Turkish Preschool Teachers' Opinions on Aggression: Uncertainty of Relational Aggression

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Abstract: Aggression in early childhood is considered to a common problem. Identification, reduction and prevention of aggression, especially in early childhood are also considered prevalent. Preschool teachers are known as one of the most important people in children's lives as they are the first ones to meet the child after parents. Therefore, they hold an important role in identifying, reducing and preventing child aggression observed in early childhood. The purpose of the present study is to examine the knowledge and the awareness levels of preschool teachers about aggression and aggressive behaviours. The study is based on phenomenological approach, as one of the qualitative research designs. A semi-structured interview form, prepared for the study based on expert opinions, was applied to the participants. On the light of the findings from the preliminary findings, the related form was applied to a second group of teachers over the internet. Besides, an additional scale consisting of the items of two different instruments directed to determine the aggressive behaviours of preschool children were formed and applied to the second group of participants. The last scale, which was prepared depending on the findings obtained from the second group of teachers, was applied to a third group of participants because the first two participant groups could not recognize and define relational aggression. The relevant themes and sub-themes were created from the data obtained and the findings were discussed within the scope of the literature. According to the results of the study, it was seen that preschool teachers generally defined aggression as physical and verbal harm, and similarly, aggressive behaviours were categorized under physical aggression and verbal aggression types. It was determined that teachers generally recognized relational aggression when they saw the items related to it in the scale. However, they hardly emphasized it while they were defining aggression. So, it can be said that preschool teachers have limited knowledge and awareness of relational aggression as they recognize it only when they see it but can neither define nor name it. The results are discussed and some suggestions are recommended.

Keywords: *Preschool teachers, preschool children, physical aggression, relational aggression, aggressive behaviours.*

Introduction

Aggression occurs at an early age. From birth, children show increasingly physical aggressive behaviour towards the age of two up to three (Alink et al. 2006; Tremblay, 2012). In addition, various studies conducted in the field show that, physical aggression in preschool children (Crick & Rose, 2000; Ostrow et al. 2006) decreases with increasing age. However, it is emphasized that the high level of aggression, especially at an early age, can be permanently stable until adolescence (Cote et al. 2006; Pingault et al. 2013; Potegal & Archer, 2004; Tremblay, 2010). After the age of three, children can learn other alternatives to physical aggression (Campbell et al. 2000). It has been reported that children around 30 months of age exhibit relational aggression in their interactions with other children and continue in a stable manner for two years (Crick et al. 2006) and become noticeably distinguishable from physical aggression (Ostrow et al. 2004).

It may also be important to define how aggression may occur at an early age. According to the common opinion of social psychologists, aggression is defined as: behaviours intended to cause pain and/or harm to a person who does not intend to harm him/her (Bushman & Huesmann, 2010; DeWall et al. 2011). In addition, depending on the results of the study that Ersan (2017) conducted on aggression and examined aggression in terms of theoretical approaches (frustration-aggression theory, social cognitive learning theory, general aggression model, etc.) and types (physical,

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verbal, relational, reactive, proactive, etc.) the definition of the term is stated as follows: "*Any kind of behaviour harming an innocent person, his belongings, his social relationships targeted by another person, or harming an innocent person to gain a goal without the intention of abusing, but by ignoring the suffer the innocent person experiences*" *(p. 17).* In this context, it is emphasized that preschool children may not only *intentionally* harm other children physically and/or relationally for any reason, but also may use it as a means to facilitate the achievement without causing intentional harm. A child, who forcibly takes a toy s/he likes very much from his/her peer's hand, has the primary goal of getting the toy, rather than intentionally harming his/her peer. However, the child who takes the toy away does not care about the other child's suffering/hurting.

In various studies, aggression is commonly classified and occur as physical (hitting, kicking, spitting, etc.), verbal (yelling, threatening, saying words that hurt, etc.) and relational (gossiping about someone, damaging social relationships, etc.) (Coyne et al. 2010; Ettekal & Ladd, 2017; Zhang et al. 2016). In the literature, it is seen that physical and verbal aggression are considered as overt aggression (Crick et al. 1997; Putallaz et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2009). In a meta-analysis study of 135 studies from seventeen countries (Casper & Cart, 2017), physical and verbal aggression were examined not under separate headings but under overt aggression. Similarly, relational aggression is used interchangeably with "indirect" and "social" aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Herrenkohl et al. 2009).

Studies in the field reveal that aggressive behaviours of children, including pre-schoolers are related to their parents' attitudes (Chang et al. 2002; Lei et al. 2018; Llorca et al. 2017; Masud et al. 2019; Suarez-Relinque et al. 2019; Valles, 2012) and their adoption of someone as a role model (Bjorkqvist, 1997; Bandura et al. 1961; Girard et al. 2019; Sankuay et al. 2017; Tremblay, 2012). It is found that aggression is not only associated with the children's age (Ostrov et al. 2004; Ersan, 2017), but also with their temperament (Gonzalez-Pena et al. 2013), language development levels (Girard et al. 2014) and even with their gender (Endendijk et al. 2017). Preschool children's aggressive behaviours were examined in terms of many variables. While some of these variables are innate and some of them are environmental. In preschool children's lives, environment is another very important variable regarding their age and development levels in addition to their parents. The relationship between a teacher and a child has great importance in the preschool years, which is considered a very critical period of human life. Preschool teachers are not only providing care and education for children, but they also are the first adults that children interact with extensively outside their families and thus, have a critical role in shaping the children's future (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). Preschool children's aggressive behaviours, like many other behaviours, can also be shaped according to teachers' teaching styles. Teachers' reactions to aggressive behaviours can be determinative upon the aggressive behaviours of children (Vasiliki, 2016). For example, teachers' enhanced classroom management skills seem to significantly reduce behavioural problems in children (McGilloway et al. 2011).

