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Awareness levels of teachers of child negligence and abuse: Rural area example

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Abstract

It was aimed to determine the frequency of teachers' encounters with child neglect and abuse and their views on this subject in this study. It is a cross-sectional and descriptive study. Three hundred eighty-eight teachers working in 40 primary schools and 18 high schools were selected with the cluster sampling method. Data was collected through a survey. The Chi-Square tests were applied. 21.6% of the research group reported that they encountered cases of neglect and 46.1% reported cases of abuse. 41.8% of the research group stated that they did not receive child neglect and abuse training. While 26.2% of them find themselves sufficient in diagnosing cases of neglect and abuse, 73.8% find themselves partially sufficient or insufficient. A significant relationship was found between self-efficacy in diagnosing cases according to gender, the number of years of work, receiving education about neglect and abuse, type of abuse, and reporting. While the rate of women who consider reporting suspected child neglect or abuse mandatory is significantly higher than men, the rate of those who find themselves sufficient in diagnosing child neglect or abuse is significantly higher in males. Among the abuse types, the rate of teachers who are faced with the suspicion of sexual abuse in diagnosing the case is significantly higher than the other types of abuse. The rate of teachers receiving training on cases of neglect and abuse and finding themselves competent in this regard is low. Men, those who have worked for 16-20 years, and teachers who have been trained in this subject find themselves more competent in diagnosing child neglect or abuse. Diagnosis the sexual abuse is higher than the other types. Regardless of the incident, the most important factor for teachers to find themselves competent is acquiring knowledge through pre-service or in-service training.

Keywords: Abuse, maltreatment, neglect

Introduction

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the age range 0–18 years is considered childhood. During childhood, children are shaped physically and in terms of cognitive capacity, emotional state and maturity, social skills, and adaptation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has developed new approaches and standards in the field of children's welfare, in terms of their survival, protection, and development. It explains the responsibilities of society, state, and family in raising children with principles and standards. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child; a child's health, development, and participation are considered key issues. Within the framework of these basic issues, child neglect and abuse have an important place [1]. Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/

or ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development of dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power [2].

Child maltreatment is a global problem with serious life-long consequences. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 3 in 4 children - or 300 million children - aged 2–4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers. One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years. 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact [2]. Sexual abuse can cause psychiatric and somatic problems in children for short and long periods, and even suicide if not intervened. [3].

According to the research on child abuse and domestic violence (2010) conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in our country, it was determined that emotional abuse was seen at a rate of 51%, physical abuse at a rate of 43%, and sexual abuse at a rate of 3% in children aged 7-18 years [4]. In a meta-analysis study, when the frequency of child maltreatment is

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examined, physical abuse was 22.6%, sexual abuse was 12.7%, emotional abuse was 36.3%, physical neglect was 16.3%, and emotional neglect was 18.4% [5]. Research Center's "Report on Child Abuse" in 2016; incest within the family, child marriages; boarding education institutions, prisons, dormitories, religious education courses, etc. It is possible to encounter cases of abuse in many institutions [6]. Having a large number of siblings, unemployment, step-parents, and low social support are reported as risk factors for child abuse [7].

Child maltreatment causes suffering to children and families and can have long-term consequences. Maltreatment causes stress that is associated with disruption in early brain development. Maltreated children are at increased risk for behavioral, physical, and mental health problems such as: perpetrating or being a victim of violence, depression, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviors, unintended pregnancy, and alcohol and drug misuse [2]. Via these behavioral and mental health consequences, maltreatment can contribute to heart disease, cancer, suicide, and sexually transmitted infections. Violence against children is also a contributor to inequalities in education. Children who experienced any form of violence in childhood have a 13% greater likelihood of not graduating from school [2]. A child who is abused is more likely to abuse others as an adult so violence is passed down from one generation to the next. Therefore, it is critical to break this cycle of violence and create positive multi-generational impacts [2].

