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## Prevalence of educational neglect and educational abuse in elementary students

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Everyone's personality develops in childhood. Any educational neglect and abuse cause serious damage to healthy development. This research aimed to investigate the prevalence of educational neglect and educational abuse in elementary students.

**Materials and Methods:** The statistical population of this descriptive study consisted of all second-period elementary students of Urmia city-Iran. Three hundred and eighty-five students were selected through random cluster sampling. All of them completed the student's educational neglect and educational abuse scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS-19, descriptive statistics, and variance analysis.

**Results:** The results showed high and very high educational abuse in 23.8% and 19.2% of cases, respectively. Also, the results indicated high and very high educational neglect in 29.6% and 18.2% of the students, respectively. Also, the findings showed no significant difference between educational neglect and educational abuse in the second-period elementary students based on gender and educational grade.

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings, the prevalence of educational neglect and educational abuse among second-period elementary students was high. Therefore, school counselors should hold workshops for teachers and parents to reduce educational neglect and abuse.

**Keywords:** Educational abuse, Educational neglect, Elementary students

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## Introduction

Childhood is a period of growth and personality development. Family relationships affect children's sentiments, feelings, thoughts, and behavior (1). Child abuse is a serious and widespread problem and includes abuse, negligence, exploitation, aggression, disrespect, or any action leading to injury, harm, or wrongdoing (2). Child abuse means physical or mental harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or neglect of children by their caregivers (3). It covers many harmful behaviors, such as failure to meet children's basic needs, physical punishment, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, educational abuse, and neglect (4,5). Unfortunately, many children are deprived of their fundamental right to proper education in good schools (6). Educational abuse means preventing children from going to school, enrolling them in improper schools, neglecting or not monitoring their education, not paying attention to their regular absences from school or to their special educational needs, and failing to purchase supplies and stationery for various reasons, including the caregivers' domestic and financial problems (7). Educational neglect is another form of educational abuse. It means the failure of the caregiver to provide educational facilities and conditions and to pay attention to their attendance and education in school (8). Abuse is defined as caregivers' actions against the child's interests, whereas negligence implies the failure of the caregivers to fulfill their duties to the child (9). Educational abuse and neglect seriously damage children's psychological development with many long-term consequences (10). Compared to their adolescent peers, many children subjected to educational abuse and neglect tend to engage in self-destructive behaviors such as suicide, substance and alcohol abuse, or anti-social behaviors such as theft and destruction of other people's property (11).

Despite the relatively large number of studies on the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, research on educational abuse and educational neglect is in its early stages. For example, Thomas et al. examined childhood neglect and abuse in dentistry and oral and dental health education students. They reported that 5.5% of dental students and 16.7% of oral health education students experienced child abuse and neglect

(12). Moreover, the 2010 report by the US Department of Health and Human Services indicated that 19.3% of reported cases of abuse were physical, 10% sexual, and 62% were neglect (13). Salmani et al. also reported that 23% of the children experienced emotional abuse, 16% physical abuse, 9% emotional neglect, and 3% physical neglect (14). In another study, Aeen et al. reported that 81.1% of parents engaged in physical abuse, 91% in emotional abuse, 77.8% in emotional neglect, 75.8% in physical neglect, and 20.6% in educational neglect (15). Stewart et al. developed and validated the Child Neglect Questionnaire with four factors and designed eight items for measuring educational neglect (16).

Despite the numerous studies on physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, there is a research gap in educational abuse and neglect. Child abuse, which also affects personality traits (17), is a pervasive social problem with unfortunate consequences that call for action to reduce and address this problem quickly. Furthermore, educational abuse and educational neglect are critical to children's future lives. Therefore, this study investigated the prevalence of educational abuse and educational neglect in elementary students.

## Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this descriptive survey covered all 4th, 5th, and 6th graders in Urmia city (n= 40956). The sample size was estimated based on Morgan's table (n= 385) and selected using random cluster sampling:

1. Six schools were randomly selected from each district (totaling 12 schools).
2. Three girls and three boys' schools from each district were visited, and one class was randomly selected for grade-based data collection. After coordination with the Provincial Department of Education, letters of cooperation were received from the departments of education in the first and second districts asking the schools' authorities to cooperate with the researcher.
3. The schools were visited, their principals and staff were briefed on the research purpose, and the students completed the educational abuse and educational neglect scale.

Before completing the scale, the research objective was explained to the participants, they were assured of the confidentiality of the information, and written informed consent was

obtained from them. The inclusion criteria included having physical and mental health and no stressful events such as divorce and the death of loved ones in the last six months. The participants who did not complete the scale or filled it in incompletely or unreliably were excluded from the research.

