

An Emphatic Perspective: How Do Pre-School and Classroom Teacher Candidates Interpret Child Abuse and Neglect?

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of teacher candidates regarding child abuse and neglect as well as propose preventive measures. Utilizing a phenomenological design, a qualitative research method, the study focuses on understanding the unique experiences of individuals. The sample was selected through purposive random sampling and homogeneous sampling techniques. Data was gathered from 13 participants, including 7 elementary education candidates and 6 pre-school education candidates, at the Faculty of Education of a public university in Turkey during the 2018-2019 academic year. The participants' work was analyzed using "content and descriptive analysis" methods.

The study found that teacher candidates depicted child abuse and neglect as "a distressing situation that makes children unhappy." In their drawings, they predominantly used black to represent abused children, while abusers were symbolized through metaphors such as "dirty, darkened hands." The research demonstrated that the teacher candidates were capable of defining child abuse, understanding its various forms, empathizing with the emotions of abused children, and proposing potential solutions.

Keywords: Child abuse, neglect, classroom teaching, pre-school teaching, teacher candidates.

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Introduction

Child abuse and neglect, which remain latent since victims are unable to express or are unaware of the situation, increasingly continue in Turkey and around the world as a crucial social scar of humanity. For a radical solution, the issue needs to be studied from a holistic perspective, including disciplines like social services, law, security, education, health, etc. To present the problem clearly, it is first necessary to understand child abuse, its types, and its effects. **Child Abuse and Its Types**

The first medical definition of child abuse was made by Ambres Tardieu (1860), who compiled the autopsy findings of 32 children abused sexually and physically. In 1946, Caffey defined "Caffey Syndrome"; in 1961, Kempe defined "Battered Child Syndrome". Sexual abuse was noticed in the 1970s, and that emotional abuse was as important as the other two became a common view after the 1980s. Garbarino and Gilliam noted, in 1980, that inappropriate and detrimental behaviors towards kids required to be identified by experts (Acehan, Bilen, Ay, et al., 2013). Today, child abuse is defined differently in various contexts. According to the World Health Organization [WHO], it is any type of exploitative behavior that harms persons under the age of 18 and impairs their physical, social, and emotional development (WHO, 2014). Any conscious or unconscious behavior by adults toward children harms their psyche, impairs their development, and is labeled inappropriate by experts. Child abuse can be studied in four main categories: "physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect" (Polat, 2016).

Physical abuse is adults' conscious or unconscious harming of children to punish or discipline them. That parents or adults responsible for the child's care use force on the child, causing observable physical damage or injury, can be defined as physical abuse. Bruises, bite marks, belt/rope wounds, or cigarette burns on a child's face, lips, or different body parts can be signs of physical abuse (Daignault & Herbert, 2009). Holding firmly, pressurizing, convulsing, biting, or scratching can also be considered physical abuse. Emotional abuse is the actions or inactions of adults or peers that damage a child's personality development (Taner & Gökler, 2004). Relevant behaviors are "frightening, intimidating, threatening, leading to crime, neglecting emotional needs, rejecting, humiliating, isolating, and separating". Since this kind of abuse includes verbal abuse or extreme rules and desires that cause psychological development to pause, it may harm a child's personality and lead to behavior disorders (Polat, 2013). *Sexual abuse* is a situation where a child is exposed to sexuality by force or persuasion. Sexual abuse involves sexual assault through violence, abuse without sexual contact (verbal abuse, obscene speeches, making a child witness sexual intercourse, exhibitionism, and voyeurism), or a child's exposure to sexual contact/subject (forcing to prostitute, subjecting to obscene publications) (Kaytez, Yücelyigit & Kadan, 2018). Child neglect can be defined as the negligence of families, relevant institutions, or the government in discharging primary liabilities towards a child. In other words, a child's needs such as nurture, shelter, care, hygiene, health, education, play, and security, which are necessary for physical, emotional, and social development, are not fulfilled. Mocking or humiliating

the child, overexpectations, overprotection, making the child dependent, using extreme authority, using strict punishment inconvenient for the child's behaviors, using violence even without marks, indifference to physical needs such as food, clothes, medicine, emotional needs, or needs for optimal living conditions can be considered child neglect (Kocaer, 2006). Abuse is an active concept, while neglect is passive. The main distinction is that children are exposed to undesirable behaviors in abuse, whereas they lack the expected behaviors in neglect (Taner & Gökler, 2004). No matter how violent or what kind, abuse affects kids adversely. Therefore, support is necessary to prevent them from experiencing the same situation again and suffering from trauma. Moreover, for public health, situation assessments should be made for child abuse, and measures should be discussed to prevent these cases.

Research Problem/Literature Review

Child abuse prevention is a crucial legal issue. The international legal framework for this issue was first addressed in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this convention, state parties are required to take all legal, administrative, social and educational measures against violence, mental or physical assault, abandonment or neglect, maltreatment, and sexual abuse against children (Kepenekçi, 2001). In Türkiye, the protection of the child is guaranteed in the 1982 Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child has force of law in the judicial system. In cases of violation of children's rights and abuse, the trial procedures are explained in Criminal Procedure Law No. 5271 dated 2004, and the issues related to the prevention of the violation and the elimination of its negative consequences are explained in Social Services Institution Law No. 2828 dated 1983. In accordance with the relevant provisions of the Turkish Penal Code [TCK] (278/1, 279/1, 280/1), while it is the state's responsibility to punish perpetrators, individuals who witness crimes, as well as all public employees, are obligated to report instances of abuse they encounter. Despite the national and international legal regulations, statistics indicate that the rate of abuse is increasing in the world, especially cases involving individuals under 18. However, it is predicted that only 5% of abusers are exposed and 95% remain anonymous (Polat, 2016).

Child abuse and neglect are serious global problems. According to the 2016 dated report of the World Health Organization, 25% of all adults were physically abused when they were children, 20% of all women, and about 8% of all men were sexually abused when they were children (WHO, 2016); according to the 2022 dated report, about 3 out of 4 children aged 2-4 —or 300 million children —are regularly subjected to corporal punishment and/or psychological violence by their parents and caregivers. The report shows that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men were sexually abused when they were children aged 0-17, and that 120 million girls and young women under 20 experienced some form of forced sexual intercourse. The report points out that the consequences of child maltreatment can lead to lifelong physical and mental health deterioration, while the social consequences can ultimately slow down a country's economic and social development (WHO, 2022).

In their study evaluating the systematic compilation of child abuse and neglect studies in the world between 2005-2015; Sari, Ardahan and Oztornaci (2016) presented that researchers mainly studied neglect and abuse together and noted that there was little research on emotional and sexual abuse, intervention and relationship identification. Consequently, they suggested that investments in knowledge improvement, early intervention and prevention should be increased for public health by collaborating with the health, social services, security, education, and justice systems.

Child abuse is a prevalent and significant social issue in Türkiye, as it is throughout the rest of the world. In a study conducted at Ege University's Child Protection Unit, which examined 89 children diagnosed with abuse between 2009 and 2010, it was discovered that 24.7% of the children experienced physical abuse, 49.4% suffered from sexual abuse, 11.2% were subjected to emotional abuse, and 14.6% faced neglect (Koç, Aksit, Tomba, et al., 2012). UNICEF's Research on Child Abuse and Domestic Violence in Turkey (2010) revealed that 25% of kids in the 7-18 age group were exposed to neglect at school and home, 43% experienced physical abuse, 51% experienced emotional abuse, and 3% experienced sexual abuse. All the kids in the study —regardless of age, gender, or region —were exposed to abuse at home, school, and on the streets. The abusers were respectively a father, teacher, mother, friend, and neighbour. Moreover, many kids reported having experienced physical and emotional abuse by teachers at school.

