



Investigating the awareness, attitude and performance of kindergarten teachers towards social harms and children's abuse

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is a widespread social phenomenon with life-long severe consequences. Kindergarten teachers can follow up on this issue by constantly interacting with children and families in case of family dysfunction. This study investigated the knowledge, attitude and performance of kindergarten teachers in Tehran in 2022. The current study was descriptive; the statistical population included all kindergarten teacher certificate holders from the welfare organization. Subjects were selected by stratified (random) sampling from educational centers for kindergarten teacher courses under the supervision of welfare organizations that had received certificates. The sample size was 350 people, and the data collection tool was a questionnaire. The data was analyzed with SPSS version 22 software. The findings showed that the knowledge and awareness of 66.9% of the teachers regarding misbehaving with a good child and the attitude of 54.9% of them are at the desired level. Also, the performance of 88.1% of them in facing child abuse was poor and average. The results of this study showed that kindergarten teachers had a good knowledge of child abuse, a favorable attitude toward dealing with child abuse, and a poor performance in dealing with child abuse. The weak performance may be due to fewer training courses, fear of marginal issues of dealing with child abuse, or the lack of clear legal guidelines for dealing with child abuse.

Keywords: Child abuse, knowledge, attitude, performance

1 Introduction

Children are essential to every society; in this regard, how children are brought up and developed in the family and society is of great importance. Moreover, many societies are sensitive to how they raise and communicate with children (Hallajzadeh, Shadmanfaat, & Kabiry, 2019). Child abuse is an issue with a broad global scope, and along

with an increasing trend, it covers all societies, both developed and developing (Lak, Noroozi, & Ehsanpoor, 2019).

As simple as it sounds, child abuse can be complicated to explain and investigate. Mistreatment of children has been examined from different aspects. However, many classifications have dealt with this issue from a clinical

aspect; some views have classified abuse from the perspective of the perpetrator's intention. Many behaviors done to raise children and are considered part of parenting methods by parents can also be a form of misbehavior towards children. Notably, cultural attitudes towards the issue of raising children should not be ignored, which can affect the severity of this discipline and its tendency towards child abuse (Zardosht et al., 2016).

According to the World Health Organization, harming or threatening a child's physical and mental well-being by parents or people who are responsible for him and exploiting people under 18 is considered child abuse. Despite the cultural differences of countries in some cases, there is a universal understanding of children's proper growth and development, as stated in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1) protection against physical danger; 2) provision of adequate shelter and nutrition; 3) Sufficient care to maintain the child's health; 4) using appropriate words when talking to the child; 5) stimulation of verbal and intellectual skills; 6) trying to create independence of thought; 7) learning to master oneself (Hashemi, Azari, & Karimi Taleghani, 2019). Unfortunately, the misbehavior in Iranian families is high, which parents mostly apply. Although comprehensive statistics are not available in Iran, and most are based on studies in limited areas, the overall results of various studies conducted in Iran indicate the significant prevalence of child abuse in Iran (Ghasemi et al., 2014). The damages and consequences of child abuse are extensive and effective, both in childhood and adulthood. Persistence of abuse can lead to severe behavioral disorders such as major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, attempts at suicide, severe physical injuries, limb disabilities, and even child death (Seyedmoallmi & Yazdi, 2014).

The research results confirm that people behave based on their attitudes, and in fact, many people's daily behaviors are influenced by their attitudes (Asadollahi et al., 2015). These studies have confirmed the relationship between attitude and behavior. The diagnosis of child abuse can depend on a person's attitude. Naturally, the type of attitude of a person in raising children can affect the severity of discipline and the tendency to misbehave with children. According to the theory of planned behavior, attitude is one of the critical factors in the occurrence of behavior. Studies and research conducted in different fields in the world while using this theory have examined the impact of people's attitudes on their performance and have shown that most people behave based on their attitudes. Many people's daily behaviors are

influenced by their attitudes. It is essential to identify the opinions and beliefs of society about the methods of dealing with children on the issue of misbehavior (Jabraeili et al., 2015).

We assumed that teachers and nurses recognize and manage child abuse differently. Public health nurses and teachers have a close relationship with children and have skills in children's growth and development. Nevertheless, these two occupational groups differ in the proportion of their contact with children, the time they spend with them, and the amount of communication they have with children and their parents. Compared to other professions, teachers spend more time in contact with children. They can directly observe potential changes in appearance and behavior that may be signs of child abuse and neglect. Teachers have more contact with the parents of the children in the meetings of parents and coaches, and they can check the growth and development of the children more. The communication of public health nurses with children and their parents is short, but they get their information from the environment outside their daily lives. Due to the lack of a legal obligation to report child abuse, we assumed that teachers and public health nurses would view it as a primary duty (Schols, De Ruiter, & Öry, 2013).

