

Child Abuse in Schools from the Perspective of Physical Education and Sports Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal child abuse in schools from the perspectives of physical education and sports teachers and to provide suggestions for preventing abuse. Case study approach, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. The participants of the study consisted of 7 physical education and sports teachers. In this study, semi-structured interview was used as a data collection tool and the data obtained were analysed by content analysis method. As a result of the research, the opinions of physical education and sport teachers were grouped under four categories: types of abuse, signs of abuse, high-risk areas and suggestions to prevent abuse. Types of abuse were divided into 4 subcategories as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The types of abuse were determined as hitting by the teacher, performance pressure, nicknaming the student, secretly watching, making fun of each other's bodies, ignoring the students' desire to participate in competitions, and neglecting their nutritional needs in tournaments. Signs of abuse include quitting the branch, temper tantrums, unkempt appearance, need for love and attention, withdrawal and desire to be alone. High-risk areas were identified as changing rooms, out-of-school activities, toilets, areas not seen by the camera, basements and empty classrooms. Suggestions to prevent abuse include educational programmes, physical environment safety and ensuring safety in sports activities. Teachers emphasised that university level courses should be added to increase child protection awareness in the field of sport and in-service trainings should be organised for existing educators.

Keywords: Sport, Child abuse, Physical education and sports teacher.

Introduction

Within the framework of Turkey's Twelfth Development Plan (2024) while the number of students participating in sports education in primary schools was 326 thousand in 2023, this number is aimed to reach 800 thousand students by 2028. At the same time while the number of students participating in school sports was 2.3 million in 2023, it is aimed to increase this number to 2.9 million students by 2028.

Schools are places where children spend most of their time and participate in sports activities. Therefore, it is of great importance that schools provide a safe and supportive environment and that children are safe while playing sports. These healthy and safe environments should support both the physical and social development of children and act as a protective shield against risks such as child abuse. According to the World Health Organisation's (1999) definition, child abuse is when an adult threatens or harms a child's health, survival, development or dignity by using a position of responsibility, trust or power to physically and/or emotionally harm the child's health, survival, development or dignity through maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect or economic or other forms of exploitation. Alexander, Stafford and Lewis (2011) found that 75% of young athletes in England were exposed to emotional abuse and Gündüz et al. (2007) found that 56.2% of elite female athletes were exposed to sexual abuse in a study conducted in Turkey. Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics (CASES) project aimed to provide evidence on the prevalence of interpersonal violence experienced by children (under 18) participating in sport in different national contexts (Austria, Germany, Belgium, Romania, Spain, England). It was concluded that the most common experience of interpersonal violence against children in sport was psychological violence (65%), followed by physical violence (44%), neglect (37%) and non-contact sexual violence (35%); the least common experience was contact sexual violence (20%) (Hartill et al., 2021). These studies reveal the prevalence of abuse in sports. However, there are few studies examining the prevalence of abuse in primary and secondary school sports (Teasley & Gill, 2015). When the studies conducted in the school context are examined, it is seen that studies focusing on sexual abuse are generally conducted (Naterman, 2014; Teasley & Gill, 2015; Basile, Espelage, Ingram, Simon & Berrier, 2022). Unfortunately, abuse is a very broad concept and is seen in different forms including sexual, emotional, physical abuse and neglect (CPSU, 2024; Fortier, Parent & Lessard, 2019). Physical education and sports teachers working in schools and out-of-school sports activities have an important role in detecting and preventing these forms of abuse. In addition, prevention of abuse is possible by providing trainings on this issue and raising awareness (Mc Mahon, Lang, Zehntner & Mc Gannon, 2023; Güler, 2024). In this context, revealing the existence of abuse in the school environment will both raise awareness and enable the development of policies and strategies for its prevention. The aim of this study is to reveal child abuse in schools from the perspectives of physical education and sport teachers and to provide suggestions for preventing abuse.

