

THE EFFECT OF AWARENESS LEVEL OF PARENTS ON CHILD ABUSE ON PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to determine the effect of parents' awareness of child abuse on the parent-child relationship. This descriptive study was carried out with 406 parents who had children aged 2-7 years and were registered at three family health centers in Kahramanmaraş city center, between February and April 2019. It was determined that being a mother or father did result in any significant difference the Abuse Awareness Scale, the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and its subscale scores of the parents ($p>0.05$). Additionally, the level of abuse of the parents who were literate or primary school graduates was higher, the level of abuse of the parents decreased as their education level increased, and the level of abuse of the parents decreased as their income level increased. As a result, it was determined that parents' level of awareness about child abuse has a positive effect on the parent-child relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Today, one of the most important problems affecting child health is child neglect and abuse. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse as intended or unintended behaviors or attitudes of an adult that adversely affect the physical and psychosocial health of a child (WHO, 2020). UNICEF's report published in 2019 revealed that a total of 690 million children under the age of 18 years have experienced some type of child abuse or neglect (UNICEF,2019). In the study conducted by Kleven and Ports in 2017 to examine the data obtained from 57 countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Africa, it was determined that the physical abuse of children ranged from 1% to 43% and that child neglect ranged between 0.8% and 49% (Kleven & Ports, 2017). A study conducted by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Russia revealed that 75.3% of children aged 11-18 years were tortured, abused, or neglected at home (Odnokova, Rusakova & Avdeeva, 2019). As a result of national surveys on violence against children in Africa, it was stated that approximately one out of every three girls in Kenya, the Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe was sexually abused during their childhood and that the prevalence of childhood physical abuse was 53% for these countries (WHO, 2019).

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Child abuse is examined in five groups as emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and neglect. In several studies conducted in Türkiye, it was reported that the incidence rates vary between 21.8% and 57% for physical abuse (Sarı, Ardahan & Öztornacı, 2016), between 2.8% and 32.4% for sexual abuse (Erdoğan & Erel, 2024; Koç, Koçtürk & Zencir, 2023), and between 53.6% and 59.8% for emotional abuse (Sarı et al., 2016). In their study, Donat-Bacıoğlu and Kaya stated that the number of sexually abused children who went to judicial authorities in Türkiye increased from 7.464 in 2014 to 83.552 in 2019 (Sak, 2024).

Any behavior that may result a non-accidental injury, wounds, or the death of a child under the age of 18 is considered within the scope of physical abuse (Hançer, 2019; Yıldırım, 2019). Physical abuse can often be in the form of beating where the child is beaten when a parent becomes angry (Sarıyar, 2019). According to the ILO, when examining the link between child labour and physical abuse, 20% of children have been exposed to physical abuse (ILO, 2022). Additionally, according to the ICN, approximately 25% of children have been subjected to physical abuse in the last five years (ICN, 2023).

Emotional abuse, on the other hand, is the most common type of abuse that is difficult to identify (Koçmarlar & Akbağ, 2018). Humiliation, threatening the child, overlooking the child's inappropriate behavior, scolding, externalizing, and not meeting the basic needs of the child involve emotional neglect and abuse (Dinleyici & Dağlı, 2016). In the study entitled "Child Abuse and Domestic Violence in Türkiye" carried out by UNICEF and the Prime Ministry Social Services and Child Protection Agency, it was reported that emotional abuse is observed in 51% of children aged 7-18 years in Türkiye (UNICEF, 2019).

Sexual abuse is defined as the use of a child with no sexual development by someone at least four years older than the child for sexual pleasure (Imren et al., 2013). In our country, Alikasıfoğlu et al. conducted nine studies with 1871 female high school students in Istanbul in 2000 and reported that the rate of incest was 1.8%. Moreover, 11.3% of the students mentioned that their private body parts were touched without their consent when they were children and 4.9% stated that they were forced to have sexual intercourse (Alikasifoglu, Erginoz, Ercan, Albayrak-Kaymak, Uysal & Ilter, 2006).

Previous studies have reported that children who are neglected and abused generally experience various emotional, physical, and academic problems and that the most common problems are decreased self-esteem, academic failure, difficulty in communicating effectively, and the inability to express oneself (Gündüz & Gökçakan, 2004).

