

Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on Aggressive Behaviors in Children: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to qualitatively analyze preschool teachers' opinions about the aggressive behaviors of children in the classroom. The phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. 46 preschool teachers selected by the maximum diversity sampling method constituted the study group. The data of the study were collected using the semi-structured interview technique, and the data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. According to the results of the study, preschool teachers generally described the aggressive behavior as "damaging friends," mentioned that the type of aggression they mostly encountered in the classroom was "physical aggression" and stated that the most important factor affecting aggression in the preschool period was "parental attitudes." Furthermore, preschool teachers indicated that aggressive behaviors generally emerged "during game activities," that the communication of children exhibiting aggressive behaviors with their peers was usually negatively affected, and that they mostly used the "verbal warning" and "punishment" method to cope with aggressive behaviors in the classroom, however, they also emphasized that they felt inadequate in coping with aggressive behaviors. The activities that will allow children to express themselves and their feelings, to properly communicate with their surroundings and to get rid of their energy can be included in preschool education institutions. Teachers can be provided with applied in-service training seminars on how they can cope with aggressive behaviors and what kinds of effective methods they should use. Furthermore, it is also considered useful to organize information seminars on how parents should approach their children's aggressive behaviors.

Keywords: preschool period, aggressive behavior, teacher opinions, phenomenology

1. Introduction

Behavior, for an adult, can be defined as the all behaviors that he/she has developed due to social, economic and cultural conditions he/she lives in and that let him/her get closer to people in the same situation while it can be defined for a child as a complex process extending from simple bodily acquisitions to identification with appropriate gender and controlling movements according to adult standards (Aydm, 2004; Eren & Gözaydın, 1988). Various problem situations are also likely to emerge within this complex process. Behavior problems refer to behavioral situations that adversely affect the child's ability to use his/her existing skills, to learn new skills, his/her social interaction with the environment and his/her social harmony and that jeopardize the safety of him/her/peers, in other words, the compliance problems occurring in observable or measurable behaviors (Carr & Durand, 1985; Chandler & Dahlquist, 2002; Erbaş, 2002; Güney, 1998; Sucuoğlu, Gümüşçü & Pişkin, 1990; Tüy, 1999). The period of development of the child and the indications should be examined carefully, and these indications should also meet some criteria to characterize the behaviors of a child as a problem. These criteria can be listed as age compliance, behavior intensity, continuity, sexual role expectation, and cultural factors. The severity, excess and frequency of behavior are the factors that are first perceived due to their effects. The indications that occur due to external factors and disappear after a short time should not be considered as a problem because they do not have continuity (Arı, Bayhan, & Artan, 1995; Ünal, 20016; Weikart, 1998; Yavuzer, 1999). The behavior problems observed in children appear in two different ways: externalized behavior problems such as aggression and impulsivity and internalized behavior problems such as introversion and shame (Bee, 1992; Merrell, 2003; Stacks & Goff, 2006; Winkley, 1996). Behavior problems in preschool children can be encountered very often. The problem behaviors that are frequently encountered during the preschool period are observed in sleep, cleaning, toilet and eating habits. Furthermore, behaviors, such as fears, lying, taking belongings without permission, stubbornness, jealousy, mocking, crying, shyness, swearing, aggression, can also be observed

(Kesicioğlu, 2015; Miller, Koplewicz, & Klein, 1997; Özbey, 2010; Özbey & Alisinanoğlu, 2009; Poyraz & Özyürek, 2005; Uysal, Akbaba-Altun, & Akgün, 2010; Ünal, 2006).

Studies have shown that aggressive behavior is one of the behavioral problems most frequently observed in preschool children (Goldstein, Arnold, Rosenberg, Stowe, & Oritz, 2001; Furniss, Beyer, & Guggenmos, 2006; Kandir, 2000; Petermann, Helmsen, & Koglin, 2010). Especially in recent years, childhood aggression has been considered an important health problem all over the world (Amin, Behalik, & El Soreety, 2011). Aggression can be defined as the fact that an individual takes an attitude undesired by the environment, forces another person to adopt his/her requests and exhibits hostile behaviors that are aimed at damaging and hurting another person or that cause fear in other people (Başaran, 2000; Deptula & Cohen, 2004; Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006; Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1993; Kırkıncioğlu, 2003; Tremblay, Gervais, & Petitcherc, 2008). Most researchers mention that there are three types of aggression, which are physical, verbal and indirect aggression. Physical aggression includes direct contact, such as beating, slapping, kicking, biting, pushing, capturing and pulling, and verbal aggression involves the use of words aimed at threatening, frightening or annoying others. Verbal aggression is often followed by physical aggression. Indirect aggression involves situations such as gossip, exclusion, remaining silent and sabotage (Amin, Behalik, & El Soreety, 2011; Ramirez, 2010; Tremblay, 2008; Tremblay, Gervais, & Petitcherc, 2008; Tremblay & Nagin, 2005).