In the Turkish Statistical Institute's [TUIK] 21 July 2020 dated report on Statistics on Children Arriving or Brought to Security Units, it is stated that the number of incidents involving children arriving or brought to security units increased by 5.8% in 2019 compared to 2018, reaching 511,247. TUIK observed that 2487 girls and 1124 boys aged 0-11, 3688 girls and 563 boys aged 12-14, and 8460 girls and 518 boys aged 15-17 suffered from sexual abuse in Turkey by 2016. Furthermore, the number of child victims was 74064 in 2014 and 83552 in 2016. It was also determined that there were a total of 2818 news stories on child abuse in Turkish media (Hürriyet, 2020). In addition, it was revealed that 11% of sexual abuse victims in Turkey were aged 0-5, 15% 6-15 and 13% 12-17, and 90 of these cases were not reported to judicial authorities (Cumhuriyet, 2020). Tacyildiz (2013), emphasizing the subject, identified that as abused children's age increased, their probability of exposure to more than one type of abuse also increased. Copur et al. (2012) revealed in their study that girls (87%) were exposed to sexual abuse more often, and 80% of abusers were family members, relatives or acquaintances; and recommended that studies with different samples should be conducted for preventive measures. Aydın (2019) emphasizes that the reported figures on the prevalence of abuse and neglect may not accurately represent the true extent of the issue. There could be unreported cases that are not reflected in police and judicial records due to factors such as the influence of traditions, customs, and social pressure. These results indicate that prevention of child abuse and protection of children fall upon policymakers, and raising awareness and educating the society fall upon educators.

To prevent child abuse and neglect, it is important that educators first learn how to protect children (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). Teachers must receive proper training

and participate in a child protection program to increase their sensitivity and awareness (Goldman, 2005; Goldman & Grimbeek, 2011). Bozgun and Pekdogan (2018) note that quality education and counseling are important to prevent child abuse and neglect, and educational institutions and educators have essential roles in this matter. At this point, it is important to investigate how teachers perceive abuse. Sagir and Gozler (2013), in their study with classroom teachers, indicated that 79,1% of teachers did not receive any training on child abuse and neglect, 75,8% were never informed about child protection law, and 76,1% needed information on the subject. In her study with pre-school teachers, Saribas (2013) presented that teachers' awareness level for signs of physical abuse was higher compared to that of emotional and sexual abuse. Dereobali, Cirak-Karadag and Sönmez (2013), in their study with pre-school teachers, expressed that 35% of teachers encountered kids exposed to violence and 8% received training on abuse in their professional lives; however, only 4, 91% thought that they needed education on the subject. Erdogan and Aslan (2020) state that pre-school teachers show awareness regarding child abuse and neglect and have relevant knowledge, but it is inadequate. Teachers think that children are abused and neglected mostly at home by those responsible for their care. Ayes-Aslan and Celik (2020) recommend that abuse should be included in the curriculum and that in-service trainings be offered for teachers to recognize its signs. They also note that the Ministry of National Education [MEB] and the Council of Higher Education [YOK] need to develop common education programs for the subjects to be dealt with at each educational level.

Can-Yasar, Inal-Kiziltepe and Kandir (2014) examined how prospective teachers interpreted physical abuse and discovered that about 40% of the participants did not recognise signs of physical abuse. Can Yasar, Senol and Akyol (2013) investigated the attitudes of teacher trainees in preschool, teaching, social science, Turkish, and information technology subjects regarding child abuse and found that 78.6% of the participants were not aware of the "child protection law" and 34.6% were not sure whether they would notice signs of sexual abuse. Fayez, Takash, and Al-Zboon (2014) found that the majority of trainee educators did not rely on their ability to recognize child abuse and they attributed the responsibility of recognizing and reporting abuse to the school administration or a mental health counselor. Goldman and Grimbeek's (2011) study revealed that trainee teachers need to be informed about child protection and relevant regulations. In Karabiyikli (2017) study, 37% of teacher candidates enrolled in pre-school teaching and psychological counseling and guidance programs at Girne American University considered themselves adequate and 25% considered themselves partially adequate on child abuse and neglect. The researcher, emphasizing that 37% was an unsatisfactory result noted that undergraduate programs should be arranged to raise awareness and levels of knowledge regarding child abuse and neglect so that teacher candidates could perform their profession effectively. Savi-Cakar and Yazici-Okuyan (2017) studied the opinions of senior students in different faculty of education programs. They identified that prospective teachers' knowledge and skills regarding the recognition, prevention and intervention processes of child abuse were inadequate. They were unaware of their roles and responsibilities under relevant laws and regulations. Besides, they stated that participants were well aware of their lack of knowledge and

willing to participate in related studies. These results show that studies and practices on child abuse and neglect are required in teacher training institutions.

Considering the numbers and rates of child abuse and the above research findings, it is acknowledged that the awareness of preschool and classroom teacher candidates should be raised during their studies to prevent incidents of abuse. Bakır and Kapucu (2017), who reviewed studies on child neglect and abuse in Turkey between 1995 and 2016, highlight that the research is generally descriptive in nature. They emphasize the importance of developing multidisciplinary team projects to design effective child abuse prevention and intervention programs. Beyazıt (2015) states that in the studies on child abuse between 1998-2013, the researchers mainly conducted studies on the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of child abuse, so qualitative studies should also be conducted. Highlighting that the number of studies on child abuse has increased recently, Şeker and Çubuk (2021), who examined 81 postgraduate studies from different fields (Psychology, Pediatrics, Public Health, Education and Training, Statistics, Dentistry, Public Administration, Literature, Sociology, Family Medicine, International Relations, Radio-TV-Newspaper, Social Work, Forensic Medicine, Nursing, Law), also stated that educational researchers focus on child abuse more than other fields. Similarly, they emphasize that the number of qualitative studies is low. When the above studies are evaluated in general, it is understood that it is crucial to raise the awareness of educators and teachers about child abuse. Based on these findings, the current study, which examines the awareness and sensitivity of teacher candidates about child abuse, was designed according to a qualitative research design. The research findings are expected to inform what should be done by teacher education institutions and policymakers to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to assess child abuse and neglect from the perspective of teacher candidates and offer preventive solutions. The study sought to understand how preschool and classroom teacher candidates who were highly sensitive to child abuse and neglect and wanted to develop appropriate solutions through research expressed their emotions through imagery with subsequent interpretations and what level of consciousness they reached.

The study aimed to address three sub-questions concerning the teacher candidates' perspectives on child abuse and neglect:

What types of metaphors did the teacher candidates employ in their illustrations to represent child abuse and neglect?

How did the teacher candidates assess the issue of child abuse and neglect?

What preventive measures did the teacher candidates propose to combat child abuse and neglect?

Method

Research Design

The study is based on the qualitative research method. The purpose is to acquire detailed information to comprehend the case, individual, or phenomenon in question by seeking an answer to “how, why?” questions instead of measuring quantitative features (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In these studies, researchers generally examine a phenomenon or case in its natural environment, understand the meanings attached by people, and assess the situation from the participants’ viewpoint (Creswell, 2014). This study utilised phenomenological research, enabling participants’ opinions to be directly reflected (Punch, 2014). Phenomenology, a research approach based on both philosophical and psychological perspectives, is a research design that examines reality based on individual perspectives and experiences against the positivist paradigm. In this type of research, the perspective formed by individual experiences is taken as the starting point, and it is philosophically important to reveal the individual reality clearly and accurately (Ersoy, 2019: 82). In this study, which employed a phenomenological research design, the opinions of participants with a high level of awareness about child abuse were gathered. These participants had witnessed incidents of child abuse and neglect and demonstrated sensitivity towards the issue..