Research instrument

A) *The Student Response Forms of Educational Abuse and Educational Neglect*: The educational abuse dimension had 15 items, and the educational neglect dimension had 14 items. The items were scored on a four-point Likert scale (1= very low, 2= low, 3= high, and 4= very high) (with no reverse scoring). Dimension scores were obtained from the sum of their items, with a higher score representing more educational abuse and neglect. Three psychology professors of the Urmia branch of the Islamic

Azad University confirmed the content and face validity of instrument, and the value of the concurrent criterion validity of the instrument was adequate for Hosseinkhani et al.'s child abuse questionnaire (18). Cronbach's alpha was 0.91 for educational abuse and 0.92 for educational neglect.

Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, variance analysis, and SPSS-19 software.

**Results**

The participants included 385 students in fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in elementary schools, 203 of whom (52.7%) were boys and 182 of them (47.2%) were girls. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum degrees of educational abuse and educational neglect.

**Table 1.** Descriptive indices of educational abuse and educational neglect in elementary students

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Educational abuse of girls	25.84	6.82	15	45
Educational abuse of boys	24.68	6.91	15	43
Educational abuse in fourth graders	25.15	6.80	15	45
Educational abuse in fifth graders	25.83	6.92	15	45
Educational abuse in sixth graders	24.80	6.35	15	42
Overall educational abuse	25.26	6.87	15	45
Educational neglect of girls	24.27	7.46	14	42
Educational neglect of boys	23.59	7.25	14	42
Educational neglect in fourth graders	24.17	7.66	14	42
Educational neglect in fifth graders	23.83	7.43	14	42
Educational neglect in sixth graders	23.79	7.29	14	41
Overall educational neglect	23.93	7.41	14	42

The results showed a mean rate of educational abuse of  $25.26 \pm 6.87$  and a mean rate of educational neglect of  $23.93 \pm 7.41$ . The participants were categorized into four categories in terms of educational abuse and

educational neglect rate using the cross-sectional data method. The research variables were categorized based on one standard deviation from the mean (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Categorization of research variables

Variable	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Educational abuse	15-18	19-25	26-32	33-45
Educational neglect	14-16	17-23	24-31	32-42

Table 2 presents four score distributions for educational abuse and educational neglect.

Table 3 presents the educational abuse prevalence among elementary school second graders.

**Table 3.** The prevalence of educational abuse

Variable	Levels	Girls		Boys		Fourth graders		Fifth graders		Sixth graders		Total students	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Educational abuse	Very low	29	15.93	36	17.73	24	17.52	22	16.79	19	16.24	65	16.88
	Low	81	44.50	73	35.96	57	41.60	52	39.69	45	38.46	154	40
	High	40	21.98	52	25.62	29	21.17	32	24.43	31	26.50	92	23.90
	Very high	32	17.58	42	20.69	27	19.71	25	19.08	22	18.80	74	19.22

According to Table 3, the prevalence of educational abuse among elementary students was very low for 65 students (16.88%), low for 154 students (40%), high for 92 students (23.90%), and very high for 35 students

(19.22%), showing prevalence by gender and educational level. Table 4 presents the prevalence of educational neglect among second graders in elementary school.

**Table 4.** The prevalence of the educational neglect

Variable	Levels	Girls		Boys		Fourth graders		Fifth graders		Sixth graders		Total students	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Educational neglect	Very low	34	18.68	42	20.69	32	23.36	32	24.43	12	10.26	76	19.74
	Low	53	29.12	72	35.47	42	30.66	39	29.77	44	37.61	125	32.47
	High	58	31.87	56	27.59	39	28.47	37	28.24	38	32.48	114	29.61
	Very high	37	20.33	33	16.25	24	17.52	23	17.56	23	19.66	70	18.18

According to Table 4, the prevalence of educational neglect among students was very low for 76 students (19.74%), low for 125 students (32.47%), high for 114 students (29.61%), and very high for 70 students

(18.18%), showing prevalence by gender and educational level. Table 5 shows the results of variance analysis for comparing educational abuse in elementary students by gender and grade.

**Table 5.** Results of variance analysis to compare educational abuse among elementary students

Variable	Source of change	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F Statistic	P
Gender	Intergroup	112.53	1	112.53	1.72	0.190
	Intragroup	25020.79	383	65.32		
	Total	25133.33	384			
Grade	Intergroup	132.12	2	66.06	1.01	0.365
	Intragroup	25001.21	382	65.44		
	Total	25133.33	384			

The results showed no significant differences between elementary school students in terms of educational abuse based on gender (girls and boys) and grade (fourth, fifth, and sixth)

( $P > 0.05$ ). Table 6 presents the results of variance analysis for comparing educational neglect of second graders by gender and grade.