Scientific studies reveal different opinions about the causes of aggression. While many researchers state that aggression motive is inherent in people (Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1993; Lorenz, 2008; Yörükoğlu, 2002), Bandura (1977) argued that children learn both aggressive behaviors and non-aggressive behaviors by observing others and taking them as a model. Furthermore, some researchers have also revealed that aggression occurs as a result of individual characteristics such as social-emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, academic failure and exclusion by peers, and also environmental characteristics such as poverty, unemployment, lower socio-economic level, limited social support to children, inadequacy to be a proper model to the child, and conflicts in family (Coie et al., 1993; Miller, 1994).

Aggressive behavior is a part of the development of young children. There is an increase in the levels of aggression of the vast majority of 2-3-year-old children due to reasons such as limited verbal abilities, increased motor skills and feelings of autonomy, and they express themselves using physical aggression (Tremblay, 2000; Campbell, 2002; Alink et al., 2006). Furthermore, aggression becomes an important issue after children go to pre-school education institutions and begin to interact with their peers extensively. Children use different compliance mechanisms such as aggression in response to their problems (Chen, Huang, Chang, Wang, & Li, 2010; Hockenberry, Wilson, & Rogers, 2016). Morrison, Furlong and Morrison (1994) summarized the risk factors that increase the likelihood of a child to exhibit aggression behaviors under four headings: community-induced (poverty), family-induced (negative parent model), school-induced (negative teacher attitudes) and individual-induced (anti-social behaviors).

It is very important to distinguish whether negative behaviors observed in children are a problem or a characteristic of the period of development, in other words, to make a distinction between children who are normal in terms of their behaviors and children who exhibit deviating behaviors (Yavuzer, 1999) because behavior is a characteristic of the period of development, however, if the teacher or parents regard this behavior as a problem without realizing that it is normal and try to produce a solution, this may further reinforce this behavior. The exact opposite of it may also occur. If the behavior is considered as a problem and ignored, it may lead to the emergence of more serious problems in the following process. Therefore, it is quite important to focus on behavior problems during these early years so that the behaviors that are characterized as problems in the early childhood period do not lead to greater behavior problems and social problems in the following years, and the awareness of parents and teachers can be raised (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Karaca & İkiz, 2014; Lane & Menzies, 2003; Lee, Baillargeon, Vermunt, Wu, & Tremblay, 2007; Savi-Çakar, Tagay, & İkiz, 2015; Walker & Shinn, 2002).

When the literature was reviewed, it was observed that there are studies on the behavior problems of children studying in preschool education institutions, but, there are quite few studies that thoroughly examine and reveal preschool teachers' observations and opinions about aggressive behavior which is included in behavioral problems. From this point of view, it is thought that this study, which aimed to determine the observations and opinions of teachers about the aggressive behaviors observed in preschool children, will contribute to the literature and that teachers' knowledge level about these negative behaviors and their coping methods can be determined, and teachers can be supported in this regard. This study is important in this respect. The main aim of this study was to qualitatively analyze preschool teachers' opinions about the aggressive behaviors of children in the classroom. For this purpose, the following questions were asked to the teachers within the scope of the study; 1. How do you define aggression in the preschool period? 2. What is the most common type of aggression you encounter in the preschool period? 3. What are the factors affecting aggression for preschool children? 4. In which cases do aggressive behaviors usually occur in your class? 5. What is the aggressive child's relationship with his/her peers during the preschool period? 6. What are your methods of coping with aggressive behaviors in the classroom?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study since it was aimed to determine the opinions of preschool teachers about the aggressive behaviors they encounter in the classroom environment. The phenomenology design focuses on the facts that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding. The facts may appear in the forms like the events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts, and situations in the world we live in. Phenomenology studies focus on the direct description of experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The study was carried out in the phenomenology design to reveal and describe preschool teachers' opinions about the concept of "aggressive behaviors" in detail.