Determining the knowledge levels and awareness of teachers about child abuse and neglect will positively affect the development of the child and her relationship with her family. Teachers are the foremost among the professional groups that establish close and long-term communication with children. For this reason, teachers should be sensitive and careful in terms of diagnosing and preventing neglect and abuse. Seeing their students with their peers may help teachers better perceive child abuse. He can notice the wounds or lesions he sees on the face or body of his student; he can notice the change in his behavior; introversion, distraction, decrease in school success, irritability, aggression, etc. can observe changes. The teacher, who encounters any problem, can create a suitable environment for his student to talk to him. Thus, it can contribute to the production of solutions that may be beneficial to the student [8].

This research was carried out with teachers working in the Kahta district of Adiyaman province located in the southeast Anatolian region of Turkey. It was aimed to determine the teachers in this region getting information about child neglect and abuse, the frequency of encountering such cases, and the approaches to the cases they encounter.

Materials and Methods

The research is a cross-sectional and descriptive study. The research was carried out in a town in southeastern Turkey from December 2021-January 2022. The universe of the research consisted of 984 teachers working in 40 primary schools and 18 high schools in the Kahta district center. Schools were selected by cluster sampling method. It was planned to include 384 teachers with a 95% confidence level, and 0.05 margin of error and 388 teachers were included in the research. The questionnaire form named "Teachers' opinions and awareness levels on child abuse and negligence"

was prepared by the researchers. The questionnaire includes questions about demographic and occupational characteristics, getting training on recognizing and reporting child neglect and abuse, encountering cases, and finding themselves competent in diagnosing cases and reporting. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews. The consent form was obtained from the participants. The survey form created by the researchers consists of 16 questions of sociodemographic information and questions about child neglect and abuse.

Statistical analysis: Descriptive data were shown as frequency, percentage, and mean/standard deviation. Qualitative data was presented in the form of numbers and % frequency, and the Chi-Square test was used for comparisons of qualitative data. The p-value of <0.05 will be considered statistically significant.

Permission for the study, dated 16/11/2021 and numbered 2021/09-14, was obtained from the Non-Invasive Ethics Committee.

Results

The average age of 388 teachers participating in the research is 37.3 ± 8.0 . 51% of the participants are men and 49% are women. The descriptive characteristics of the research group are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the research group

Feature	Number	%
Age group		
24-29	67	17.3
30-39	179	46.1
40-49	111	28.6
50-65	31	8.0
Gender		
Male	198	51
Female	190	49
Marital status		
Never married	58	14.9
The married	316	81.4
Separated/deceased	14	3.6
Number of children		
None	101	26.0
1	64	16.5
2	134	34.5
3+	89	23.0
School		
Primary education	290	74.7
High school	98	25.3
Working years		
0-5	73	18.8
6-10	113	29.1
11-15	83	21.4
16-20	56	14.4
>20	63	16.2

46.1% of the research group were between the ages of 30-39, 81.4% were married, and 74.0% had at least one child. 74.7% of the research group work in primary schools. 29.1% of the teachers worked 6 to 10 years

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In Table 2, the incidence of child neglect and abuse cases of the research group is given.

Table 2. The incidence of child neglect and abuse cases of the research group

Feature	Number	%
Coinciding With A Case Of Child Neglect		
Encountered	84	21.6
Not Encountered	304	78.4
Coinciding With A Case Of Child Abuse		
Encountered	179	46.1
Not Encountered	209	53.9
Incidents Of Abuse (n=179)		
Psychological	67	37.4
Economic	48	26.8
Physically	34	19.0
Sexual	30	16.8
Self-Efficacy In Diagnosing Abuse Cases (N=179)		
Self-sufficient	47	26.2
Not Self-sufficient	41	23.0
Partially Self-sufficient	91	50.8
The Place To Report In Case Of Suspected Child Neglect Or Abuse (n=388)		
Social Services Directorate	6	1.5
School Administration	155	39.9
School Counsellor	187	48.2
Security Forces	23	5.9
Child's Family	6	1.5
Does Not Know	11	2.8

21.6% of the research group encountered cases of neglect and 46.1% of them encountered cases of abuse. 37.4% of abuse cases are psychological, 26.8% are economic, 19.0% are physical and 16.8% are sexual abuse. While 26.2% of them find themselves sufficient in diagnosing the cases of neglect or abuse they encounter, 50.8% find themselves partially sufficient and 23.0% find themselves inadequate. The places where the research group thinks to apply in case of suspicion of neglect and abuse are, in order of frequency, the school's guidance teacher (48.2), the school administration (39.9%), the police forces (5.9%), and the child's family.

