

# Evaluation of Secondary School Teachers' Stance to Verbal Abuse on Children

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## ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to evaluate the secondary school teachers' attitudes about verbal abuse and make suggestions about the issue in order to raise awareness. The population of the research, conducted using the screening method, was secondary state school teachers in the city of Duzce. The study's sample consists of 255 male and 265 female teachers in the city of Duzce's central district state schools. Data collection was carried out using a personal information form and the Questionnaire on the Verbal Abuse of Children developed by researchers.

This study found that as class sizes increase, so does the child-abuse potential of teachers. Data show that teachers' abuse-potential scores do not vary significantly by gender or by tenure in office. Therefore, in training and consultation sessions with teachers, precautionary work should be done, and the issue should also be discussed from the perspective of child abuse.

**Keywords:** school, verbal abuse, education, teacher, secondary school

## INTRODUCTION

Child abuse, defined as all types of mistreatment that adversely affect the growth and development of children, is found in every society at all development levels independent of culture, race and religion. The type of abuses that individuals may have been exposed to during infancy, childhood and adolescence by people responsible for their care, family, relatives, friends, peers, teachers and others is an issue of concern. Many scientific studies of child abuse have been carried out in medical, law, sociology and psychology (Ersanlı, Yılmaz and Özcan, 2013; Kara, Bicer and Gokalp, 2004). Every study reveals the existence of issues that constitute the subject of future studies. This study aimed to evaluate preventive information.

Emotional abuse has certain differences from other types of abuse. Emotional abuse is considered part of psychological neglect together with emotional neglect, mental torture and mental mistreatment (Paris, 1999). Therefore, emotional abuse is often used as psychological abuse (Newman, 1997; Jellen, McCarroll, Thayer, 2001). There are various causes of emotional abuse. Verbal abuse is one. Verbal abuse is defined as non-physical, but heavy punishment acts or threats mainly in family and school environments, undermining the self-esteem of children and hampering their emotional development (Ban & Oh, 2016; Taner & Gokler, 2004; Glaser, 2002). Schools, in particular, are institutions where children spend most of their time outside their home (Walsh, Farrell, Bridgstock, 2006). Research indicates that verbal abuse and violence occurs at early ages of childhood (Aydoğan & Ozyurek, 2013).

The crucial role of teachers in detecting cases of abuse and neglect implies the need for teachers' education about child abuse and neglect. First of all, teachers must create a classroom environment where students can build self-confidence and improve their self-defense capabilities. Teachers should take care of their own attitudes in the classroom and handle unexpected student behavior without exercising physical or verbal punishment (Tugay, 2008).

## Research questions/hypothesis

This study aims to evaluate the viewpoint of secondary school teachers about acts defined as verbal abuse and also makes some proposals in order to raise take attention. The teachers' verbal abuse data were analyzed by gender, age, professional seniority, marital status, parental status and class size. Since child abuse can also take place in schools, this study focuses on the abuse potential of teachers and raising societal awareness about it. The research problem and questions of this study allow the identification of the demographic variables that are associated with higher and lower levels of child abuse potential among teachers. The study provides an assessment of the findings. The study's sub-problems are determining these socio-demographic variables.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research aiming to evaluate the stance of secondary school teachers to verbal abuse against children has been carried out using the survey research model.

**Research Design:** The research design of this study is based on the use of a survey (Karasar, 2000). According to Karasar (2000), surveys are a research method that provides a description of a past or present phenomenon. In surveys, a description of the phenomena under study is provided. This study, which employs different variables, aims to describe the current child abuse potential of teachers.

**Research Sample:** The research population consists of teachers working at secondary schools under the Directorate of National Education of the city of Duzce. Since the study is based on the scanning model, random sampling was conducted. The sample consists of 520 teachers (265 female and 255 male) from the city of Duzce's secondary schools. The schools were selected using sampling.

**Research Instrument and Procedure:** A personal information form about the teachers' demographic information and the Questionnaire on the Verbal Abuse of Children were used for data collection.

The Personal Information Form. This form was prepared by the researchers for the purpose of collecting general information about the teachers participating in the research. It includes questions about gender, age, professional seniority, place of residence, marital status, parental status and class size.

