

**TRACES OF THE PAST IN IDENTIFYING EMOTIONAL NEGLECT AND ABUSE****Mehmet KANAK***Lecturer Dr., Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, mkanak@cumhuriyet.edu.tr**ORCID Number: 0000-0003-3583-5545**Received: 24.05.2018**Accepted: 26.09.2018***ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this descriptive and retrospective study is to investigate the association between pre-service preschool teachers' past experiences of emotional abuse and their knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse. To this end, this study surveyed 151 fourth-grade pre-service teachers studying preschool teacher education at the Department of Basic Education under Faculty of Education at Cumhuriyet University during the 2016-2017 academic year. The data were collected using the "Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect/Abuse Scale" and the "ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools Retrospective Version (ICAST-R) for Young Adults". The analysis results indicated a significant difference between the respondents' level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse by being told by a family or household member that he or she was unloved and did not deserve to be loved. However, no significant difference was found between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experiences of emotional abuse by being told by a family or household member that they wish he or she had never been born or were died, by a family or household member threatening to abandon him or her or refusing to let him or her live in the house, and by being insulted or criticized by anyone to make him or her feel stupid, bad or worthless.

**Keywords:** Emotional neglect, emotional abuse, history of past abuse, awareness.

## INTRODUCTION

The definition of and criteria for emotional abuse vary from country to country, from culture to culture, and even between different structures within the same cultures (Tricket, Mennen, Kim & Sang, 2009). Emotional abuse and neglect are among the most common forms of maltreatment that children and adolescents suffer. Unfortunately, however, they are considered to be less harmful than physical abuse. Compared with the results of physical maltreatment, it is more difficult to embody emotional abuse and neglect (Kaplan, Pelcovitz & Labruna, 1999).

Emotional neglect refers to the lack of love and emotional support and involves letting a child suffer domestic violence; emotional abuse involves verbal abuse, harsh non-physical punishment, and threats of maltreatment (Kaplan, Pelcovitz & Labruna, 1999). Emotional abuse can be rated as mild, moderate or severe abuse. Mild abuse is not malicious and does not cause emotional long-term harm and a legal process but may require psychological support. Moderate abuse causes long-term emotional harm to a child but parents have no malicious intention. Severe emotional abuse is an abuse that parents intentionally inflict on their child by being aware of its harm and requires a legal process (Hamerman & Bernet, 2000).

Emotional abuse reaches its peak at the age of 6 to 8 and remains at a similar level during adolescence (Kaplan, Pelcovitz & Labruna, 1999). The majority of young people (68% women and 55% men) reported that their parents told them hurtful words and it happened between sixth and eighth grades (Wekerle et al., 2009). Adults exposed to childhood emotional abuse are prone to aggression and interpersonal conflicts and have inappropriate schemes such as lack of confidence and emotional deprivation (Riggs, Cusimano & Benson, 2011).

Individuals suffering childhood emotional abuse are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety disorder, and especially social phobia in adulthood (McCabe et al., 2003 as cited in Gibb, Chelminski & Zimmerman, 2007). Emotional abuse can also have effects such as emotional unresponsiveness or a negative worldview and can deeply influence children's growing beliefs about themselves and others. Children experiencing their parents' negative emotional reactions develop a negative self-image and have feelings of worthlessness (Riggs, 2010). Zurbriggen, Gobbin and Freyd (2010) found that emotional abuse is an important predictor of sexual abuse in close relationships in adolescence (as cited in Mazzeo & Espelage, 2002). Adults exposed to childhood emotional abuse are more likely to commit suicide compared to those who were not abused; suicide attempts are more frequently undertaken by individuals suffering three forms of abuse (emotional, sexual, and physical) (Anderson et al., 2002). Childhood trauma based on emotional abuse has been reported to be the basis of bipolar disorders (Etain et al., 2010). Emotional abuse also leads to problems in the development of the child's sense of self and a significant loss of self-esteem in later years (Dottan & Karu, 2006).

Emotional abuse is a form abuse that can be seen alone or along with other forms of abuse; however, it has much more traumatic effects in terms of long-term consequences. Thus, past experiences of emotional abuse play an important role in the prediction of related problems that individuals may face in later years and in the development of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse. Against this background, this study aims to investigate the association between pre-service preschool teachers' past experiences of emotional abuse and their knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse.