Suppose the high prevalence of child abuse in Iran, its short-term and long-term effects on society, and the vital role of kindergarten instructors and teachers in identifying and referring child abuse since knowledge and attitude are significant in predicting and controlling behavior. Moreover, suppose that awareness of people's knowledge and attitude towards prevention is the first, most, and least expensive level in health and treatment prevention. Therefore, the awareness, attitude, and performance of coaches and teachers in the field of risk factors, signs and symptoms of misbehavior with children, and the effects of misbehavior are essential to this category. In this way, a way to identify and prevent child abuse can be created by kindergarten teachers and school teachers. Also, child abuse often happens in preschool and elementary school children. This range of children can be reached through kindergartens and schools, considering there has been no study in this field in Tehran. In this study, we decided to investigate the level of knowledge, attitude, and performance of kindergarten teachers in misbehaving with children.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

The current research was a quantitative, survey, and cross-sectional study. The statistical population in this research included all kindergarten teachers in Tehran city in 2022. The sample size was calculated using the following formula and considering $\alpha = \beta = 0.05$ to calculate the largest sample size and the lowest estimation error $d = p/5$. According to the following formula, the sample size was calculated by taking into account $P < 0.05325$ people, and taking into account a drop of 10%, it was decided that 360 people in each group would be included in the study.

$$N = \frac{p(1-p)(Z_{1-\alpha/2} + Z_{1-\beta})^2}{d^2}$$

The stratified sampling method was used in this study. First, centers with licenses to teach the kindergarten teacher course were identified by inquiring with the welfare organization. In the next stage, two centers were selected. Then, a random sample was selected from each center based on the list of students who completed the course. Then, through a telephone call, the information needed by the respondents and their consent to participate in this study was obtained. An online questionnaire was sent to people through widely used messengers in the country.

The inclusion criteria for the study included participating in the kindergarten teacher's training course and receiving a certificate and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criterion was withdrawal from participation in the study.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics findings

Row	Variable		Frequency	Percentage
1	Knowledge of factors influencing misconduct	Excellent	27	7.7
		Good	225	64.3
		Average and weak	98	28
2	Knowledge of the effects of signs and symptoms effective in misbehavior	Excellent	53	15.1
		Good	187	53.4
		Average and weak	110	31.4
3	Total awareness/knowledge	Excellent	13	3.7
		Good	234	66.9
		Average and weak	103	29.4
4	Attitude	Good	158	45.1
		Excellent	192	54.9
5	Performance	Good	5	11.9
		Weak and average	37	88.1

2.2 Measures

In order to collect information, a questionnaire designed in the study of Sahebihagh et al. (2017) was used. The items related to "knowledge" contained 45 items, which included two parts: 1- factors of misbehavior, including 20 items and 2- signs and complications of misbehavior, including 25 items. The knowledge items had three options (true, false, and I don't know); a correct answer was given a score of 1, and a false answer and I don't know a score of zero. To measure the attitude, there were 15 questions with the options of completely agree, agree, neutral, disagree, completely disagree. The completely disagree option was given a score of 5, disagreed with a score of 4, indifferent with a score of 3, agreed with a score of 2, and completely agreed with a score of 1. The items in the performance section are filled in if the participant had the experience of encountering misbehavior and includes 16 two-choice items (I did, I didn't do) where the option I did is given a score of 1 and the option I didn't do is given a score of 0 (Sahebihagh et al., 2017).

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS statistical software and descriptive statistics.

3 Findings

The articles that met the inclusion criteria were examined. The results of the review of 9 articles to report the results of their content are listed in the [Table 1](#).

The above table shows that the level of awareness of factors influencing misconduct in most respondents (64.3 percent) and their awareness of complications, signs and symptoms of abuse (53.4%) was good. Regarding attitude, most respondents had a favorable (excellent) attitude towards misbehaving with children (54.9%). However, the performance (88.1%) of the respondents who faced misbehaving with children was weak and average.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the level of knowledge and awareness of most good educators was good about misbehaving with children. This study's results were consistent with Seyedmoalemi et al.'s (2014) study (Seyedmoalemi & Yazdi, 2014). However, the results of this study are inconsistent with the results of the findings of Naregal (2016), who investigated the effectiveness of the educational program on the level of awareness about the prevention of child abuse among primary school teachers (Naregal, 2016). The inconsistency of the results of these two studies can be due to the difference in the training completed and the educational topics or due to different tools in measuring knowledge. Examining the attitude of kindergarten teachers in this study showed that their attitude is at the desired level. Also, these findings, with the results of Beck et al. (1994), showing that 89% of teachers have a favorable attitude towards child abuse and tend to act according to the law and report the cases (Beck, Ogloff, & Corbishley, 1994).

The results of this study showed that the performance of educators in dealing with child abuse and mistreatment of children is at an average and weak level. In this study, only 12% of the respondents stated they had faced child abuse. Also, in a few studies, the number of doctors facing child abuse was reported to be very low (Golparvar, 2017; Jabraeili et al., 2015). In some other studies, about 14% of child abuse was reported (Hashemi, Azari, & Karimi Taleghani, 2019). One of the common factors in the present study and similar studies is the lack of training courses related to child abuse among the participants. From the stated content, it can be concluded that although the awareness and attitude among the trainers were high and desirable, they did not undergo formal and standard training. They may be unable to diagnose correctly at the time of encounter. Perhaps the reason for not reporting cases of child abuse in this study is the fear of child abuse, litigation, family violence against them, lack of knowledge about

referral and uncertainty about the diagnosis of child abuse. It may also be due to the lack of support systems in the country's health centers.

5 Limitations and Suggestions

This research was conducted among kindergarten teachers in Tehran, and researchers can carry out this study in other populations as well. Since a standard tool for measuring awareness, attitude, and performance regarding child abuse has not been designed, researchers can design a standard tool or standardize non-native tools in future studies. The effectiveness of practical training regarding misbehaving with children in increasing the desired performance can be investigated. One of the limitations of the research is the use of an online questionnaire and the lack of close supervision by the researcher during the implementation of the questionnaire.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

Not applicable.

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