Phenomenological research is examined in the literature in two parts: “descriptive and interpretive phenomenology”. The main aim of the former is to describe participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding a phenomenon. In contrast, the latter tries to present participants’ relevant experiences, perceptions, attached meanings and levels of awareness they reach as a result of their experiences. Interpretive phenomenology focuses on examining the meanings embedded in individuals’ life experiences. This approach goes beyond simply defining concepts and their attributes, seeking a deeper understanding of the experiences themselves (Ersoy, 2019: 88-89). This study aimed to understand what level of awareness teacher candidates reached by researching child abuse and neglect, and attending discussions to express their opinions on abuse.

Participants

In qualitative research, methods like maximum variation, homogeneous, snowball, convenience, critical, and criterion sampling can be used (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). The sample this study was constituted through purposive random sampling and homogeneous sampling. The latter method is preferred to focus on the subject in question, decrease diversity, simplify analysis, and make group interviews easier; the former method is preferred to decrease prejudice, and increase credibility and reliability (Baltacı, 2018). The phenomenon of this study is “child abuse and neglect”. In phenomenological studies, participants must have experience with the phenomenon or contact with those having experience (Rolfe, 2006). In phenomenological research, when it is desired to reach the common experiences of a group regarding a phenomenon, the homogeneous sampling method can be used (Ersoy, 2019). The sample is selected from

those who have experienced or observed the phenomenon (teachers, prisoners, abuse victims, etc.) (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Since young children are the most vulnerable to abuse, it is possible that preschool and classroom teachers or aspirants may be indirectly affected by forms of abuse. In addition, female teachers may have a female perspective. Accordingly, the aim was to seek the opinions and impressions of female aspirants when the sample was formed, which consisted of 7 senior students (1CT-21, 2CT-21, 3CT-21, 4CT-21, 5CT-22, 6CT-21, 7CT-21) from the field of teaching and 6 junior students (1PS-20, 2PS-21, 3PS-20, 4PS-21, 5PS-22, 6PS-21) from the field of preschool teaching candidates at the faculty of education of a public university in Türkiye in the academic year 2018-2019. The researcher, who is a doctoral graduate of educational administration and classroom teaching, had the opportunity to get to know the teacher candidates closely while teaching courses such as "Children's literature, Visual Arts Teaching" in the classroom teaching and preschool teaching programs at the faculty where she worked. The researcher believes that in order to raise awareness about child abuse and violations, various aspects of the issue should be discussed in faculties of education. During the lectures, the researcher stated to the teacher candidates that they would make a study on "child abuse and neglect" by drawing pictures and after the study, "various aspects of the issue shall be discussed". The researcher realized that the female teacher candidates who witnessed cases of child abuse and neglect and followed this issue in the media were more sensitive to it. Since the researcher expected the teacher candidates to produce solutions while taking their opinions on child abuse and neglect into account, she included 13 female participants in the study group who were sensitive about child abuse and neglect, could express their opinions verbally and in writing, could easily convey their feelings and thoughts in front of the public, had high empathy and abstract thinking skills, could make paintings by using different techniques and develop metaphors, and could convey opinions on child abuse and neglect.

Research Instrument and Procedure

Qualitative studies serve to provide deep, detailed, and multidimensional information on participants' viewpoints, experiences, interests, tendencies, thoughts, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and habits regarding a subject (Punch, 2014). In these studies, data can be obtained through observation, documents, interviews, and focus group interviews (Lune & Berg, 2017). Various documents that suit the purpose of the study, including all sources such as texts, pictures, advertisements, agendas, records, meeting notes, letters, artworks, and photo albums that were recorded without the researcher's interference, can be considered data (Labuschagne, 2003). Although interviewing is the main data collection technique in phenomenological research, different data collection techniques such as observation, visual tools, and written materials can be utilized (Ersoy, 2019).

Focus group interviews, one of the interview methods, are also preferred methods in sociology and educational research (Creswell, 2014). This method provides comprehensive information and ideas during discussions between a small group and its leader (Culley, Hudson & Rapport, 2007). The data of this study consisted of teacher candidates' paintings, explanations of how they expressed abuse in colors, figures etc.,

and relevant opinions that they asserted during focus group interviews. Four focus group interviews were held with classroom and pre-school teacher candidates separately on different dates. In a preliminary meeting, participants were first informed about the study and asked to research various sources about child abuse. In the second interview, they were asked to present their opinions and impressions about child abuse using various techniques. In the third interview, the trainee teachers explained the reasons for the colors, figures and shapes they had used in their paintings and shared their feelings and thoughts on the subject. In the fourth and final interview, 8 questions were asked of the participants and their relevant opinions and recommendations were sought.

In phenomenological research, the interview process involves communication and interaction, with both the researcher and the participants serving as active elements in the exchange. The interview can be conducted by preparing semi-structured questions determined by the researcher to gather the participants' conversations at a certain point and to ensure that they focus on the topic without distracting from the context. The interviews are conducted so that the participants can share their perspectives on the context. In phenomenological research, it is recommended that the interview duration should be approximately 45-90 minutes, the semi-structured interview questions to be applied to the participants should consist of 6-10 questions on average, and the questions should be used after piloting (Ersoy, 2019: 113). In this study, the researcher, who gave importance to interacting with the participants during each focus group interview, determined the interview duration to be 60 minutes including preliminary preparation to avoid boredom.

Before the interviews, the researcher prepared 8 open-ended questions to enable the participants to focus on the context, received the opinion of 2 expert academicians to confirm the validity, reliability and comprehensibility of these questions, and piloted the questions. The questions were as follows: "What is child abuse? (1), What are the types of child abuse? (2), How can we notice that a child is abused? (3), What type of abuse affects children the most? (4), How do abused children feel? (5), What should you do when you recognize child abuse? (6), What should you pay attention to while communicating with an abused child as a teacher? (7), What do you recommend to prevent child abuse? (8)."

Given the sensitive nature of abuse, participants in this study were not comfortable being recorded. To facilitate open and pressure-free discussions about abuse, the participants were informed that their lived and observed experiences were of significant importance. When the drawing activities were completed, the interviews began. Before each interview, the participants were given 20 minutes to prepare to talk about abuse. During this time, the interview forms were distributed to the participants and it was emphasized that it was important for them to focus on the questions in the interview form. The participants wrote down their opinions and thoughts based on their experiences while preparing for the talk. During the focus group interviews, which lasted an average of 40 minutes, all the participants answered the questions by following their individual notes, and when they developed new ideas, the ideas developed by each participant

were recorded in writing. At the end of the sessions, the results were evaluated together. The researcher summarized the participant comments and asked the group if they wanted to add or remove anything.

Data Analysis

In this study, when the sessions were completed, the participants' drawings and metaphorical explanations about the drawings and their answers to the questions asked by the researcher were evaluated as data. Data review in phenomenological studies aims to uncover experiences and meanings. In qualitative research, data is analyzed through the processes of data collection, elimination, inference, and verification. Techniques such as descriptive, content are used (Patton, 2014). Document review is a qualitative research method that meticulously investigates written documents or visuals (Wach, 2013). Content analysis in qualitative studies enables data variation and thus contributes to reliability, data resources are interpreted and examined systematically and objectively to reveal patterns, themes, judgments, and meanings (Lune & Berg, 2017). The process involves four steps: 'coding the data, creating themes, arranging the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the results'. Descriptive analysis makes it possible to quote the opinions of the participants (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). In this study, the teacher candidates' images and interpretations were analyzed through document analysis, and their opinions in the focus group interviews were analyzed through content and descriptive analysis. The researcher tried to understand what kind of metaphors the teacher candidates used in their drawings and how they interpreted them. She first presented the participants' drawings and their interpretations under the findings part. Secondly, she carefully read the opinions conveyed by the teacher candidates during the interviews, analyzed them through the content analysis technique, presented the results by putting them into tables in themes and subcategories with frequency values, and interpreted them. She quoted the participants' opinions on each theme to provide examples of their interpretations of abuse. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, codes such as "1PS-20 and 1CT-21" were used, each referring to their sequence number, degree program, and age. In the data analysis, the participants' study programs were indicated as PS (preschool) and CT (classroom teaching), while the codes in the tables were indicated as P1...P6 for preschool and C1...C7 for classroom teaching.