In Table 3, the awareness levels of the research group regarding child neglect and abuse are given.

According to Table 3, 41.8% of the research group did not receive training on child neglect and abuse, 31.2% researched it with their efforts, 16.7% received in-service training and 10.3% received training at the faculty. 92.5% of the participants stated that they would report on suspicion of neglect, 96.9% stated that they would report on suspicion of abuse, and 97.4% stated that it was mandatory to report suspected child neglect/abuse. While 27.8% found themselves sufficient in detecting child neglect or abuse, 23.2% found themselves insufficient and 49.0% found them partially sufficient. When evaluated according to gender, a significant difference was found in terms of receiving education about child neglect and abuse, reporting on suspicion of neglect, opinions about the obligation to report, and proficiency in diagnosing cases. The frequency of women receiving education on child neglect and abuse at the faculty is significantly higher than that of men ($p=0.015$). The rate of women who consider reporting suspected child neglect or abuse mandatory is significantly higher than men ($p=0.001$). The rate of men who state that they will report on suspicion of negligence is significantly higher than women ($p=0.013$). The rate of those who find themselves competent in diagnosing child neglect or abuse is significantly higher in men than in women ($p=0.007$). No significant difference was found in terms of reporting suspected abuse by gender.

Table 3. Awareness levels of the research group on child neglect and abuse by gender

Feature	Sayı	%	Male %*	Female %*	X ² .p
Education on child neglect and abuse					
Not received	162	41.8	40.4	43.2	
With in-service training	65	16.7	21.2	12.1	X ² =10.53, P=0.015
Bachelor's degree*	40	10.3	6.6	14.2	
Researched by his efforts	121	31.2	31.8	30.5	
Reporting On Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect					
I report on suspicion of negligence	359	92.5	97.0	87.9	X ² =11.55, P=0.001
Undecided/I don't report	29	7.5	3.0	12.1	
Reporting Suspected Child Abuse					
I report on suspicion of abuse	376	96.9	96.5	97.4	X ² =0.26, P=0.607
Undecided/I don't report	12	3.1	3.5	2.6	
Is It Mandatory To Report Suspected Child Neglect Or Abuse?					
Compulsory	378	97.4	95.5	99.5	X ² =6.24, P=0.013
Not required/ I don't know	10	2.6	4.5	0.5	
Self-Efficacy In Diagnosing Child Neglect Or Abuse					
Self-sufficient *	108	27.8	34.8	20.5	X ² =10.04, P=0.007
Not Self-sufficient	90	23.2	20.2	26.3	
Partially Self-sufficient	190	49.0	44.9	53.2	

*% of the column

The rate of education related to neglect and abuse of teachers who encountered cases was 27.6%, and for those who did not encounter cases was 26.6%. While it was 30.6% obtained information through their efforts in those who encountered the case, it was 31.8% of those who did not. The difference between them is not significant.

While the rate of those who found themselves sufficient in diagnosing the cases in the research group was 27.8%, the rate of those who did not find it sufficient was 72.2%. In Table 4, the frequency of finding themselves sufficient in diagnosing neglect or abuse cases according to the descriptive characteristics of the research group is given.

According to Table 4, in diagnosing cases a significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and gender, the number of years of work, receiving education about neglect and abuse, the type of abuse, and the idea of reporting. The frequency of men finding themselves competent in diagnosing cases is significantly higher than women ($p=0.002$). The frequency of finding themselves self-sufficient in those whose number of working years is between 16 and 20 years is significantly lower than in other age groups ($p=0.045$), there is no significant difference between other age groups. The frequency of finding themselves self-sufficient in those who received education in-service or faculty training and those who researched child neglect and abuse are significantly higher than in those who did not get information ($p=0.001$). When examined according to the situation of encountering the case, it was found that only those who received the training considered themselves sufficient ($p=0.001$). Those who gain knowledge through their efforts consider themselves sufficient in diagnosing the most common types of psychological abuse. There was no relationship between the types of abuse and self-efficacy in those who received and did not receive an education.