The Questionnaire on the Verbal Abuse of Children. This scale developed by researchers are used to measure teachers' perspective on the verbal abuse of children. The researchers tested its validity and reliability. It has 47 questions with agree or disagree response options. In the validity and reliability studies, the two-fold reliability of the test scores was .74 for the whole group, and the results ranged between .70 and .75 in the subgroups. The KR-20 reliability is .80 for the whole group and between .59 and .84 in the subgroups. Test-retest reliability was calculated using the weighted kappa coefficient, and stability and internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Finally, the scale attained its best test-retest reliability at 0.80.(Table 1

Table 1: The Questionnaire's sub-dimensions validity and reliability

Sub-dimensions	Reliability (Cronbach Alpha)	Test-Retest
Humiliation	.79	.75
Derision	.59	.78
Insult	.78	.70
Innuendo	.84	.81
Total	.80	.74

**Data Analysis:** The researchers informed the participants about the purposes and significance of the study prior to collecting data. The results came from teachers who volunteered to fill out the test forms and resided in the province of Duzce. The researchers eliminated the forms that were completed by teachers without reading them, forms with contradictory answers to similar questions, and forms that gave rise to suspicions about the responders' honesty (by providing nice and proper answers only). The t-test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were used for statistical analysis of the data.

## RESULTS

In this part, the teachers' verbal abuse data were analyzed by gender, age, professional seniority, marital status, parental status and class size.

The verbal abuse score of the female teachers is slightly higher than those of male teachers. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

No significant difference by age was found in the t-test results of teachers' stance against verbal abuse.

Table 2: The T-test results of the teachers' stance against verbal abuse by gender

Gender	N	X	Sd	T	P
Male	255	10.9563	2.456	0.865	0.412
Female	265	11.8636	2.583		

p>0.05

The data in Table 2 show that teachers' abuse-potential scores do not vary significantly by gender (t=863;

p>0.05). Although the difference between 18-25 year old teachers and 26-45 and 36-45 year old teachers' abuse-potential scores is not significant, 18-25 aged received slightly higher scores (X=13.312) than the 26-45 and 36-45 year old teachers (X=12.763, X=12.688).(Table 3).

Table 3: The T-test results of the teachers' stance against verbal abuse by age

Age	N	X	Sd	T	P
18-25	179	13.312	2.583	0.863	0.488
26-35	166	12.763	2.456		
36-45	94	12.688			
46 or older	81	11.405			

p>0.05

Table 4: Kruskal Wallis Test results of the teachers' stance against verbal abuse by Tenure in Office

Tenure in Office	N	Mean	Sd	$\chi^2$	P
1-4 years	144	188.396	2	11.427	0.001*
5-9 years	141	146.170	2		
10-15 years	137	132.438	2		
Above 15 years	98	192.561	1		

p<0.05

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test in Table 4 show a significant difference between teachers' tenure in office and their stance against verbal abuse. The multiple comparison test conducted to identify which of the groups differ significantly from one another showed that teachers with years above 15 years and 1-4 years of tenure in office had significantly higher abuse-potential scores (X=192.561, X=188.396) than teachers with 5-9 years and 10-15 years of tenure in office (X=146.170, X=132.438).

Table 5: The T-test Results of the teachers' stance against verbal abuse by parental status

Parental Status	N	X	Sd	T	P
Participants with Children	269	149.853	2.754	0.806	0.494
Participants without Children	251	153.177	4.911		

p>0.05

Table 5 shows the t-test results for teachers' stance against verbal abuse by parenthood. No significant difference was found between teachers with children and teachers without children.

A statistically significant difference was found by class size (Table 6). Multiple comparison tests conducted to identify which of the groups differ significantly from one another showed that teachers with classes of 15-25 students had abuse-potential scores (X=145.186) that were significantly lower than those of teachers with classes of 25-35 students or teachers with even more (X=177.508, 186.139). This difference can be explained by the fact that

teachers with crowded classrooms have difficulty approaching students with patience.