2.2 Study Group

46 preschool teachers working in preschool education institutions affiliated to Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education constituted the study group of the research. The "maximum diversity sampling" method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to create the study group. Maximum diversity sampling aims to create a relatively small sample and to reflect the diversity of individuals who may be a party to the problem studied in this sample at the maximum level (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). During the determination of the teachers to be interviewed within the scope of this study to ensure maximum diversity, the criteria were the fact that teachers worked in different types of schools (independent nursery school / nursery school within a primary school) in different socio-economic regions and that they had different service periods. Preschool teachers constituting the study group consisted of 40 (87%) female and 6 (13%) male individuals. 14 (31%) of the preschool teachers were between 25-34 years old, 19 (41%) of them were between 35-44 years old, and 13 (28%) of them were between 45-54 years old. Among the preschool teachers, 16 (35%) of them had 1-10 years of professional seniority, 20 (43%) of them had 11-20 years of professional seniority, and 10 (22%) of them had 21-30 years of professional seniority. 38 (83%) and 8 (17%) of the teachers had undergraduate education and postgraduate education, respectively. While 17 (37%), 16 (35%) and 13 (28%) of the teachers worked in the institutions located in a lower socioeconomic region, middle socioeconomic region and high socioeconomic region, respectively, 24 (52%) and 22 (48%) of them worked in independent nursery schools and nursery classes within primary school, respectively.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

In the study, the data were collected using the semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions suitable for qualitative research. In semi-structured interviews, an attempt to collect data in depth is made with pre-determined questions. This method is neither as strict as fully structured interviews nor as flexible as unstructured interviews (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2009; Karasar, 2009). The review of the literature was performed while preparing the interview questions. Three field experts were asked for their opinions to ensure content validity. The interview form consists of two sections, the first section including the "Personal Information Form" related to preschool teachers and the second section including six open-ended questions related to the study. Open-ended questions enable participants to explain their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and tendencies (Ekiz, 2009). Pre-application was performed by asking three preschool teachers the interview questions to evaluate whether the questions in the interview form were clear and understandable. The interview form was finalized by an expert by checking whether the answers given to the questions were appropriate for the main aim of the study. The opinions of the teachers with whom pre-application was performed were not included in the study.

2.4 Data Collection

46 preschool teachers volunteering to participate in the study were interviewed individually and face to face between May-July 2017, and the research data were collected as a result of the interviews lasting for an average of 30 minutes. The aim of the study was explained in detail to the teachers, and the importance of answering the questions in a friendly manner was emphasized to achieve this aim. The interviews were recorded by the voice recorder and the records were transcribed.

2.5 Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained as a result of the interviews conducted with the teachers. According to this method, the data obtained are summarized and interpreted according to the predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this study, the themes were research questions, and the data were summarized and interpreted under these questions. The preschool teachers who were asked for their opinions were given code numbers (T1, T2, T3...), and their names were not used directly. The results were presented with frequency and percentage values.

2.6 Validity and Reliability

How the results, conclusions, and comments were reached was presented clearly and in detail to ensure internal validity in the study. An attempt to explain all processes of the study, in other words, the research design, study group, preparation of the data collection tool, data collection, data analysis process, and the comparisons with different studies on the subject in detail was made to ensure external validity. The research questions were clearly and fully expressed to ensure internal reliability, direct quotations were included, and separate encoding was performed by two different encoders on the data obtained. The external reliability was ensured by attempting to explain the descriptions related to the data collection and analysis methods, the conceptual framework and all processes followed in detail in order to test the study with other studies. The data obtained were coded separately by the researcher and an academican experienced in qualitative research. Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula $\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Dissensus}) \times 100$ was applied to the encoding performed by both researchers. The compliance between the two encoders was calculated to be 91%. When conformity percentage is 70% in the calculation of reliability, the reliability percentage is accepted to be achieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

3. Results

The results obtained as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the interview form which was used to determine preschool teachers' opinions about the aggressive behaviors they encountered in the classroom are included in this section of the study. The results are presented systematically in accordance with the research questions. The first question of the study "How do you define aggression in the preschool period?" was named as the theme of *The definition of aggression*, the second question of the study "What is the most common type of aggression you encounter in the preschool period?" was named as the theme of *The type of aggression*, the third question of the study "What are the factors affecting aggression for preschool children?" was named as the theme of the *Factors affecting aggression*, the fourth question of the study "In which cases do aggressive behaviors usually occur in your class?" was named as the theme of the *Causes of aggression*, the fifth question "What is the aggressive child's relationship with his/her peers during the preschool period?" was named as the theme of *Peer relationship*, and the sixth question "What are your methods of coping with aggressive behaviors in the classroom?" was named as the theme of *Coping methods*.

