (2022), teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect does not differ depending on the

status of having a child. In short, the effect of having children status in the determination of child abuse and neglect has not yet been confirmed in the literature. Since abuse and neglect of children is considered acceptable by parents or society, and especially since physical abuse is used by parents as a disciplinary tool (Ağırtan et al., 2009), the status of teachers having children may not have revealed any differentiation in awareness of child abuse and neglect. In this context, it is thought that teachers' knowledge about child abuse and neglect, rather than having a child, will provide them with awareness. Another finding of the research, the fact that teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect does not differentiate according to their marital status also supports this situation. In the study conducted by Ataç et al. (2022), teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect does not differ according to their marital status. In other words, it can be said that professional variables such as teaching experience and training on this subject rather than individual variables such as marital status or having children, affect teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect.

A focus group interview was conducted with teachers in order to reveal the reasons for teachers' low awareness of child abuse and neglect. According to the qualitative findings, it was revealed that the reasons for teachers' low awareness were due to teacher-related factors (excessive workload of teachers, lack of knowledge and experience) and school-related factors (age of students, school environment and school/class size). However, it has been revealed that teachers face barriers in reporting when faced with a situation of abuse and neglect.

When the qualitative findings are interpreted, it is clear that teachers have many responsibilities in schools and that they do not have enough time to notice the possible changes in students in case of abuse and neglect while trying to fulfill these responsibilities. However, teachers think that they do not have enough knowledge and experience to understand and recognize the changes that occur in children who are neglected and abused. In the study conducted by Ataç et al. (2022), 82% of teachers stated that they needed more information about child abuse and neglect. The reason for the insufficient level of knowledge of the teachers on this subject is that they do not receive training on the subject (Walsh & Farrell, 2008). Today, it is accepted that basic information about child protection should be obtained during teacher education (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). However, child protection education is sacrificed for other basic courses (Baginsky, 2003), or child protection-related courses are not mandated by most teacher education programs (Baginsky, 2001), and teacher candidates graduate without knowledge and skills in child protection (McKee & Dillenburger, 2009). In this context, it is recommended that child protection

education be given at the early stages of teacher education, given that teachers are in direct contact with children in schools (McKee & Dillenburger, 2009). The reason for this according to the research findings of Karadağ et al. (2015), teachers who receive training on child abuse and neglect are able to diagnose child neglect and abuse more than teachers who do not get education. According to qualitative findings, teachers' low awareness is not only due to teacher-related factors but also to school-related factors such as students' ages, school environment, and school/class size. According to teachers, the fact that elementary and high school students can resort to lies to attract attention, that abuse and neglect are accepted in the culture in which the child is raised, and that class and school sizes are high make it less likely that teachers will notice child abuse and neglect. In the study conducted by Tugay (2008), teachers with a small class size and teachers who had discussions about child abuse and neglect in their schools were more likely to report child abuse and neglect.

In addition to being able to detect child abuse and neglect, it is also very crucial for teachers to report the case to the relevant places. According to the qualitative findings, teachers also face barriers in reporting child abuse and neglect. According to the teachers, the fact that teachers do not feel safe in the reporting process of child abuse and neglect, the long duration of legal procedures and processes, the pressure exerted on the teacher by their colleagues, the school administrator, the parents of the abused and neglected student or the society prevent teachers from reporting. In addition, teachers' belief that even if they notice abuse and neglect, nothing can change in the process and that the offenders will not receive the necessary punishment also prevents teachers from reporting. Similar to the findings obtained in this study, in the study conducted by Tugay (2008), it was concluded that teachers were afraid of the feeling of revenge that may come from the family, they saw this situation as normal in the traditional Turkish family structure, and they did not report because they thought that reporting would not provide any benefit. According to Walsh et al. (2005), teachers who do not receive education about child protection and do not discuss this topic at school are unsure about their legal obligations. According to Kenny (2001) there are a lot of teachers who do not report the case even if they detect child abuse and neglect because they think they may report it incorrectly. It has been observed that the probability of teachers to report child abuse and neglect increases with the increase in the probability of identifying child abuse and neglect (Tugay, 2008). In this context, teachers should be trained in child protection in order to both identify the victims and report them to the relevant places.

SUGGESTION

As a result, of all the experts who can take part in child abuse and neglect, teachers are the ones with the greatest opportunity to observe children on a daily basis and to monitor subtle changes in appearance and behavior that may accompany child abuse (O'Toole et al., 1999). However, teachers do not have enough knowledge to detect child abuse and neglect, and the biggest reason for this is that they do not take any courses related to child protection during the teacher education process. In this context, teachers develop their knowledge by reading, listening, and discussing the subject with their knowledgeable colleagues (Walsh & Farrell, 2008). One of the basic recommendations for policymakers is to put mandatory child protection courses in teacher education curriculum so that teachers can get information about the subject, develop skills in this regard, and learn their legal responsibilities and legal processes. Additionally, it may be recommended to establish a child protection department in schools for teachers to improve themselves regarding child abuse and neglect, to make current readings on the subject, and to discuss current cases. These departments may be led by school principals and school counsellors. Trainings can be organized to inform not only teachers but also children about child abuse and neglect and how to protect themselves. Given that parents are one of the important stakeholders of the school and child abuse and neglect can also occur within the family, trainings for parents can be arranged by the school counsellors. In this way, rates of child abuse and neglect in the family can also be expected to decrease.

LIMITATION

As with any research, this research has some limitations. A similar research can be conducted qualitatively, and teachers' experiences on child protection can be examined in depth. Additionally, individual variables such as gender, age, marital status and having a child were discussed in this study. Subsequent researchers can investigate whether organizational variables such as school size, socio-economic status of the school environment, and school achievement level differentiate teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect. Additionally, the relations between teachers' awareness of child abuse and neglect and the concepts such as professional qualifications, self-sufficiency, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship, and organizational trust of teachers can be examined.

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