Validity and Reliability

This study was intended to ensure credibility, consistency, transferability, and objectivity. For credibility (internal validity) in qualitative studies, it is important to relate findings to facts. For this purpose, it is necessary that participants' perspectives are comprehended and presented, and a holistic interpretation is reached for their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Different methods, data resources and cross-check are strategies for increasing internal validity in qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, participants' paintings on child abuse and neglect and their interpretations were analyzed, and relevant opinions were asked in focus group interviews. Before application, phenomena regarding study context were researched, and long-term

interaction with participants was given importance to enable them to express themselves comfortably during application (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Creswell, 2014). To ensure honesty, participation was based on voluntariness. After painting analysis, a participant requested to withdraw, and her work and opinions were descoped, so the study was completed with 13 female teacher candidates.

For internal reliability in qualitative research, findings and interpretations should be presented consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this study, themes revealed from different data collection and analysis processes were intended to be presented from a comprehensive and holistic perspective (Silverman & Masti, 2008). The researcher trying to ensure transferability criteria for external validity completed the study considering issues like working environment, data collection methods, data resources, sample group, and number of focus group interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Shenton, 2004). Teacher candidates' paintings with interpretations and statements during focus group interviews were utilized as data resources and analyzed using various methods. Data obtained from 13 female participants was themed and presented in tables. In painting analysis, participants were requested to interpret their own work so that they could express their feelings in both verbal and written forms. In tables, participants are presented in codes (PS: Preschool and CT; Classroom Teaching). In order to keep participants excerpts, codes like "1PS-20 and 1CT-21" were used. The researcher kept all the data and codes in case reconsideration was needed.

The Role of the Researcher

Before conducting the study, the researcher informed participants about the context and purpose of the research. Addressing ethical concerns, the researcher emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. The researcher keeping track of the application was attentive to interactions with teacher candidates and the teacher (Merriam, 2013). It is important in qualitative studies that data obtained from small groups be presented correctly and objectively with an interpretive approach without generalization (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In this study, the researcher conducted a neutral evaluation of the participants' paintings, along with their interpretations and responses in focus group interviews. The findings were presented without generalization and with the use of codes to maintain confidentiality. During data analysis, the researcher employed constant comparison and systematic relational methods with an inductive approach (Punch, 2014). After generating the initial codes, the researcher re-examined the interview results and established the themes. By maintaining an objective attitude throughout the study, the researcher strived to present the results impartially.

Findings

Findings are presented in three themes: "paintings on child abuse and their analysis, opinions shared on child abuse, and solutions developed to prevent child abuse."

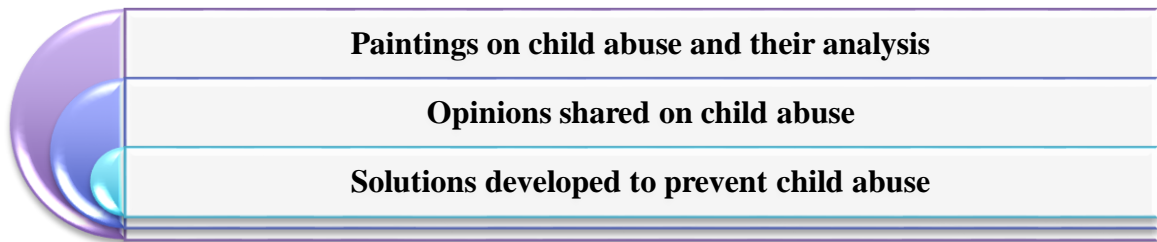


Figure 1. Findings (Themes)

Paintings on Child Abuse and Their Analysis

Paintings and analyses are presented below for pre-school (Table 1) and classroom teacher candidates (Table 2).

Table 1.

Painting Analyses of Pre-school Teacher Candidates



I used a gray-blue background. Victims are surrounded by gray, other parts are blue, it represents their different worlds. Child abuse is first thought of as sexual; other types are neglected or even not considered abuse. 1PS-20



I used a girl figure and especially painted her black because I wanted to emphasize that her life is darkened every time an abused child is touched. With the red circle and line, I wanted to say-DON'T TOUCH!-1PS-1PS-20



I have used dark colors to represent pain and sorrow. I used a red cross to represent bad behavior. I wanted abuse and neglect to stop. In the child's thought bubble, I pasted images of abuse on black. To reflect her psyche, I drew a sad face with tears. 2PS-21



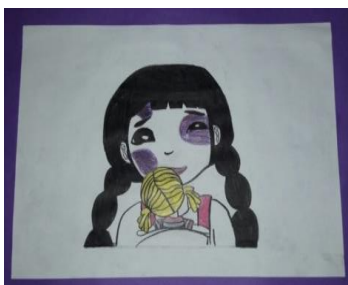
I drew an unhappy, abused child. I emphasised the negativities in the shadows around the child, making him upset. I used black to reflect darkness, unhappiness, sorrow and the evil done. 3PS-20



I meant a child can be abused by anyone, anywhere. I used red, black and white on an orange background to make it stand out. The hands represent abusive people. I painted their heads black because the abuse deeply affects their psyche and causes damage. 4PS-21



I drew a white hand in the center, it gets darker gradually. The child is walking with his back turned. The hand belongs to an adult using violence. I did it to emphasize parents' effects on kids because they have been together since birth. 5PS-22



I drew a girl with bruises on her face and a doll in her arms. There is sorrow and fear in her look. No child should face abuse. Let them smile and play. Let them play, live like children and laugh all the time. 6PS-21

In Table 1, it can be seen that 1PS-20, who had two works, in the first painting painted the child's surroundings in gray and used the "hand metaphor" (child laborer, prisoner, bride, etc.) to draw attention to child abuse; and in the second painting painted a girl in black and used red lines because she did not want her to be touched. 2PS-21 also used dark tones representing sadness and pain in her girl figure, and put a red cross on abusive behaviors to prevent them. 3PS-20 expressing an abused child's unhappiness uses black to reflect the kid's psychology (misery, worry) and the evil done. 4PS-21 depicted abused kids with "black heads" to emphasize the deep scars caused by abuse. Moreover, with black hands highlighted by red frames surrounding the kids, she drew attention to the fact that that abuse could be from anyone, close or distant. 5PS-22 also painted abused kids in black and used "black hand" to highlight physical abuse. 6PS-21 drew a physically abused girl with bruises and emphasized that families and society were responsible for children's happiness. This study found that trainee educators had an emphatic view of child abuse, which they rated as "a disturbing situation that makes children unhappy". It was observed that they used black when depicting abused children, emphasized the types of abuse with "dark hands reaching the children" and preferred red to emphasize the need to prevent abuse. Similarly, it was observed in the works of classroom teacher candidates that they mostly used "black" to symbolize children's unhappiness and darkened worlds, depicted abusers with "dark/dirty hands" and child victims adversely affected by the experience as "dark figures". The relevant analyses are presented below.

Table 2.