3.1 Results Related to the Definition of Aggression

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the definition of aggression determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definition of aggression in the preschool period

Definition of aggression	n	f	%
Damaging friends (pushing, kicking, biting...)	46	27	59
Behavior disorder (requiring treatment, expert support ...)		9	20
Damaging items (throwing, tearing, discarding)		8	17
Self-harming (self-beating, self-scratching ...)		2	4

As it is understood from Table 1, the majority of the preschool teachers who participated in the interview defined aggressive behavior as "damaging friends" while other preschool teachers defined it as "behavior disorder," "damaging items" and "self-harming." It is observed that the vast majority of the teachers described aggressive behavior as an act of damaging someone or something like "beating, pushing, tearing, self-scratching." Furthermore, some of the preschool teachers also described aggression as a behavior problem requiring treatment or expert support.

Some of the teachers' opinions regarding the definition of "damaging friends" are as follows:

T5: "...Aggression is to cause physical damage to peers and friends deliberately and intentionally..."

T13: "...I can define aggression as hurting children in a way to make friends sad, cry..."

Some of the teachers' opinions regarding the definition of "behavior disorder" are as follows:

T27: "...Aggression is a behavioral disorder that should be intervened as early as possible..."

T39: "...Aggression is a behavior problem that should be treated by receiving expert support..."

Some of the teachers' opinions regarding the definition of "damaging items" are as follows:

T9: "...It is the person's damage to the items of friends or surrounding items without controlling himself/herself when he/she gets angry..."

T44: "...Aggression is the child's damage to the items around him/her by destroying them without

ensuring anger control...

Some of the teachers' opinions regarding the definition of "self-harming" are as follows:

T11: *"...It is the situation in which children hurt themselves when their requests are not fulfilled..."*

T32: *"...Aggression is the situation in which the child who cannot harm the environment when he/she cannot achieve his/her requests and who gets further angry hurts himself/herself..."*

3.2 Results Related to the Most Common Type of Aggression

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the most common type of aggression determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Most common type of aggression in the preschool period

Type of aggression	n	f	%
Physical aggression (punching, slapping, spitting ...)		27	59
Verbal aggression (threatening, insulting, humiliation...)	46	12	26
Indirect aggression (being offended, exclusion, backbiting...)		7	15

As it is understood from Table 2, the majority of the preschool teachers who participated in the interview indicated "physical aggression" as the type of aggression encountered in the preschool period. Other teachers indicated "verbal aggression" and "indirect aggression." The preschool teachers stated that they mostly witnessed physical aggression such as "punching, slapping," and then verbal aggression including "threatening, insulting" and indirect aggression such as "being offended, exclusion." The preschool teachers stated that they mostly witnessed physical aggression, and then verbal aggression and indirect aggression, respectively, in the classroom. Furthermore, the teachers stated that aggressive behaviors were especially observed in children in the institutions located in lower socio-economic regions and in nursery classes serving within a primary school.

The quotations from the teachers' statements on "physical aggression" are as follows:

T29: *"...The children who get angry usually push their friends, beat them, in other words, they hurt them and make them cry..."*

T46: *"...When preschool children get angry with each other, they generally react by beating or slapping..."*

The quotations from the teachers' statements on "verbal aggression" are as follows:

T3: *"...During this period, children mostly make serious accusations that will upset their friends..."*

T31: *"...It is to insult in a way to tarnish friends' honor, even to swear by going further..."*

The quotations from the teachers' statements on "indirect aggression" are as follows:

T16: *"...It is the case when the child closes all means of communication with the friend with whom he/she gets angry without talking in any way..."*

T37: *"...Some children are offended at their friends and never get in touch with them for a long time..."*

3.3 Results Related to the Factors Affecting Aggression

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the factors affecting aggression determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors affecting aggression for preschool children

Factors affecting aggression	n	f	%
Parental attitude (authoritarian, overprotective, indifferent)		21	46
Environment (relative, friend pressure...)	46	14	30
Gender (female, male)		11	24

As it is understood from Table 3, the majority of the preschool teachers who participated in the interview indicated that "parental attitude" was the most important factor affecting aggression. Other teachers mentioned the importance of

“environment” and “gender” factors. The teachers stated that the children of parents exhibiting “authoritarian, overprotective and indifferent” attitudes are the oppressed children with aggressive or direct aggressive behaviors. Moreover, the teachers also stated that children commit violence against their peers under the influence of close relatives and friends. The preschool teachers emphasized that male children exhibited more aggressive behaviors than female children, and that male children and female children mainly resorted to physical and verbal aggression and indirect aggression, respectively.

