



Research Article/Araştırma Makalesi

DETERMINING NURSING STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

HEMŞİRELİK ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÇOCUK İSTİSMARI VE İHMALİ FARKINDALIĞI İLE ÇOCUK HAKLARINA YÖNELİK TUTUMLARININ BELİRLENMESİ

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the relationship between nursing students' awareness of child abuse and neglect and attitudes towards children's rights. The study population covered 167 students from the nursing department of a university in eastern Turkey between 01 and 20 March 2024. A descriptive characteristics form, the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale, and the Attitudes Towards Children's Rights Scale were used to collect data online. The students' mean scores from the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale and Attitude Towards Children's Rights Scale were 75.34±10.35 and 89.73±11.54, respectively. It was found that female students had higher mean scores on the total Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale, the Neglect subscale, and the Attitudes Toward Children's Rights Scale. Additionally, students who felt competent in recognizing child abuse and neglect had significantly higher mean scores on the Neglect subscale of the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale, and the difference was found to be statistically significant. A moderately significant positive correlation was found between the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale and the Attitude Towards Children's Rights Scale mean scores ($r=0.482$, $p<0.001$). It was determined that nursing students had a good level of awareness regarding child abuse and neglect and held positive attitudes towards children's rights. It is recommended that extra-curricular training programs be organized and social responsibility projects that actively involve students be developed to enhance their awareness of children's rights and of child abuse and neglect.

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı, hemşirelik öğrencilerinin çocuk istismarı ve ihmali farkındalığı ile çocuk haklarına yönelik tutumları arasındaki ilişkinin belirlenmesidir. Araştırmanın evrenini, 01-20 Mart 2024 tarihleri arasında Türkiye'nin doğusundaki bir üniversitenin hemşirelik bölümünde eğitim-öğretim gören 167 öğrenci oluşturmıştır. Tanıtıcı Özellikler Formu, Çocuk İstismarı ve İhmali Farkındalık Ölçeği ve Çocuk Haklarına İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği online olarak veri toplamak için kullanılmıştır. Öğrencilerin Çocuk İstismarı ve İhmali Farkındalık Ölçeği ve Çocuk Haklarına İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği puan ortalamalarının sırasıyla 75.34±10.35, 89.73±11.54'tür. Araştırmada kadın öğrencilerin Çocuk İstismarı ve İhmali Farkındalık Ölçeği toplam puan ortalaması ile İhmal alt ölçek puan ortalamalarının ve Çocuk Haklarına İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği toplam puan ortalamasının daha yüksek olduğu; çocuk ihmali ve istismarını tanımlama kendini yeterli hissedilen öğrencilerin ölçek puan ortalamalarının daha yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir ($p<0.05$). Öğrencilerin Çocuk İstismarı ve İhmali Farkındalık Ölçeği ve Çocuk Haklarına İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği puan ortalamaları arasında pozitif yönde orta düzeyde anlamlı ilişki bulunmuştur ($r=0.482$, $p<0.001$). Hemşirelik öğrencilerinin çocuk istismarı ve ihmali farkındalıklarının iyi ve çocuk haklarına ilişkin tutumlarının olumlu olduğu saptanmıştır. Öğrencilerin çocuk hakları ve istismar ihmali farkındalıklarının artırılması için müfredat dışı eğitimlerin düzenlenmesi ve öğrencilerin aktif yer alabileceği sosyal sorumluluk projelerinin geliştirilmesi önerilmektedir.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations General Assembly defines children's rights in the "Convention on the Rights of the Child," encompassing essential rights such as protection, life, health, education, and housing (Official Gazette, 1995). Nurses must be knowledgeable about these rights and incorporate them into their care to effectively advocate for the child (Shaban Mohamed et al., 2022). In our country, children's rights are integrated into the Child Health and Diseases Nursing and Children's Rights courses within the undergraduate nursing education curricula (Kırıkkale University, 2024). During clinical practice, nursing students provide care to children and must be highly aware of these rights to ensure the delivery of quality care. Research on nursing students' attitudes towards children's rights indicates generally positive attitudes (Kaynak et al., 2021; Yıldız et al., 2018). In their 2019 study, Alemdar and Yıldız found that although pediatric nurses exhibited positive attitudes towards children's rights, the majority of nurses lacked knowledge about these rights (Alemdar & Yıldız, 2019). The knowledge, attitudes, and awareness levels of child development and nursing students in the fields of health and education regarding children's rights are crucial for the protection and implementation of these rights. For professionals serving children to effectively analyze their actions and make ethical decisions related to children's rights, it is essential that these rights are well understood, and that ongoing education is provided (Kaynak et al., 2021).