Painting Analyses of Classroom Teacher Candidates



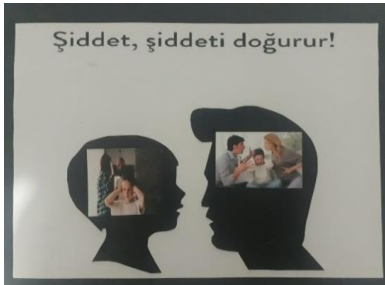
I actually halved the paper with a tree. In half of the tree, branches are filled with leaves, while in the other half, they are dead. The former represents the world kids need to have. 1CT-21



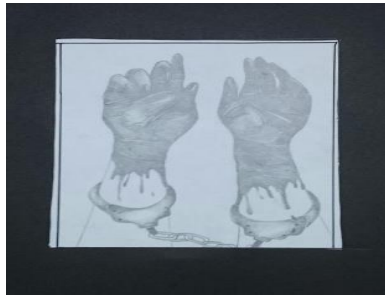
Big black hands are abusers' dirty hands. Kids are in light and colour to fight against the dark. They have hopes for the future. Every negativity leaking in their light is black. 2CT-21



Big hands belong to abusers, small hands to kids avoiding touch, raising hands to react, and saying no (even though it is hardly possible). Unfortunately, our kids, unaware of what is going on, do not know how to react. 2CT-21



I emphasized the psychological and emotional abuse/neglect that an individual experienced in childhood due to interparental conflict, which would settle in the child's consciousness and they might do the same to others. 3CT-21



I imagined how the situations kids may may affect their lives , and how they struggle. I think abusers (either foreigners or family) with such effects on life must be punished, so I drew the abuser's hands as handcuffed. 4CT-21



I used different techniques and crayons for different emotions. I depicted two worlds, one surrounded by black and the other by colours. I drew maps with a black marker in the former and with a colored marker in the latter. 5CT-22



I depicted the girl as unhappy; she lost interest in her environment, felt responsible for what she experienced, and saw only the negative events she had when she looked around. Hands have two meanings. 6CT-21



I have highlighted the abuse and its effects. I used black, gray and white because abuse darkens children's worlds and turns them into shades of black. Behaviors that children are exposed to permanently affect their lives. 7CT-21

As can be seen in Table 2, 1CT-21 used the "spring-winter metaphor" in her black painting, emphasizing that the abused children were deprived of the world of childhood (spring-like sprouting branches); they were confined like innocent prisoners in an unprotected world (winter-dry tree) and left vulnerable (vulnerable to lightning). She depicted abused kids with shackles on their feet and highlighted child innocence with kids running and playing like birds and butterflies, unaware of everything. 3CT-21 interpreted abuse as violence against a child and used black to emphasize the situation affecting the child emotionally. 5CT-22, who drew attention to two different worlds for children as happy and unhappy, tried to reflect abused and neglected children's psychology with black colours, unlike those enjoying their colourful worlds. 6CT-21, who used black to emphasize abuse darkening children's worlds, drew "an unhappy girl feeling guilty and withdrawn" to show the negative effects of abuse on a child. In the "tightly held hands" metaphor representing all kinds of violence and coercion against kids, she remarked on kids' powerlessness and need to be informed and protected against abuse. 2CT-21, another participant using the "black hand metaphor" in her first painting, drew kids like rainbows surrounded by light in the abuser's "dirty palms". She expressed that abusers who hit children took away their motivation to stay alive, like chopping saplings that would grow and sprout. In her second picture, 2CT-21 emphasized the importance of "teaching children to say no" by drawing "big hands for the abuser and small hands for the child who did not want to be touched". 4CT-21 also used "handcuffed, muddy, dirty hands" in black to symbolize the abuser and, with the handcuffs, emphasized that abusers must be punished. Similarly, 7CT-21 used the "black hand" metaphor for the abuser, and a dark child figure to point out that abused children were withdrawn and unhappy, estranging themselves from the outside world. The study evaluated teacher candidates' paintings and explanations on how they expressed abuse in colors and figures, and relevant opinions during focus group interviews as data. The paintings indicated that preschool teacher candidates had an emphatic perspective towards child abuse and considered it "a distressing situation that makes kids unhappy". They used black while depicting abused children, highlighted types of abuse with "dark hands reaching the kids" and preferred red to emphasize the necessity to prevent abuse. Likewise, it was observed in the works of classroom teacher candidates that they mostly used "black" to symbolize children's unhappiness and darkened worlds, depicted abusers with "dark/dirty hands" and child victims adversely affected by the experience as "dark figures".

Opinions Shared on Child Abuse

In the second topic, teacher candidates answered, "What is child abuse? (1), What are the types of child abuse? (2), How can we tell that a child is being abused? (3), What type of abuse affects a child the most? (4), and How do abused children feel? (5)" in the focus group interviews were explored in 5 sub-dimensions (Table 3).

Table 3.

Opinions of Teacher Candidates on Child Abuse

Themes and categories	Frequency (f)	Preschool Teachers	Classroom Teachers
1. What is child abuse?			
Attitudes and behaviors against child's will, hindering his/her development	11	P1, P2, P4, P3, P6,	C1, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
Harm is deliberately done by an immediate circle or strangers	7	P2, P3, P4, P5, 06	C1, C2
2. What are the types of child abuse?			
Physical abuse	13	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
Emotional abuse	13	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
Sexual abuse	13	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
Neglect	12	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C2, C3, C5, C6, C7
3. How can we notice that a child is abused?			
Physical symptoms (wound, burn, cut, bruise etc.) can be seen.	9	P1, P2, P3, P4	C2, C3, C5, C6, C7
Emotional changes (indifference, shyness, ill-temper or withdrawal etc.) can be observed.	9	P1, P3, P4, P6	C1, C3, C4, C6, C7
Signs of fear (dislike to be touched, tics, uneasiness etc.) can be observed.	4	P1, P2	C1, C6
They can be observed to have more knowledge about sexual matters than their peers.	1	P1	-
Their paintings (colors, figures etc.) may give clues.	4	P2, P5, P6	C3
A decrease in academic success can be seen.	1	P6	-
4. What type of abuse affects the child the most?			
Sexual abuse	8	P3, P5, P6	C1, C3, C5, C6, C7
Emotional abuse	2	P2	C2
Any type of abuse	3	P1, P4	C4
5. How do abused children feel?			
Fear/Anxiety	9	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C6, C7
Hopelessness	3	P1	C1, C6
Insecurity	5	P1, P2, P3	C1, C2
Loneliness (Withdrawal)	10	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C4, C6, C7
Embarrassment/Shyness	8	P1, P2, P5, P6	C1, C3, C4, C7
Guilt	6	P1, P6	C2, C3, C4, C6
Unhappiness	13	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
Rage	6	P1, P4	C2, C3, C6, C7
Abasement/Insignificance	6	P2, P5, P6	C1, C2, C6

As it can be seen in Table 3, in their answers to the first question, teacher candidates gave definitions such as "attitudes and behaviors against a child's will, hindering his/her development", and "harm deliberately done by immediate circle or strangers". Sample definitions by teacher candidates are presented below.

