

Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual Education and Child Sexual Abuse in Early Childhood Education*

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the opinions of prospective teachers about sexual education and child sexual abuse in preschool. Case study research design was used in the study in which data were obtained through interviews with 73 prospective teachers. Eight questions and 2 fictional cases related to sexual education were used in the semi-structured interview form prepared to collect the data which were then analyzed by content analysis method. The research results indicate that prospective teachers did not have sufficient background knowledge regarding sexual education and child sexual abuse. When the answers of the participants to the fictional cases are examined, it is seen that they have deficiencies in early intervention. In line with the research results, parents are one of the most important stakeholders in providing sexual education to children. It is also highlighted that it is very important that in the curriculum of preschool teachers' issues about sexual education should be addressed.

Keywords: Sexual Education, Child Sexual Abuse, Early Childhood Education, Prospective Teachers

Öğretmen Adaylarının Erken Çocukluk Döneminde Cinsel Eğitim ve Çocuk Cinsel İstismarına Yönelik Görüşleri

Öz: Bu araştırma, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi dönemde cinsel eğitim ve çocuk cinsel istismarı hakkındaki görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Verilerin 73 öğretmen adayı ile görüşülerek elde edildiği çalışmada durum çalışması araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Daha sonra içerik analizi yöntemi ile analiz edilen verilerin toplanması amacıyla hazırlanan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu cinsel eğitimle ilgili 8 soru ve 2 kurgusal vaka kullanılarak oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma sonuçları, öğretmen adaylarının cinsel eğitim ve çocuk cinsel istismarı konularının önemli olduğunu vurgularken bu konuda yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını da göstermiştir. Katılımcılar kurgusal vakalara vermiş oldukları cevaplar incelendiğinde erken müdahale konusunda eksikliklerinin olduğu görülmektedir. Ayrıca araştırma sonuçlarına göre, ebeveynler çocuklara cinsel eğitim sağlanmasında en önemli paydaşlar olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ayrıca, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin müfredatında cinsel eğitimle ilgili sorunların ele alınmasının çok önemli olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Cinsel Eğitim, Çocuğa Yönelik Cinsel İstismar, Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi, Öğretmen Adayları

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Being an important part of human life and personality, sexuality has biological, psychological, sociocultural, economic, religious, moral, and behavioral dimensions (Kakavoulis, 1998; World Health Organization (WHO), 2015). Sexuality is, therefore, expressed as a concept that continues for life and is affected by the attitudes and values of the society in which people live (Alkan Ersoy, 2019). Although the history of sexuality began with the history of humanity, studies on sexual education in the world began to stand out with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) epidemic in the 1980s (Çalışandemir et al., 2008; WHO, 2010).

Sexual Education

According to the European Expert Group on Sexuality Education (2016), sexual education aims at improving the interpersonal relationships as well as physical and emotional health of children and young people and enabling them to make healthy choices regarding sexuality. However, the Ministry of National Education in Turkey (MoNE) (2013) made a general definition of sexual education as a training to inform people about reproduction, satisfy their sexual concerns and enable them to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes in their relations with other people. Bayhan and Artan (2009), on the other hand, defined sexual education as an individual's understanding of the sexual development, respect for sexuality and other people's values, and gaining positive behavior. In short, sexual education is a training that includes sexual health and development along with its physical, emotional, social dimensions, enabling to gain sexual identity roles, and developing skills about gender and relationships (Dyson & Smith, 2012; Kadioğlu Polat & Üstün Budak, 2016). Sexual education in early childhood is, therefore, ignored. Berge (1969) emphasized that sexual education of children is much more important than sexual education of adolescents since the latter is largely related to early childhood sexual education. Likewise, in a recent study about child sexual abuse and its negative psychosocial outcomes, Maciel and Basto-Pereira, (2020) stated that boys and girls have different mental health issues in their latter of life. Researchers also stated that "female victims who had family ties with the perpetrator showed aggravated stress symptoms" (Maciel & Basto-Pereira, 2020, p.2128). In this case, sexual education to be given at an early age is of great importance for children to build a healthier future by protecting themselves.

Sexual Education in The Family

As a matter of fact, the primary responsibility belongs to the family in providing sexual education to children (Deniz et al., 2015). The studies in the literature suggest that parents have difficulties in giving sexual education, feel uneasy, and think that sexual education should be given in school (European Expert Group on Sexuality Education, 2016; Pandia et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2017). Such views are thought to be resulted from the fact that sex-related issues are seen as a taboo in societies in addition to the lack of necessary knowledge (Stone et al., 2013; Tuğrul & Artan, 2001). Walker (2004), on the other hand, stated that the reasons for adults not being able to talk with children about sexual matters are that they do not have sufficient information, are ashamed about sexual matters and do not know how to communicate on this issue.

Sexual Education in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood is the period in which children have sexual interests and curiosity about their own bodies as well as others' (Alkan Ersoy, 2019; Özkızıklı & Okutan, 2019). Therefore, this period, which is critical for development and education, should be spent in the best way and is of great importance to provide appropriate sexual education (teaching children their body parts, the importance of their bodies, and protecting them from others) to in early childhood. Relevant studies in the literature indicate that the most appropriate age to start sexual education is early childhood, when sexual behavior begins (Astuti et al., 2017; Hayes, 1995; Kakavoulis, 2001). The guide published by the Sex Education for Social Change (SIECUS) (1998) on sexuality from birth to five years of age stated that the sexual education to be given in this period should address to positive body image, problem-solving, decision making, emotions, and social issues including the ability to establish healthy relationships with other individuals. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2009) stated that the aim of sexual education for children is to provide children with knowledge, skills and values related to sexuality appropriate for their age and developmental level.