Parents are the first and most important individuals who form and shape a child's social and psychological environment. In various studies conducted on parents of abused children, it

was seen that these parents are mostly alcohol-dependent, mentally ill, and single parents with a low socioeconomic status (Burç & Güdücü Tüfekçi, 2014; Kürklü, 2011). For this reason, it is important for parents to be aware of factors that may adversely affect their child's health.

The way parents communicate with their child determines the position of the child in the family. Parents who establish an environment that supports the child prepare an environment for their child to communicate more effectively with the people around them (Saygı, 2011). In a family environment where effective communication is established, family members spare time for each other, allow each other to openly express their feelings, and value each other. Positive family relations play an important role for children to gain and maintain a sense of trust and for the psychological health of children (Saygı, 2011).

Research Objective

No study was found in the literature that examined the effect of parents' awareness of abuse on the parent-child relationship. Thus, this research was conducted to determine the effect of parents' awareness of child abuse on the parent-child relationship. This study aimed to contribute to the relevant literature, to determine the current situation on this issue, to shed light for future studies, and to determine the measures that can be taken.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research Type

This descriptive study was conducted in the city center of Kahramanmaraş, a province located in the southern region of Turkey, between February and April 2019.

Research Universe and Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 2587 parents who had children aged 2-7 years and who were registered in three family health centers that were selected by lottery among family health centers located in different socioeconomic regions determined by the municipality. In total, 410 parents (81 fathers and 329 mothers), who were determined by the power analysis with an error margin of 0.05, an effect size of 0.09, and at a confidence interval of 0.95, were included in the study. The sample was aimed at representing 95% of the universe. The study was completed with 406 parents since four questionnaires were only partially completed.

Inclusion Criteria of Research

- Being open to communication (no speech or hearing impairment)
- Being literate

Exclusion Criteria of Research

- Being illiterate
- Having a hearing or speech impairment

Disqualification Criteria of Research

- Not fully completing the form

Limitations of the Study

In this study, which was conducted to examine the effect of parents' awareness level of child abuse on the parent-child relationship, the selection of the province of Kahramanmaraş, where the research data was collected, stemmed from the fact that the researcher resided in that province. In addition, the selection of only three family health centers with different socioeconomic statuses can be considered among the limitations of the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using a Parent Information Form prepared by the researcher, the Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form, and the Child-Parent Relationship Scale.

Parent Information Form

The Parent Information Form was prepared by the researcher and consists of 13 questions regarding a parent's age, profession, education level, employment status, family type, number of children, gender, and age of their children.

Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form (AAS-PF)

The AAS-PF scale was developed by Pekdoğan in 2016 to measure the abuse potential of parents towards their children in daily routines. The items of the scale include a parent's attitude about ignoring their child's wishes or needs, imposing physical punishment on the child, the parent's attitude exhibited to their child when angry, and the beat marks on the child's body. The scale has a 5-point Likert type rating of "strongly disagree (1)", "disagree (2)", "indecisive (3)", "agree (4)", and "strongly agree (5)" and consists of 18 items. Items 12, 15, and 17 are reverse-scored. The lowest score obtainable from the scale is 18 and the highest score is 90. A score between 18 and 42 indicates a low level of abuse, a score between 42 and 66 indicates a moderate level of abuse, and a score of 66 and 90 indicates a high level of abuse. High scores obtained in the AAS-PF indicate that the abuse potential of parents is high (Pekdoğan, 2017).

It was observed that 18 items were gathered under a single factor in the measurement tool and the item loads in the scale varied between 0.76 and 0.93. It can be said that the validity of

the measurement tool is high if the factor-item loads are high. In the study of Pekdoğan, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency value for the total one-dimensional scale was found to be 0.98 and the test-retest correlations were found to be 0.94 (Pekdoğan, 2017). In this study, the Cronbach alpha value of the measurement tool was determined to be 0.70.

Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS)

The CPRS was developed by C. Pianta in 1992 to understand the parent-child relationship. The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Saygı in 2011. The scale, consisting of a total of 30 items, is ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale and evaluates the perception of the parent regarding his/her relationship with his/her child. The items are scored as "definitely unsuitable (1)", "not very suitable (2)", "indecisive (3)", "somewhat suitable (4)", and "definitely suitable (5)".