## METHOD

### Research Model

This study is descriptive and retrospective (collecting data backward). This study carried out to identify pre-service teachers' past experiences of emotional abuse used a screening model to find out whether there is an association between past experiences of emotional abuse and the knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse.

### Study Group

The study group consisted of 151 fourth-grade pre-service teachers studying preschool teacher education at the Department of Basic Education under Faculty of Education at Cumhuriyet University during the 2016-2017 academic year. University students were chosen for their accessibility and availability (Büyüköztürk, 2011). Additionally, the features of the measurement tools used in the data collection played an important role in determining the study group.

### Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using the "Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect/Abuse Scale" and the "ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools Retrospective Version (ICAST-R) for Young Adults". Information on the measurement tools is presented below.

### *Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect/Abuse Scale (KAENS)*

The scale was developed by the researcher to measure pre-service preschool teachers' knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse. The initial form of the scale consisted of 45 vignettes. According to Veal (2002), vignettes are used to promote teachers' knowledge and understanding in both pre-service and in-service training programs. Vignettes contribute to increasing participants' knowledge and problem-solving and decision-making skills. When vignettes are used multiple times at certain intervals, a trainer can see changes in participants. Additionally, through vignettes, pre-service teachers can reflect on their views and practices multiple times and develop new concepts of teaching (as cited in Sucuoğlu et al., 2014).

While creating the vignettes, the researcher analyzed school experience observation reports and teaching practice course reports of third-grade and fourth-grade pre-service teachers studying at the Faculty of Education at Cumhuriyet University during the 2013-2014 academic year. 45 vignettes were written based on the examples of emotional abuse observed in reports. 45 items were deemed necessary based on expert opinions. According to the validity and reliability results, the final form of the scale consisted of 4 sub-scales and 38 items.

The scale is rated on a 7-point Likert scale (absolutely inappropriate, inappropriate, slightly inappropriate, neutral, slightly appropriate, appropriate, and absolutely appropriate). The participating pre-service teachers were asked to respond to the scale items according to this rating scale. A prediction is made about the level of knowledge and awareness based on scores. As a result of exploratory factor analysis of "Emotional Neglect / Abuse Knowledge and Awareness Scale ", it was observed that the scale has four factors and 38 items. The Cronbach-alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0,826. These findings Show that the instrument is valid and reliable.

#### ***ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools-Retrospective Version (ICAST-R) for Young Adults***

The ICAST-R was developed by 122 international experts by means of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN). The International Child Abuse Screening Tools (ICAST) has three versions. The ICAST-R (retrospective) for young adults is one version involves investigating past experiences of abuse. It includes 26 items and screens physical, emotional and sexual abuse experiences. This study used only the items from 14 to 20 to screen emotional abuse experiences (Sofuroğlu et al., 2013; Dunne et al.,2009). Runyan, Dunne and Zolotor (2009) tested the validity and reliability of the measurement tool and found that the item-total correlation varies from 0.61 to 0.82. The ICAST-R section about emotional abuse including the items from 14 to 20 involves questions about insults, threats, and hurts. If the answer to these questions is yes, respondents also answer sub-questions such as how often this happened, at what times this happened, and which person did this to them. Some of these sub-questions can have multiple answers.

#### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were compiled through the ICAST-R and frequency and percentage values were presented in the results section. In the relational screening phase, the data were statistically analyzed using SPSS statistics V 18.0. The independent samples t-test was run to find out whether there is a significant difference between the respondents' level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and their past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being insulted or criticized by anyone to make him or her feel stupid, bad or worthless. The Mann-Whitney U test was run to find out whether there is a significant difference between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being told by a family or household member that they wish he or she had never been born or were died, between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the experience of emotional abuse

before age 18 by being told by a family or household member that he or she was unloved and did not deserve to be loved, and between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by a family or household member threatening to abandon him or her or refusing to let him or her live in the house.

### FINDINGS (RESULTS)

In this part of the research, findings on association between pre service teachers' past experiences of emotional abuse and the knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse.