In a meta-analysis study (Oliver et al. 2011), it was determined that behavioural problems, especially aggression, decreased significantly in the classrooms where teachers had competent classroom management skills. Even the teacher's sensitivity to aggressive behaviours in the classroom can prevent the spread of aggression in it (Goldstein et al. 2001). On the contrary, low levels of teacher's competence (Works, 2014), as well as their negative attitudes, are significant triggers of children's aggressive behaviours (Dias & Ventura, 2017; Morrison et al. 1994). The results of a five-year longitudinal study conducted by Weyns et al. (2017) in which the relationships between teacher responses and relational aggression were examined are quite interesting. According to the results, teachers who gave praising feedback significantly reduced relational aggression levels over time. Conversely, it was concluded that feedback based on scolding and condemnation increased relational aggression. A study conducted in Egypt (Amin et al. 2011) on aggressive behaviour of preschool children showed that 68% of the children in the sample were exposed to peer aggression. At this point, the study emphasizes the need for preschool teachers to work together with nurses, parents, and school psychologists on the early diagnosis, reduction and prevention of aggressive behaviours of preschool children.

Many examples of aggressive behaviour can be seen especially in newspapers, on television, on social media, in films and even in cartoons (Christakis et al. 2013; Klein, & Shiffman, 2012; Pazarbasi, 2018). Parents, teachers and social psychologists are particularly concerned about the increase in aggression among children (Coplan et al. 2015; Trawick-Smith, 2014). Besides, it is important to understand the importance of preschool teachers who are the first mentors of young children following their parents (Ersan, 2015) and to determine which behaviours these teachers consider as aggressive behaviours. When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is seen that there have been many studies conducted in Turkey (Akcay & Ozcebe, 2012; Alisinanoglu & Kesicioglu, 2010; Amca & Oztug, 2016; Ari & Yaban, 2016; Ersan, 2020; Gultekin-Akduman, 2012; Ozdemir & Tepeli, 2016; Uysal & Dincer, 2013) as well as around the world (Carpender & Nagle, 2006; Dailey, 2015; Gower et al. 2014; Ingram & Bering, 2010; Juliano et al. 2006; Lindley, 2014; Morine et al. 2011; Pathirana, 2016; Rich et al. 2008; Runions & Shaw, 2013; Song et al. 2015) in which teacher evaluations were used to determine preschool children's aggressive behaviour.

Preschool teachers are expected to recognize aggression and aggressive behaviours within its sub-types. Whether preschool teachers are aware or not aware of aggression and its categories can be a determinant for children either to show aggression or to become victims of aggression. At the same time, this knowledge and awareness can enable them to make more objective and realistic assessments of the measurement tools aimed at determining child aggression in

scientific studies. In this study, whether the preschool teachers have a deep and detailed understanding of the phenomenon of aggression and aggressive behaviour was examined.

Methodology

Research Goal

The purpose of the present study is to examine the views and experiences of preschool teachers about the cases of aggression and aggressive behaviour of children. In order to achieve this goal, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What is aggression according to preschool teachers?

2. What behaviours do preschool teachers define as aggressive behaviours?

3. Are preschool teachers able to recognize aggressive behaviours and types in a group of behaviours presented to them?

Research Model

The present study is qualitative research and phenomenology design was used to determine preschool teachers' opinions and awareness about aggression and aggressive behaviours. The phenomenology design is preferred in cases that people are somehow familiar to but do not have a deeper and detailed understanding. In the world we are in, phenomena can be seen as various events, perceptions, sensations, experiences, orientations, concepts and situations. However, encountering these cases may not indicate that we fully understand them. In this context, phenomenology can provide a suitable scientific basis for studies aiming to investigate cases that are not completely unknown but at the same time cannot be fully understood (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016). In this context, in order to determine the tendency of preschool teachers about aggression and aggressive behaviour, a survey model was applied in three stages.

Participants

It is of great importance in phenomenology research to select participants that have experienced the phenomenon investigated (Creswell, 2016). The participants of the present study were expected have experienced aggression and aggressive behaviour in preschool children. In this context, three different participant groups were identified. The reasons for working with three different groups of participants are explained in detail in the "data collection process" section.

First participant group

It is composed of five female teachers who work as preschool teachers in different schools in Alanya district. Participants were between the ages of 31 and 40. In terms of experience, teachers had at least 8 years and at most 17 years of experience. While only one teacher had an MA degree, the other four teachers had bachelor degrees.

Second participant group

It is composed of 100 teachers who were contacted online. Five of the participants were male and 95 of them were female. In terms of age, the participants ranged from 21 to 44 years. In terms of experience, the teachers had at least 2 years and at most 15 years of experience. Considering educational backgrounds, 10 teachers had a two-year degree and 80 of them had bachelor degrees. Three of the teachers stated that they had completed a non-thesis master's degree program and seven of them had a master's degree with thesis. While 76% (n=76) of the teachers stated that they had not received any training about aggression or prevention of aggression before, 24% (n=24) of them stated that they had received trainings related to aggression.

Third participant group

The researcher formed a third study group of five female teachers working as preschool teachers in different schools in Alanya district as a result of the findings obtained from the first two groups. Participating teachers were between 26 and 38 years old. In terms of experience, teachers had at least 3 years and at most 11 years of experience. All teachers had bachelor's degrees.

Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form was prepared in order to reveal the preschool teachers' "aggression" phenomenon and which behaviours they defined as" aggressive behaviour". In order to get demographic information, questions such as age, gender and experience were asked. In addition, since it was thought that there might be a difference in terms of education levels and the definition of aggression and aggressive behaviours, the participants were asked the last level of education. Similarly, assuming that it can create a preliminary awareness, the participants were asked another

question: "Have you ever received any training (meetings, conferences, in-service trainings, seminars) regarding aggression/prevention of aggression in preschool children?"