Methodology

Research Design

This research, which aims to reveal child abuse in schools from the perspectives of physical education and sports teachers and to provide suggestions for preventing abuse, is a qualitative research and is designed as a case study. Case study is the process of describing and analysing a limited system in detail (Merriam, 2013). According to Yin (2008), a case study is an empirical research that examines a current event in the context of real life. As stated by Merriam (2013), researchers prefer qualitative case studies when they want to understand, explore and interpret an event in depth. In this study, the case study method was preferred in order to understand a complex and sensitive issue such as child abuse in schools in detail in the context of real life.

Participants

The participants of the study were determined by criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. The study group of this qualitative research was determined by using purposive sampling method. Qualitative research usually focuses on small or individual sample groups that are purposively selected to examine in detail situations that may be rich in information. The main strength and logic of the purposive sampling method is based on specifically selecting situations with information potential for in-depth analysis (Patton, 2018). The criterion sampling method aims to examine all situations that meet the criteria determined by the researcher using predetermined or existing criteria lists. The criteria determined by the researchers in this study are that the participant teachers have at least five years of teaching experience, have encountered abuse situations in school environments, and work as physical education and sports teachers. Seven physical education and sports teachers who met these criteria constituted the participants of the study. Information about the participants is presented in Table 1. There are no strict rules regarding sample size in qualitative research. In-depth information obtained from a small number of participants can be extremely valuable for rich situations. On the other hand, obtaining shallower information from more participants can be useful for investigating a phenomenon, documenting diversity or understanding variations. Therefore, the sample size should be shaped by what you want to learn, how you plan to use the findings, and the resources allocated to the study (Patton, 2018).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Code name	Gender	Experience
Yeşim	Female	20 years
Kübra	Female	13 years
Hasret	Female	18 years
Ekin	Female	17 years
Ayhan	Male	17 years
Mehmet	Male	10 years
Hasan	Male	15 years

Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to express the world they perceive through their own thoughts. In order to reach this understanding, it is emphasised that the questions should generally be open-ended (Merriam, 2013). Therefore open-ended questions were used in the interviews. The interview questions of this study were developed after a comprehensive literature review, expert opinions were taken and a pre-application was carried out. The interviews were conducted online with the teachers at specified times and recorded with the consent of the participants. Interview durations varied between 15 minutes and 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used to analyse the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis requires a detailed examination of the collected data and allows the discovery of previously undetermined themes and dimensions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The data were analysed by classifying them into codes and categories using the content analysis method. Coding is the process of adding symbolic labels to the data in order to extract important parts for the study from the data set. These codes, which are assigned to the data sections, form categories, which are conceptual elements that contain predefined pieces of data and are related to each other (Merriam, 2013). As a result of the data analysis, four categories emerged: types of abuse, signs of abuse, high-risk areas and suggestions to prevent abuse. Types of abuse were divided into 4 subcategories: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. During the research process, consistency analysis was carried out by the researchers working on the categories and codes created; they were reviewed on different days to increase the reliability of the data. In addition, the reliability of the defined categories and coding was checked and approved by an expert in measurement and evaluation.

Validity and Reliability

Participant validation, expert review, rich and dense description strategies were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. Participant validation is the process of sending data and ambiguous comments back to some of the participants and getting their views on whether they are reasonable (Merriam, 2013). For this validity strategy, the researchers sent the raw transcribed data to the participants and asked them to confirm the validity. Expert review is a process that evaluates whether the findings, interpretations and recommendations obtained in the research process are verified by returning to the raw data. This evaluation is made by an external expert on the subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). For expert review, interviews and discussions were held with colleagues working in this field. Intensive description is the details that the researcher presents when describing a situation or theme and enables the reader to understand the subject in depth (Creswell, 2021). For intensive description, child abuse, which is the subject of the study, and teachers' perceptions on this issue were conveyed to the readers in detail. While describing teachers' statements and situations related to child abuse, the researcher aimed for the reader to have a broad perspective on the subject and to grasp the themes examined in a concrete way.