The original version of the CRPS consists of three subscales. The conflict subscale consists of 14 items, the closeness (positive relationship) subscale consists of 10 items, and the attachment subscale consists of six items. The Cronbach α values were 0.83 for the conflict subscale, 0.72 for the closeness (positive relationship) subscale, and 0.50 for the attachment subscale. In previous studies, it was stated that the reliability of the attachment subscale was low (Pianta, 1992; Zhang & Chen, 2010). Therefore, this subscale was not included in this study. A high score on the closeness subscale indicates that the parent-child relationship is close and positive and a high score on the conflict subscale indicates that there is a conflictual relationship between the parent and their child (Saygı, 2011). The total scale score can be obtained as a single score by reverse scoring the positive or negative statements. If the score is calculated by reversing positive statements, a high total score indicates a negative parent-child relationship. When the total score is obtained by reversing negative statements, a high total score indicates a positive parent-child relationship (Saygı, 2011).

Cronbach alpha values were calculated to examine the reliability of the subscales and the entire scale that was adapted by Saygı. As a result of the factor analysis, the Cronbach alpha coefficient value of the conflict subscale was 0.84 and the Cronbach alpha coefficient value of the positive relationship (closeness) subscale was 0.57. The alpha coefficient obtained for the entire scale was 0.81 (Saygı, 2011). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient value was 0.763 for the conflict subscale, 0.662 for the positive relationship subscale, and 0.727 for the total parent-child relationship scale.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were evaluated in the computer environment. Skewness and Kurtosis values were examined to determine whether the data were normally distributed. It was determined that the data followed a normal distribution. The data were analyzed in light of this information. Mean, standard deviation, median (minimum-maximum), the independent samples t-test, and the one-way ANOVA test were used for defining quantitative variables while number and percentage were used for the qualitative data. The correlation between the scale scores was analyzed using Pearson's correlation test. The effect between the scale scores was analyzed using regression analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the research, institutional permission was received and ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Inonu University (dated and numbered 2019/6-19). The parents that were included in the study were informed about the scope, purpose, and volunteerism principle of the study and verbal and written consent was obtained from the parents.

RESULTS

Table 1. Distribution of the Parents According to their Descriptive Characteristics (n:406)

Descriptive Characteristics		n	%
Parent interviewed	Mother	327	80.5
	Father	79	19.5
Age (in years)	30 and below	141	34.6
	31-35	129	31.7
	36-40	96	23.9
	41 and above	40	9.8
Education level	Illiterate	5	1.2
	Primary school	171	42.1
	High school	95	23.4
	Associate degree	27	6.7
	Bachelor's	92	22.7
	Post-graduate	16	3.9
Employment status	Employed	154	37.8
	Unemployed	252	62.2
Parents' status of living together	Yes	394	97.0
	No	12	3.0
Reason for living separately	Divorce	10	83.3
	Death	2	16.7
Economic status	Income less than expenses	112	27.6
	Income equal to expenses	249	61.3
	Income more than expenses	45	11.1
Family type	Nuclear	340	83.7
	Extended/Fragmented	66	16.3
Number of children	1	72	17.7
	2	152	37.5

	3-5	182	44.8
Number of daughters	1	170	56.5
	2	95	31.5
	3-5	36	12.0
Number of sons	1	165	53.1
	2	107	34.4
	3-4	39	12.5
Previously receiving information about child abuse	Yes	263	64.9
	No	142	35.1
Source of information	Internet	90	22.2
	School of graduation	54	13.3
	In-service training	81	20.0
	Media	177	35.0
	Other	39	9.5

Of the 410 parents who participated in the study, four were excluded from the study due to incomplete form responses. As a result, the study was completed with 406 parents. Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of the parents. Of the parents, 80.5% were mothers; 34.62% were aged 30 years or younger; 42.1% were primary school graduates; 62.2% were unemployed; and 3.0% were living separately from their spouses. Furthermore, 83.3% of the separated parents were divorced. 61.3% of the parents' income was equal to their expenses and 83.7% of the parents had a nuclear family structure. 64.9% of the parents had previously received information about child abuse. 35% of the parents who had previously received information received this information from the media, 22.2% received information on the internet, and 20% received information from in-service training.