In order to determine the definition of aggression and find out which behaviours are perceived as aggressive behaviours the following questions were asked: "What is aggression?", "What are the aggressive behaviours in children?" or "Which behaviours do you define as aggressive behaviour?"(Please describe all the behaviours that you think/observe as aggressive behaviour) and e-mails were sent to three academicians with a doctorate degree in the field of preschool education and one in the field of guidance and psychological counselling. The purpose of the study was explained in the e-mail and the experts were asked to evaluate the interview questions in accordance with the purpose of the research. They were asked to give a value between 0 and 100 points for each question and also to add any further suggestions and criticisms. For each question, 80 and above was taken as the criterion to provide the validity of the questions. As a result of the expert evaluations, the validity of the questions were approved and found appropriate with the purpose of the study. However, the two experts emphasized the possibility of the teachers to be interviewed presenting their ideas only on the basis of their current preschool children, so added the question of whether aggression was observed on the basis of their whole teaching career. In this context, after the first question: "What is aggression?", the second question "When you consider your whole teaching career, have you observed any of your preschool children exhibiting aggressive behaviour(s)?" was asked. When this question was answered as "yes", the process is carried out with the third question "What were the aggressive behaviours in children?" or "Which behaviours do you define as aggressive behaviour?". The semi-structured interview form was applied to two teachers for a pilot study before it was applied to the participant group. As a result of the pilot study, it was seen that the teachers perceived and answered the questions easily. At the same time, it was determined that an interview took approximately 10-15 minutes to answer the questions.

Based on the results obtained from the interviews conducted with the first participant group, the researcher formed a pool from two different measurement tools (Karakus, 2008; Kaynak et al. 2016) used in many studies in Turkey and included items related to both physical and relational aggression. As mentioned, this pool included the items of the reliability and validity scales used to determine preschool children's physical/verbal and relational aggressive behaviours. Together with these items, neutral, non-aggressive items were added to the pool to determine possible bias. This form was presented to gain the opinion of two experts (one in guidance and psychological counselling and one from preschool education department) along with the explanation of the purpose and reasons. Based on the feedback received from the experts, some items in the form were removed (as they were too many in number). The form was applied to the third group of participant teachers after the second group.

Data Collection Process

Data collection process for first participant group

There was no time limit for the interviews. Each interview took approximately 10 and 15 minutes. Interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the permission of the teachers and were also noted by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher used the words "aggression" or "aggressive behaviour" and did not mention the sub-types of aggression. When the teachers used the words "physical, verbal, psychological aggression etc.", the researcher repeated these words for confirmation. During the interviews, teachers were asked to define aggression and give examples of aggressive behaviour they encountered in their classrooms. In cases where a description of aggression or examples of aggressive behaviour was required or if unclear responses were received, the questions like "Can you explain this a little more?" were included. Qualitative research is not based on what experts, researchers or literature say about the case/situation/subject examined, but relies upon determining the meaning attributed by the participants to the case/situation/subject (Creswell, 2016).

Data collection process for the second participant group

The same questions which were applied to the first participant group were converted into a GoogleDocs document and applied to the second participant group online. Considering the research carried out in Turkey on preschool age and studies including relational aggression as a variable, (Ari & Yaban, 2015; Ersan, 2020; Karakus, 2008) another form was added to the GoogleDocs document. In this form, the scale items (Karakus, 2008; Kaynak et al. 2016) were listed in order to determine the physical/verbal and relational aggressive behaviours of preschool children and presented with an explanation "Please, mark the behaviours that you define as aggressive behaviour in the following items". This form was designed so that all the questions applied to the first group of participants could not be seen. The link for filling out the form was shared in social media accounts which were created by preschool teachers. After about 24 hours, it was seen that 100 teachers evaluated the form over the internet and the answers given by the teachers to the related questions were encircled and the related link was removed from the internet. Charmaz (As cited in Creswell, 2016) recommends to stop the data collection process in the qualitative research when the themes are satisfying or when additional data collection does not provide new and original perspectives.

Data collection process for the third participant group

Based on the interviews conducted with the first participant group and internet-based findings with the second participant group, the researcher applied the scale items (and neutral items) created to determine the physical/verbal and relational aggressive behaviours to the third participant group. In this context, the scale items were asked one by one with the question "Is ___ an aggressive behaviour?" Depending on the teachers' answers to the question as "Yes/No", the next question was asked: "Why do you think ___ is an aggressive behaviour/Why do you think ___ is not an aggressive behaviour?" so that they could explain the reason.

Verification methods

In a qualitative study, validation methods have a very important place in terms of validity. In this study, validity is obtained through expert opinions and feedback given to the respondents. The open-ended questions prepared by the researcher were evaluated with the help of the experts in terms of their suitability for the purpose of the study and recommended changes and arrangements were made accordingly. At the end of the interviews with the participating teachers (first and third groups), the researcher transcribed the voice recordings into text format and communicated again with the participants. Each participant was asked to read the interview text and share in case of any misunderstanding or anything needed to be changed.

Data analysis

In phenomenological research, data analysis aims to reveal the experiences of the participants or the meanings they impose on cases. Therefore, content analysis is frequently used. The data obtained through content analysis are conceptualized so that it may be possible to identify the themes that make up the phenomenon. Direct quotations can often be used to reveal findings (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016). Through content analysis at all stages, the repeated themes and the categories regarding the participants' opinions on aggression and aggressive behaviours were formed. To determine if there was an agreement between the raters, Cohen's K was run. There was substantial agreement between the raters' codings, K=.70, p<0.05. Based on these repeated statements, the theme creation process was omitted only once and that was when one participant *in the second group* answered the question of "*What is aggression*"? as "*it is physically and socially damaging behaviours.*". For the purposes of the study, it is important how preschool teachers define aggression. From this point of view, it was seen that only one teacher emphasized the "*social*" context of aggression and it was found important and taken as a theme. This situation is explained in the findings and discussion sections in detail.

Findings

The findings of the present study, which was conducted in order to get the opinions of preschool teachers towards aggression and aggressive behaviours, were analysed on the basis of the research questions.

Findings Regarding Interviews Carried out with the Teachers in the First Group of Participants

Examining the findings regarding preschool teachers' answers to the question about what is aggression, it is seen that the participants defined aggression as "behaviour-based". In this context, it is found that aggression is regarded by teachers as mainly *physical aggression and verbal aggression*. The most common categories and the sub-categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of first group of participant teachers about aggression

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Aggression	*Physical Aggression*	*Hitting/Pushing *Kicking *Throwing an object/hitting with an object *Biting
	Verbal Aggression	*Yelling/Cursing *Making fun of...