Findings

In this study, which aims to examine child abuse from the perspective of physical education and sports teachers and to develop solutions for this problem, 4 categories emerged as types of abuse, signs of abuse, high-risk areas and suggestions to prevent abuse as a result of the analysis of the interviews with teachers. Types of abuse were divided into 4 subcategories: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

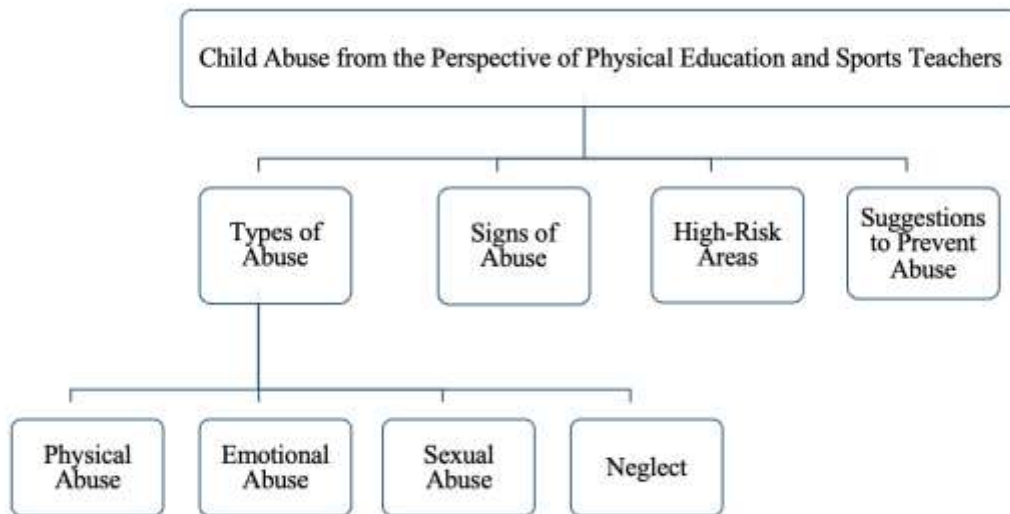


Figure 1. General Framework of Child Abuse from the Perspective of Physical Education and Sports Teachers

Types of Abuse

In this category, teachers stated that they encountered different types of abuse such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect in school environments.

Physical Abuse

The physical abuse subcategory reveals various forms of physical abuse among students and by teachers. Teachers expressed physical abuse at school as beating by peers and hitting by teachers. Teacher Ayhan stated that physical abuse is not only directed towards problematic children, successful and well-behaved children are also exposed to such behaviours:

Children are now cheeky enough to beat their peers, hit them, spit on them, pull their hair, take the ball from their hands and run away. I have a student named Ersin. A very talented child beat his peer Ersin for no reason. The beaten child is not a problematic child, he is a very decent child, a successful child, the best sprinter of our school. He came crying to me. He said, My teacher hit me, beat me. The boy is crying, how he is crying.(Ayhan)

Teacher Kübra, on the other hand, stated that teachers used harsh physical contact with students through behaviours such as shoving and pushing, and that such behaviours were suppressed by social pressure, but still occurred frequently:

Some teachers would unfortunately beat the child there if they were not ashamed of the pressure of society. In other words, this kind of physical contact sometimes happens in an obvious way. Unfortunately, there may be those who exhibit behaviour in the form of squeezing their arm, touching them hard, pushing them. We can see these frequently (Kübra).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse sub-categories were identified as performance pressure, nicknaming the student, scolding by the teacher, excessive shouting by the teacher, humiliating comments by the teacher, and insulting by the teacher. Teachers defined emotional abuse in various ways and described the negative effects of such abuse on students. Teachers stated that they applied pressure in competitive environments in order to improve the performance of children. For example, one teacher expressed her anger at her student's poor performance in a competition and observed that this situation caused the student to become more withdrawn:

You go to the school tournament, you have worked hard, you have worked hard, and the child can get excited at that moment. When he gets excited, he suddenly freezes in a competition in the province. This time we get a little angry with the child. What happened to you, when you are at school another time, you do this and that. Why were you embarrassed here? Why couldn't I play, the child can also withdraw into himself/herself (Hasan).