The frequency of finding themselves competent in those who are faced with the suspicion of sexual abuse is significantly higher than in those who encounter other abuses ($p=0.002$), there is no

significant difference between other types of abuse. There was no significant difference between those who received training and those who did not, in terms of finding themselves competent in diagnosing the case of suspected sexual abuse. Those who have positive opinions about reporting find themselves more competent than those who are undecided about reporting ($p=0.029$). However, there was no significant difference between those who reported on suspicion of abuse and those who found themselves sufficient. In addition, there was no significant relationship between finding themselves competent in diagnosing cases according to age group, marital status, having a child, the school they work at, and encountering cases of neglect or abuse.

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Table 4. Finding sufficient in diagnosing cases of neglect or abuse according to the descriptive characteristics of the research group

Feature	n	Self-efficacy in diagnosing cases		X ²	p
		Self-sufficient %	Not self-sufficient %		
General	388	27.8	72.2		
Age group					
24-29	67	29.9	70.1	3.06	0.383
30-39	179	30.2	69.8		
40-49	111	21.6	78.4		
50-65	31	32.3	67.7		
Gender					
Male	198	34.8	65.2	9.90	0.002
Female	190	20.5	79.5		
Marital status					
Not married	58	29.3	70.7	0.07	0.786
Married at least once	330	27.6	72.4		
Status of having children					
No children	101	24.8	75.2	0.65	0.422
Have at least 1 child	287	28.9	71.1		
School					
Primary education	290	27.2	72.8	0.20	0.654
High school	98	29.6	70.4		
Working years					
0-5	73	24.7	75.3	9.73	0.045
6-10	113	31.0	69.0		
11-15	83	34.9	65.1		
16-20*	56	12.5	87.5		
>20	63	30.2	69.8		
Education on child neglect and abuse					
Not received	162	17.9	82.10%	19.76	0.001
Received*	105	42.90%	57.10%		
Self-researched**	121	28.10%	71.90%		
Encountering a case of neglect/abuse					
Encountered the case	196	29.1	70.9	0.31	0.580
Not encountered the case	192	26.6	73.4		
Type of abuse					
Physically	34	14.7	85.3	14.50	0.002
Sexual*	30	53.3	46.7		
Psychological	67	22.4	77.6		
Economic	48	22.9	77.1		
Encountering cases and Education on child neglect and abuse					
Encountered					
Not received	82	18.3	81.7	20.13	0.001
Received*	54	44.4	55.6		
Self-researched	60	30.0	70.0		
Not encountered					
Not received	80	17.5	82.5		
Received**	51	41.2	58.8		
Self-researched	61	26.2	73.8		
Notifying in case of suspicion of negligence					
Positive in reporting	359	29.2	70.8	4.77	0.029
Undecided to report	29	10.3	89.7		
Notifying in case of suspicion of abuse					
Positive in reporting	376	28.2	71.8	0.77	0.381
Undecided to report	12	16.7	83.3		

Discussion

Child neglect and abuse is an important public health problem that affects the child and family. Reducing the incidence of child neglect and abuse is an imperative that will provide definite benefits for children and society. Teachers have an important role in catching these cases at an early stage.

The rate of encountering cases of neglect and abuse during the professional life of the teachers participating in our research is 21.6% and 46.1%, respectively. In other studies conducted with teachers working in different schools, the frequency of encountering neglect or abuse varies between 7.5% and 42.4% [9-12]. While the frequency of encountering neglect and abuse may differ with various variables such as teachers' age and working years, it also depends on the teacher's knowledge and awareness levels in diagnosing cases.

In our study, the frequency of encountering a case of abuse is higher than the frequency of encountering a case of neglect. In our study, 37.4% of the abuse cases faced by teachers were psychological, 26.8% economic, 19.0% physical, and 16.8% sexual abuse. In the study of Karakurt, it was reported that sexual abuse was the most common, and in the study of Çopur, physical abuse was the most common [9,10]. It is stated in the literature that the most frequently detected type is physical abuse cases, and it is often difficult to detect emotional and sexual abuse cases [12]. Physical signs are more likely to be diagnosed. In our study, contrary to this information, it was stated that the most common psychological abuse was encountered.