**Table 6.** The results of variance analysis to compare educational neglect among elementary students

Variable	Source of change	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F Statistic	P
Gender	Intergroup	8.65	1	8.65	0.06	0.809
	Intragroup	56422.78	383	147.31		
	Total	56431.44	384			

Grade	Intergroup	512.92	2	256.46	1.75	0.175
	Intragroup	55918.51	382	146.38		
	Total	56431.44	384			

The results showed no significant differences between elementary school students in terms of educational neglect based on gender (girls

and boys) and grade (fourth, fifth, and sixth) ( $P > 0.05$ ).

### Discussion

The results of this study showed high and very high rates of educational abuse in 23.8% and 19.3% of the elementary students, respectively. The results were consistent with previous studies. For example, Thomas et al. found that 5.5% of dental students and 16.7% of oral and dental health education students had suffered from child abuse (12). Likewise, the 2010 report by the US Department of Health and Human Services showed that 19.3% of reported cases of abuse were physical while 10% were sexual (13). In the study by Salmani et al., it was reported that 23% of the cases of abuse were emotional, whereas 16% were physical (14). In another study, Ayin et al. concluded that 77.8% of the parents neglected their children emotionally, 75.8% physically, and 20.6% educationally (15).

According to the studies by Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. (5) and Nandyal et al. (19), educational abuse and educational neglect show inattention to the educational needs of children and their education in society. For example, Sharifi and Akbari reported that 60% of school students were not interested in textbooks since curricula and content needed to match their educational needs (20). Moreover, some researchers, such as Mahmoudi et al. and Hamed Heydari et al., stated that the weakness of curricula and lesson plans was that they neglected the psychological needs of students, causing academic failure and truancy, which are indicators of educational abuse and neglect (21,22). The high rates of educational abuse and educational neglect were also explained by Fathi and Saadattalab, pointing out the incompatibility of traditional educational facilities with the needs of modern students and stating that students were rebuked and humiliated by teachers or other students (23). Sadeghi et al. reported that schools emphasized grades and competition to get high grades excessively on the one hand. There is a considerable distance between teachers and

students, on the other hand gives the teachers the feeling of dominating the students, and the students are forced to obey the orders given by the teachers. Thus, these factors first decrease motivation, educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, and meaningfulness of education, etc., and then cause educational abuse and neglect (24).

The results also showed no significant differences between educational abuse and neglect in elementary school students based on grade and gender. To explain this, it can be said that educational abuse and neglect are personality traits that are relatively stable over time. Therefore, one can expect no significant differences between educational abuse and neglect of students from different grades (fourth to sixth graders). Since educational abuse and neglect are personality traits, their rates are not expected to differ significantly between males and females despite their higher prevalence in female students.

The self-reporting scale was the first limitation of this study. Another limitation was that the sample was limited to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in elementary schools in Urmia city. The last limitation was the lack of sufficient research and academic resources on educational abuse and educational neglect and the lack of relevant questionnaires to establish convergent validity. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use structured or semi-structured interviews for data collection. Investigating students from other educational levels or groups, such as children and adolescents, and group comparisons can produce interesting results. Further still, it is recommended that future researchers produce instruments with greater validity and reliability or standardize the instruments in other groups based on this and other similar studies.

The results showed a high rate of educational abuse and neglect with no differences between male and female students or between different graders. Therefore, school staff should devise measures to prevent or reduce educational

abuse and neglect. Since the lack of proper educational facilities, neglect of the educational and psychological needs of students, and incompatibility of contents and programs with the capacities of students lead to educational abuse and neglect, the Ministry of Education must plan to optimize educational facilities and content based on students' educational and psychological needs. School counselors can hold workshops for teachers, parents, and even students to reduce the prevalence and consequences of educational abuse and educational neglect. Teachers and education officials should also get closer to students and avoid burdening them with excessive tasks, rebuke, and humiliation to lower the rates of educational abuse and neglect. They should also seek to put better facilities and attention to students' needs at the top of their agenda.

Given the widespread educational abuse and neglect in elementary schools and the importance of these variables to the future of these students and, indeed, of the country,

guidelines and practical educational programs can be developed, and educational and intervention programs can be implemented to reduce the rates of educational abuse and neglect, especially among elementary school students.

#### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the prevalence of educational neglect and educational abuse among second-period elementary students was high. Therefore, school counselors should hold workshops for teachers and parents to reduce educational neglect and abuse.

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