The derogatory nicknames and comments used towards students damage their self-confidence and negatively affect their social relations in the classroom. Teacher Hasan stated that comments made on characteristics such as weight and height triggered emotional reactions of children, and this situation was sometimes not repeated:

When you say "come on, my lion" to the student, he likes it, but otherwise, when you say something about his weight or height, this is the reaction of the child at first, when you say "come on, son, you are already like a camel, you can do this, you can do this, horse basketball", the child laughs. If there is a warm environment there, this can continue, but as soon as the child makes a face at that moment or we feel that we have upset the child, it cannot be repeated again. This is what happens during that lesson (Hasan).

During sports competitions, teachers' excessive shouting and sometimes using insulting expressions decreases children's motivation to do sports. Teachers stated that such behaviours have psychologically demoralising effects on children:

A physical education teacher scolding a child in a competition among a lot of people among a lot of friends. For example, we witnessed these. The child is demoralised there psychologically (Ekin).

I participate in competitions in the volleyball branch, in inter-school competitions, in the same way in the club. The words he uses more, shouting, calling, I don't know, do you mind if I say it? You're stupid, you can't do it, you're retarded, do this, do that, unfortunately (Ayhan).

It is a very unconscious behaviour, but we have too much shouting. The biggest mistake that coaches make in inter-school sports is that they miss the students while they are doing sports and shout excessively, as if they are trying to win a medal (Mehmet).

Humiliating and disrespectful attitudes towards students in order to ensure discipline have a negative impact on children's psychological well-being. Teacher Ekin stated that she tried to discipline adolescents by humiliating them in front of their friends, but later realised that this approach was wrong:

Disrespect is at a very high level, indeed, such a generation is coming. In this case, what I experience is to humiliate the child a little bit. Obviously, I experienced this in the children of adolescence and high school age. You know, if you humiliate him at least there among your

friends, he gets a little quiet, he sits down. For example, I did this when I was very angry. Well, but now I think it is very wrong (Ekin).

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse subcategory was determined as non-contact sexual abuse and contact sexual abuse. Non-contact sexual abuse was found as secretly watching, making inappropriate analogies that would embarrass the peer, making fun of each other's bodies. Contact sexual abuse was expressed as the student rubbing against the peer, the teacher hitting the child's buttocks, and the peer disturbing the peer by masturbating. Teachers stated that there are some risks when boys and girls' locker rooms are next to each other:

Boys' and girls' changing rooms are next to each other. This is a very dangerous situation because a male student can look through the hole. He can disturb the girl through the door. While the girl opens the door to see who it is, the other one can undress and dress there (Yeşim).

In addition, it was stated that making fun of students' bodies and making inappropriate analogies were among the problems encountered:

For example, there was a girl a few years ago. She was hugging the volleyball pole like that, I mean, she was hugging it quite a lot, so after that, I said, "Girl, what are you doing?" I said, "That's the pole." I said, "Why did you hug the pole like that? A male student turned round and said, "My teacher is doing a pipe dance. He was embarrassed. I was embarrassed too. What he was going to say was something I never expected (Yeşim).

I mean, I noticed that the men were making fun of each other when they saw each other getting dressed. I guess they must have experienced something, especially in the men's locker room, we opened those bathroom parts so that the individual can change the bathroom parts inside when they have to change their underwear. In other words, we found such a solution so that there would not be too many things other than dressing and undressing in a collective environment, a problem among men (Hasret).

Teacher Yeşim stated that male students rubbing against female students and passing off these behaviours with the excuse of accidentally touching them is a common situation at high school level. Teacher Ekin on the other hand, stated that she observed behaviours such as teachers sometimes applying violence and spanking the student's buttocks:

Especially when running or doing gymnastics in physical education classes, male students rub against female students and touch them by saying that they accidentally touched them. Conversations are much more common in high school (Yeşim).

Teachers shout and sometimes use violence, for example, slapping a student's bum. We have also seen these (Ekin).

Teacher Hasret stated that sexual abuse cases such as male students' inappropriate behaviours with sexual content were witnessed because female students wore tights during sports lessons:

You know, girls wear tights in volleyball. While the boys were watching, I saw one of my students masturbating while watching them, for example. I mean, I witnessed it. I warned the boy, plus I filed a report. I referred him to the disciplinary board because the girl was very disturbed (Hasret).