It is revealed that the most emphasized point in relation to physical aggression mainly involves hitting behaviour, while pushing and kicking behaviours are intensively seen as aggression by teachers. In her own words, T1 expresses aggression as: *"To me, aggression is the behaviour shown when someone is hitting others. That's the easiest thing! Hit the other in any case you are not satisfied and get results!"* Additionally, another participant T4 says *"Aggression is especially harming someone physically; I can say that it occurs most intensely as hitting and pushing."* According to teachers, kicking is another definition of physical aggression besides hitting or pushing. According to the findings of the study, kicking is the most common action described as aggression. In relation to this, T3 stated that *"Aggression can be defined physically, in particular, kicking someone. I sometimes observe children kicking others for no reason at all."* Another point that

preschool teachers mentioned in their definitions of aggression is that individuals throw objects at others or hit others with objects. T1 explains hitting with an object as: *"When you say hitting, it does not have to be only with your hands. For example, hitting with a toy in your hand is very clearly aggression."* T2 likewise expressed this in her following words: *"Aggression is one of the most common problems we have. Parents complain a lot. They complain about other children hitting their children with a wooden block or throwing crayons in their faces. It is not possible to disagree with parents' complaints. Because hitting and/or throwing objects in this way is obviously aggression…"* Another sub-category emphasized by teachers' definitions in the first participant group regarding aggression is biting. Two of the participating teachers (T4 and T5) described aggression as physical harm, and they emphasized that biting or trying to bite someone was aggression. At this point, T4 stated: "*… and of course there is also biting to harm someone physically.*" and T5 explained: *"sometimes children bite to hurt especially when they cannot use their hands or feel like the other individual is stronger."*

In the definition of aggression, it was seen that preschool teachers also emphasized verbal aggression prominently in addition to physical aggression. In this context, screaming/swearing and making fun of someone about something were mentioned as examples to verbal aggression. For example, during the interview T4 stated: "*Shouting at someone is very hurtful. I also see this situation as aggression. No one, whether child or adult, should show aggression by shouting at someone. The best way is to solve problems through communication….*" T5 stated: "*… in fact, we observe verbal aggression everywhere in daily life. Perhaps shouting is spontaneous aggression when it is not possible to attack or hit directly. Children do this too. A child reacts by shouting at another child as s/he finds it as the easiest solution in case of an event/situation s/he does not want or that s/he sees as negative. This shouting behaviour (if the child has learned it from someone in some way) also emerges in the form of cursing.*" In very similar terms, after hitting (physical based aggression), T1 refers to shouting behaviour the most. T1 states: "*Especially in our classes, we immediately need to intervene during physically damaging attacks such as hitting. We explain to children that behaviours like hitting and pushing can injure others and hurt them very much. I even get angry at the kids who do this*. The child, who is angry at another for one reason, can also immediately attack by shouting (to get rid of the reaction from the teacher.). T2 explains the situation as follows: *"…apart from physically hurting, I witness a child shouting at another child and even swearing when s/he gets angry for some reason.".* In addition to the phenomenon of aggression defined as screaming, making fun of somebody was also defined as aggression by teachers. T2 clarified this situation as: "*hurting someone verbally is also defined as aggression. For instance, making fun of his/her friend's drawing. I must say that there is really a purpose to torment the other child here.*" T3 shares about the same issue: "*…one can make fun of another child's team that s/he supports and the child who is made fun of can even cry because of this situation. Girls can make fun of each other's' clothes…".*

Findings regarding the following question: What were these aggressive behaviours in children? Or: What behaviours do you define as aggressive behaviour?

Table 2. Definitions by the first group of participant teachers about aggressive behaviours

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Aggressive Behaviour(s)	*Behaviours that hurt physically*	*Hitting/Pushing/Trying to make someone fall *Kicking *Throwing an object/Trying to hit with an object *Biting
	Behaviours that hurt verbally	*Yelling/Cursing *Making fun of *Insulting

It was seen that the responses given to the question "Which behaviours do you think are aggressive behaviours?" by the participants in the first group were quite similar to the answers given to "What is aggression?" As mentioned before, the first group of preschool teachers defined the phenomenon of aggression as "behaviour" based. To put it more clearly, it was observed that when the teachers answered the question "What is aggression?" the next question was "Which behaviours do you think are aggressive behaviours? and their answers started with expressions such as *"…as I said before (as I mentioned in the definition of aggression.)"*. In this context, aggressive behaviours fall under the categories of "*physically damaging behaviours*" and *"verbally damaging behaviours."* In this section, in order not to fall into repetitive behaviours that were under the category of "*physically damaging behaviours"* in the first question but that emphasized in the physical aggression category as "*hitting, pushing, kicking, throwing objects, hitting with an object and biting" sub-categories*, were not included. However, some teachers also described the behaviour of "*attempting to push"* another child as aggressive behaviour. As an example, T2 explains the process by saying "*it is necessary to state that trying to trip someone up is also aggression."* Similarly, T4 states: "*Sometimes a child tries to trip another child up as if s/he were playing. However, the child who is tripped up is uncomfortable. This is an aggressive behaviour,"* which confirms the previous statement. Furthermore, T3 says: "*I'm not just talking about pushing on a flat surface. When going*

down the stairs, one child might push the other to make them fall," emphasizing that it is an aggressive behaviour when one intentionally wants another one to fall down. In the category of "*verbally damaging behaviours,"* it was observed that "*humiliation*" was also emphasized by teachers. At this point, behaviours such as "*yelling/cursing and making fun of somebody*" which are mentioned in the definition of aggression under the theme of verbal aggression, were once more repeated by the teachers as aggressive behaviour. In addition, "*humiliation*" is defined as aggressive behaviour that damages verbally. For example, T1 says: "*There is no mockery here. There is a deliberate action to hurt a child who completes (or cannot complete) her/his activity on time and telling him/her that s/he is already incompetent or is always the last one to finish the activity. This is an aggressive behaviour…"* Similarly, T3 states that a child tries to humiliate another child by emphasizing their physical characteristics and says "*you look like a monkey*" or "*you are so ugly,*" and this is an aggressive behaviour. Physical characteristics of children are not the only subject of humiliation. T5 expresses that she comes across humiliation and shares what she experienced with the following examples: "*…a child's new toy that s/he brings to class; looking at the clothes s/he wore for the first time – telling that "it is very ugly, not beautiful at all, I can never play with that toy/ I can never wear that, it is disgusting, etc.".*

As a result of the interviews conducted with the first group of preschool teachers, it was seen that both the definition and behavioural manifestation of aggression were defined only under the categories of physical and verbal aggression. In addition, it was found that teachers in the first group did not emphasize social/relational aggression within the aggressive behaviours they encountered in their classrooms.