Table 2. Examination of the Parents' Scores on the Abuse Awareness Scale, Child-Parent Relationship Scale, and Subscales in terms of Education Level (n:406)

Education Level		n	Mean	sd	F	p
Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form	Illiterate/Primary school	175	60.13	7.77	2.493	0.043*
	High school	96	58.71	5.19		
	Associate degree	27	58.48	6.25		
	Bachelor's	92	57.91	5.52		
	Post-graduate	16	56.50	8.69		
Conflict	Illiterate/Primary school	175	40.71	8.87	8.523	≤0.001*
	High school	96	38.94	8.94		
	Associate degree	27	35.07	9.09		
	Bachelor's	92	35.10	8.28		
	Post-graduate	16	33.88	7.33		
Positive Relationship	Illiterate/Primary school	175	42.76	4.49	1.190	0.314
	High school	96	43.61	4.23		
	Associate degree	27	43.15	4.43		
	Bachelor's	92	42.23	4.53		
	Post-graduate	16	42.88	4.84		
Child-Parent Relationship Scale	Illiterate/Primary school	175	107.68	9.69	1.801	.128
	High school	96	109.04	9.25		
	Associate degree	27	112.07	10.27		
	Bachelor's	92	109.45	8.82		
	Post-graduate	16	111.31	11.82		

A statistically significant difference was found between the education level of the parents and the mean AAS-PF score ($p<0.05$). When the mean scores were examined, it was determined that the level of abuse of parents who were illiterate or who were primary school graduates was higher and that the level of abuse decreased as their education level increased.

Table 3. Examination of the Parents' Scores on the Abuse Awareness Scale, Child-Parent Relationship Scale, and Subscales in terms of Economic Status (n:406)

Economic Status		n	Mean	Sd	F	p
Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form	Income less than expenses	112	60.57	6.86	4.046	0.018*
	Income equal to expenses	249	58.54	6.55		
	Income more than expenses	45	58.09	6.98		
Conflict	Income less than expenses	112	39.19	9.21	1.745	0.176
	Income equal to expenses	249	38.28	8.75		
	Income more than expenses	45	36.22	9.77		
Positive Relationship	Income less than expenses	112	42.97	3.87	0.448	0.639
	Income equal to expenses	249	42.69	4.74		
	Income more than expenses	45	43.31	4.17		
Child-Parent Relationship Scale	Income less than expenses	112	108.82	9.10	0.826	0.439
	Income equal to expenses	249	108.59	9.87		
	Income more than expenses	45	110.58	8.90		

A statistically significant difference was found between the economic status of the parents and their mean AAS-PF score ($p<0.05$). When the mean scores were examined, it was determined that the level of abuse was the highest among the parents who had less income than their expenses and that the level of abuse decreased as the income level increased. No statistically significant difference was found between the economic status and the mean scores of the CPRS and its subscales ($p>0.05$).

Table 4. Examination of the Parents' Scores on the Abuse Awareness Scale, Child-Parent Relationship Scale, and Subscales in terms of Previously Receiving Information About Child Abuse (n:406)

Previously Receiving Information about Child Abuse		n	Mean	sd	t	p
Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form	Yes	263	59.06	6.66	0.226	0.822
	No	143	58.90	7.02		
Conflict	Yes	263	37.44	8.61	-2.844	0.005*
	No	143	40.09	9.57		
Positive Relationship	Yes	263	42.83	4.20	-0.194	0.846
	No	143	42.92	4.93		
Child-Parent Relationship Scale	Yes	263	109.46	9.35	1.820	0.070
	No	143	107.65	9.85		

There was no statistically significant difference between the parents' status of previously receiving information about child abuse and the mean scores on the AAS-PF, the CPRS, and the positive relationship subscale ($p>0.05$). There was a statistically significant difference between the parents' status of previously receiving information about child abuse and the mean score on the conflict subscale ($p<0.05$). When the mean scores were examined, it was seen that

the parents who had not previously received information had a higher score on the conflict subscale.

