

Effect of Training About Child Neglect and Abuse to Teachers and Its Effect to Awareness

İskender GÜN (✉ iskender@erciyes.edu.tr)

Erciyes University

Adeviye ÇOPUR

Kayseri University

Elçin BALCI

Erciyes University

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Abstract

Background: This study aimed to evaluate the effects of child neglect and abuse training on the knowledge and awareness of medical vocational schoolteachers in Turkey.

Methods: This study was conducted with teachers from Kayseri, Turkey, between October 2016 and April 2017. Teachers who agreed to participate in the study received training on child neglect and abuse. Data were collected through a survey form and by the Scale for Identifying the Symptoms and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect. Data were analyzed through the software SPSS V.20.0. For statistical analyses, student's t test, analysis of variance and McNemar tests were performed, with $p < 0.05$ value being considered statistically significant.

Results: Of the teachers, 63.7% were female and 80.5% were married. Teachers' mean age was 40.5 ± 9.9 years. Of the teachers, 87.4% reported the training was adequate. Teachers' level of knowledge on neglect and abuse and the percentage of those who reported that they would report it to the authorities when faced with such a case increased after the training. Women teachers' scores for the neglect and abuse scale increased among those without children and who found the training adequate.

Conclusions: Teachers' knowledge level in the study group prior to the training was found higher. The subject of child neglect and abuse should be further discussed during teachers' formal training.

Background

Child neglect and abuse is a global and universal issue. This type of situation may cause physical, mental, sexual and social harm to the child and endanger his/her health and safety.^[1, 2] Child abuse is defined as any sort of maltreatment and attitude which may negatively affect the child's healthy growth and development, and may involve the harmful use of a child for all sorts of commercial interests.^[3]

Specifically, child abuse became a grave problem that has been increasing worldwide: According to data released by UNICEF, 42.0% of the students in Australia stated that they had been faced with child abuse.^[3] In Poland, 80.0% of the adults declared having already been victims of physical violence in their childhood.^[4]

In Turkey, the main factors resulting in an increase of the number of children exposed to neglect and abuse are described herein: The vast number of families with low socioeconomic status, the high population growth rate, the fact that individuals use violence as a way of discipline and the raising levels and rates for unemployment and immigration.^[5] Further, a study conducted in Turkey demonstrated that child abuse mostly occurs within the child's home, school and in the streets, and that the abusers are mostly fathers, teachers, mothers, friends and neighbors.^[6] When these children were asked to identify what type of abuse they witnessed, 56.0% reported witnessing physical abuse, 49.0% reported witnessing emotional abuse and 10.0% reported witnessing sexual abuse; however, these numbers changed when

they were asked about what type of abuse they experienced, as 25.0% reported experiencing neglect, 51.0% reported experiencing emotional abuse and 3% reported experienced sexual abuse.^[6]

Generally, child neglect and abuse may result in various injuries to the child, or even death; and children who carry on with their lives after an incident of abuse may experience several mental problems, and drug addiction, inclination towards crime and prostitution may be observed. ^[7] Further into the topic, children in early childhood who are exposed to neglect and abuse are more likely to abuse other children in their close environment when they become adults, thereby contributing to a vicious cycle (as this behavior passes on to coming generations): a previous study confirmed this affirmation, as mothers and fathers who have experienced abused early in their lives also abuse their own children, and the study makes a final statement to show that what really matters is children being safe from neglect, abuse and other types of harm.^[7]

To keep them safe, it is necessary to identify the symptoms of child neglect and abuse and to ensure that legal notices regarding this type of behavior are applied in accordance with legal procedures. Like other civil servants, teachers also have certain responsibilities regarding child abuse, and they are obliged to give a legal notice in case they witness such incidents.^[8, 9] Further, studies have shown that teachers play a crucial role regarding the recognition and cessation of child abuse because they often are the first professionals to have a long-term close relationship with children, and they communicate with children in this setting.^[1, 10] Thus, along with preventive efforts, teachers should also take on the task to identify children who are victim of abuse and report it to the relevant authorities.^[10, 11]

According to the legal regulations in Turkey, health professionals have particular liabilities concerning the legal notice of such cases;^[12] as health professionals take part at health institutions where there is a possibility of identifying children neglect and abuse, they are expected to be competent in this identification.^[2] Accordingly, since teachers at medical vocational schools raise and teach those who may become future health personnel, it is of significant importance that they are knowledgeable and qualified on the topic.

Methods

Aim: This study aimed to find out the effects of child neglect and abuse training on the knowledge and awareness of Turkish medical vocational schoolteachers.

Materials: This study was a descriptive study focusing on teachers working at medical vocational schools in Kayseri city, Turkey. In Turkey, medical vocational school's graduate assistant nurses. The study was carried out between October 2016 and April 2017. During the period of this study, there were 305 medical vocational teachers working in the city of Kayseri, and all were invited to participate. During data collection, ten were on a job leave, and 80 did not agree to participate in the study; these were either excluded from the study or did not participate at all, so the final sample comprised 215 teachers.