Sexual education for children is also named as primary preventive education (Schwikart, 2004). Preventive approaches given through sexual education provide children with knowledge and skills such as self-protection, feeling safe, learning about their rights and gaining self-control (Eshak & Zain, 2019; Schwikart, 2004). Recent studies have also shown that there is a significant increase in the personal safety and self-protection skills of children who receive preventive education (Bustamante et al., 2019; Kenny et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2014). Yanardağ-Çelik (2018) stated that children can protect themselves more thanks to their ability to be aware of their limits and to recognize the inappropriate approaches taught during the sexual education. Moreover, Tansel (2017) states that sexual education and sexual abuse are concepts that are closely related to each other and should be given together in order to raise awareness about sexual abuse at an early age together with sexual education.

Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse has become a common problem all over the world due to its prevalence. According to the statistics of the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) (2017) website, one child is exposed to sexual abuse every nine minutes in the USA (RAINN, 2017). Similarly, the European Commission (EC) (2019) states that approximately 10% to 20% of children are sexually abused during childhood. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) data contained in the Child Abuse Report in Turkey-2 reported that the number of children sexually abused was approximately 11 thousand in 2014, 13 thousand in 2015, and 17 thousand in 2016. The results indicate that child sexual abuse increased by 54% in the period from 2014 to 2016 (Polat, 2018). Given the child sexual abuse data by the General Directorate of Judicial Records and Statistics Department (2020) in Turkey, the number of lawsuits filed against sexual abuse offenses in 2019 was approximately 23,000 and there has been a 50% increase in the number of cases since 2015. The study in the literature demonstrates that different rates are given for the number of children who have been sexually abused in the world. However, recorded cases of sexual abuse are estimated to be one-tenth of what is actually happening (Edgardh & Ormstad, 2000).

It is believed to be caused by the fact that children are sexually abused usually by people they know (Ebigbo, 2003; Foote, 2011; McDonnell & Skosireva, 2009). The relevant data by RAINN (2020) indicate that in 59% of the cases in America, the abuser is someone that the child knows, a family member in 34%, and a stranger in 7% (see Figure 1). In addition, Hancı and Özdemir (2001) stated that 30% of children who are sexually abused are between the ages of 2-5. Moreover, Bulut (2007) stated that “sexual abuse of children for them, for the attacker who attempted this crime, and also psychological and social consequences for society, legal and it is a problem with moral dimensions and sanctions.” (p.139). For this reason, teachers and parents should play a great role in recognizing and preventing the increased child abuse cases in preschool (Dereobalı et al., 2013).

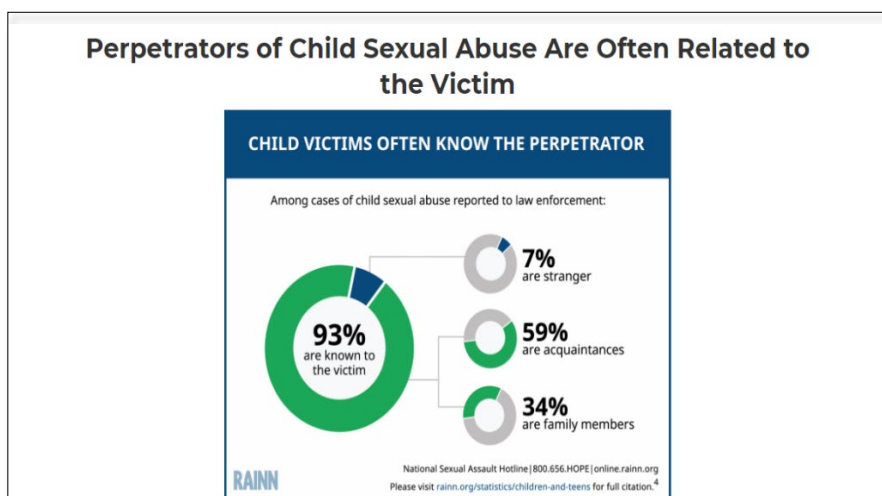


Figure 1. Data about children who are sexually abused (www.rainn.org).

Furthermore, teachers play a very important role in developing children's knowledge and behaviors about sexuality through school-based sexual education (Xiong et al., 2020). Considering the studies on sexual education given by teachers, despite having a common consensus about the need to provide preventive education within sexual education and its content, teachers do not seem adequate in evaluating the sexual behavior of children, coping with problem behavior (Çankırı, 2018; Ey & McInnes, 2018; Gökdeniz, 2008; Miragoli et al., 2017; Yeşilay & Altun, 2009), identifying and reporting the cases of abuse (Feng et al., 2010; Goldman & Greembeek, 2015; Márquez-Flores et al., 2016) and providing children with appropriate education and guidance according to their level of development. When we look at the studies stating the opinions of pre-school teachers about sexual education in Turkey, it is seen that teachers think that it is necessary to provide sexual education in the pre-school period and that it is important for them to assume an informative role, but most of them do not have enough information on this subject because they do not receive a formal education and they avoid giving sexual education (Dereobalı et al., 2013; Ünlüer, 2018). In other studies conducted with Turkish parents with pre-school children, although the opinion that parents should give sexual education to the child is dominant, it has been stated that they do not feel comfortable while giving education to their children and they do not have enough information (Göçgeldi et al., 2007; Eliküçük & Sönmez 2011).