Findings Regarding Interviews Carried Out with the Teachers in the Second Participant Group

Findings regarding the question "What is aggression according to preschool teachers?"

The teachers in the second participant group were reached via internet. It is seen that the teachers in the second participant group tried to define the phenomenon of aggression on a more conceptual basis compared to the first participant group teachers. In this context, it can be said that instead of using one or more behaviours to define aggression, teachers deal with aggression conceptually as "*harming physically.*" When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that participating teachers define the question of what is aggression mostly as "*harming oneself and/or others (n=23)*". This definition is followed by *"physical and verbal damage (n=18)"* and "*negative expression of emotion (n=18)*". Aggression was defined as "*physically harming (n=9)*" as well as "*physically, verbally and psychologically harming (n=11)*". It is also possible to see that aggression is defined as "*expression of lack of communication (n=8)*", "*learned behaviour (n=2)*", "*instinct (n=1)*"and "*self-defence mechanism (n=1)".* Surprisingly, only one participant described the phenomenon of aggression not only from physical and verbal aspects, but also from social dimension. The related teacher defined aggression as "*physically and socially harming (n=1)*". This is discussed carefully in the discussion part. Finally, some of the participants' conceptual or behavioural categories that do not fall into a category, such as "*the criminal of the future (n=1)*", "*it is an easy way to solve an issue (n=1)*" and "*disturbing the peace in the environment (n=1)"* were not taken into account.

Table 3. Definitions by the second group of participant teachers about aggression

Theme	Category	n
	Hurting physically	9
	Hurting Physically and Verbally	18
	Hurting himself/herself or others	23
	Hurting Physically, Verbally and Psychologically	11
	Negative Expression of Emotion	18
Aggression	*Expression of Communication Lack*	8
	Learned Behaviour	2
	Physically and Socially Harmful Behaviours	1
	Instinct	1
	Self-Defence Mechanism	1

Findings regarding the question "What were these aggressive behaviours in children? Or which behaviours do you define as aggressive behaviour?

Through the internet, the second group of teachers were also asked which behaviours they perceived as aggressive. In this context, three different categories were obtained according to the findings (See Table 4). According to the responses of the participants, aggressive behaviours were categorized as "*physically damaging behaviours,* "*verbally damaging behaviours*" and "*socially/relationally damaging behaviours.*"

Participants stated "*hitting (n=77)", "pushing (n=28)", "biting (n=22), "throwing toys/objects (n=17)"* and *"damaging one's possession/product (n=13)"* under the category of *"physically damaging behaviours".* In addition, "*spitting (n=12)*", *taking someone's toy/hiding a toy (n=12)", "kicking (n=11)", "hitting (n=9)", "pulling hair (n=7)"* and *"attempting to tripping someone up (n=4)"* are some of the other physically damaging behaviours. The least number of physically

damaging behaviours indicated were "*taking someone's turn* (n=2)", "*trying to poke with a pencil or scissors (n=2)*", "*pinching/scratching (n=2)*" and "*locking someone in the bathroom/classroom (n=2)*". It is found that under the category of "*verbally damaging behaviours*" the participants expressed the following behaviours: "*swearing (n=17)", "yelling (n=15)", "humiliating/underestimating (n=6)", "making fun of someone (n=6)*" and "*saying things that hurt (n=3)*". Although the number of the teachers in the second participant group were not as many as the first one, they mentioned aggressive behaviours that led to the formation of "*socially/relationally damaging behaviours*" theme. In this context, two participants defined "*excluding one from the group/not taking one in the group (n=2)*" as aggressive behaviour.

Table 4. Definitions by the second of group participant teachers about aggressive behaviours

Theme	*Category*	Sub-Category	n
	Physically Harmful Behaviours		
		Hitting	77
		Pushing	28
		Biting	22
		Throwing Toys/Other Objects	17
		Damaging Someone's Possession or Product	13
		Spitting	12
		Getting someone's toy or hiding it	12
		Kicking	11
		Hitting self	9
		Pulling hair	7
Aggressive		Tripping someone up	4
Behaviours		Taking someone's turn	2
		Trying to poke a pencil or scissors	2
		Pinching/scratching	2
		Locking someone in the bathroom/class	2
	Verbally Damaging Behaviours		
		Swearing	17
		Yelling	15
		Humiliating/underestimating	6
		Making fun of	6
		Saying things that hurt	3
	Socially/Relationally Damaging Behaviours		
		Excluding/Not taking one in the group	2

Teachers in the second group were also presented with a third form which included the items taken from the assessment tools to determine physical/verbal and relational aggression in preschool children. Neutral items that were not related to physical/verbal or relational aggression were also included in the form to prevent possible bias. The findings obtained in this context are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Second participant group teachers' recognition of aggressive behaviour items

No	Behaviour	Type	Yes n	No n
1	A child pushing another child	Physical	98	2
2	A child spitting on another child that s/he is angry with	Physical	84	16
3	A child telling another child that s/he is a liar	Relational	75	25
4	A child not letting another child sit next to her/him	Relational	77	22
5	A child kicking another child	Physical	93	7
6	A child not holding another child's hand (in an activity) just because s/he didn't do what s/he is asked to do	Relational	69	31
7	A child telling another child whom s/he is angry with that s/he will not invite him/her to his/her birthday party	Relational	41	59
8	A child biting another child	Physical	89	11
9	Telling his/her peers that s/he cannot be his/her friend until s/he does what s/he asked for	Relational	83	17
10	A child pinching another child	Physical	85	15