In our study, the incidence of abuse was higher than the incidence of neglect, and the most common type of abuse was psychological abuse; It can show that teachers have difficulty distinguishing cases of neglect and cases of psychological abuse. Cases diagnosed as psychological abuse are likely to be cases of neglect. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, child neglect is the most prevalent form of child abuse, accounting for more than one-half of cases reported to child protection services [13].

In our study, the rate of teachers who had previously received training on child neglect and abuse was 27.0%, and those who researched it with their efforts were 31.2%. The rate of those who do not have any information is 41.8% and it is more common in women than men. While the frequency of men receiving in-service training on child neglect and abuse is higher than that of women, the frequency of women receiving education at the faculty is significantly higher than men. In a study, the rate of teachers who received training on child abuse and neglect was 26.3%, and the rate of teachers who obtained information from any source was 55.3% [11]. In another study, it was determined that the rate of those who received pre-service training was 33.9%, while the rate of those who received in-service training was 3.4% [12]. In some studies on child neglect and abuse, it is seen that the rate of teachers receiving information and training varies between 6-45% [10,16,17]. In the other study, lectures, seminars, etc. related to the subject. areas are 16.1%, those receiving in-service training are 32.2%, and individual researchers are 9.6% [18]. In a study conducted with primary school teachers, 45.7% stated the source of information about abuse as school and health education, 75.2% stated television and 80.2% stated the internet [14]. The most important period in which individuals can obtain information

about neglect/abuse situations is the undergraduate education period. However, in most of the studies, the participants stated that they either did not receive training on this subject during their undergraduate education or that the education they received was insufficient. The level of knowledge and awareness about neglect and abuse is one of the most determining factors in the differentiation of approaches to cases. Our research and other studies show that teachers do not receive adequate training during both undergraduate and in-service training.

In our study, 26.2% of the teachers who encountered cases of neglect or abuse found themselves sufficient in diagnosing the cases, 50.8% found themselves partially sufficient and 23.0% found themselves inadequate. In the whole research group, 27.8% found themselves sufficient in detecting child neglect or abuse cases, 49.0% found themselves partially sufficient and 23.2% found themselves inadequate. The rates of teachers who have encountered or not encountered cases of neglect and abuse are close to each other and the difference between them was not found to be significant. The frequency of finding themselves competent in the field of education on child neglect and abuse is the highest, and those who research their efforts are significantly higher than those who do not receive an education. However, when training and encountering a case are evaluated together, both those who have encountered a case and those who have not, only those who have received training find themselves sufficient. In a study, 82% of the teachers stated that they considered themselves sufficient about physical abuse, 72.1% about emotional abuse, and 70.2% about sexual abuse [9]. In another study, the rate of teachers who think that they know how to approach a child who is abused and neglected is 65.8% [11]. In another study, 58.3% of the teachers who participated in the research stated that they did not have enough information to diagnose abuse and neglect [10]. In a study conducted with primary school teachers, the rate of those who found themselves sufficiently in neglect and abused was 15.5% [14]. Our research and other studies show that teachers do not find themselves competent in diagnosing cases. Nearly half of those who gain knowledge at the faculty or during in-service training and about one-third of those who gain knowledge through their efforts find themselves sufficient.

In our study, the rate of those who found themselves competent in diagnosing child neglect or abuse was significantly higher in men than in women. However, there was no significant difference in terms of gender among those who stated that they would report on suspicion of abuse. This helps show that their awareness level is high, although they see themselves as more inadequate in case recognition. In a study, it was determined that the rate of men finding themselves competent in diagnosing cases was significantly higher than women, and their awareness of sexual or emotional abuse was higher than women [12]. This may be because men receive more in-service training on abuse and neglect in our study. In-service pieces of training make a significant contribution to increasing the awareness level of teachers.