Child abuse is another person's psychological and physiological wearing out of children. 4PS-21

Child abuse is defined as behaviors displayed by persons or institutions responsible for the child that adversely affect the child's development and cause them to become withdrawn and depressed. 6PS-21

It is violating a child's personal space, using physical or emotional violence against the child, touching his/her body or disturbing the child verbally with sexual words. 5CT-22

"Abuse " includes all kinds of attitudes and behaviors hindering a child's physical and emotional development. 6CT-21

Considering the responses to "What are the types of child abuse?" It was identified that teacher candidates evaluated abuse types in four subgroups: "physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect". Sample statements are as follows:

Sexual, emotional, physical, and neglect are types of abuse. Exploiting a child's emotions and oppressing them is emotional abuse. Physical harm is physical abuse; kids battered by teachers or families and very young child workers can be examples. Sexual abuse is a using child's body; which harms the most. That family or caregivers do not meet a child's basic needs or needs for love and security is neglect. 6PS-2

Emotional, physical or sexual pressure, physical violence, insulting, teasing, forcing to touch, marry and work, all are types of abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual abuse). Avoiding education, storming at the child for daily life problems, using foul language, belittling the child etc. can be examples of neglect. 2CT-21

Participants' responses to "How can we notice that a child is abused?" are as follows:

"Physical symptoms (wound, burn, cut, bruise, etc.) can be seen"; "Emotional changes (indifference, shyness, ill-temper or withdrawal, etc.) can be observed"; "Signs of fear (dislike to be touched, tics, uneasiness, etc.) can be observed"; "They can be observed to have more knowledge about sexual matters than his peers"; "Their paintings (colours, figures etc.) may give clues"; and "Decreases in academic success can be seen". Below are some quotations from teacher candidates.

If a child has wounds or bruises, exhibits indifferent, anxious, or aggressive behaviors, or has more knowledge on sexual matters than their peers, I can think they are abused and inquire about the situation. 1PS-20

We can realize that a child is physically abused when we see bruises on the body, injuries in areas that cannot be damaged by accident, or injuries the child tries to hide. Socially, we may suspect when the child exhibits timid, shy attitudes. Emotionally, a child's sudden emotional changes, tantrums, or extreme silence may be signs of abuse. 4PS-21

It is suspicious if the child has sudden emotional and behavioral changes. Children paintings may also give clues. They may draw large hands or arms... also the genitals, if sexually abused. 3CT-21

Regarding "What type of abuse affects child the most?", participants responded as "sexual abuse" , "no difference, all affect the child." and "emotional abuse". Examples are as follows:

Whatever type it is, it leaves deep scars on the child that will not be erased for years. 1PS-20

"I think sexual abuse hurts more because the child becomes emotionally and physically devastated. It causes a lifelong trauma that will not be forgotten." 3PS-20

Emotional abuse hurts more, as emotions are the basis of everything. If a child's psychology is harmed, other problems may arise later. Leaving kids loveless, insulting, and belittling affect them in the long run. To make up for the deficiency in their lives ahead, they may adopt behaviors not approved by society. 2CT-21

Emotional abuse harms a child's ego. Physical abuse causes damage to the body. Sexual abuse causes both emotional and physical harm to a child's health. If kids' care is neglected, they cannot develop physiologically.. If their needs for attention, love and reliance are not met, they cannot be securely attached, which may create an anxious, insecure, overly relaxed, or trusting personality. 4CT-21

Teacher candidates responded to "How do abused children feel?" as "Fear/Anxiety, Hopelessness, Insecurity, Loneliness (Withdrawal), Embarrassment/Shyness, Guilt, Unhappiness, Rage, Abasement/Insignificance". Below are some opinions from participants.

Abused kids live with an inexhaustible sense of fear. They worry that it will happen again. Worst of all, they do not know when; it scares them. Fear turns into withdrawal over time; they cannot trust anyone as everyone is a potential criminal for them. The most painful thing is that they do not change even after years. 1PS-21

Abused kids may think they have a worthless, wrong life. They may feel responsible for what happened. They may be nervous at any time. With the effect of the experience they had, they may develop angry, aggressive behaviors or, on the contrary, become withdrawn. Besides changes in their behaviors, changes in their verbal expressions can be observed. 6CT-21

In the second theme, teacher candidates defined child abuse as "attitudes and behaviors against a child's will, hindering his/her development" and "harm deliberately done by immediate circle or strangers". They evaluated abuse in four subgroups: "physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect". They responded to "How can we notice that a child is abused?" as "Physical symptoms (wound, burn, cut, bruise, etc.) can be seen", "Emotional changes (indifference, shyness, ill temper, or withdrawal, etc.) can be

observed”, “Signs of fear (dislike to be touched, tics, uneasiness, etc.) can be observed”, “They can be observed to have more knowledge about sexual matters than his peers”, “Their paintings (colors, figures etc.) may give clues”, and “Decreases in academic success can be seen”. Regarding “What type of abuse affects the child the most?”, they mostly responded “sexual abuse”, and then respectively “no difference, all affects the child”, and “emotional abuse”. Responses to “How do abused children feel?” were “fear/anxiety, hopelessness, insecurity, loneliness (withdrawal), embarrassment/shyness, guilt, unhappiness, rage, and abasement/insignificance. These findings indicate an increase in the awareness levels of teacher candidates.

Solutions Developed to Prevent Child Abuse

Participants’ opinions on child abuse and neglect were reviewed in the third theme. Responses were evaluated in two subdimensions: “what teachers should do” and “preventive measures and solutions” (Table 4).

Table 4.

Abuse Suggestions That Teacher Candidates Developed to Prevent Child Abuse

Themes	Frequency (f)	Pre-school Teaching	Classroom Teaching
What teachers should do (1)			
What should you do when you recognize child abuse?			
We should teach kids how to say no.	5	P1, P3, 05	C2, C3
We should teach kids that others must not touch their genitals.	5	P1, P2, P4	C5, C7
We should do awareness-raising activities.	8	P4, P5, P6	C3,C5,C4,C6,C7
We should get help from experts/authorities.	5	P1, P4, P5	C4, C6
We should organize in-class activities on abuse (painting, reading, roleplays, cartoons etc.)	10	P1, P3, P5, P6	C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7
We should give kids examples to differentiate between friendly and unfriendly love.	6	P2, P5	C2, C3, C5, C7
We should display positive behaviors as a teacher (be a role model).	4	P4	C1, C4, C5
What should you pay attention to while communicating with an abused child as a teacher?			
We should avoid inquisitive questions.	6	P1, P2, P4	C5, C6, C7
We should talk to the kid in private.	3	P1, P3,	C6
We should encourage the kid to open up.	4	P1, P3	C1, C6
We should communicate with the kid as if we are having a chat for them to speak.	6	P2, P3, P5	C3, C5, C7
We should be calm while talking.	3	P2	C1, C4
We should give confidence to all kids.	7	P1, P2, 03	C1, C4, C5, C7
Preventive measures and solutions (2)			
What do you suggest to prevent child abuse?			

Education quality at schools should be increased.	6	P1, P3, 05	C1, C4, C7
Deterrent punishments to prevent abuse should be imposed, removing matters of extenuation.	11	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6	C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7
Raising social awareness should be worked on.	6	P5, P6	C1, C2, C4, C5
TV and media contents should be controlled.	2	05	C2
Families with abuse should be interviewed.	3	P3, P5	C4
Families should be educated (teachers, ministry, media, TV)	7	P1, P2, P4, P5	C2, C4, C5
Abusers should be alienated from the society.	2	P2	C3

What teachers should do?. As shown in Table 4, the participants' responses to the question "What should you do if you recognize child abuse?" were "We should teach children to say no, and that others should not touch their genitals, conduct awareness activities, seek help from experts/authorities, organize in-class activities on abuse (drawing, reading, role-playing, cartoons, etc.), give children examples to differentiate between kind and unkind love, and show positive behaviors as a teacher (be a role model).