**Table 1.**Data of the 14<sup>th</sup> Question [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Before age 18, did anyone insult and criticize you, to make you feel that you were bad, stupid or worthless?</b>	Yes	80	52.9
	No	61	40.4
	Cannot remember	10	6.7
<b>If yes, how often did this happen?</b> (for N=80)	1-2 times	32	40
	3-10 times	31	38.8
	More than 10 times	17	21.2
<b>At what times did this happen?</b> (for N=80)	Before age 5	1	1.3
	Between age 5-9	32	40
	Between age 10-13	38	47.4
	Between age 14-17	9	11.3
<b>* Which people did this to you?</b> (for N=80)	Birth mother-father	26	32.5
	Step mother-father	1	1.25
	Brother-Sister	14	17.5
	Relative	26	32.5
	Neighbor	6	7.5
	Peer	21	26.25
	Grandmother-father	5	6.25
	Teacher	28	35
	Other	12	15

\*(The participants gave multiple responses to this question.)

Among 151 respondents, 52.9% answered yes to the question "Before age 18, did anyone insult and criticize you, to make you feel that you were bad, stupid or worthless?", 40.4% answered no, and 6.7% could not remember. Among 80 respondents answering yes to this question, 40% reported suffering this abuse once or twice, 38.8% between 3 and 30 times, and 21.3% more than 10 times. Among 80 respondents answering yes to this question, 1.3% suffered this abuse before age 5, 40% between ages 5 and 9, 47.4 between ages 10 and 13, and 11.3% between ages 14 and 17.

Among the respondents insulted and criticized, 32.5% reported their birth mother-father as the perpetrator of the abuse, 1.25% reported their step mother-father, 17.5% reported their brother-sister, 32.5% reported their relative, 7.5% reported their neighbor, 26.25% reported their peer, 6.25% reported their grandmother-grandfather, 35% reported their teacher, and 15% reported other than those.

**Table 2.**Data of the 15<sup>th</sup> Question [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Before age 18, did any family or household member say that they wish you had never been born or were dead?</b>	Yes	11	7.2
	No	135	89.5
	Cannot remember	5	3.3
<b>If yes, how often did this happen?</b> (for N=11)	1-2 times	6	54.5
	3-10 times	1	9.1
	More than 10 times	4	36.4
<b>At what times did this happen?</b> (for N=11)	Between age 5-9	3	27.3
	Between age 10-13	3	27.3
	Between age 14-17	5	45.4
<b>*Which people did this to you?</b> (for N=11)	Mother	6	54.5
	Brother-Sister	2	18.2
	Grandmother	2	18.2
	Grandfather	1	9.1

\*(The participants gave multiple responses to this question.)

For the question "Before age 18, did any family or household member say that they wish you had never been born or were dead?", 7.2% answered yes, 89.5% answered no, and 3.3% could not remember. Among 11 respondents answering yes to this question, 54.5% suffered this abuse once or twice, 9.1% between 3 and 30 times, and 36.4% more than 10 times. Among 11 respondents, 27.3% suffered this abuse between ages 5 and 9, 27.3% suffered this abuse between ages 10 and 13, and 45.4% between ages 14 and 17. Among 11

respondents, 54.5% were abused by their mother, 18.2% by their brother-sister, 18.2% by their grandmother, and 9.1% by their grandfather.

**Table 3.**Data of the 16<sup>th</sup> Question [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Before age 18, did any family or household member say that you were not loved or did not deserve to be loved?</b>	Yes	15	9.9
	No	129	85.4
	Cannot remember	7	4.7
<b>If yes, how often did this happen?</b> (for N=15)	1-2 times	6	40
	3-10 times	8	53.3
	More than 10 times	1	6.7
<b>At what times did this happen?</b> (for N=15)	Between age 5-9	7	46.7
	Between age 10-13	6	40
	Between age 14-17	2	13.3
<b>*Which people did this to you?</b> (for N=15)	Mother	5	33.3
	Father	2	13.3
	Brother-Sister	5	33.3
	Grandmother	3	20
	Grandfather	1	6.6
	Other	3	20

\*(The participants gave multiple responses to this question.)

For the question "Before age 18, did any family or household member say that you were not loved or did not deserve to be loved?", 9.9% answered yes, 85.4% answered no, and 4.7% could not remember. Among 15 respondents answering yes, 40% heard this abusive statement once or twice, 53.3% between 3 and 10 times, and 6.7% more than 10 times. 46.7% heard this abusive statement between ages 5 and 9, 40% between ages 10 and 13, and 13.3% between ages 14 and 17. 33.3% were told this statement by their mother, 13.3% by their father, 33.3% by their brother-sister, 20% by their grandmother, 6.6% by their grandfather, and 20% by other family/household member (uncle, aunt, cousin, etc.).