Neglect

The subcategory of neglect was determined as; ignoring the students' desire to participate in competitions, ignoring the family's desire for the child to participate in sports, teachers leaving the students free in lessons, coming to school hungry, neglecting nutritional needs in tournaments. Teachers stated that children who want to do sports are left alone and this situation is negligence. It was observed that students could not participate in competitions due to disagreements between teachers:

I think that a child who wants to do sports is very lonely and cannot do it. This is the child's most natural right, the right to do sports. That child has the right to participate in that competition. For example, we see this in schools, because of the conflict of 2 teachers, the child cannot participate in the competition in school sports. Why because of the ego of 2 huge people. Sometimes I can't voice it, these are among the problems I experience, and they are sad things (Ekin).

Teachers stated that neglect also occurs when families do not support children's desire to do sports. Teachers' letting the students free in the lessons, especially in physical education lessons, was evaluated as an element of neglect. Teacher Ayhan stated that this letting go actually meant avoiding responding to the needs of the students:

There is a lot of negligence on the part of the teachers in letting the students loose in lessons. In physical education classes, many teachers, sometimes even me, neglect the children. Because we prefer to leave them free. This is actually a negligence. In other words, it is a reason that negatively affects the physical education lesson, that is, it does not fulfil its purpose. You know, letting them go is actually a way. I mean, it may be right to do this sometimes, but I think this is a very big neglect (Ayhan).

Teachers stated that students attended classes with hunger and this situation negatively affected students' performance. In addition, it was also emphasised that during tournaments and competitions, teachers used low-cost food to meet the nutritional needs of students, which put students' health and performance at risk:

Children come to school hungry, you make them do physical education sports in the first hour, you have a certain thing. The child gets tired after 20 minutes, what happened? I did not have breakfast (Mehmet).

Let me tell you especially for school sports. There may be negligence here, it may be like this. Since the money received by our teacher friends is not enough, there may be problems in terms of attention to athlete nutrition. What can happen? Here, the child needs to eat a little more vegetables, in order to increase his/her performance to a higher level, you see that he/she makes do with a wrap or a pastry and a bagel. With such things, they can get by with simple things and cheap things and they can participate in the competition in that way. Just because we participated and the children came and went, but there is abuse here (Ayhan).

Signs of Abuse

In the category of abuse signs, indicators such as dropping out of the branch, temper tantrums, neglected appearance, need for love and attention, loss of self-confidence, withdrawal and desire to be alone were determined. Teachers' statements show the multidimensional

reflections of the abuse faced by children. Teacher Hasan stated that lack of organisation in sports competitions caused children to quit sports:

When we go there, the referees who manage the competitions, the disciplinary committees that come there, the representative of that branch, the ambulance, when the organisation there is bad, the child thinks that it is an organisation of the school. He/she does not participate in them again and these are an abuse and the child gets disenchanted with sports. Believe me, he doesn't want to do sports in that branch or he wants to quit (Hasan).

Teachers stated that the anger crises experienced by children were usually caused by abuse incidents. Teacher Mehmet explained this situation as follows:

The child suddenly has a tantrum and fights with his/her friend. When we go to the root of this, family violence emerges. I wouldn't say in every child, but when you get to the bottom of it, 70% of the children either have family violence or violence with a friend (Mehmet).

Teachers stated that they could generally recognise neglected children by their clothes and behaviour. They observed that children who do not receive enough love and attention from their parents experience similar emotional deficiencies in school life. Teacher Hasret and teacher Yeşim explained this situation as follows:

More precisely, we can more or less identify children who are neglected by their families, not sexually abused. In other words, we can understand from their expressions to you, from their clothes to their behaviour (Hasret).

We always come across children who do not grow up in such love from their parents, that is, children who are hungry for attention and love, especially since I have been at this school for 6 years (Yeşim).

It was also observed that children were sometimes neglected by their coaches or other adults in the field of sports and this situation caused great losses in children's self-confidence. Teachers also stated that abused children want to be alone. Teacher Ayhan and teacher Hasan explained this situation as follows:

For the child, for example, I have an athlete who is also involved in cycling. He is the same way. For example, the other day they went abroad for races. He can share the same complaint with me. He is involved in cycling at a club. He says that his coach treats other students differently, that he is not interested in him or that his interest is very low. When you look at it, this has caused a great lack of self-confidence in the child. Unfortunately, there are also such examples (Ayhan).