An unpublished study was conducted by the researcher between April and September 2016 to identify the levels of knowledge about child neglect and abuse of teachers working in Turkish private and public medical vocational high schools. Teachers who participated in the previously conducted study stated that they did not have enough knowledge to identify neglect and abuse and, if provided, they would like to participate in trainings related to the topic.

Thus, the researcher planned out a child neglect and abuse training for the same group. To increase their level of competence on the issue, an individual training on child neglect, types of abuse and the legal framework was received from the Forensic Medicine Department by one of researcher. Then, the researcher provided training on neglect and abuse to teachers within a through a structured program outlining the relevant topics of the subject matter, which was performed through a group working approach and took approximately 30 minutes. After the training, a questionnaire was applied by a face-to-face interview technique.

For data collection, a questionnaire with 15 questions containing the socioeconomic characteristics of the teachers and the Scale Form for Identifying the Symptoms and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect developed by Uysal^[13] was used. The scale was used with the permission of its owner.

Moreover, a validity-reliability study was performed for the aforementioned scale, which is a Likert-type scale consisting of 67 items. Its internal consistency was calculated, and we found a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.924. Scores closer to 5 meant more correct answers, and farther from 5 meant more incorrect answers. Participants who gave correct answers to all items received a full score of 335.

Collected data were evaluated through the software SPSS V 20.0. For statistical analyses, Student's t test, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the McNemar test were used, and results with a value of $P < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant.

Results

Teachers' mean age was 40.5 ± 9.9 years, and mean work experience was 15.7 ± 11.0 years. Further, teachers who were married, had children and had longer service periods were higher in number within public schools, while number of female teachers were higher in private medical vocational schools, and the difference was statistically significant.

Of the teachers, 87.4% stated that the researcher's training was enough; there was no significant difference regarding this topic between public and private schools.

The ratio of teachers who thought they had enough knowledge to recognize child neglect and abuse after the training increased from 40,9 to 82,3 percent, and the change was found to be statistically significant (Table 1).

Table 1

Teacher's status on whether they had adequate knowledge to identify child neglect and abuse before and after the training

Status on whether they had adequate knowledge to identify child neglect and abuse	Before Training		After Training	
	Number	%	Number	%
	Yes	88	40.9	177
No	127	59.1	38	17.7
Total	215	100.0	215	100.0
McNemar P < 0.001				

The ratio of teachers who thought they would give a legal notice when faced with child neglect and abuse after the training increased from 14,4 to 22,8 percent, and the change was found to be statistically significant (Table 2). The main reason of not give a legal notice was stated as lack of knowledge by teachers before training.

Table 2

Teacher's status on whether they would give a legal notice when faced with child neglect and abuse before and after training

Status on whether teachers would give a legal notice when faced with child neglect and abuse	Before Training		After Training	
	Number	%	Number	%
	Those who stated they would give a legal notice	31	14.4	49
Those who stated they would not	184	85.6	166	77.2
Total	215	100.0	215	100.0
McNemar P = 0.033				

Then, we evaluated teachers' total scores according to various variables, which showed that female teachers' total scores (258,3) were higher than those of male teachers (247,6), and the difference between genders was statistically significant. The total score of teachers who found the training was enough was high (255,9 versus 232,3), and the difference was statistically significant. Further, we evaluated teachers' total scores according to their work experience, age, and whether or not they had children or reported abuse, and there were no statistically significant differences. Teachers' having a child, giving a legal notice and under 35 years of age, had higher scores but not statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3
Teachers' overall total scores for the Scale Form for Identifying the Symptoms and Risks of Child Neglect and Abuse according to their demographic characteristics

		Overall Total Score		t	P
		Number	Mean ± SD		
Gender	Male	78	247.6 ± 23.7	-3.109	0.002
	Female	137	258.3 ± 24.6		
Having a child(ren)	Yes	165	253.7 ± 25.2	-0.736	0.304
	No	50	256.7 ± 23.1		
Giving a legal notice	Yes	49	259.7 ± 21.7	1.856	0.067
	No	166	252.9 ± 25.4		
Finding training adequate	Adequate	188	255.9 ± 24.8	2.491	0.014
	Inadequate	7	232.3 ± 18.8		
Work Experience	0–10	79	258.4 24.3	1.181	0.318
	11–20	39	251.2 23.6		
	21–30	80	252.9 25.5		
	31 and above	17	250.2 25.3		
Age	35 and below	72	258.0 22.8	1.510	0.132
	36 and above	143	252.6 25.6		

Discussion

Focusing on teachers working at medical vocational schools in the Kayseri city of Turkey, this study aimed to identify the effects of child neglect and abuse training on teachers' knowledge and awareness.