**Table 4.**Data of the 17<sup>th</sup> Question [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Before age 18, were you ever personally threatened that you would be badly hurt or killed?</b>	Yes	10	6.6
	No	130	86,09
	Cannot remember	11	7,3
<b>If yes, how often did this happen?</b> (for N=10)	1-2 times	7	70
	3-10 times	2	20
	More than 10 times	1	10
<b>At what times did this happen?</b> (for N=10)	Between age 10-13	5	50
	Between age 14-17	5	50
<b>Where did this happen to you?</b> (for N=10)	Neighborhood	3	25
	School	4	33.3
	Work	1	8.3
	Other places	4	33.3
<b>Which people did this to you?</b> (for N=10)	Peer	5	50
	Another stranger	5	50

\*(The participants gave multiple responses to this question.)

For the question “Before age 18, were you ever personally threatened that you would be badly hurt or killed?”, 6.6% answered yes, 86.1% answered no, and 7.3% could not remember. Among 10 respondents reported being threatened, 70% were threatened once or twice, 20% between 3 and 10 times, and 10% more than 10 times. Among 10 respondents, half were threatened between ages 10 and 13 and the other half between ages 14 and 17. 25% were threatened in their neighborhood, 33.3% in their school, 8.3% in the place they worked, and 33.3% in other places. Half were threatened by their peer and the other half by other strangers.

**Table 5.**Data of the 18<sup>th</sup> Question [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Before age 18, did anyone in your family or household threaten to abandon you, or refuse to let you live in the house anymore?</b>	No	151	100



All 151 respondents answered no to the question “Before you were age 18, did anyone in your family or household threaten to abandon you, or refuse to let you live in the house anymore?”.

**Table 6.**Data of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Questions [ICAST-R]

Variables	Sub-categories	N	%
<b>Was any legal action taken against all these events?</b>	No	151	100
<b>General thoughts about childhood</b>	I was never insulted or threatened by anyone	44	29,2
	When I was insulted or threatened, mostly it was discipline and it was reasonable and justified	27	17,8
	When I was insulted or threatened, mostly it was discipline but it was not reasonable or justified	55	36,4
	When I was insulted or threatened, mostly it was not discipline and it was not justified	25	16,5
<b>*A comparison of insults and threats before age 18 with those of other children of the same age</b>	Much less than most children	60	39,2
	A little less than most children	10	6,5
	About the same as most children	29	19
	A little more than most children	13	8,5
	Much more than most children	6	3,9

\*(The participants gave multiple responses to this question.)

Considering the responses to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> questions, no legal action was taken against all these instances of abuse. Accordingly, no respondent received help from an institution or agency for the abusive behavior. 29.2% reported being never insulted or threatened. 17.8% reported that insults or threats were mostly for discipline and they were reasonable and justifiable. For 36.4%, insults or threats were also for discipline but they were not reasonable and justifiable. For 16.5%, insults or threats were not for discipline and they were not justifiable. When the respondents were asked how often they were insulted or threatened before age 18 compared to other children around their age at that time, 39.2% reported much less than most children, 6.5% a little less than most children, 19% about the same as most children, 8.5% a little more than most children, and 3.9% much more than most children.

#### **The Analysis Results of the Association between Past Experiences of Emotional Abuse and Their Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect and Abuse**

This section presents the results of independent samples t-test testing whether pre-service preschool teachers' levels of knowledge and awareness of emotional neglect and abuse differ according to their past experience of emotional abuse.

**Table 7.**The T-test Results of the Association Between Past Experiences of Emotional Abuse and Their Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect and Abuse

Factors	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Question 14	Yes	80	6.20	.486	139	.844	.400
	No	61	6.13	.509			

$p > .05$

As seen in Table 7, according to the results of the analysis testing whether the respondents' past experiences of emotional abuse identified through the ISPCANICAST-R for young adults have an effect on their scores in the Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect/Abuse Scale (KAENS), there was no significant difference between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being insulted and criticized to make him or her feel that they were bad, stupid or worthless [ $t(139) = .844, p > .05$ ].