In our study, no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy in diagnosing cases according to age group. There was no significant difference in age between those who stated that they would report on suspicion of neglect and abuse. In a study, it was determined that individuals aged 46 and over show less sensitivity toward sexual abuse [12]. In our study, the rate of finding self-

sufficiency among those whose number of working years is between 16 and 20 years is significantly lower than other working years, there is no significant difference between other year groups. In a study, it was determined that the duration of working in the profession did not significantly affect the processes of detecting cases of child neglect and abuse and making appropriate referrals [12]. While it is expected that self-efficacy in diagnosing neglect and abuse cases increases as age and working year progress, the expected relationship was not found in our study. This may be because teachers have difficulty diagnosing cases as they encounter real cases over time.

In our study, there was no significant relationship between finding themselves competent in diagnosing cases according to marital status, having a child, the school they work at, and encountering cases of neglect or abuse.

92.5% of the participants stated that they would report on suspicion of negligence, 96.9% stated that they would report on suspicion of abuse, and 97.4% stated that it is mandatory to report a suspicion of neglect/abuse. The rate of women who consider it mandatory to report suspected child neglect or abuse is significantly higher. However, while 97.4% of women stated that they would report on suspicion of abuse, those who stated that they would report on suspicion of neglect decreased to 87.9%. In a study, 67.6% of the teachers who encountered a case of abuse made a case report, while 32.4% preferred not to make any report [9]. Only 14.6% of the teachers stated that they reported cases related to child abuse and neglect they encountered throughout their professional life [10,18]. In our research, in case of suspected cases of neglect and abuse, the places that teachers consider applying are, in order of frequency, the school's guidance counselor (48.2%), school management (39.9%), police forces (5.9%) and the child's family (1.5%). In a study, 99.2% of teachers stated that they would report a child abuse case when they encountered it, 48.2% stated that they would first report it to the school administration, and 33.8% to the guidance teacher. In another study, teachers were asked "if there is a suspected abuse case, which would you prefer to do?" When asked, "I will inform the administrators and guidance counselor", 62.6% answered, "I will observe the child a little more for signs of abuse" [9]. In the other study, 41.9% of them will report first to the administration, 22.5% to the guidance service, 16.1% to the police, and 9.6% to the ministry of family and social policies, respectively. have stated [18]. In a study conducted with primary school teachers, 93.1% stated that they would report suspected abuse [14]. In studies, the place to be reported in case of abuse was reported by 53% of law enforcement officers [19]. In our research and other studies, although the majority of teachers are sensitive about reporting, some of them do not see school officials as a priority for notification. This shows the importance of in-service training.

In a study, 39.5% of the teachers thought that they knew the legal responsibilities and obligations to be done when they encountered a child who was exposed to child abuse and neglect despite working in a risky region in terms of child abuse and neglect, while those who thought they did not know were 60.5% [11]. In another study, 57.62% of the teachers stated that they did not know whether there was an instruction/procedure for neglect/abuse in the institution where they work [12]. This situation makes us think that teachers do not have enough information about the reporting obligation of

child abuse and neglect cases and they are worried.

Conclusion

In our study, nearly half of the teachers found neglect or abuse, the most common type of psychological abuse. While approximately one-fourth of them found themselves sufficient in diagnosing the cases encountered, approximately half of them found themselves partially sufficient and approximately one-fourth of them insufficient. About 90% of teachers stated they would report the cases to school officials. One-fourth of the research group had received training on child neglect and abuse, and nearly one-fourth of them found themselves sufficient in detecting child neglect or abuse. Women are more likely to receive an education. The rate of women who considered reporting suspected child neglect or abuse mandatory is significantly higher than men. The rate of those who find themselves sufficient in diagnosing child neglect or abuse is significantly higher in teachers who were males, have worked between 16 and 20 years, and received training on this subject. Among the abuse types, diagnosing sexual abuse is higher than the other types. Among the teachers who did not encounter any cases, only those who received training consider themselves sufficient. For this reason, necessary attention should be paid to this issue both in pre-service faculty training and in-service training.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declare that they have received no financial support for the study.

Ethical approval

Permission for the study, dated 16/11/2021 and numbered 2021/09-14, was obtained from the Non-Invasive Ethics Committee of Adiyaman University Faculty of Medicine.

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