Ensuring that children are free from all forms of neglect and abuse is a child rights requirement. Millions of children are maltreated each year (WHO, 2022), and many children are presented to hospitals with suspected maltreatment (Offidani et al., 2022). Nurses are among the first to identify child neglect and abuse in emergency departments, schools, or pediatric clinics (Hanson et al., 2023; Harding et al., 2019; Offidani et al., 2022). It is therefore crucial that nurses graduate with the necessary knowledge and skills to recognize child neglect and abuse. However, studies show that nursing students have only a partial, inadequate, or moderate

understanding of child neglect and abuse (Ozbey et al., 2018; Poreddi et al., 2016; Topçu et al., 2022). Defining neglect and abuse is one of the responsibilities of nurses (Lines et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to increase the awareness of nursing students about this issue. Various initiatives have been implemented to improve nursing students' understanding of child neglect and abuse (Özçevik Subaşı et al., 2024; Turan, 2022). These programmes used methods such as case studies, discussions, narratives, and question and answer sessions, and at the end of the programme, it was observed that awareness of child neglect and abuse increased (Özçevik Subaşı et al., 2024) and attitudes towards reporting abuse improved (Tar Bolacalı & Bolacalı, 2023; Turan, 2022).

Nursing students' awareness of children's rights and their awareness of child neglect and abuse are related. Whilst awareness of children's rights enables students to become aware of the rights of children that need to be protected, this awareness can contribute to the development of a more proactive approach to identifying cases of child neglect and abuse. It has been reported that there is a positive correlation between the educational level of nursing students and their ability to diagnose the symptoms of child abuse and neglect (Bat Tonkuş et al., 2024). In addition, training on children's rights was found to increase students' knowledge of neglect and abuse and significantly improve their awareness (Uysal et al., 2022). Observing changes in children's physical and behavioral symptoms and addressing these situations in the context of children's rights may be another factor that can positively influence awareness of neglect and abuse. As a result, neglect and abuse can be more effectively identified and prevented through child rights awareness training and practice. This study aims to determine nursing students' awareness of child abuse and neglect and their attitudes towards child rights.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of child abuse and neglect among nursing students?
2. What is the level of nursing students' attitudes towards children's rights?
3. Is there a relationship between nursing students' awareness of child abuse and neglect and their attitudes towards children's rights?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Study Type

This study used a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationship between nursing students' awareness of child abuse and neglect and their attitudes towards children's rights.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted between 01 and 20 March 2024 with 3rd and 4th year nursing students at a university in eastern Turkey. The study population covered 3rd and 4th-year students (N=304) from the same school between the specified dates. A total of 167 students who agreed to take part in the study were included in the sample. At the end of the study, post power analysis using the G* Power program (version 3.1.9.7, University of Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf, Germany) showed that the study had a power of 100% with a type I error of 5% and a confidence interval of 95%. The Child Health and Diseases Nursing course is taught during the 5th semester of the nursing department curriculum in which the research was conducted. Therefore, only 3rd and 4th year students were included in the study. Students enrolled in the Child Health and Diseases Nursing course who volunteered to take part in the study were included in the study. Students who had not taken the Child Health and Illness Nursing course were not included in the study.

Data Collection Tools

A Descriptive Characteristics Form that the researchers developed by reviewing the relevant literature, the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale (CANA-S), and the Children's Rights Attitude Scale (CRAS) were used to collect the study data.