If a child is abused in a team or in class, he/she does not listen to the lesson well, he/she becomes distracted. It doesn't make any difference whether it's a girl or a boy. If the child is alone in the garden or at recess and has no friends, I start to follow him/her more closely. There are cameras everywhere. I follow this child with cameras and observe whether he/she is sitting alone or has a friend (Hasan).

High-Risk Areas

In the category of high-risk areas; changing rooms, out-of-school activities and competitions, toilets, areas not seen by the camera, basements and empty classrooms were identified. Teachers' statements are critical in evaluating these areas in terms of risk factors. Teachers

stated that changing rooms are particularly risky in terms of peer bullying and girl-boy relationships. It was emphasised that these rooms provide a suitable environment for abuse incidents due to their physical structure and lack of supervision. Teacher Ekin explained this situation as follows:

Changing rooms are very risky for abuse. It is a place where there are girl-boy relationships, peer bullying and fights. The changing rooms are a very big risk for us.", Abuse incidents are more common in competitions. These are the things we experience more outside the school rather than in the school environment (Ekin).

Competitions and out-of-school events were cited as other areas where abuse incidents were most common. Teachers stated that these activities usually take place outside of school, which leads to less protection of students. Toilets and places away from camera angles were mentioned as other critical points where abuse can occur. Especially the frequent use of toilets by students and lack of supervision make these areas risky. Teacher Kübra explained this situation as follows:

Trying to be in places far away from the camera angle. These are things that will bring to mind abuse (Kübra).

Basements and empty classrooms were similarly identified as areas where there is insufficient supervision and where the risk of abuse increases when students are alone. Teachers stated that students' requests to be alone in such places should be carefully monitored and that these situations can often pave the way for abuse. Teacher Yeşim explained this situation as follows:

I want to be alone in the classroom means I don't want to come to class. Why do they say that they are going to study at work and take a peer and a friend with them and want to stay in the classroom, for example, or they have disappeared in any activity. I mean, I follow him/her. Because at the same time, there are 4 classes in the school garden. Because it can be really difficult to control. Because we are a crowded school (Yeşim).

Suggestions to Prevent Abuse

Suggestions to prevent abuse include educational programmes, physical environment safety, safety in sports activities, student observations, and providing education to all segments of the society. Teachers emphasised that in order to increase child protection awareness in the field of sports, both university-level courses should be offered and in-service trainings should be organised for existing educators. Teacher Yeşim and Teacher Ekin explained this situation as follows:

I have never come across child protection in in-service trainings. I attend such occasional trainings of the Ministry of National Education. They explain it very well. You know, it can be included in trainings on child protection. This training is especially important for teachers (Ekin).

Child protection training in sport should be given at university. It should be included in the curriculum at universities (Ekin).

It was stated that private areas such as changing rooms, basements and toilets should be kept under constant surveillance and school administrations should increase security measures in these areas. In addition, it was emphasised that students coming in sportswear during physical

education classes could reduce potential abuse incidents in changing rooms. Teacher Yeşim and teacher Ekin explained this situation as follows: Teachers explained this situation as follows:

Changing rooms must be under control. The teacher and the student on duty should be able to control them. The changing rooms are always placed in nooks and corners, which is actually very inconvenient and causes them to be used like this. Well, when they are in secluded corners, they are deserted. All kinds of abuse can occur there (Ekin).

Especially during class time, no student should be allowed to go to the toilet. I mean, because one boy and one girl can agree in class and ask for permission at that time and even get involved in the toilet in different classes. For example, children meet in the toilet in a way that we would never think of. I mean, you are in class time (Hasret).

I mean, all kinds of security at school, for example, I am in favour of controlling all the areas in the school, you know, from the basement floor, for example, our watch team has a watch in the basement floor. There are also fire escapes. I mean, we are in favour of constant control of both children and toilets (Kübra).