The quotations from the teachers’ opinions on “parental attitude,” one of the factors affecting aggression, are as follows:

T21: “...*In particular, fathers advise their children to treat in the same way when they suffer injustice or violence...*”

T42: “...*The children of authoritarian parents usually behave aggressively against their peers so that their requests are accepted...*”

The quotations from the teachers’ opinions on the “environment” factor affecting aggression are as follows:

T7: “...*When problems arise among children, actually, they can be easily solved, but sometimes, the comments of grandfather, paternal and maternal uncles may easily lead children to violence...*”

T28: “...*Very calm children in my class are even sometimes affected by the negative attitudes of their peers and try to solve their problems with aggressive behaviors...*”

The quotations from the teachers’ opinions on the “gender” factor affecting aggression are as follows:

T20: “...*All of the children exhibiting aggressive behaviors in my class are boys, and boys cannot control their anger easily...*”

T34: “...*Boys try to solve their problems immediately by resorting to violence, especially under the influence of their fathers...*”

3.4 Results Related to the Cases in Which Aggressive Behaviors Emerge

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the cases in which aggressive behaviors emerge determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Cases in which aggressive behaviors emerge

Cases in which aggressive behaviors emerge	n	f	%
During the game activity (game rules, toy...)	46	16	35
During the free time activity (waiting in the queue, material...)		13	28
In cases when the request is not fulfilled (insisting, excess demand...)		9	20
In cases when they are separated from the family (longing for mother, grandparents...)		8	17

As it is understood from Table 4, the preschool teachers who participated in the interview indicated the cases in which aggressive behaviors emerge as “during the game activity,” “during the free time activity,” “in cases when the request is not fulfilled” and “in cases when they are separated from their family.” The majority of the teachers stated that children resorted to aggressive behaviors in the fights that arise during game activities due to reasons, such as toy sharing and violating the rules of the game. Furthermore, the teachers also stated that aggressive behaviors occurred in the classroom in cases such as the inability to share the materials available in centers and lining up to receive materials during free time activities, failure to achieve something they insist and demand in the classroom as a result of persistent requesting, and unwillingness to leave the mother, father or grandparent who take them to school.

Some of the opinions of the teachers who indicated that aggressive behaviors occurred “during the game activity” are as follows:

T23: “...*When two children want to have the same toy at the same time during the games, there usually arises a situation of violence...*”

T45: “...*The children who think that they suffer injustice while applying the rules in games usually cannot control their anger...*”

Some of the opinions of the teachers who indicated that aggressive behaviors occurred “during the free time activity” are as follows:

T1: *"...Sometimes a fight may arise during material sharing among the children playing free games at the centers..."*

T19: *"...Each of the children in my class spends a certain amount of time at the centers, but when this time is extended, the children who do not want to wait in the queue may damage their friends..."*

Some of the opinions of the teachers who indicated that aggressive behaviors occurred "in cases when the request is not fulfilled" are as follows:

T10: *"...Since families do what their children want at any time they like, and when we expect them to delay their demands a little, we witness bursts of anger..."*

T15: *"...Some of the children in my class insist on their requests, and they damage the items around them when their request is not fulfilled..."*

Some of the opinions of the teachers who indicated that aggressive behaviors occurred "in cases when they are separated from their family" are as follows:

T25: *"...A few children in my class get angry and treat their friends badly after their mothers take them to the school in the morning and leave them..."*

T36: *"...My children who do not want to leave the family member who takes them to the school usually become aggressive when they come to school..."*

3.5 Results Related to the Peer Relationship of the Aggressive Child in the Preschool Period

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the peer relationship of the aggressive child determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The peer relationship of the aggressive child in the preschool period

Peer relationship	n	f	%
Negatively affected (fear, communication problem, disturbance...)		25	55
Not affected (disregarding, forgetting...)	46	19	41
Positively affected (knowing well, proper reaction...)		2	4

As it is understood from Table 5, the majority of the preschool teachers participating in the interview on the peer relationship of the aggressive child stated that they are "negatively affected" while other teachers stated that they are "not affected" and "positively affected." The majority of the teachers stated that the peer relationships of the aggressive child are disrupted due to reasons such as the fear of children exposed to aggressive behavior, and disturbance occurring in the classroom. Furthermore, some teachers stated that the peer relationships of the aggressive child were not affected on the grounds that children disregard or forget the aggressive behavior experienced. Two male preschool teachers mentioned that aggressive behaviors cause children to know each other better and to give proper reactions, therefore, the peer relationships of the aggressive child are positively affected.