In response to the question, **"As a teacher, what should you look for when communicating with a child who has been abused?"**, teacher candidates stated, "We should avoid asking nosy questions, talk to the child in private, encourage the child to open up, communicate with the child as if we are having a conversation so they can talk, be calm when talking, and trust all children". Some statements are as follows:

We can teach children to say no and tell them that some things should not be kept secret. Most importantly, we can show them that we believe in them. 1PS-20

We can do activities to raise awareness among children, parents and society. 5PS-22

Children's books about types of abuse can be read to draw their attention, and cartoons can be watched. Writing activities on "If I were to confess something to my teacher..." can be organized. Those with weak writing skills can paint/draw. To prevent social/emotional abuse, a teacher can ensure that the tools used by children are similar. 2CT-21

To raise children's awareness, the subject of abuse can be covered in class; relevant videos can be watched. They can be told what to do in case of such an incident. If they experience such an incident, they should be told that it is not their fault and that they must do something to stop it. 3CT-21

The answers to the question **"What do you propose to do to prevent child abuse?"** are; "The quality of school education should be improved", "Deterrent punishments should be imposed to prevent abuse and there should be no more need for trivialization", "Work should be done to raise awareness in the society", "TV and media content should be controlled", "Families with abuse should be interviewed", "Families should be educated

(teachers, ministry, media, TV)", "Abusers should be alienated from society". The following are excerpts from the teacher candidates' views on this topic.

Deterrent punishments should be imposed by law. Abusers must face a severe penalty. Society should be educated, so the quality of education should be increased. 1PS-20

Families should be educated about the seriousness of the situation and how to deal with it, as well as informed about the law to raise awareness. The state must impose deterrent penalties for crimes involving children. 4PS-21

Families' awareness of the impact of childhood on personal development should be raised. Parents should be told that they are responsible for their children and that they should not have many children if they cannot take proper care of them. The Ministry of Family and Social Policy can provide family education. The number of TV child development programs can be increased. TV content should be reviewed and controlled. Violent media should not be allowed. Whatever the crime is, it must be punished. 2CT-21

Abusers must be alienated from society. The environment should make them feel wrong. To raise social awareness, abused people's experiences should be told. 3CT-21

In the third theme, they were observed to have understood their duties as teachers and could develop "preventive measures and solutions" for the problem. For instance, when asked "What should you do when you recognize child abuse?", they responded "We should teach kids to say no, that others must not touch their genitals, do awareness raising activities, get help from experts/authorities, organize in-class activities on abuse (painting, reading, roleplays, cartoons etc.), give kids examples to differentiate between friendly and unfriendly love, and display positive behaviors as a teacher (be role models). Regarding the question "What should you pay attention to while communicating with an abused child as a teacher?", teacher candidates stated "We should avoid inquisitive questions, talk to the kid in private, encourage the kid to open up, communicate with the kid as if we are having a chat for him/her to speak, be calm while talking, and give confidence to all kids". It can be inferred here that they expanded their individual awareness of child abuse and neglect prevention, and grasped their responsibilities in the communication process as teachers. The answers given to the question "What do you suggest to prevent child abuse?" are as follows:; "Education quality at schools should be increased", "Deterrent punishments to prevent abuse should be imposed, removing matters of extenuation", "Raising social awareness should be worked on", "TV and media contents should be controlled", "Families with abuse should be interviewed", "Families should be educated (teachers, ministry, media, TV)", and "Abusers should be alienated from society".

Results and Discussions

Examining the overall consequences of child abuse and neglect, the effects can vary widely, from bruising due to a strike on the child's hip as a form of punishment, to the extreme case of homicide committed by a mentally distressed parent or caregiver. Consequently, the child's growth retardation and poor condition can be

assessed due to domestic misconduct (abuse) or the conscious or unconscious withholding of care, attention, nurturing, and love (neglect), as well as sexual exploitation in the context of abuse, and neglect (Polat, 2013). In a study, the prevalence of child abuse was 4,60% for physical abuse, 7,83% for emotional abuse and 10,20% for sexual abuse (Harford, Yia & Grant, 2014). Regardless of type and prevalence, abuse has negative effects on children in the short or long term. Their experiences may cause social, emotional, or behavioral problems (Lundahl, Nimer & Parsons, 2006). Indeed, there is evidence that abused children may use violence against others and themselves in adulthood (Harford, Yia & Grant, 2014); that those who were mistreated in childhood have relatively weaker social relationships (Colman & Widom, 2004); and that there is an association between childhood physical abuse and psychiatric disorders (Keyes et al., 2012; Suguya et al., 2012); and between physical and sexual abuse and mood disorders, anxiety, and substance use (Afifi et al., 2008). It is also known that emotional abuse in childhood damages mental health in the long term, and emotional neglect leads to behavioral disorders such as delinquency and impulsivity (Taillieu et al., 2016). Considering the above destructive effects, it is better to understand the need to prevent child abuse and neglect. Deciphering the effects of the various forms of abuse can greatly aid the intervention and treatment process (Taillieu et al., 2016). To this end, it is imperative to raise social awareness in addition to implementing child protection laws. In particular, it is important for teachers to recognize cases of abuse, increase their knowledge, and be informed about the agencies from which they can seek help (Walsh et al., 2012). At this point, conducting studies to improve preschool and classroom teacher candidates' awareness of abuse and neglect can help identify the problem and provide solutions. Based on this idea, this study tried to understand the awareness of pre-service teachers who attend preschool and classroom teaching programs about child abuse and neglect.

The study evaluated teacher candidates' paintings and explanations on how they expressed abuse in colors and figures, and relevant opinions during focus group interviews as data. Findings were presented in three themes: "paintings on child abuse and their analysis, opinions shared on child abuse, and solutions developed to prevent child abuse. The paintings in the first theme indicated that preschool teacher candidates had an emphatic perspective towards child abuse and considered it "a distressing situation that makes kids unhappy". They used black while depicting abused children, highlighted types of abuse with "dark hands reaching the kids," and preferred red to emphasize the necessity to prevent abuse. Likewise, it was observed in the works of classroom teacher candidates that they mostly used "black" to symbolize children's unhappiness and darkened worlds, depicted abusers with "dark/dirty hands" and child victims adversely affected by the experience as "dark figures". These findings indicated that teacher candidates who researched child abuse and neglect, could express their feelings and thoughts using metaphors with deep meanings in both paintings and texts. In another study, Bayrak (2019a) identified that prospective preschool teachers described child abuse with metaphors of "pruning, disaster, darkness, collapse, wound, deform, virus, stain, and conscience". Bayrak (2019b) presented that parents with kids

aged between 1 and 6 used the metaphors of “erosion, victim, scar, wound, disaster, benefit, domino, darkness, pain, crime, and damage” for child abuse.

Given the significant role of teachers in society, enhancing their understanding of child abuse and neglect is part of their professional and social responsibilities. Thus, it is crucial for teachers to be knowledgeable about the various aspects of child abuse and the impact it has on children (Doğan & Bayar, 2018; Koçtürk, 2018; Soylu, et al., 2012; Walsh, et al., 2008). In this study, teacher candidates defined child abuse as “attitudes and behaviors against the child’s will, hindering his/her development” and “harm deliberately done by immediate circle or strangers”. They evaluated abuse in four subgroups: “physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect”. They responded to “How can we notice that a child is abused?” as “Physical symptoms (wound, burn, cut, bruise, etc.) can be seen”, “Emotional changes (indifference, shyness, ill temper or withdrawal, etc.) can be observed”, “Signs of fear (dislike to be touched, tics, uneasiness, etc.) can be observed”, “They can be observed to have more knowledge about sexual matters than his peers”, “Their paintings (colors, figures etc.) may give clues”, and “Decreases in academic success can be seen”. Regarding “What type of abuse affects the child the most?”, they mostly responded “sexual abuse”, and then respectively “no difference, all affects the child”, and “emotional abuse”. Responses to “How do abused children feel?” were “fear/anxiety, hopelessness, insecurity, loneliness (withdrawal), embarrassment/shyness, guilt, unhappiness, rage, and abasement/insignificance. These findings show that teacher candidates have an idea about child abuse and its destructive effects.