Teachers mentioned the importance of keeping students' behaviours under constant observation and taking detailed notes in order to detect possible signs of abuse early. Mehmet explained this situation as follows:

In such a meeting about individual students, I was in a class, even the best class. I learnt that twenty out of about 30 students had been subjected to domestic violence. For example, I must have missed it, they were very good in my class, they were having fun, but 20 of them were in this situation. Almost the numbers were more or less like this. Teachers should be more careful in such cases. For example, like us, they should follow the signs of such abuse. I have a small notebook. I take note of such things. I pay attention and observe as much as I can from the beginning to the end of the year (Mehmet).

It was emphasised that in accommodation arrangements during sports competitions or events, children of similar age groups should share the same room and accommodation rules should be clearly explained to the students. It was emphasised that these rules would be effective in preventing the abuse that children may apply against each other. Teachers explained this situation as follows:

I share the accommodation rules with the students before going to the competition. I always warn the children about such issues before I go. I always warn them that no one should enter or leave the rooms, from bedtime to wake-up time (Hasret).

There may be abuses perpetrated by the child against the child. Unfortunately. In that sense, when we travel to a sportive place, we should definitely pay attention to these. Let's definitely pay attention to the accommodation of individuals of the same age group together." (Ayhan).

It was stated that in addition to informing educators, parents and children about child abuse, awareness should be raised throughout the society. It was stated that these trainings will enable children to understand whether the events they experience are abuse or not and to learn how to ask for help when necessary.

Both children and adults should be educated. Unfortunately, children do not realise whether what they have been subjected to is sexual abuse or physical abuse, and they consider it normal for the teacher to shout at them. Yes, he insults, but he says that he insults me to make

me better. In fact, the child will know that this is wrong, no one has the right to insult anyone, or yes, my teacher did not do this to me, he showed me this way, there should be no question of the teacher touching you. The child should know this (Kübra).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal various aspects of child abuse occurring in schools from the perspective of physical education and sport teachers. In the study, teachers stated that they encountered different forms of abuse such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect in school environments. In a study conducted by Theoklitou, Kabitsis and Kabitsi (2012), more than half of the students (52.9%) reported experiencing neglect, about one-third (33.1%) emotional abuse, and almost one-tenth (9.6%) physical abuse. These results show that the frequency of occurrence varies between types of abuse; neglect was the most common type (52.9%), followed by emotional abuse (33.1%) and physical abuse (9.6%) was the least common. The reason why physical abuse is less common than other types may be that such cases are not usually ignored and the reactions of parents and students create serious difficulties for teachers. Rossouw (2009) states that unfortunately, sports coaching at school level includes both sexual and non-sexual abuse and harassment cases. Abuse in the field of sports coaching comes in various forms such as overtraining, abusive coaching methods, non-accidental physical injuries, neglect and overuse injuries. Rossouw emphasises that such abuse seriously violates the fundamental rights of children, in particular the principle that their best interests should be protected. In the study conducted by Kızıltepe, Irmak, Eslek and Hecker (2020), 54.9% (n=161) of the students reported that they had been subjected to violence by their teachers at least once in the last month. The prevalence of emotional violence by teachers was 53.6% (n=157), while the rate of physical violence was 25.2% (n=74). Almost all of the children who experienced physical violence (93.2%, n=69) also experienced emotional violence by their teachers. The most common methods of emotional violence used by teachers were shouting or screaming loudly (43%, n=126) and telling students that they would be expelled from the class (19%, n=56). The most common types of physical violence were shaking the students (15%, n=44) and slapping their hands, arms or legs (8.7%, n=26). All these studies show that the abuse applied to students is usually realised by their teachers. In addition to this situation, our study reveals that abuse in the school context also occurs by peers. Supporting this finding, Aras, Özan, Timbil, Semin and Kasapçı (2016) reported that 61.8% of the students were exposed to emotional violence and 24.9% were exposed to physical violence by their peers. An important finding of this research is that children not only suffer direct physical harm but also carry emotional and psychological burdens. Emotional forms of abuse, such as pressure to perform and derogatory epithets, constitute serious psychological pressures that negatively affect students' overall well-being and academic achievement. In addition, contact and non-contact forms of sexual abuse have been shown to pose serious threats to students' safety and mental health.