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that the peer relationship of the aggressive child is "negatively affected" are as follows:

T4: *"...His/her friends often stay away from the child exhibiting aggressive behaviors and try not to communicate with him/her..."*

T33: *"...The child who frightens his/her friends by continuously causing damage is left alone, and in this case, he/she gets further angry, and eventually, a disturbance environment emerges in the classroom..."*

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that the peer relationship of the aggressive child is "not affected" are as follows:

T6: *"...Even though there are sometimes problems that may lead to fighting due to some children's aggressive tendencies, children easily forget these situations, and their relationships continue in exactly the same way..."*

T43: *"...I've never observed that the behaviors of aggressive children disrupt the communication with their friends..."*

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that the peer relationship of the aggressive child is "positively affected" are as follows:

T14: *"...Since the children who are prone to violence immediately manifest themselves, other children do not conflict with these children to avoid problems. Thus, positive communication is formed among them..."*

T30: *"...I think this is related to the fact that children know each other well. If children know for what they get angry and what to react to, they act accordingly, and friendship relationships are positively affected in this case..."*

3.6 Results Related to the Methods of Coping with Aggressive Behaviors in the Classroom

The categories, frequencies, and percentages regarding the methods of coping with aggressive behaviors in the classroom determined during the interviews conducted with preschool teachers are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Methods of coping with aggressive behaviors in the classroom

Coping methods	n	f	%
Verbal warning (explanation, persuasion, getting angry...)		19	41
Punishment (excluding, keeping away from game and activity...)		16	35
Establishing classroom rules (making a joint decision, imposing sanction...)	46	7	15
Interviewing with the family (cooperation, including the family in the process...)		4	9

As it is understood from Table 6, the majority of the preschool teachers participating in the interview stated that they used "verbal warning" and "punishment" to cope with aggressive behaviors while other teachers stated that they used the methods of "establishing classroom rules" and "interviewing with the family." Most of the teachers stated that they gave verbal warnings such as explaining the impropriety of the behavior, trying to persuade and getting angry depending on the severity of aggression or gave punishments like exclusion from the game or activity when they were faced with aggressive behavior. Other preschool teachers stated that they established rules as the class at the beginning of each term and also determined the sanctions to be imposed on those who did not follow these rules by a joint decision. Moreover, the teachers emphasized that they also included the family in the process and cooperated with them by reasoning that aggressive behaviors are generally available in the families of the children exhibiting aggressive behaviors.

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that they used the method of "verbal warning" to cope with aggressive behaviors are as follows:

T12: *"...I talk to my students who are unable to control their anger and cause damage to their friends or environment, and I explain what they do is wrong, I do not know what else I can do..."*

T26: *"...I certainly talk to my students exhibiting aggressive behaviors, and I explain that they act wrongly, but this method is not usually useful..."*

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that they used the method of "giving punishment" to cope with aggressive behaviors are as follows:

T2: *"...For me, aggression is a problem that should definitely be avoided. For this reason, I do not include the child who causes damage to those around in activities, and he/she surely pays for what he does by suffering the consequences. This situation makes me sad, but it is the only way I know is effective..."*

T41: *"...To keep children away from exhibiting aggressive behaviors, I give punishment to them by keeping them away from the game and their peers for a while, I mean, I refer to conventional methods..."*

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that they used the method of "establishing classroom rules" to cope with aggressive behaviors are as follows:

T8: *"...On the first day of the school, I try to tell that damaging is a bad behavior and to make all children adopt that it is a classroom rule, but sometimes, I have to remind this rule again because this method is not very effective for a long period..."*

T17: *"...At the beginning of the 1st semester, all my students and I determined the rules for our class together. I clearly expressed my students that all students including me have to follow the rules..."*

The opinions of the teachers who indicated that they used the method of “interviewing with the family” to cope with aggressive behaviors are as follows:

T22: “...I try to find solutions in cooperation and interviewing with the parents of the children exhibiting aggressive behaviors...”

T38: “...I try to find permanent solutions by talking with the families of the children with a tendency to violence towards their friends. However, I have serious concerns about whether this is an effective method...”

4. Discussion

The majority of the preschool teachers who participated in the study defined aggressive behavior as “damaging friends” while other preschool teachers defined it as “behavior disorder,” “damaging items” and “self-harming.” When the studies in the literature are examined, it is observed that aggressive behavior is generally defined as a behavioral problem (Furniss et al., 2006; Petermann et al., 2010). Aggression in 2-3 years of age refers to the risk of the child’s damage to himself/herself, his/her peers, any object or animal (Alink et al., 2006; Dodge et al., 2006; Tremblay et al., 2008). It can be thought that the reason why teachers generally defined aggressive behavior as the act of “damaging” someone or something like “beating, pushing, tearing, throwing, self-scratching” is due to the fact that aggressive children use physical violence to themselves, their friends and items in the classroom and cause damage. It was determined that all of the teachers who defined aggression as a “behavior disorder” worked in the institutions located in lower socioeconomic regions. These teachers emphasized that children in their classrooms also had different behavioral problems other than aggression and certainly needed treatment or expert support.