Table 6: T-Test Results of the teachers stance against verbal abuse by Class Size

Class Size	N	X	Sd	x <sup>2</sup>	P
15-25 students	124	145.186	2	10.23 7	0.040*
25-35 students	304	177.508	1		
More than 35 students	92	186.139	1		

p<0.05

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For children, school is an education environment and also a social environment where new and various relationships are established with teachers and others. Children spend more time with their teachers than they do their families. Therefore, teachers are considered the best people to evaluate the development, behavior and achievements of students, but in some cases, teachers may exhibit negative attitudes and treatment. Teachers may warn instantly and even react harshly when they see students do things of which they do not approve. Teachers may get confused and offend students emotionally for misbehavior. However, such reactions exacerbate the problem and emotionally damage students rather than solving anything (McNamara & Moreton, 2001). In this context, students may face a potential verbal abuse of teachers.

Table 2 shows that the verbal abuse score of the female teachers are slightly higher than those of the males, but this difference is not statistically significant. We may conclude that gender has no effect on verbal abuse. On the other hand, another study found that male teachers engage in more physical abuse rather than verbal abuse when compared to female teachers (Hatunoglu & Hatunoglu, 2005). There are studies showing that verbal and emotional abuse is more common among females as both offenders and victims (Taillieu, Brownridge, Sareen and Afifi, 2016).

Table 3 shows that no significant difference by age was found in the t-test results of the teachers' verbal abuse. However, there are studies claiming that mothers aged 20 and younger abuse their children physically more than others (Sahiner, Yurdakök, Kavak, et al. 2001; Demir, 2008).

Table 4 shows that the teachers' stance against verbal abuse varies significantly by tenure in office. It has been thought that less experienced teachers with 1-4 years of service are more impatient and have negative attitudes about verbal abuse. On the other hand, it can be claimed that teachers with 15 years or more experience expose their students to verbal abuse because of exasperation, exhaustion and the socio-economic struggle to survive.

A study has shown that the awareness level of teachers between 18 and 20 years of age about conflict and violence is lower than that of teachers between 21 and 25 years of age. The difference was explained by the fact that the level of sensibility and the consciousness pertaining to the importance of the social role of teachers increases as they become more experienced (Can, Yasar, Senol & Akyol, 2015; Sargın, 2010; Turk, 2010).

The t-test results of the teachers' stance against verbal abuse based on their parental status are shown in Table 5. No significant difference was found between teachers with children and teachers without children. This may be associated with their personal problems, lifestyles and childhoods. Some studies have found that child abuse is engaged in by parents or others in the children's close environment 95% of the time (Kara, Bicer & Gokalp, 2004). It has been found that emotional abuse by mothers directly influences levels of self-expression and how to regulate the emotions (Graham, 2005). Family and school environments are accepted as the most secure environments for children. Nevertheless, it is apparent that many teachers, consciously or unconsciously, torment, harm and adversely affect children's physical, mental, cognitive and social development in order to discipline them, creating unhealthy individuals (Akduman, Korkusuz, Akduman, 2006).

Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference in the teachers' stance against verbal abuse by class size. This study found that the abuse risk of teachers who have more crowded classrooms is at a higher level. There are several studies demonstrating that the more crowded is classroom the higher, the risk of abuse in order to gain control and establish authority (Holt, Buckley and Whelan, 2016). Crowded classrooms are one of the main factors that lead to unmotivated teachers. Crowded classrooms may affect teachers' instruction methods due to noise, and a noisy environment, teachers may not treat students patiently (Dubowitz, Kim, Black, Weisbart, Semiatin and Magder, 2011).

**Suggestions:** This study found significant differences between the secondary school teachers' stance against verbal abuse on children based on variables such as professional seniority, marital status and class size. However, no any significant differences were found by gender, parental status or age.

The study results show that there are no significant differences between teachers with children and without children relating to their stance against verbal abuse. Variables such as longer or shorter tenure in office, being single and higher class size are factors that increase verbal abuse. This is important since it correlates the extent to which teachers may engage in verbal abuse depending on circumstances and demographic features.

Here are some suggestions based on this study. All schools should have a clear, comprehensible, written policy statement, addressed to administrators and teachers, on verbal abuse against children. Directors should provide the teachers with relevant education to ensure no children are harmed and should clearly communicate the types of behavior that are categorized as verbal abuse. In public areas and institutions, schools in particular, the behavior classified as verbal abuse should be clearly identified and communicated.

Programs supporting abuse victims and their families should be carried out, and importance must be given to the education of instructors. The Ministry of National Education, non-governmental organizations and the Social Services and Child Protection Agency should jointly organize training courses and publish leaflets, posters and booklets to inform teachers.

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