In Turkey, it has been reported that teachers receive limited training on child neglect and abuse during their formal training.^[14] However, a study conducted by Sagir and Gozler showed that Turkish teachers had a moderate level of knowledge about the topic, even if 89% of the participants reported not receiving any training on it.^[15] As supported by these studies, our results showed that teachers' knowledge on how to recognize child neglect and abuse was not sufficient: While 40.9% of the participants stated that they had enough knowledge to identify abuse before training, this rate increased to 82.3% after the training. Thus, it was observed that teachers' awareness regarding child neglect and abuse increased after training. We evaluated this change as the result of training.

Further, our results showed that, before the training, the rate of teachers who reported they would give a legal notice when faced with a case of child neglect and abuse was very low (14.4%); this rate raised to 22.8% after training. In Sagir and Gozler's study,^[15] 84.4% of the teachers thought that they should report cases of child neglect and abuse; in the study of Kurklu,^[16] this rate was at 85.9%. Kurklu's study showed that a lack of knowledge on the legal processes was the reason behind teachers not giving a legal notice when faced with such a situation.^[16] Similarly, our results showed that their reason for not giving a legal notice may be a lack of knowledge on the legal aspects of the issue. Contrastingly, in the study of Ozgul,^[17] almost all teachers and school administrators stated that they would give a legal notice in this regard. Uslu and Zincir^[2] performed a study with different occupational groups including teachers. Their findings also support this inference, and further examination of the reasons behind not giving a legal notice showed most teachers and school administrators were fearful of putting the child in a worse situation than their current one. Moreover, when the same reasons were examined in Tugay's study,^[18] results showed that they were similar to those of Uslu and Zincir's study: teachers were concerned for the child and feared that they could come to suffer even more after the legal notice because the child abuse would continue. Still in that topic, Kenny's study analyzed and compared trained and untrained teachers on whether or not they would give legal notices when faced with child neglect and abuse,^[19] and results showed that teachers who had received training before they started their teaching service gave more legal notices. Thus, in our study, since the ratios for teachers who would give legal notices indeed increased after the training, it is possible to say that these aforementioned studies corroborate to our results, mainly because they show that teachers' most common deficiencies in this specific topic may owe to the inadequacy of training during their university education and to their lack of knowledge on legal obligations and relevant legal procedures (these two being topics directly explored in our training).

When teachers' total scores for the Scale Form for Identifying the Symptoms and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect were examined, results showed that teachers' had a good level of knowledge on the topic after the training. In studies with health care workers, it was observed that the scores of participants who had received training increased after the training.^[20, 21] Moreover, in a study conducted by Uysal and Ozsoy,^[22] they showed that the mean scores of teachers with in-service training were significantly higher. Moreover, our results that showed teachers evaluated the training as 'enough' also supports this assumption that more trained teachers are more able to identify the symptoms of child abuse and neglect.

Our analyses also showed that that the total scores of female teachers were higher than those of male teachers. Demir,^[23] in her study with physicians, reported that female physicians had higher levels of knowledge about child neglect and abuse. Even the studies performed in different occupational groups; this can be explained by the fact that women may be more aware of children's concerns and behaviors as they spend more time with them.

Moreover, when participants' total scores were analyzed according to whether or not they had children, the total score averages and overall total scores of those without children were higher. Some researchers

performed studies using the Scale Form for Identifying the Symptoms and Risks of Child Abuse and Neglect. Demir^[23] in physicians, Kocaeli^[24] in nurses and physicians, Kara^[25] in physicians and Yilmaz^[26] in nurses as study groups. Corroborating, those studies have shown that those who do not have children scored higher in the scale.^[23-26] Thus, people who have children, even when indifferent professions, may be more inclined to see certain abusive and/or negligent behaviors as normal behaviors in the disciplining and education of their children.

Conclusion

In sum, teachers' knowledge levels on child neglect and abuse significantly increased after training. Accordingly, an intervention program should be developed and applied within the Turkish national education system to help teachers identify incidents of child neglect and abuse. Further, there is a special need for the development and appliance of such scheme in the settings of Turkish schools that train health personnel, so neglect and abuse in these settings to ensure future health workers have the tact and the knowledge to recognize and act in such occurrences, mainly owing to their level of responsibility as being one of the first close contacts between children and adults outside their families in Turkey - and many countries worldwide.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate:

For this study, ethical approval was obtained from Erciys University Clinical Research Ethical Committee (Ethical approval number 2016/531), and institutional approval was obtained from authorities.

All participants were previously informed about the study, gave their written and signed consent and filled the questionnaire accordingly.

We confirm that all methods were performed in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations.

Consent for publication:

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials:

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests:

There is no competing interest in this study.

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Authors' contributions:

İ. G: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - original draft

A. Ç: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Resources, Writing - original draft

E. B: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - review & editing

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