The majority of the preschool teachers who participated in the interview indicated that the type of aggression encountered in the preschool period was “physical aggression” including the actions such as “punching, kicking, slapping.” Other preschool teachers mentioned “verbal aggression” including verbal actions such as “threatening, swearing, insulting” and “indirect aggression” including cases like “being offended, exclusion, backbiting.” The teachers stated that physical aggression was mostly experienced in the classroom, followed by verbal aggression and indirect aggression. Furthermore, the teachers stated that the children in lower socioeconomic regions and especially in nursery classes serving within a primary school exhibited much more aggressive behaviors. The fact that the children in lower socioeconomic regions are also exposed to aggressive behaviors in the family environment, especially due to poverty, and the fact that the children in nursery classes serving within a primary school are exposed to the aggressive behaviors of children attending primary school or witness that those children often include aggression in the relationships with each other can be considered as causes of the situation mentioned. Studies reveal that the most common type of aggression in childhood is physical aggression (Tremblay, 2003; Tremblay et al., 1996; Tremblay & Nagin, 2005).

The majority of the preschool teachers indicated “parental attitude” as the most important factor affecting aggression. Other teachers emphasized the effect of “environment” and “gender” on aggressive behaviors. The teachers stated that the children of the parents exhibiting authoritarian, overprotective or indifferent attitudes other than democratic parental attitudes are vulnerable children exposed to aggressive or persistent aggressive behaviors. It can be said that the children who are constantly suppressed, protected or disinterested by their parents at home use violence against their peers or remain unresponsive to the violence applied to them like at home. Studies reveal that parental attitudes are associated with aggressive behavior, in other words, children who establish a close relationship with their parents exhibit less aggressive behaviors (Chen et al., 2002; Erdinç, 2009; Gander & Gardiner, 2004; Gülay, 2008; İkiz, Otlı, & Vural, 2016; Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004; Marcus & Kramer, 2001; Rhodes, 2003; Walker & Golly, 1999). Brook, Zheng, Whiteman and Brook (2001) revealed that the fact that parents exhibit aggressive behaviors affects the child’s aggression. Furthermore, the teachers also stated that children used violence to their peers by being influenced by the people in their immediate surroundings, in other words, the behaviors and words of their relatives and friends. This can be explained that children are affected by the people they have adopted as a role model and loved, and also, by the behaviors they are exposed to in their environment. In general, the fact that boys are more active than girls and that boys take male members of the family (father, paternal uncle, maternal uncle, etc.) as a role model can be shown as a reason for this situation. Identification plays an important role in the learning of aggressive behaviors (Chen et al., 2002; Köknal, 1999). If the people in the immediate surroundings of children and their peers exhibit aggressive behaviors or are allowed to exhibit these behaviors, children may internalize these behaviors or apply them to their environment (Öksüz, Çevik, & Kartal, 2012; Yavuzer, 2000). Furthermore, all teachers emphasized that male children resorted to aggressive behaviors far more than female children and that male children and female children are more inclined to physical and verbal aggression and indirect aggression, respectively. This result is consistent with the literature results (Campbell & Muncer, 1998; Chen, Wang, Chen, & Liu, 2002; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; Erdinç, 2009; Gülay, 2008; İkiz et al., 2016; Karaca, Gündüz, & Aral, 2011; Keenan, Shaw, Delliquadri, Giovannelli, & Walsh, 1998;

Tremblay et al., 1996). Bonica, Arnold, Fisher, Zeljo and Yershova (2003) determined that girls were more inclined to relational aggression than boys. Studies show that aggressive behaviors are more common among males in societies with low economic, educational and cultural levels (Jersild, 1979; Köknal, 1996). In a study on the determination of the factors affecting the aggression tendencies of students aged between 10 and 12 years, it was determined that there was a statistically significant relationship between aggressive behavior and gender, the child's participation in family decisions, parents' reactions when they get angry with their child, and their attitudes towards the child (Bayrak, 2011).