Table 5. Continued

No	Behaviour	Type	Yes n	No n
11	A child gossiping about another child to put him/her in trouble	Relational	51	49
12	A child threatening another child	Verbal	85	15
13	A child excluding another child from a play-group when getting angry with him/her	Relational	88	12
14	A child swearing or saying bad things to another child	Verbal	95	5
15	A child telling other children about another child that s/he has cooties or s/he is dirty	Relational	76	24
16	A child hitting another child	Physical	99	1
17	A child telling other children not to include another child (that s/he is angry with) in their play group	Relational	79	21

As it is seen in Table 5, items 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16, which aim to identify physical/verbal aggressive behaviours, are overwhelmingly recognized as aggressive behaviours by teachers. In this context, 99 participants out of 100 teachers recognized the behaviour of *"a child is hitting another child"* as aggressive behaviour. The behaviour that receives the least recognition for the identification of physical aggression is "*a child spitting on another child that s/he is angry with*". Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that 84 teachers accepted this behaviour as aggressive. Table 5 also includes items that are used to determine relational aggressive behaviours. These items are 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17. Among these items, the behaviour of "*a child excluding another child from a play-group when getting angry with him/her*" was marked as aggressive behaviour by 88 teachers. Similarly, "*telling peers that they cannot be his/her friend unless they do what s/he wants*" has been recognized by 83 teachers as aggressive behaviour. On the other hand, in relation to relational aggression, only 41 teachers regarded "*telling someone whom s/he is angry with that s/he will not invite him/her to his/her birthday party*" as aggressive behaviour. Possible reasons for this finding are discussed in the discussion section.

Findings Regarding Interviews Carried out with the Teachers in the Third Participant Group

In this section, the codes of the third group teachers who participated are given as "3.T…" (3 for the third group, T for Teacher and then a number between 1 and 5 as there were five participants) in order not to get confused with the first group participants. According to the findings, all of the third group participants defined the items aimed at determining physical/verbal aggression as aggressive behaviour. For example, when teachers were asked to explain why "*spitting on a child that s/he is angry with*" is an aggressive behaviour, 3.T3 explains: "*… of course it is aggression. S/he doesn't have to hit or push. Nobody, even a tiny little child, would like somebody spit on him/her.*" Or regarding the question *"is threatening another child an aggressive behaviour?"* 3.T5 explains that threatening is an aggressive behaviour in the following sentences: *"…it scares the child. The child who is exposed to threatening, whether it happens or not, gets hurt. So even though the direct act of beating is more damaging, I think the threat of beating has a similar effect."* As mentioned, all of the items aimed at determining physical aggression such as *"a child biting another child"* or "*a child kicking another child*" are considered aggressive behaviours by the participants. What is surprising is that teachers who completely agree on items aimed at identifying physical aggression differ in items related to social/relational aggression (see Table 6). For example, while 3.T1 was defining all 9 items as aggressive behaviour to determine relational aggression, 3.T2 defined 6 items, 3.T5 defined 3 items, and 3.T2 and 3.T3 defined only one item as aggressive behaviour. To put it more clearly, 3.T1 defined "*a child saying about another child that s/he is a liar*" and "*a child gossiping about another child to put him/her in trouble*" as aggressive behaviours. And with her statement: "*because s/he is casting aspersions on somebody; s/he is even trying to destroy the friendship*" she is supporting her claim. Similarly, 3.T1 stated that all the items given as "*a child not letting another child sit next to him/her*", "*a child telling another child whom s/he is angry with that s/he will not invite him/her to his/her birthday party*", "*a child excluding another child from a play-group when getting angry with him/her*" were intended to exclude a child, so therefore they were aggressive behaviours.

Table 6. Third participant group teachers' recognition of aggressive behaviour items

Type	Behaviour	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
P	A child pushing another child	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
P	A child spitting on another child when s/he is angry	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
P	A child kicking another child	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
P	A child biting another child	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
P	A child pinching another child	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
V	A child threatening another child that s/he is going to beat her/him	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Table 6. Continued

Type	Behaviour	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
V	A child swearing another child/saying bad things	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
P	A child hitting another child	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
R	A child telling his/her peers that they cannot be his/her friend unless they do what s/he wants	Y	Y	N	N	N
R	A child telling another child that s/he is a liar	Y	Y	N	N	N
R	A child gossiping about another child to put him/her in trouble	Y	Y	N	N	N
R	A child not letting another child sit next to her/him	Y	N	N	N	N
R	A child excluding his/her peer from a play-group when getting angry with him/her	Y	Y	N	N	Y
R	A child not holding another child's hand (in an activity) just because s/he didn't do what s/he is asked to do	Y	N	N	N	N
R	A child telling another child whom s/he is angry with that s/he will not invite him/her to his/her birthday party	Y	N	N	N	N
R	A child telling other children about another child that s/he has cooties or s/he is dirty	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
R	A child telling other children not to include another child (that s/he is angry with) in their play group	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