Descriptive Characteristics Form

The form was created by the researchers through a literature review. It consists of 9 items questioning the demographic characteristics of nursing students and how knowledgeable they are about child abuse and neglect and children's rights (Altan, 2015; Başdaş & Bozdağ, 2018; Özbey et al., 2018; Topçu et al., 2022).

Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale (CANA-S)

Developed by Altan (2015) in 2015, the CANA-S consists of four "sub-dimensions" and 20 items, 11 of which are negative (1,2,3,5,7,10,12,13,16,17,18) and nine positives. The four subscales are Neglect (1,2,3,5,12), Physical Abuse (4,9,13,15,18), Sexual Abuse (6,7,11,17,20), and Emotional Abuse (8,10,14,16,19). The lowest overall score on the 5-point Likert-type scale is 20, and the highest is 100. On individual scales, the lowest possible score is 5, and the highest is 25. The higher the scores obtained from the scale, the higher the level of awareness of child abuse and neglect, and the lower the scores, the lower the level of awareness of child abuse and neglect. The internal consistency analysis for reliability indicated Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.768 for the overall scale, confirming that it is both valid and reliable (Altan, 2015). In our study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for internal consistency was 0.80.

Children's Rights Attitude Scale (CRAS)

The 5-point, 22-item Likert-type scale was developed by Kepenekci (2006). 19 items have positive attitude statements, and three have negative ones. The scale features four dimensions, namely rights related to the vital sphere, development sphere, protection sphere, and participation sphere, and is scored between 22 and 110 points. Kepenekci (2006) reported a

Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of 0.85 for the scale, compared with 0.90 in this study.

Data Collection

An online questionnaire was used to collect research data. The questionnaire was first converted into an online format through Google Forms. The online questionnaires were then sent to the class representatives and other students by sharing them in the class social media groups. Students could view the survey questions after accepting the consent page, which explained the purpose of the study. Each questionnaire took about ten minutes to complete. The data collection was completely online. IP moderation was provided to ensure that a participant completed only one questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22 (IBM Corp., Armonk, New York, USA) was utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics included percentages, arithmetic means, standard deviations, medians, and minimum and maximum values. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were employed to assess the normality of the data. The t-test evaluated differences between two independent groups assuming normal distribution, while the Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the differences for groups without normal distribution. The Pearson correlation test was employed to examine the relationship between the two dependent variables. According to Cohen (2013), correlation coefficients (r) between 0.10 and 0.29 indicate a low-level relationship, between 0.30 and 0.49 indicate a medium-level relationship, and between 0.50 and 1.00 indicate a high-level relationship. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Limitations of the Study

The study's limitations include that the research form was sent online, the study was conducted solely in the specified university, and the forms were completed by the students through self-reporting.

Ethical Committee Approval

Before initiating the study, ethical approval (date: 13.02.2024/ number: 2024/03-81) was received from the non-interventional research ethics committee of the Firat University where the study took place. Institutional approval was also secured from the faculty. Additionally, student consent was obtained through an online form prior to their participation in the study.

RESULTS

The nursing students' mean age was 22.34 ± 1.66 years, and 66.5% were female. 58.7% were in their 4th year of education. 80.8% had encountered child neglect and abuse, 50.3% felt they could recognize child neglect and abuse, and 59.9% knew their legal responsibilities in relation to child neglect and abuse. The study found that female students had higher mean scores on the CRAS and CANA-S total scores and higher mean scores on the CANA-S 'Neglect' sub-dimension. It was found that students who believed they could recognize child neglect and abuse had higher mean scores on the CANA-S Neglect sub-dimension (Table 1).