The majority of the teachers stated that children resorted to aggressive behaviors in the fights that arise during game activities due to reasons, such as toy sharing and violating the rules of the game. Furthermore, teachers also stated that aggressive behaviors occurred in the classroom in cases like the inability to share the materials available in centers and lining up to receive materials during free time activities, failure to achieve something they insist and demand in the classroom as a result of persistent requesting, and unwillingness to leave the mother, father or grandparent who take them to school. It can be thought that all cases with the emergence of aggressive behaviors mentioned are actually the natural consequences of behaviors such as sharing, owning and self-focusing that children exhibit in the egocentric period because, in the egocentric period, children act according to their own points of view and cannot think by putting themselves in others' place (Berk, 2013; Yazgan, Bilgin, & Kılıç, 2015). İkiz et al. (2016) emphasized that teachers indicated egocentrism as one of the causes of aggressive behaviors.

The majority of the teachers stated that the peer relationships of the aggressive child are disrupted due to reasons such as the fear of children exposed to aggressive behavior, emerging lack of communication, and disturbance occurring in the classroom. It can be said that the situations that cause fear, anxiety, and worry in children affect their peer communication negatively. Studies reveal that aggressive behaviors negatively affect social relations (Loeber & Farrington, 2000; McComas, Johnson, & Symons, 2005; Vitaro, Brendgen, Pagani, Tremblay, & Mc Duff, 1999). Gülay (2009) determined that there was a statistically significant relationship between children's levels of aggression and being fearful and anxious, exhibiting non-social behaviors, and the levels of exposure to violence of their peers. Furthermore, some teachers stated that aggression does not affect children's peer relationships by arguing that children disregard or forget the aggressive behaviors to which they are exposed, or they also respond in time. Teachers working in institutions located in lower socio-economic regions indicated that the negative behaviors experienced in the school by the children who are used to being exposed to aggressive behaviors by their family members and those in their immediate surroundings did not disrupt their peer relationships. However, two preschool teachers mentioned that negative behaviors positively affect the peer relationships of children on the grounds that aggressive behaviors allow children to know each other better and to see their reactions. Peterson and Flanders (2005) stated that especially boys play fighting games that look like aggression, but the intent and result in these games are quite different because fighting games are not aggression, and in these games, children have fun and also test themselves physically against each other. Due to fighting in games, children learn how to manage their aggressive reactions and how to reduce aggression impulses.

Teachers who establish positive communication with children can support children in preventing negative behaviors by creating a classroom environment based on trust in their classrooms. In this respect, it is extremely important that teachers know the strategies they need to implement against undesirable behaviors and they should be supported in this regard (Ahn, 2005; Pianta, 1997; Şeker, 2000; Uysal et al., 2010). The majority of the preschool teachers participating in the interview stated that they used "verbal warnings" such as explaining the impropriety of the behavior, trying to persuade and getting angry, and "punishment" methods like exclusion from the game or activity to cope with aggressive behaviors in the classroom. Studies reveal that preschool teachers generally prefer verbal warnings against problem behaviors (Sadık, 2002; Sadık, 2003). Other teachers stated that they determined the "classroom rules" as the class at the beginning of each term and also determined the sanctions to be imposed on those who did not follow these rules by a joint decision. If the teacher determines the rules and the sanctions to be imposed when these rules are not followed together with students, students further exhibit the behaviors of acting in accordance with these rules and cooperating (Supaporn, 2000). Moreover, the teachers emphasized that they also included the family in the process and cooperated with them by reasoning that aggressive behaviors are generally available in the families of the children exhibiting aggressive behaviors. This result is consistent with the literature results (İkiz et al., 2016; Özbey, 2010; Sadık, 2002). Studies reveal that preschool teachers use the methods such as talking to the child, determining simple and clear classroom rules, supporting positive behaviors, rewarding or punishing, sitting next to the child, ignoring, scolding the child, sending to another classroom, and sending to the school principal to cope with behavioral problems and that they feel inadequate (Acar, 2009; Andrew, Ken, & Stephenson, 1999; Çetin, 2013; Kısa, 2009; Öngören Özdemir & Tepeli, 2016; Turla, Şahin, & Avcı, 2001; Uysal et al., 2010).

To make recommendations based on the research findings, the activities that will allow children to become aware of their feelings and express them and their feelings, to properly communicate with their surroundings and to get rid of their energy can be included in preschool education institutions. Preschool children exhibiting aggressive behaviors can

be provided with help and support from the guidance teacher of the school or from an expert in a health institution. Teachers can be provided with applied in-service training seminars on how they can cope with aggressive behaviors and what kinds of effective methods they should use. One of the three trivets in training activities is undoubtedly parents. Therefore, it is considered useful to organize information seminars on how parents should approach their children's aggressive behaviors.

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