Statement of the Problem

No courses have been found to cover sexual education to children in the teacher training programs of preschool teachers in Turkey. In fact, the educational content of preschool teacher training program published by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) (2018) does not include a course related to sexual education either in the compulsory or elective courses. However, in some universities, this course is given as an elective. It seems that the issues related to sexual education are dwelled upon in a very narrow manner in courses such as social-emotional development, personality development, education psychology, and health education (Kadioğlu Polat & Üstün Budak, 2016). It is well known that depends on the university and professor how gives the counseling course in the early childhood education program, these issues are dealt with very briefly in the course. However, due to the important role of teachers in sexual education for children (Tunc et al., 2018), they need a qualified teacher training to have sufficient information about sexual education and improve themselves (Weiler & Martin-Weiler, 2012).

Furthermore, in societies where sexuality cannot be discussed within the family, it is important that this education is given by teachers at school (Bulut Peduk, 2016). Relevant research shows that people who are abused in childhood can also develop physical, psychological, behavioral and social problems during their adulthood (Daignault & Hebert, 2009; Luo et al., 2008). In fact, teachers are expected to address issues related to the protection of children from sexual abuse along with sexual education to develop their healthy physical, psychological, behavioral, and social skills. Actually, when the reports of Polat (2018) are examined, it is necessary to raise awareness about the protection of children from abuse, especially in these times when child abuse is increasing day by day. However, there is a need for research on how capable pre-school teachers, who will give this education at an early age, are in both sexual education and child abuse. In this way, the main research question of the current study is "What are the opinions of prospective early childhood teachers about sexual education and child sexual abuse?" In this context, the following sub-questions were tried to be answered in the study;

- What are the perspectives of prospective preschool teachers about sexual education?
- What are the perspectives of prospective preschool teachers about child sexual abuse?
- What are the perspectives of prospective preschool teachers about sexual education and parents' roles?
- What are the perspectives of prospective preschool teachers about sexual education and teachers' roles?

Research Method

The aim of this study is to use the case study design to reveal the prospective teachers' opinions about the concept of sexual education and child sexual abuse in preschool. A case study is defined as a method in which one or more events, environments, and programs are described and analyzed in depth (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014; Merriam, 2018). Creswell (2007) explained the case study as an approach in which the researcher collects detailed information about a current situation, real life, and situations in a certain time period, through observations, interviews, documents, and puts forward as a situation description. In line with this purpose, the case study design of this study helped us to understand the experiences, views, and real-life views of individuals regarding the concepts of sexual education and sexual abuse.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 73 (59 female and 14 male) prospective teachers who voluntarily participated in the study from among a total of 187 prospective teachers who were studying preschool teacher education at Kilis 7 Aralık University in Turkey. The participants who study freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students as in early childhood education program in the university. In general, the number of participants in qualitative studies is kept low. Due to the sensitivity of the subject in this study, sufficient data could not be obtained from some participants. Therefore, the number of participants is slightly higher than in other qualitative studies.

The study used the critical case purposive sampling which is one of the purposive sampling models to reach the participants easily. Patton (1990) stated the critical case purposive sampling as a method that allows selecting the participants who are considered to have sufficient experience about the phenomenon and to examine their thoughts on the subject in a deeper way. In the current study, prospective preschool teachers who had and will find the opportunity to work with children were invited to this study. Most of the participants' mother's (78.08%) and father's (47.95%) educational level were primary school. Most of them (71.23%) did not have taken any education or training about sexual education. Moreover, the majority of the participants (46.58%) were 21-25 years old. The most of them study as third year (junior) in university (27.40%). Furthermore, majority of them (71.23%) had never taken any class about sexual education. For detailed demographic information about the participants, see Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Theme	Codes	f	%
Gender	Female	59	80,82
	Male	14	19,17
Age	20 years and under	23	31,51
	21-25 years old	34	46,58
	Age 26 and over	16	21,92
Mother Education Status	Primary school	57	78,08
	Middle School	5	6,85
	High school	8	10,96
	University	3	4,11
Father Educational Status	Primary school	35	47,95
	Middle School	17	23,29
	High school	13	17,81
	University	8	10,96
Number of Siblings	2 and below	11	15,07
	3-5 siblings	32	43,84
	6 and more	30	41,10
Taking Lessons on Sexual Education	Yes	21	28,77
	No	52	71,23
Taking Courses on Sexual Education at the University	Yes	14	19,18
	No	59	80,82
Feeling Competent in Sexual Education	Yes	28	38,36
	No	44	60,27

Data Collection Tools and Process

The data collection tools included a "Demographic Information Form", which constitutes the demographic data of the participants, and a "Semi-Structured Interview Form", which reveals their views on sexual education. The questions in the interview form consisted of a total of ten questions and two fictional cases in order to clearly determine the perceptions and meanings attached to the phenomenon by the participants as well as revealing their thoughts and emotions about the experiences. Patton (1990) stated that the interview questions should be open-ended, sequential, clear, and comprehensible with no directional features. In this regard, 18 questions were prepared to ensure the content validity about sexual education and presented to 8 field experts with at least a PhD degree, 3 of whom were in the field of preschool education, 2 in the field of psychological counseling, 2 in the field of assessment and evaluation, and 1 in the field of Turkish language. While taking the opinions of the experts for the interview questions, the experts were presented with sub-categories such as "suitable", "not suitable" and "should be corrected", after which 8 questions with 2 fictional cases were included in the study in line with the suggestions of the experts.

For the semi-structured interview questions, 5 prospective preschool teachers and 5 preschool teachers, who were not included in the research, were contacted to confirm the comprehensibility and scope validity of the questions. As a result of the pilot procedure, the final interview form was prepared with some changes made to the questions and in their order. Sample of the questions and one of the 2 fictional cases in the semi-structured interview form are listed below:

- What do you think about the reasons for the increase in child sexual abuse in relation to its presentation on TV, radio, newspapers, and social media in recent years?
- What do you think is the purpose of sexual education in the preschool period?