P: physical, V: verbal, R: relational, Y: yes, N: no

In addition to 3.T1, who responded "yes" to the item *"a child gossiping about another child to get him/her in trouble"*, 3.T2 also gave the answer "yes" and explained the situation with the following statement:*"…it is an indirect aggression. S/he doesn't actually hurt, but s/he doesn't know about her/his feelings because s/he's young. The child that gossiped probably told it to another child and shared it with another".* 3.T2 describes the other child's gossiping behaviour as indirect aggression, but emphasizes that it is not intended to cause harm. "*A child telling other children about another child that s/he has cooties or s/he is dirty" and "a child telling other children not to include another child (that s/he is angry with) in their play group"* are the items that get the most "*yes*" answers. 3.T5 says that: "*… there is a serious grudge here. When a child gets angry because of a previous problem with another child, s/he is taking the opportunity of trying to make others ignore that child. S/he even gets angry with the other children in the playgroup if they don't take his/her words into consideration!*". Contrary to 3.T1, giving the answer *"no"* to the item "*a child telling his/her peers that they cannot be his/her friend unless they do what s/he wants",* 3.T3 explains her reason for the answer "no" as follows: "*This is only a matter of choice, that is to say that actually s/he just does not want to play with that child.".* 3.T4 states *"… it is a childish attitude. But not an aggressive behaviour. It happens mostly among girls."* As can be seen in Table 6, the three items that received the answer "no" were "*a child not letting another child sit next to her/him*", *"a child not holding another child's hand (in an activity) just because s/he didn't do what s/he is asked to do"* and *"a child telling another child whom s/he is angry with that s/he will not invite him/her to his/her birthday party".* It was determined that the teachers who said no to these items emphasized that the behaviours stated in these items generally depends on the personal preferences of the children and do not have any bad intentions. As an exception, 3.T5 expressed that the behaviour of *"a child not holding another child's hand (in an activity) just because s/he didn't do what s/he is asked to do"* is not related to aggressive behaviour and explains this situation as follows: *"may be a child saw the other child (the one whose hand is not held) while he was picking his nose or leaving the restroom without washing his/her hands".* Depending on 3.T5's expressions defining this behaviour as an aggressive one may seem unfair.

Discussion

This study was conducted with three different participant groups consisting of preschool teachers in order to examine their opinions about aggression and aggressive behaviour. According to the findings of the first group of participants, it is seen that both the definition and the behavioural manifestation of aggression were described only under the categories of physical and verbal (overt) aggression. As a result of this finding, the question of what is aggression comes to mind once again because experts who adopt behavioural learning approaches define aggression as "any behaviour that hurts others" (Taylor et al. 2012). In a dictionary of psychology terminology published in Turkish (Bakircioglu, 2012), aggression is defined as "revealing feelings of anger and hostility based on destructive and physical coercion towards individuals or objects". The fact that behavioural approaches lack the emphasis on the "intention" phenomenon related to aggression, as well as Bakircioglu (2012) considering aggression only in physical contexts, can be considered as critical deficiencies in defining it. Huber and Brennan (2011) stated that aggression is one of the most misunderstood concepts in behavioural sciences because the commonly accepted definition of aggression is "the behaviour directed to an innocent person with the intention of hurting or harming (DeWall et al. 2011). According to Allen and Anderson (2017), in order to be able to talk about aggression, an action has to emerge as observable behaviour, not just as feelings or thoughts, and should have the intention of harming the innocent one. Therefore, it can be considered as normal for the first group of participants to define aggression as behavioural-based rather than

conceptual-based. In this sense, the teachers in the first group described aggression with observable behaviours such as hitting, pushing, biting, yelling, swearing, and so on. It is difficult to say that teachers in the first participant group misidentified aggression. However, it is worth indicating that they conceptually did not express the contexts of "intention of harming" and/or "intentionally hurting". Aggression can be interpreted in the literature or in everyday life in a similar meaning as to the concepts of violence and anger (Allen & Anderson, 2017; Varburton & Anderson, 2015). The fact that the first group of participants defined aggression under the categories of physical and verbally aggressive behaviour may have been due to this misconception.

In addition, the first group of teachers identified aggressive behaviours under the categories of physically and verbally damaging behaviours. As a noteworthy finding, it was understood that in the context of "social/relational/indirect aggression" the first group of teachers did not experience any behaviours emphasized in their classroom. Ersan (2020) stated in his study that scientific studies on child aggression from preschool to adolescence usually focused on physical aggression and ignored relational aggression. In this context, it can be considered that five teachers in the first participant group did not have knowledge and awareness about social/relational/indirect aggression in the context of aggression and aggressive behaviours because relational aggression is a concept that began to be mentioned in the literature only after the 1990s (Belden et al. 2012; Ostrov & Keating, 2004), so relational-aggression can be considered as a very new phenomenon (Allen & Anderson, 2017). It was seen that the 100 teachers in the second participant group, whose data was collected via internet, tried to define the phenomenon of aggression on a more conceptual basis than teachers in the first participant group. It was understood that aggression was defined as harming self and/or harming others and was classified as physical, physical + verbal, physical + verbal + psychological harm. The results of the qualitative study in which Turkoglu (2019) examined preschool teachers' perspectives on child aggression are also in line with the findings of the present study. In her study, 60% of the 46 participants defined aggression as harming friends by hitting, pushing or biting. It was seen that the second group participants defined aggression as learned behaviour based on social learning theory and tried to express it from a Freudian point of view as a mechanism of instinct and defence. However, it was seen that only one teacher defined the phenomenon of aggression as physical and social harm and mentioned the relational/social context of aggression. As highlighted earlier, considering the phenomenon of aggression as the same concept as anger and violence may be because of the fact that physical and verbal aggression are much easier to observe than relational aggression (Hurst, 2017; Onghena, 2013); and the lack of emphasis on the social/relational context of action may be decisive for this outcome. Thus, in Ersan's (2017) definition, the relational aspect of this aggression was also emphasized. It is emphasized that there is a high positive relationship between physical aggression and relational aggression (Ersan, 2020; Landsford et al. 2012) and that relational aggression is as severe as physical aggression (Henninger, 2004; Coyne & Ostrov, 2018).