Table 1

Comparing Students' Descriptive Characteristics with CRAS and the CANA-S Total Mean Scores and CANA-S Subscale Mean Scores

Descriptive Characteristics	n	%	CRAS (X±SD)	CANA-S (X±SD)	CANA-S Subscale (X±SD)			
					Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Neglect
	Mean±SD	Median (Min-Max)						
Age	22.34±1.66	22.00 (20-33)						
Gender								
Female	111	66.5	91.17±10.84	76.66±10.33	19.95±4.28	17.46±3.11	17.25±2.94	21.99±3.02
Male	56	33.5	86.87±12.41	72.71±9.97	18.67±4.24	17.03±3.00	16.50±2.63	20.50±3.51
Test^a			U: -2.358	t: -2.383	U: 1.182	U: -1.182	U: -1.785	U: -3.016
p			0.018	0.017	0.237	0.237	0.075	0.003
Grade								
3 rd grade	69	41.3	88.88±11.11	76.60±9.65	20.13±4.07	17.55±2.86	17.37±2.75	21.55±3.32
4 th grade	98	58.7	90.32±11.85	74.44±10.78	19.10±4.42	17.16±3.22	16.73±2.91	22.44±3.23
Test^b			t: -.794	t: 1.330	t: 1.527	t: .800	t: 1.433	t: .198
p			0.428	0.185	0.129	0.425	0.154	0.844
Encountering neglected and abused children								
Yes	32	19.2	89.56±11.89	75.03±9.40	18.81±3.71	17.50±3.36	17.15±2.68	21.56±3.15
No	135	80.8	89.77±11.50	75.41±10.60	19.69±4.42	17.28±3.01	16.96±2.90	21.47±3.30
Test^a			U: -.794	U: -.275	U: -1.328	U: -.280	U: -.575	U: -.033
p			0.428	0.784	0.184	0.779	0.566	0.974
Feeling competent to recognise child neglect and abuse								
Yes	84	50.3	90.57±10.18	75.57±10.47	19.57±4.47	17.27±3.14	16.70±2.97	22.02±2.90
No	83	49.7	88.87±12.77	75.10±10.29	19.48±4.14	17.37±3.02	17.30±2.72	20.95±3.52
Test^b			t: .947	t: .288	t: .234	t: -.209	t: -1.356	t: 2.144
p			0.346	0.774	0.894	0.835	0.177	0.033
Knowing the legal responsibilities regarding child neglect and abuse children								
Yes	67	40.1	88.04±12.11	74.98±11.55	19.07±4.97	17.53±3.36	16.74±2.98	21.62±3.22
No	100	59.9	90.19±11.17	75.58±9.52	19.83±3.78	17.18±2.87	17.17±2.77	21.40±3.30
Test^b			t: -.627	t: -.349	t: -1.055	t: .712	t: -.938	t: .439
p			0.531	0.727	0.294	0.478	0.350	0.661

^a Mann Whitney U, ^b Independent t test

The nursing students' CRAS total mean score was 89.73 ± 11.54 , and their CANA-S total mean score was 75.34 ± 10.35 . Their CANA-S subscale mean scores were 19.52 ± 4.30 for physical abuse, 17.32 ± 3.07 for sexual abuse, 17.00 ± 2.86 for emotional abuse, and 21.49 ± 3.26 for neglect (Table 2).

Table 2

Total and Subscale Mean Scores of Nursing Students on the CRAS and CANA-S Total and CANA-S Subscale

Scales	Mean \pm SD	Median (Min-Max)
CRAS total score	89.73 \pm 11.54	95.00 (48-102)
CANA-S total score	75.34 \pm 10.35	77.00 (51-97)
Physical Abuse	19.52 \pm 4.30	20.00 (11-25)
Sexual Abuse	17.32 \pm 3.07	17.00 (10-25)
Emotional Abuse	17.00 \pm 2.86	17.00 (12-25)
Neglect	21.49 \pm 3.26	22.00 (8-25)

A moderate positive correlation was found between the nursing students' CRAS total mean scores and CANA-S total mean scores ($r=0.482$, $p<0.001$) and between their CRAS total mean scores and their CANA-S Physical Abuse ($r=0.432$, $p<0.001$) and Neglect ($r=0.490$, $p<0.001$) subscale mean scores. There was a low level of positive correlation between CRAS total mean scores and Sexual Abuse ($r=0.266$, $p<0.001$) and Emotional Abuse ($r=0.249$, $p<0.001$) subscale mean scores (Table 3).