Fictional Case1:

A kindergarten teacher called Zeynep teaches in a classroom of 20 children aged 4-5 with no class assistants. A girl and a boy ask Zeynep for permission to go to the toilet. She gives them permission, but after a while she realizes that the children are late. She goes to the toilet to check the children. On arriving at the bathroom, she sees that the children have finished their toilet needs, and are not wearing their pants but watching each other instead.

- How would you behave if you were Zeynep teacher in "Fictional Case1"?

Fictional Case2:

A 19-year-old shepherd, who goes to the upland to graze the animals, takes his 5-year-old brother with him every time he goes. Every time they go, the shepherd asks his little brother to touch his genitals. Sometimes the shepherd touches the private parts of the little boy.

- If you encountered such a situation by chance, how would you intervene in this situation of a 5-year-old child in your class? "Fictional Case2"?

After the data collection tool was created, firstly, the freshman students were identified from among those studying preschool teaching and wanting to participate in the research voluntarily. The students were then asked to read and approve the volunteering form to participate in the research. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a room where students who agreed to participate in the study could feel comfortable. Then, sophomores, juniors, and seniors were invited to the study, respectively. The voice recording was used in the interview for 46 participants, who gave their consent for it. In the research, the interviews of 27 participants who did not allow voice recording were recorded in writing. In line with the suggestions of the field experts and the indicators that emerged as a result of the pilot study, 37 out of 60 female participants were interviewed by female researchers, and 8 out of 13 male participants were interviewed by male researchers in order to make the participants feel more comfortable during the interview. And 23 female and 5 male participants were interviewed with both male and female researchers. Given that sexuality is still considered a taboo in Turkey and people still refrain from talking about such matters, that method was chosen for the interviews so that the participants would feel more comfortable and deeper information could be reached during the interview

process.

Ethical Statement

The current study procedure was ethically approved by Kilis 7 Aralık University Ethics Board by the getting approval number of 2021/09 with the document date 07/04/2021. The study was carried out after collecting all the participants' informed consent forms.

Data Analysis

The content analysis was used to analyze the data. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) stated that the content analysis process should be implemented in four steps, which are: I) data coding, II) developing themes, III) organizing codes and themes, and IV) defining the results. Firstly, the interview forms obtained were transcribed and transferred to the electronic medium before the data analysis. Then, one of the qualitative data analysis software was used for transcoding. The findings are presented in tables.

The research data were presented with a reliable analysis. Creswell (2007) stated that the reliability of qualitative research must be achieved by moving away from the participants' perspective on the research in order to make sure that the research results are definite. However, this study used coding reliability, which is frequently used in qualitative research, to ensure internal consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding reliability is calculated by determining the codes with "agreement" and "disagreement" among the coders in the process of data analysis. In this study, internal consistency among the coders was achieved by using the following coding reliability formula: $[\text{Reliability} = \text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})]$ as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the coding reliability being over 70% is acceptable for the research in the analysis process of qualitative data in social sciences. In this study, the cohesion among the coders was found 93% ($.93 = 921 / (921 + 69)$). The themes and codes that emerged as a result of the content analysis were converted into tables and the frequencies and percentages were calculated. Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are presented under the tables. The research data collection and analysis process could be seen in Figure 2.

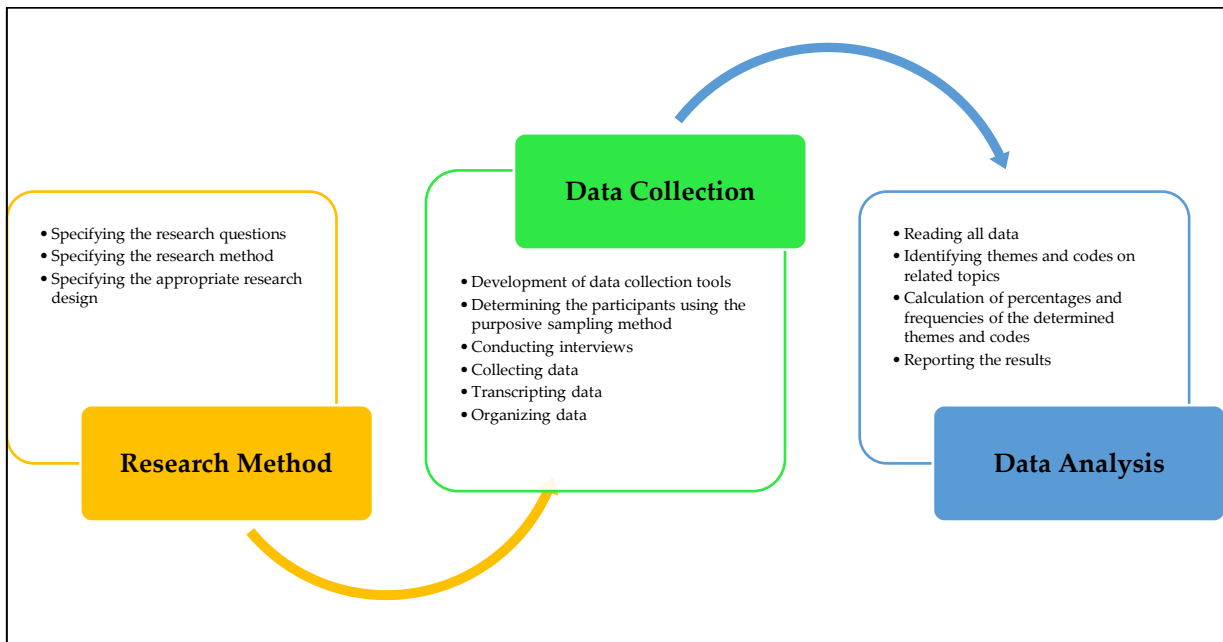


Figure 2. Research method, data collection process and general view of data analysis.