Sings of abuse were determined as indicators such as dropping out of the branch, anger crises, neglected appearance, need for love and attention, loss of self-confidence, withdrawal and desire to be alone. In studies such as this study, it has been reported that violence against students is associated with emotional and behavioural problems and poor academic performance (Şimşek & Cenkseven-Önder, 2011; Kızıltepe, Irmak, Eslek, & Hecker, 2020). The study conducted by Vertommen et al. (2018) shows that abuse in athletes can cause various psychosomatic disorders such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, substance use, self-harming behaviors and suicidal thoughts. Davis,

Brown, Arnold and Gustafsson's (2021) study shows that psychological and neural development is negatively affected in young athletes who are exposed to abuse, and this prevents the development of attachment abilities and social skills.

The study also revealed areas where abuse is commonly experienced in the school environment. These were identified as locker rooms, out-of-school activities and competitions, toilets, off-camera areas, basements and empty classrooms. These findings indicate that surveillance and security measures should be increased in these specific places. Çetin (2019) stated in her thesis that sports camps, places travelled for tournaments or competitions (such as hotels, rental houses, guesthouses) stand out as places where sexual abuse can occur. Such places offer situations where controls and supervision are less. Urazel et al. (2017) stated that sexual abuse can occur anywhere, but especially closed spaces (homes, schools, workplaces, lifts, etc.) carry a higher risk. Although these studies show that sexual abuse can potentially occur anywhere, especially closed spaces and places without adequate supervision carry a higher risk. Specific locations in school settings, such as locker rooms, toilets and empty classrooms; outdoor locations, such as sports camps and places travelled to for competitions; all these spaces contain elements that may increase the risk of abuse. Therefore, identifying such risky areas and increasing surveillance and security measures in these areas is vital for the protection of children and young people.

The last finding obtained from the interviews with teachers is the suggestions for preventing abuse. These suggestions include training programmes, physical environment safety, increasing surveillance and security measures in high-risk areas, careful monitoring of students' behaviours during sports activities, student observations, and providing education to all segments of society. Teachers emphasised that in order to increase child protection awareness in the field of sport, both university-level courses should be offered and in-service trainings should be organised for existing educators.

This research provides important contributions to ensuring the safety of children in school environments by revealing the types of child abuse experienced in schools from the perspective of physical education and sports teachers and the measures to be taken to prevent this abuse.

Recommendation

In this section, various suggestions for reducing child abuse are presented:

- Specific child protection trainings for teachers, parents, school staff and students should be designed and implemented at regular intervals.
- Teacher trainings should provide comprehensive knowledge and skills on children's rights, types and signs of abuse, effective intervention methods and child protection policies.
- Students should be informed about their rights and ways to stay safe. They should be trained on how to recognise abuse against themselves or their friends and to whom to report it.
- It is important that parents understand the physical and emotional needs of their children and know how to support them. Training for parents can help them to be more sensitive and supportive towards their children.
- School staff should receive regular training on recognising signs of abuse and appropriate intervention methods. In addition, ethical behaviour and professional responsibility issues should be continuously updated.

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- Child protection courses should be introduced at university level and continuous in-service training should be organised for existing educators.
 - Surveillance and security measures should be increased in high-risk areas and student behaviour should be carefully monitored during sports and other school activities.
 - Schools should conduct regular environmental audits and risk assessments to ensure the safety of children. These inspections should cover the adequacy of physical security measures.
 - Special rules should be set for changing rooms used for physical education and sports lessons in schools and compliance with these rules should be monitored.
 - Child protection guidebooks should be prepared for teachers and these guidebooks should be actively used in schools.
 - School management should determine codes of behaviour for teachers to protect children from all kinds of abuse and supervise their implementation.
 - Safe travel and accommodation procedures should be established for out-of-school trips (sports tournaments, historical trips, etc.) and care should be taken to implement these procedures.
 - School management should provide information about complaint and reporting mechanisms to manage child abuse cases.
 - It is recommended that teachers should create a positive classroom climate and adopt disciplinary methods instead of punishment.

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