Table 5. Examination of the Effect of Child-Parent Relationship Scale Subscale Scores on Abuse Awareness Scale (n:406)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Coefficient (B)	t	p	R ²
Abuse Awareness Scale-Parent Form	Conflict	0.178	4.944	0.000*	0.072
	Positive Relationship	0.174	2.390	0.017*	

***p<0.05**

According to the results of the regression analysis that was performed to determine the effect of the CPRS subscale scores on the AAS-PF, the model established to examine the effect was significant ($p<0.05$). When the coefficients were examined, it was seen that the conflict and positive relationship subscale positively affected the AAS-PF ($B=0.178$; $B=0.174$; $p<0.05$). Lastly, 7% of the change in the AAS-PF was found to be explained by the conflict and positive relationship subscales.

DISCUSSION

Children should be given the opportunity to grow up to be talented and physically and mentally healthy individuals in society. Parental abuse against children has received little attention in the scientific literature. However, due to the recent increase in abuse rates, this subject has become the focus of scientific investigation (Condry & Miles, 2014). Child maltreatment is a widespread problem that has been proven to be difficult to prevent, assess, and treat in a community context (Zolotor, Theodore, Runyan, Chang & Laskey, 2011). Child maltreatment is associated with negative consequences for the mood, education, and health of children, as well as with a significant public health cost for society (Fang et al., 2012). The parent-child relationship affects the academic achievement, self-control, language development, and social skills of children in early childhood (Tam, Lee, Kumarasuriar & Har, 2012). It was reported in the literature that a negative child-parent relationship, especially experienced with the mother, can affect the child's other relationships emotionally (Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek & Vermulst 2010).

When the level of child abuse awareness was evaluated according to education level, it was found that the child abuse potential of the parents was significant in relation to their education level. In this study, it was determined that the level of abuse was higher among parents who were illiterate or primary school graduates and that the level of abuse decreased as their level of education increased (Table 2). In the literature, it was reported that the frequency of child abuse was higher in children of parents with a low education level (Soykan Aysev et

al., 2014). In the study conducted by Pekdoğan, it was determined that there was a negative and significant correlation between the education level of mothers and their potential for abuse (Pekdoğan, 2016). Dubowitz et al. (2011) stated that the low education level of mothers was associated with child maltreatment. The findings of this study and other studies show that a high education level of parents is an important determinant for the healthy development of a child's personality due to avoidance of abuse.

In our study, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the income status of the parents and their potential for child abuse. It was found that while the level of abuse was the highest among the parents who had an income that was less than their expenses, the level of abuse decreased as the income level increased (Table 3). Different findings are available in the literature regarding the relationship between the income level of the family and the potential for child abuse. In the study conducted by Çetin and Danacı with 158 parents, a significant relationship was found between the parents' potential for abuse and their socioeconomic level (Cetin & Danaci, 2016). In contrast, in the study conducted by Kumar et al. (2019), it was reported that there was no significant relationship between the level of abuse and the economic status. A low-income level can be an important source of stress for parents, can affect parents' communication with their children negatively, and can increase abusive behaviors.

In our study, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the parents' status of previously receiving information about child abuse and their potential for child abuse (Table 4). However, it was determined that the parents who had previously received information had better relations with their children. No findings on this subject are available in the literature, which may be due to the small number of participants with extended families.

CONCLUSION

It was determined that the level of child abuse decreased as the education level of the parents increased and that the level of child abuse decreased as the income level increased. Additionally, the level of abuse awareness of the parents was moderate and there was no statistically significant difference between the age groups of the parents.

To increase awareness of child abuse in parents and to reduce the negative effects of abuse on children, parental abuse awareness should be created by conducting studies for parents. Furthermore, pediatric nurses and other health professionals should identify families with a high risk of child abuse and make effort to prevent this abuse.

In-service training should be planned for nurses to be able to identify child abuse that they may encounter in the clinics where they work. It may be recommended that they demonstrate a multidisciplinary approach with other employees in the institution to be able to communicate with the necessary disciplines in identified child abuse cases. For future studies, it is recommended to contribute to the literature by applying similar studies to health centers in different provinces with larger sample sizes.

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