Results

In this section, the data were analyzed, and the findings of each theme were presented in tables by calculating the frequencies and percentages. In addition, some exemplary excerpts of the participants were

included regarding the results. The interview questions were analyzed as those related to sexual education, child sexual abuse, as well as sexual education and parents' roles, and sexual education and teachers' roles.

Sexual Education

In the second part of the interview form, the prospective preschool teachers were asked some questions related to sexual education and fictional cases, the results of which were presented in tables. In this section, the participants were initially asked the following question: "What is sexual education?". Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis results for their answers.

Table 2. *Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual education*

Theme	Codes	f	%
Sexual Education	Body Awareness of Children	25	23.81
	Gaining Biological Awareness	19	18.10
	Developing a Sexual Identity	15	14.29
	Getting Preventive Training	14	13.33
	Other (knowledge about body parts, physiological need... etc.)	11	10.48
	Supporting the Personality Development	7	6.67
	Sex-related Education	6	5.71
	Don't Know/No response	8	7.62
	Total	105	100.00

Table 2 shows that the majority of prospective preschool teachers defined sexual education as the body awareness of children (23.81%) and gaining biological awareness (18.10%). Some participants did not recognize sexual education as sex-related education (5.71%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below.

PPST8: "It is the education given to teach people about their sexual anatomy, emotional relationships and reproduction."

PPST18: "It is the education for individuals to protect themselves, especially when young children feel that someone else is not approaching them innocently."

PPST28: "These are the trainings given to recognize personal differences as well as one's own body and private body parts to protect them."

The participants were then asked the following interview question: "What do you think is the purpose of sexual education in preschool?" Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis results.

Table 3. *Prospective Teachers' Opinions on the Purpose of Sexual education*

Theme	Codes	f	%
The Purpose of Sexual Education	To raise awareness about sexuality	26	27.66
	To protect from abuse	24	25.53
	Being a developmentally appropriate period	13	13.83
	To support personality development	12	12.77
	Other (increasing the child's interaction with her environment, the world order requires it ... etc.)	9	9.57
	To satisfy their sexuality-related curiosity	9	9.57
	Don't Know/No response	1	1.06
	Total	94	100.00

Table 3 indicates that the majority of the participants were of the opinion that sexual education in preschool aims at raising awareness about sexuality in children (27.66%), while some others related it to protect children from abuse (25.53%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below.

PPST8: "Children should become aware of their own features, and that consciousness should be instilled. This training should be given so that children can protect themselves and develop a personality suitable for their genders. Also, in line with this information, children should learn to be able to protect themselves and to make their voices heard."

PPST26: "The purpose of sexual education to children can be considered as a training to teach them how to protect themselves against possible situations, because unfortunately, sexual assault against children has increased a lot and this education is essential for children to defend themselves."

The prospective teachers were told about a fictional case in a kindergarten to obtain their opinions.

Table 4 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data obtained.

A kindergarten teacher called Zeynep teaches in a classroom of 20 children aged 4-5 with no class assistants. A girl and a boy ask Zeynep for permission to go to the toilet. She gives them permission, but after a while she realizes that the children are late. She goes to the toilet to check the children. On arriving at the bathroom, she sees that the children have finished their toilet needs, and are not wearing their pants but watching each other instead.

Table 4. Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual Behavior

Theme	Codes	f	%
Interventions for Children with Sexually-related Behavior	Warning about the behavior	37	37.37
	Protecting private body parts	20	20.20
	Education for biological differences	14	14.14
	Informing the family	10	10.10
	Expert support	7	7.07
	Other (I can act calmly, I can say it is shameful for both of the children, I do nothing, but I can observe their attitudes... etc.)	7	7.07
	Don't Know/No response	4	4.04
Total		99	100.00

Table 4 shows that some prospective teachers stated that children should be warned about the most frequent behavior towards sexual behavior (37.37%), while some of them stated that children should be taught about protecting private body parts (20.20%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are as follows:

PPST1: "I would call both students. I would tell them not to do this again. I would bring an expert regarding sexual education and I would call the families of the children on the day when the expert would come. I would also inform the families about this."

PPST5: "I would tell them that such a thing was not true in an appropriate language, and from then on I would let them go to the toilet one by one. In addition, I would try to engage the experts in the field of sexual education."

Child Sexual Abuse

In this section, the participants were asked about the reasons for the increase in child sexual abuse in relation to its presentation on TV, radio, newspapers, and social media in recent years. Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data obtained.

Table 5. Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Child Sexual Abuse

Theme	Codes	f	%
The Reasons for Increased Sexual Abuse	Lack of education	59	51.75
	Change in social structure	19	16.67
	The media effect	13	11.40
	A male-dominated culture	9	7.89
	Lack of deterring penalties	9	7.89
	Other (People's unemployment, focusing on vulnerable people, not respecting personal rights... etc.)	5	4.39
Total		114	100.00

Table 5 indicates that the vast majority of prospective preschool teachers stated that this results from lack of education (51.75%), while some of them associated it to the change in social structure (16.67%), and the influence of the media (11.40%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below:

PPST22: "First off, there is not enough education and such education is considered as a shame in the society. Also, the discrimination between men and women in the society is very high, and men are favored on many issues."

PPST37: "The penalties for sexual abuse are not heavy. In fact, it is said by some ignorant people that the reason for the increase in sexual abuse result from women's clothing. That is, the use of the phrase "can do it because it is a man". Anyone who is sexually abusing someone should be punished very severely."