**Table 8.**The Mann-Whitney U Test Results of the Association between Past Experiences of Emotional Abuse and Their Knowledge and Awareness of Emotional Neglect and Abuse

Factors	Group	N	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	p
Question 15	Yes	11	84.18	926	647.000	.436*
	No	135	73.72	10100		
Question 16	Yes	15	44.93	674	554.000	.005**
	No	129	77.13	10204		
Question 17	Yes	10	76.45	764.50	709.500	.997*
	No	141	76.50	10863.50		

\* $p > .05$ , \*\* $p < .05$

There was no significant difference between the respondents' level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being told by a family or household member that they wish he or she had never been born or were died ( $p > .05$ ).

A significant difference was found between the respondents' level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being told by a family or household member that he or she was unloved and did not deserve to be loved ( $p < .05$ ).

No significant difference was found between the respondents' level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by a family or household member threatening to abandon him or her or refusing to let him or her live in the house ( $p>.05$ ).

## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Considering all research results, the majority of the respondents (52.3%) reported that they were insulted and criticized to make him or her feel that they were bad, stupid or worthless. The respondents reported that they were insulted or criticized mostly between ages 10 and 13. Considering the perpetrators of the insult or criticism, teachers were first-ranked and birth parents were second-ranked. Children spend a significant part of their day at home and at school. Therefore, they may be emotionally abused by people who have authority over them.

In general, the respondents less frequently reported suffering emotional abuse by being told by anyone that "they wish you had never been born or were died" and "you were not loved or did not deserve to be loved", and by being threatened that "you would be badly hurt or killed". No respondents reported suffering emotional abuse by anyone "threatening to abandon you or refuse to let you live in the house anymore". Similarly, no respondents reported that any legal action was taken against these abuse events. The reason why emotional abuse, an integral part of all forms of abuse, is underestimated and not subject to a legal action is that the society tolerates emotional violence and uses it as a tool of discipline (Kanak, 2015). Considering the overall impressions of childhood, the most frequent response was that emotional abuse inflicted on them was not reasonable and justifiable.

Considering the research results in general, mothers are the most commonly reported perpetrators of domestic abuse. Güler, Uzun, Boztaş and Aydoğan (2002) reported that 93% of mothers do not show their children their love to discipline them and not to let them get spoiled and inflict emotional neglect or abuse on their children by rebuking and scolding. This result is consistent with that of the present study. Especially relatives living in the same household have also a considerably large share in emotional abuse. According to child abuse reports in Canada, at least one relative is involved in 96% of abuse cases (Trocmé et al., 2006 as cited in Sharpe, 2011). Öncü, Kurt, Esenay and Özer (2012) reported that 15.8% of working children in the sample were emotionally abused by their brothers and sisters.

In this study, with 35%, teachers were the most frequently reported perpetrators of the emotional abuse by insulting a child to make him or her feel bad, stupid or worthless. Ba-Saddik and Hattab (2012) also reported teachers the most frequent perpetrators of emotional abuse with 45.6%, which runs parallel with the present study. Umobong (2010) illustrated that teachers and school administrators in Nigeria intentionally or unintentionally inflict emotional abuse on students by sinisterly telling them, for example, "idiots, never do well, I knew you'll never perform better". Benberishtry, Zeira and Astor (2002) reported that 20.9% of Israel children aged 7 to 11 were abused by school staff. El Bcheraoui, Kouriye and Adib (2009) surveyed 1177

Lebanese children aged 10 to 18 and reported that 81% suffered emotional abuse at least once by being insulted by teachers or peers. These research results are consistent with those of the present study.

In this study, a number of respondents were exposed to emotional abuse at least once by being insulted and threatened. Vissing, Straus, Gelles and Harrop (1991) reported that 63% of children under 18 living with their parents were exposed to verbal violence at least once, such as swearing and insulting, in the last one year. This result is consistent with the present study.

Lastly, this study found a significant difference between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experience of emotional abuse before age 18 by being told by a family or household member that he or she was unloved and did not deserve to be loved. However, there was no significant difference between the level of knowledge and awareness of emotional abuse and the past experiences of emotional abuse by being told by a family or household member that they wish he or she had never been born or were died, by a family or household member threatening to abandon him or her or refusing to let him or her live in the house, and by being insulted or criticized by anyone to make him or her feel stupid, bad or worthless.

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