Considering child abuse and neglect studies, Bayrak (2019b) and Ustundag, Senol and Magden (2015) presented that parents emphasized sexual abuse with more destructive effects. Donat-Bacioglu and Kaya (2020) also identified that 87,5% of teacher candidates did not have any relevant training and had negative attitudes towards reporting sexual abuse; however, this changed when their knowledge level and confidence increased. Yetis and Ziyalar (2018) revealed, in their study, that teachers and educators had positive attitudes towards reporting child abuse and neglect but had hesitations in evaluating the reporting process and system. They pointed out that it might be helpful to educate teachers and directors on preventing abuse and neglect, intervention methods, legal dimensions, etc. Tatlıcalı and Berkmen (2017) investigated prospective pre-school teachers’ views on emotional neglect/ abuse and determined that those aged 22-25 tended to ignore emotional neglect. These results suggest that it is necessary to increase the awareness levels of those responsible for children’s care and education, regarding abuse and neglect.

This study aimed to determine whether teacher candidates enrolled in preschool and classroom teaching programs possessed adequate knowledge about their responsibilities as educators when encountering abuse and neglect. Additionally, the study sought to comprehend their suggestions for addressing child abuse more comprehensively. Upon examining their views on preventing child abuse and neglect in the third theme, it was observed that the candidates understood their duties as teachers

and were able to develop "preventive measures and solutions" for the issue.. In response to the question, "What should you do if you recognize child abuse?" they responded, "We should teach children to say no to others touching their genitals, conduct awareness activities, seek help from experts/authorities, organize in-class activities on abuse (drawing, reading, role-playing, cartoons, etc.), set examples for children to distinguish between kind and unkind love, and exhibit positive behaviors as teachers (be role models). When asked, "What should you as a teacher look for when communicating with an abused child?" the teacher candidates responded, "We should avoid prying questions, talk to the child in private, encourage the child to open up, communicate with the child as if we are having a conversation so they can talk, be calm, and trust all children. It can be inferred here that they expanded their individual awareness to prevent child abuse and neglect and grasped their responsibilities in the communication process as a teacher.

The answers to the question "What do you propose to do to prevent child abuse?" are "The quality of school education should be improved", "Deterrent punishments should be imposed to prevent abuse, and things that lead to trivialization should be eliminated", "Society awareness should be worked on", "TV and media content should be controlled", "Families affected by abuse should be interviewed", "Families should be educated (teachers, ministry, media, TV)" and "Abusers should be alienated from society". These findings show that the teacher candidates point to urgent issues, such as "raising public awareness, teacher training, family education, reviewing legal sanctions, and media content" on child abuse. In this regard, Eşgin (2019) emphasizes that there has been an increase in child abuse cases on social media in recent years and that the way child abuse news is reported on social media and the photographs used have a significant impact on public perceptions, so even the way child abuse news is reported should be controlled.

Ziyalar and Salihoğlu (2010) indicated that all institutions in society have varying degrees of responsibility over the child. It should share this responsibility in the mass media. The mass media also share this responsibility, and it is one of the expected institutions. With shared value in society and the power field of written or spoken language that establishes judgments also from visual communication tools and news production in the process, a more sensitive approach is expected when it comes to children. Tunca and Ozer (2015) also found that they developed suggestions such as "training individuals, taking measures through the media, attaching importance to teacher training, reviewing school programs, monitoring teachers' mental health, and increasing legal sanctions" to prevent abuse. Dogan and Bayar (2018) pointed out that victims could tell about the incident as much as they trusted the school counselor and teacher, and highlighted the importance of informing prospective teachers about personal responsibilities and legal obligations during their undergraduate studies. Dilsiz and Magden (2015) emphasized the need to organize regular in-service training programs for teachers, to review their continuity and quality, and to raise teachers' awareness of legal responsibilities and duties in child abuse and neglect cases, as well as of appropriate approaches to abused children. Yildiz et al. (2017), in their study evaluating the knowledge levels of primary

school teachers on child neglect and abuse, revealed that 80% of teachers considered the internet as their source of information, and 84% did not find their knowledge on the subject sufficient. Based on the research findings, they emphasized the need to organize regular seminars, symposiums, and conferences on the most appropriate approach and attitude in cases of child neglect and abuse and to inform them about their legal obligations. Erkan (2018) also emphasized that educators, pedagogues, health professionals, social work authorities, police officers, lawyers, and judicial officers should work together to raise public awareness about child abuse and make society more sensitive to prevent cases. Şeker and Çubuk (2021) stated that in order for children to grow up as healthy and beneficial citizens in every aspect, universities should research this issue more to reduce and prevent child abuse, and that studies to improve social awareness will shed light on all persons and institutions responsible for recognizing and preventing abuse at an early stage. In their study on the relationship between teacher candidates' knowledge and risk recognition levels about child abuse and neglect and their decision-making styles, Pesen and Epçaçan (2021) recommended that in-service and pre-service trainings to provide teachers and teacher candidates with rational decision-making skills as cognitive competence should be planned, principles that would facilitate the recognition of abuse and the rational decision-making should be determined, related courses should be included in the curricula of faculties of education as compulsory or elective courses, and research should be conducted to examine the level of awareness of teachers and teacher candidates about abuse.

Recommendations

TCK, it is obligatory to report cases for the prevention and penalization of child abuse and neglect, and the responsibility is attached to all public officials. For children to continue their development in a healthy environment, teachers must understand their roles regarding child abuse and neglect, take responsibility, and act as role models. To ensure social awareness, it is important to educate parents and other adults. A high-level of social awareness and recognition of abused and neglected children will contribute to the prevention or intervention process in such situations. Based on the findings obtained in the study, the following recommendations have been developed for practitioners and researchers:

Recommendations to practitioners. The research findings suggest that teacher candidates are capable of defining child abuse and its various forms, demonstrating an empathetic approach to comprehending the emotions experienced by abused children. It shows that improving awareness levels is possible when teacher candidates are appropriately guided in the teacher training process. Based on this finding, it can be suggested to attach importance to the education of teachers, who are society's architects, on child abuse and neglect. Moreover, informing them about how to approach and communicate with abused kids and who to get help from can contribute to their professional development (regarding the prevention of child abuse and neglect). The suggestions provided by teacher candidates in this study (reviewing media content, imposing deterrent penalties, and raising social awareness) may serve as a guide for

developing comprehensive solutions to child abuse and neglect on a societal level. The Ministry could incorporate child abuse topics into teacher training programs, taking initiatives to develop course content that increases teacher candidates' awareness and sensitivity levels. Moreover, the Ministry of National Education (MEB) could collaborate with universities to organize abuse-related "seminars, workshops, and symposiums" that "teacher candidates, teachers, administrators, families, and the broader society" can attend.

Recommendations for researchers. This study examined child abuse-related opinions and awareness levels of teacher candidates who continue their education in preschool and classroom teaching programs. The research started with art activities and ended with a focus group interview. A similar study can be conducted with teacher candidates in different branches, and their awareness levels can be examined. The study sample consisted of female teacher candidates. Similar studies can be carried out with male teacher candidates, and their sensitivity levels to child abuse and neglect can be researched. Conducting qualitative research with different sample groups (teacher candidates, teachers, administrators, families, etc.) to reveal the event's reasons can improve the awareness levels of all stakeholders interested in the subject. Studies that education researchers (educational administration, educational programs) will conduct with different sample groups (teachers, administrators, parents, kids, etc.) through various research methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) to evaluate child abuse in all dimensions can offer solutions to prevent child abuse and neglect.

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