The participants were also asked about how they can support children regarding sexual abuse. Table 6 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data obtained.

Table 6. *Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on the Protection of Children from Abuse*

Theme	Codes	f	%	
Providing Support to Prevent Sexual Abuse	Body safety education	Protecting private body parts	49	44.55
		Knowing private body parts	24	21.82
	Organizing events (puppet shows, songs, stories, etc.)	21	19.09	
	Cooperation with families	7	6.36	
	Expert support	3	2.73	
	Don't know/No response	3	2.73	
	Teachers' self-development in this regard	2	1.82	
	Giving religious knowledge to the child	1	0.91	
Total		110	100.00	

While the vast majority of prospective teachers stated that children should be provided with trainings on body safety (66.37%), and trainings should especially focus on the protection of private body parts (44.55%). They also expressed their views on the necessity to cooperate with families (6.36%) and provide expert support (2.73%) when necessary. Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below:

PPST54: "I would tell them (children) not to show their private body parts to anyone or have them touched. I would teach them (children) to ask for help from other people around if a stranger touched them."

PPST63: "It is necessary to tell the child what the private body parts are. From the age of three, children must be taught what the private body parts are and that such parts must not be touched. They must be told that the private body parts must not be touched by anyone other than parents and doctors."

PPST69: "I would introduce the private body parts and explain their functions. I would also say that the private parts are personal and no one should touch them."

The participants were briefly told about a fictional case created from an incident that had been recently shared by a teacher and asked about their possible responses under such conditions. Table 7 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data.

A 19-year-old shepherd, who goes to the upland to graze the animals, takes his 5-year-old brother with him every time he goes. Every time they go, the shepherd asks his little brother to touch his genitals. Sometimes the shepherd touches the private parts of the little boy. If you encountered such a situation by chance, how would you intervene in this situation of a 5-year-old child in your class?

Table 7. *Prospective Preschool Teachers' Opinions on Intervention in Sexual Abuse*

Theme	Codes	f	%
Intervention in Sexual Abuse	Notification to the authorities (Mayor Of The Village Or Neighborhood, School Principal, Family and Social Policies Directorate, and Guidance and Research Center Directorate, etc.)	32	20.78
		Expert support	32
	Informing the families	22	14.29
	Informing the security forces	21	13.64
	Informing the school administration	21	13.64
	Informing the children	15	9.74
	Talking to the abuser	8	5.19
	Other (speaking without resentment and anger, continuing to observe the situation... etc.)	3	1.95
Total		154	100.00

Table 7 shows that the participants were mostly of the opinion that the incident must be reported to the competent authorities (20.78%) and that the abused child must be provided with an expert support. Interestingly, some of the participants expressed their views about the necessity to talk to the abuser (5.19%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below:

PPST4: "I would notify the authorities and do everything. I could improve that child's psychology. I would do my best to get his brother to get the heaviest punishment for this ugly incident."

PPST7: "First, I would inform his family. I would try to give sexual education to the child, his family and the abusive brother. I would always be in contact with the family so that they would not punish their children on this matter."

PPST41: "I would inform the little child's family. I would like the child to receive treatment from a good psychologist. I would also complain about the person who did it to competent authorities. I would show my psychological support so that the child would not remember such times and lead a horrible life."

Sexual Education and Parents' Roles

The participants were asked: "What kind of support can be given to families regarding sexual education?". Table 8 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data obtained.

Table 8. Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual education and Parent's roles

Theme	Codes	f	%
Actions for Families	Raising awareness of the family	42	33.87
	Organizing meetings and seminars	21	16.94
	Resource sharing and book recommendations	13	10.48
	School-family cooperation in sexual education	12	9.68
	Family involvement	12	9.68
	Permanence of education	8	6.45
	No opinion	3	2.42
	Other (giving advice to families on education, talking about sexual traumas... etc.)	3	2.42
	Total	124	100.00

Table 8 indicates that while most of the participants emphasized the necessity to raise awareness of families about sexual education for children (33.87%), some others suggested that meetings and seminars should be organized for families (16.94%), as well as sharing relevant resources and recommending books to enable them to become more knowledgeable about the issue (10.48%). Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below.

PPST8: "I would visit and meet the families in person to inform them about sexual education and its importance. I could even make brochures and give them to families."

PPST19: "Parents could be offered a book about child sexual abuse, good touch and bad touch, and about sexual education for children, and I would like the parents to read it and give their children necessary information about sexual education."

PPST64: "Families can be given specific information about the sexual education of children and generally about menstruation so that they would not misrepresent the behavior of children."

Sexual Education and Teachers' Roles

The participants were also asked the following question: "What should the preschool teachers do to improve themselves about sexual education?" Table 9 presents the frequencies and percentages of the content analysis for the data obtained.

Table 9. Prospective Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual education and Teachers

Theme	Codes	f	%
Actions for Sexual education	Organizing seminars, congresses, panels, etc.	54	44.63
	Involving sexual education lesson to the curricula	22	18.18
	Provision of sufficient materials (books, magazines, articles, brochures, etc.)	19	15.70
	In-service training	10	8.26
	Other (Lack of transport to rural areas, visualization, surveys... etc.)	8	6.61
	Expert support	5	4.13
	Don't know/No response	3	2.48
	Total	121	100.00

In Table 9, the majority of the participants stated that events such as seminars, congresses, and panels, etc. should be organized for teachers (44.63%), while some of the participants mentioned the issue of involving sexual education lessons into preschool teacher training programs (18.18%). In addition, some participants were of the opinion that providing an expert support for teachers (4.13%) could be beneficial for teachers to improve themselves in sexual education. Some exemplary excerpts of the participants are given below.