Table 3*Comparing Students' Total Scale and Subscale Scores*

CANA-S		CANA-S Subscale			
CRAS		Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Neglect
r	0.482	0.432	0.266	0.249	0.490
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

DISCUSSION

Protecting children from all forms of neglect and abuse is a crucial component of children's rights (Official Gazette, 1995). For this reason, nurses who assume the role of child advocates should graduate with a high awareness of protecting children's rights and preventing child maltreatment (Shaban Mohamed et al., 2022). Therefore, this study examined nursing students' awareness of child neglect and abuse and their attitudes towards children's rights together.

In the study, it was found that the mean score of the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale of the students was 75.34 ± 10.35 . In the literature, there are different studies in which the mean scores of the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale are similar (Özçevik Subaşı et al., 2024; Uysal et al., 2022) and different (Cho & Chung, 2013; Poreddi et al., 2016). In studies conducted in different countries, nursing students were found to have insufficient awareness of child abuse and neglect (Cho & Chung, 2013; Poreddi et al., 2016). A study conducted in Korea showed that nursing students did not receive any training on child abuse and had little knowledge about laws and regulations (Cho & Chung, 2013). In our study, only 40.1% of the students were aware of the legal responsibilities related to child abuse. However, the students in our study received training on child neglect and abuse as part of the course.

In this study, no significant difference was found between students' grade levels and child neglect and abuse awareness scores. Topçu et al. (2022) found that knowledge levels were higher among fourth-grade students who knew about child abuse and neglect, had received

pertinent training, and felt competent in identifying abuse and neglect. In our study, half of the students indicated that they felt competent in identifying child abuse and neglect, which is very low. The Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale-Neglect subscale mean scores were higher among the students who felt competent in recognising child abuse and neglect. Therefore, it is imperative to increase students' competence in recognising child abuse and neglect. Of the participating students, 19.2% reported encountering child abuse and neglect. It is expected that this rate will increase as students' competence in recognising child neglect and abuse increases.

The Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale total mean scores and the neglect subscale mean scores were higher among female students. Similar to our study, different studies have determined that female students have a higher awareness of child abuse and neglect (Kartal & Bayraktar, 2021; Ozbey et al., 2018). It has been suggested that women may have a higher awareness of abuse due to higher rates of violence (Kahsay et al., 2020).

In our study, the total mean score of the students' Child Rights Attitude Scale was positive at 89.73 ± 11.54 . In the study by Yıldız et al. (2018), nursing students' total mean score on the Child Rights Attitude Scale was 29.85, and their attitude towards children's rights was generally positive. The study by Kaynak et al. (2021) found the mean scale score to be 90.72 for nursing students, which was significantly lower than that of child development students. To enhance students' awareness of children's rights, increasing the number of courses on children's rights in the educational curriculum could be beneficial.

The study found a moderately significant positive relationship between the Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Scale and the Attitudes Towards Children's Rights Scale mean scores. No study was found that examined awareness of children's rights together with awareness of child neglect and abuse. Therefore, no comparison could be made with the relevant literature. As students' awareness of children's rights increases, so does their awareness of child abuse and

neglect. Therefore, to better detect child neglect and abuse, nursing students should be taught about children's rights at regular intervals and using different methods.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a deficiency in nursing students' understanding of child neglect, abuse, and children's rights. Only half of the students felt they could define child neglect and abuse, and less than half were aware of relevant legislation. This suggests that students may have significant problems defining child abuse and making legal reports after graduation. To increase nursing students' awareness of children's rights and child neglect and abuse and to ensure more precise recognition of child abuse, it is recommended to schedule training on the subject at regular intervals during the undergraduate course and include courses on children's rights and child neglect and abuse in the undergraduate curriculum. It is also important to increase the number of studies on nursing students to monitor the current situation.

ETHICAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Ethical approval (date: 13.02.2024/ number: 2024/03-81) was received from the non-interventional research ethics committee of Fırat University.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Idea/concept: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ; Design: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ; Consultancy: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ; Data Collection: SD, ÖSM; Data Processing: SD, ÖSM; Analysis and/or Interpretation: SD, ÖSM; Literature review: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ; Writing of the article: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ; Critical review: SD, ÖSM, ZKŞ.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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PEER REVIEW

Externally peer-reviewed.

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