The second group of teachers defined various aggressive behaviours under the categories of "physically and verbally harming behaviours" just like the first group of teachers. In this context, in addition to hitting, pushing, biting etc. the second group of participants indicated that physical aggressive behaviour could occur in different ways such as pulling hair, taking someone's turn, damaging someone's possession, poking someone with a pencil, and so on. Studies reveal that physical aggression is observed among children and adolescents more than relational-aggression (Taylor & Jose, 2014; Tremblay et al. 2004; Tzoumakis et al. 2014). Similarly, teachers in the second group stated that behaviours such as swearing, yelling and making fun of someone were intense under the verbal aggression category. What is surprising is that "excluding/not accepting someone in a group" was indicated as aggressive behaviour by two teachers. In her qualitative study, Turkoglu (2019) asked preschool teachers "what are the common aggression types in the preschool period", and 7 teachers out of 46, defined indirect aggression as a sub-type. 27 teachers in her study answered the same question as physical aggression. Although in her study, teachers defined indirect aggression as resentment, exclusion and gossip, in their detailed explanations teachers described aggression as resentment and cutting off communication. However, indirect/social/relational aggression is characterized by similar behaviours, such as not inviting a person to a social activity, telling others not to be friends with someone, and making unfounded rumours in order to weaken someone's social relationships (Allen & Anderson, 2017; Crick et al. 1997). Therefore, the lack of knowledge and awareness of indirect/social/relational aggression among teachers reached in the present study is supported by Turkoglu's (2019) study results.

It was seen that participants in the first and second group easily defined physical and verbal aggressive behaviours, but they were not sure about how to define relational aggressive behaviours. For this reason, the second group of participants were asked about the items in the measurement tools developed to evaluate physical, verbal and relational aggressive behaviours. As expected, the second group of teachers accepted physical and verbal aggressive behaviour very easily as aggressive behaviour. The same teachers recognized relational aggressive behaviours when they saw relational aggression related items in the measurement tool, which they could hardly define before. In this context, relational aggressive behaviours such as "excluding peers from the game or group" or "saying that s/he could not be his/her friend" were defined as aggressive behaviours by teachers. Saying that s/he would not invite his/her friend to his/her birthday party was the least recognized aggressive behaviour by 41 teachers. This can be assessed in the socio-economic and cultural context. A study conducted in Turkey indicated that birthdays celebrated outdoors were associated with higher socio-economic level. While the minimum wage in Turkey was about 400 dollars, the income of families in the research sample varied between 1000 to 3200 dollars (Ozel Turkay & Bozyigit, 2017). In Turkey,

birthday celebrations are usually celebrated at home among the family. For this reason, this relational aggressive behaviour might not be observed by the teachers. As an additional result, the fact that the second group of participants were able to recognize aggressive behaviours in the items within the validity and reliability of the assessment instruments could be considered as another proof of the validity of these assessment instruments.

Teachers in the third participant group were interviewed again because the second group of participants significantly recognized the items related to aggression in the assessment tool. As expected in this process, all of the participating teachers defined the expressions in the items about physical and verbal aggressive behaviour as aggressive behaviour. However, the teachers in the third group did not have the same views on social/relational aggression. One of the participating teachers defined all behaviours such as *exclusion, not allowing her friend to play, not inviting a friend to his/her birthday party, and not holding his/her hand in an activity* as aggression because s/he intended to exclude and put the other child in a difficult situation. Another teacher stated that the items for determining relational aggressive behaviours were caused by a grudge because of a previous issue. It was seen that another teacher defined the items related to relational aggression as indirect aggression. However, s/he emphasized that the child performing this action did not have "any purpose of harming." From this point of view, it can be concluded that harm/pain is a general aspect within physical aggressive behaviours but when it comes to relational aggressive behaviours, these behaviours may change according to the teacher's perception. It was also observed that some of the teachers in the third participant group explained the behaviours in the items aimed at determining relational aggression as the personal preferences of the children. Again, relational aggressive behaviour, unlike physical and verbal aggressive behaviour, may vary according to the meaning teachers attribute to them. It is seen that in studies carried out on child aggression (Amin et al. 2011; Dias & Ventura, 2019; Dobs & Arnold, 2009; Romi et al. 2011; Sullivan et al. 2014; Taylor & Smith, 2017; Weyns et al. 2017) via teachers, the frequency of aggressive behaviours of children and their teachers' reactions were evaluated. On the other hand, in the studies in which mothers', preschool teachers' and prospective teachers' views on physical and relational aggressive behaviour of children were examined (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Swit, 2019; Ogul & Yurtal, 2014; Werner et al. 2006), it has been reported that they had more negative perceptions in scenarios where children are *physically hurt.* Hence, it can be said that teachers' level of knowledge and awareness about aggression and aggressive behaviour types have not been examined at all. However, it is emphasized that teachers should have the knowledge and skills to reduce and prevent child aggression (Orpinas & Home, 2004). On the other hand, physical and relational aggression that emerge at an early age is not only a threat for children's peers. It is observed that children who show physical and relational aggression at an early age also bully teachers in the following years, especially during high school years (Uz & Bayraktar, 2019).

Conclusion

It was observed that aggressive behaviours that emerged at an early age were divided into two categories as physical and relational. However, relational aggression has not been directly identified by teachers or highlighted as a subcategory. The teachers were only able to recognize it when they saw the related items on the scale. In the data obtained, it is understood that teachers had enough knowledge and awareness about physical aggression as they were all able to make its definition, find out its sub-dimensions and recognize it when they saw the scale items related to it. However, these were not possible for relational aggression. This aspect of the study is thought to contribute to the literature.

Suggestions

In this study, it was seen that Turkish preschool teachers lack knowledge and awareness about relational aggression. However, we do not have enough knowledge about how preschool teachers in other countries define or perceive relational aggression. To answer this question, it is necessary to work with teachers in different countries. Additionally, teachers' level of relational aggression knowledge and awareness working in higher education levels can also be examined. It is thought that including the emphasis on relational/social/indirect harm in the widely accepted definition of aggression may also be beneficial. In order to strengthen and increase preschool teachers' knowledge and awareness of relational aggression, both newsletters/brochures can be prepared and in-service trainings can be organized by the experts in Turkish Ministry of National Education.

Limitations

In the present study, mothers' knowledge and awareness regarding levels of early childhood aggression were aimed to be examined. However, due to the results obtained from preschool teachers, it was foreseen that mothers may not have sufficient knowledge and awareness about the issue. This situation can be considered as a limitation of this study. In addition, to recognize physical and relational aggression 2nd and 3rd group teachers were asked items from standard assessment tools and the results of the study are limited to these items determining the level of physical and relational aggression.

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