PPST1: "Seminars should be given by field experts. In addition, seminars on sexual education can be organized for preschool teachers by the Ministry of National Education."

PPST16: "First off, I think that the necessary lessons about sexual education should be taken while studying preschool teaching at university. What's more, some necessary practices can also be made during that process."

PPST37: "Field experts with related training could be invited to schools to organize seminars. CRC (Counselling and

Research Center) can be asked for assistance.”

Discussion

This study aimed to reveal the prospective preschool teachers' opinions about sexual education. When the study findings were examined, the majority of pre-service teachers stated that early childhood sexual education is only a part of sexual education, as body awareness. Likewise, it was observed that the pre-service teachers stated that the purpose of sexual education is to inform children about sexuality and to protect children from abuse. When the answers given by the pre-service teachers in the fictional events are examined, it is seen that there are wrong ways in some of the answers given in the first and second cases. In this direction, it was determined that many of them mentioned that they should warn children about their behavior. In this part of the study, the research results are discussed in comparison to the previous studies in the literature.

Sexual Education in the Early Childhood

The prospective teachers defined sexual education as body awareness of children, awareness of sexuality, developing a sexual identity and preventive education for sexual abuse. Besides these, they also mentioned some other definitions such as supporting personality development and sexual activity education. Bayhan and Artan (2009) defined sexual education as understanding the individual's sexual development, developing a positive perspective on sexuality, and respecting the values of others. The literature demonstrates that sexual education includes physical, emotional, and social development and skills teaches respect for oneself and others, introduces sexual identity roles, and gives information about sexuality and reproduction (Kadioğlu Polat & Üstün Budak, 2016; MoNE, 2013). The relevant definitions indicate that prospective teachers describe sexual education with its physiological and biological dimensions in general, and do not address the social-emotional dimension such as respect to other differences as physiological and biological, which may be regarded to result from the prospective teachers' approach to sexual education from a single perspective without having sufficient information about its scope. The fact that the majority of them have not taken any lessons on sexual education can be considered to be effective in this regard.

The participants further stated that the purpose of sexual education in preschool is to raise awareness about sexuality and protect children from abuse. The relevant literature shows that most of the studies on the subject are in line with this finding (Eshak & Zain, 2019; Güzelyurt et al., 2019). Eshak and Zain (2019) found that given sexual education children can improve their self-protection, feeling safe, learning about their rights, and gaining self-control. Moreover, in an earlier study conducted with teachers in Scotland and Greece, Menmuir and Kakavoulis (1998) stated that the purpose of sexual education is to enable children to recognize their own bodies and gain timely knowledge and awareness on sexuality. However, the authors indicated that the participants did not make mention of protection from sexual abuse, which is actually one of the purposes of sexual education (Menmuir & Kakavoulis, 1998). This is thought to arise from the inadequate knowledge of teachers about sexual education or can be considered to be related to the rapid increase in sexual abuse from past to present or its prevalence country-by-country. It is, therefore, believed that the prospective teachers in our study may have been affected in this issue due to the increase in cases of child sexual abuse in recent years as frequently emphasized in social media, television and the Internet environment.

When asked: "How would you intervene if you saw a girl and a boy watching each other in the toilet?", most of the participants stated that they would give verbal warning about the behavior and say that their behavior was not correct, whereas other participants stated that they would inform the children about the private body parts and biological differences as well as informing their families about the situation. The behavior of preschool children to watch each other in the toilet is one of the most common, natural and unexpected sexual behaviors (Yeşilay & Altun, 2009). Some research results in the literature also show that the most common sexual behaviors of preschool children in classrooms include such normal behavior as showing their own genitals, looking at someone else's genitals, and touching (Larsson, 2000). It is, therefore, very important for teachers to know how to react in the face of such behaviors in terms of children's healthy sexual development.

In addition, telling children what they are doing is wrong, and separating them from each other in the classroom environment is not the right approach, but can cause feeling of guilt in children. In this case, it is considered sufficient to give the children enough information to satisfy their curiosity with the right information (Çalışır & Onur, 2014). In this study, the responses given by the majority of prospective teachers did not coincide with the findings in the literature, which may be associated with the teachers' lack of knowledge about following a strategy against sexual behaviors of children and with their assumption that such situations are regarded as socially inappropriate. Besides this, it can also be assumed that the majority of the participants were female and the fact that girls are raised in a more suppressed manner compared to boys in Turkish society may also have an impact on their answers.

The participants expressed that they would support the education of children in order to get them to know and protect their private body parts, to carry out various activities in the classroom, and cooperate with the family in order to protect children from sexual abuse. The preventive sexual education mainly focuses on the motto of "my body belongs to me", as well as on human emotions, touches, secrets, saying no, and getting help. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure the active participation of children in education in order to prevent child sexual abuse (Huang & Cui, 2020). As stated by the participants, preventive education can be given in the classroom through various activities such as games, drama, reading stories, and singing. Children may also learn their body while using technological tools (Yalçın & Erden, 2018). Öztürk and Feyman Gök (2021) also suggested the children's picture books for learning their body and the proper anatomical names of the genitals that used in the books.

Child Sexual Abuse

In this study, in line with the analysis of the data, although the lack of education is determined as the basis of child sexual abuse, it is seen that the negative effect of the changing social structure and the media cause an increase in child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is regarded as one of the biggest problems in all societies and cultures (Manheim et al., 2019). The recent increase in child sexual abuse in different countries has brought up the need to take necessary measures on this issue once again (Huang & Cui, 2020; Manheim et al., 2019). Relevant research shows that people who are abused in childhood can also develop physical, psychological, behavioral and social problems during adulthood (Daignault & Hebert, 2009; Luo et al., 2008). It is, therefore, frequently emphasized that sexual education for children should be given at an early age (Huang & Cui, 2020; Martínez et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2018). Huang and Cui (2020) stated that formal, systematic and repetitive school-based sexual education prepared for children can be very effective in protecting children from abuse. In the current study, by the using second fictional case, the strategy to follow in the face of sexual abuse was asked the participants. The participants focused that they would inform the authorities, try to provide expert support from a psychologist and the school psychological counselor, inform the family, and report it to the security forces and school management. Although notification is considered as a positive attitude, the participants were observed to be insufficient in terms of the order to follow in making a notification. The fact that the participants considered reacting against sexual abuse a social responsibility, preferred to report it to the competent authority like any sensible individual would do, but not follow a strategy to provide abused children with any psychological, social, and emotional support may result from lack of knowledge about what they should do. The results of the studies that investigate how teachers and prospective teachers should behave and report sexual abuse support the findings in this study. The relevant studies in the literature have revealed that teachers have a great role in recognizing and preventing sexual abuse (Feng et al., 2010; Goldman & Grimbeek, 2015; Márquez-Flores et al., 2016; Tunca & Özer, 2015). Therefore, it is of great importance for teachers to have sufficient information on such a critical issue, and is crucial that prospective teachers should be provided with the necessary training on issues related to recognizing, preventing, and reporting abuse and be able to provide pedagogical support to the child victim in the event that they encounter sexual abuse cases. Similarly, a recent study conducted by Gushwa, Bernier, and Robinson (2019) to provide teachers with training on child sexual abuse indicated an increase in the level of knowledge of teachers on issues such as the prevalence, awareness, and reporting of sexual abuse.

The factors that cause sexual abuse are indicated as the lack of sexual education and child sexual abuse

preventive education in addition to inequality between individuals and other women, the weakness of legal sanctions related to sexual abuse in societies, the change of social norms, and the existence of male-dominant ideology (WHO, 2010). According to the research data, the prospective teachers stated the reason for the increase in sexual abuse as a general lack of education. Other reasons included the change in social structure, media influence, male-dominated culture and lack of deterrent punishments. The research results are in line with the factors specified in the literature.

Families and Teachers Need More Support

In order to increase social awareness against sexual abuse, teachers can carry out trainings, seminars, provided sufficient materials (books, magazines, articles, brochures) aiming at raising public awareness as well as sexual education at schools to provide children with self-protection skills. However, the teachers who will provide such trainings should first receive a comprehensive sexual education themselves. The participants' opinions about male domination show that they still have incomplete information about child abuse and that they think that sexual abuse can only be done by men. The fact that the majority of the participants in our study were female could be a contributing factor to such beliefs. Despite the dominant view that women are victims of sexual abuse in general, women carry out sexual crimes at a higher rate than expected (Banton & West, 2020). The research results of the studies by Stemple, Flores, and Meyer (2017), investigating sexual abuse crimes committed by women in America, are in contradiction with the view that sexual abuse crimes by women are very low.

Studies have shown that families have a great responsibility in terms of sexual education (Eliküçük & Sönmez, 2011; Huang & Cui, 2020; Xiong et al., 2020). Many prospective teachers have stated that when they start their professional life, they will try to raise awareness of families about sexual education, organize meetings and seminars, share resources and ensure the active participation of parents in the sexual education process. Similarly, Huang and Cui (2020) and Öztürk and Feyman Gök (2021) emphasized in their study that book sharing with parents is important in terms of supporting the sexual education given in the school to continue at home. Some other studies concluded that families do not have enough information about sexual education and they need it (Eliküçük & Sönmez, 2011; Tuğrul & Artan, 2001). Sexual education is a life-long process that begins with birth and in the family first. Parents are, therefore, regarded as the most important stakeholders in providing sexual education to children (Xiong et al., 2020). Some studies indicated that the cooperation with schools and families is necessary to raise awareness of families so that children can have a healthy sexual education (Huang & Cui, 2020) and physical, emotional, language, mental, moral, and social development (Konca, 2020). Our research results showed similar results with the studies in the literature, which is considered to result from the fact that the prospective teachers pointed out the importance of family participation due to being influenced by other courses they had already taken.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated the sexual education and child sexual abuse opinions of prospective preschool teachers who were expected to give such trainings. This situation of prospective teachers again suggests whether or not such education should be given in preschool or not, although sexual education is of great importance for children, as mentioned above. Especially, the chance of reaching more detailed information about the purpose of sexual education will increase for the pre-service teachers who stated that they received such training in different courses.

If this education is to be given to children, it should be noted that the prospective preschool teachers do not find themselves sufficient in this regard and do not have necessary knowledge as understood from the answers to the interview questions. Considering the findings of the study, it is known that teacher candidates who have information about sexual education and sexual abuse took this information in the short part mentioned in the counseling lesson. In this case, it is recommended that there should be compulsory and elective, applied, and theoretical courses on sexual education in preschool teacher training programs for prospective teachers. The number of applied courses on cases can be increased by enriching the content of the

courses to be developed in cooperation with the psychological counseling and guidance department on this subject.

If this education will not be given to children, it is necessary to carry out studies to protect children from abuse and have them gain a healthy sexual identity these days, when child sexual abuse is on the increase. In this regard, important steps must be taken both for family-wise and social-wise. For example, families can be informed and involved in activities in cooperation with schools and psychological counseling centers so that they can provide their children with healthy sexual identities. By providing materials for families, the education given in schools can be continued in the family. In addition, field experts can be consulted in order to enable the families to give their children the sexual education at an early age. Various practices, sanctions and laws can be enacted by governments to raise awareness among individuals.

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