**Interaction Between Kindergarten Teachers and Parents in Cases of Known or Suspected Child Sexual Abuse (CSA):**

**Barriers, Coping Styles, and Socio-Cultural Influences**

**Abstract**

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a prevalent phenomenon with far-reaching consequences. Kindergarten teachers play an essential role in its identification, initial intervention, and providing assistance. The current study examines kindergarten teachers’ experiences and coping methods when interacting with parents in cases of known or suspected CSA, in diverse socio-cultural contexts. This study was guided by the following questions: 1) How do kindergarten teachers perceive their interaction with parents in cases of known or suspected CSA? 2) What social and cultural factors influence their interaction with parents regarding CSA?

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 31 kindergarteners from two main population sectors in Israel: 18 from the Jewish sector and 13 from the Arab sector. Two central themes were found. The first pertains to the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the interaction, with two subthemes: intrapersonal and interpersonal complexities that cause distress and damage teachers’ professional and existential security. Interaction with parents raises negative emotions on these parallel fronts, and teachers may use defense and neutralization mechanisms, which are motivational barriers to reporting the abuse. The second theme refers to three unstable and possibly conflicting coping mechanisms: active, cautious, and avoidant. These are affected by individual and structural factors that shape choice, such as community influence. These were similar in the Arab and Jewish sectors. Other factors differed among the kindergarten teachers from the Jewish sector, some of whom are more cautious about defining the incident as abuse. Multiple factors shape kindergarten teachers’ narratives, and socio-cultural background is not the only determinant of their coping methods. This study offers practical professional recommendations for supportive policies to help kindergarten teachers optimally cope in their interactions with parents in cases of CSA.

**Keywords**: Traditions & Community Influence, Child Sexual Abuse in Early Childhood, Intervention, Cultural & Societal Contexts, Kindergarten and Preschool, Kindergarten Teacher-Parent Interactions

**Introduction**

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a serious global social and health crisis (American Psychological Association, 2002; Collin-Vézina, Daigneault, & Hébert, 2013). A meta-analysis of 217 studies estimated the prevalence of CSA at 11.8% (7.6% among boys and 18% among girls) (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Moreover, this phenomenon is underreported (Anderson, 2016; Finkelhor, 2009).

CSA is defined or classified according to each country’s culture and laws (Fontes et al., 2001; Fontes & Plummer, 2010). According to the World Health Organization: “Child Sexual Abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.”

CSA can occur between a child and an adult, or between one child and another who is in a position of authority in terms of age, developmental stage, trust, or power (WHO, 1999). It can also occur in peer relationships with no power differential (Tener & Katz, 2019). CSA can have devastating long-term physiological, psychological, cognitive, emotional, educational, and social repercussions (Almuneef, 2019; Fisher et al., 2017; Hornor, 2010; Smith & Sgarzi, 2003; van Roode et al., 2009).

Research indicates that there is a gap in knowledge about CSA that occurs at a young age and how it impacts those children as they reach school age and adolescence (Hébert et al., 2017; Tejada & Linder, 2018; Van Duin et al., 2018; Yüksel & Koçtürk, 2020). According to the *Child Sexual Abuse Statistics* (2015), the youngest children are at the highest risk of sexual abuse. It is estimated that 25% - 30% of CSA victims are less than seven years old (Fontanella et al., 2003; Putnam, 2001). Young children are particularly vulnerable, due to their developmental immaturity and inability to understand and articulate the abuse (Feng et al., 2010). Trauma that occurs in early childhood is more likely to be linked to severe mental distress in adulthood, as compared to trauma in later childhood (Kaplow & Wisdom, 2007). The first years of life are a critical period in brain development, and trauma at that age has significant and lasting effects (Andersen et al., 2008; Lupien et al., 2009).

**Kindergarten Teacher-Parent Relationships**

Kindergarten teachers usually run an independent educational unit (Oplatka & Eizenberg, 2007). They are responsible for educational and administrative roles, as well as maintaining formal and informal relationships with students’ parents (Schwartz & Sheila, 2018). Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) developmental-systemic approach indicates that combined and reciprocal influences are mutually reinforcing. Accordingly, attachment theory indicates that optimally, child education requires cooperation, agreement, and mutual understanding between parents and teachers, with each contributing their unique abilities and resources (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Parents of young children should be more involved, because these children are vulnerable and it is difficult to get information from them about what is happening in the kindergarten (Gilat et al., 2017). A special circular from the Director-General of Israel’s Ministry of Education (1996) emphasized that parents, especially those with young children, must fully cooperate and be transparent regarding their children’s needs and difficulties. However, meeting with parents can be a source of anxiety for kindergarten teachers, especially when they must face the parents alone (Oplatka & Eizenberg, 2007). Several studies show that kindergarten teachers find the relationship with parents to be among the most complicated and stressful aspects of their daily work, due to factors such as a perceptual gap between teachers and parents regarding the teacher’s role and responsibilities (McBride et al., 2003; Shimoni & Baxter, 1996), parental interference in the teacher’s work, parents’ refusal to respect the kindergarten’s rules, and more (Gilat et al., 2017).

**Laws and Procedures Regarding CSA that Connect Kindergarten Teachers and Parents**

In Israel, educators are required to report any reasonably-based suspicion that a minor is being abused by a person who is responsible for the child (Mandatory Reporting Act, 1977), by a family member under the age of 18, or by someone in a day care center, educational or therapeutic setting (amendments from 2007 and 2010). The obligation to report also applies if the offender is a minor in any of these contexts. The Mandatory Reporting Act is stricter regarding administrators or educational-therapeutic staff members. Not reporting abuse may be punishable by up to six months in prison. Reporting is not an accusation of guilt and does not violate any ethical or professional code; it is a request for an investigation by a welfare official or the police. The legal obligation to report such cases overrides staff members’ commitment to professional confidentiality.

A circular from the Director-General of the Israel Ministry of Education (2008) specified the intervention procedures that apply to all schools and kindergartens. These include: discussion with an educational consultant or psychologist to define the reporting methods, determining partners in the process, and making a decision about notifying the parents and the school administration. The circular emphasized that when there is suspicion that a child is being abused by a person responsible for him or her, and if informing that person has the potential to endanger the child, then it is forbidden to inform the parents about the incident, the content of the investigation, or possibly removing the student from the educational framework. If the student objects to his or her parents being informed, they will only be invited to a meeting and informed about the incident in coordination with a welfare official.

The Mandatory Reporting Act specifies that abuse between students, whether it occurs within or outside an educational institution, must be reported to a welfare official, in order to protect and provide treatment to the victim, the offender, and others (Director-General’s circular 1999 and 2020). As soon as such incidents are discovered, the therapeutic-administrative team must inform the abused students‘ parents and the offenders’ parents, in coordination with the welfare official.

Mandatory reporting forces kindergarten teachers to cope with emotionally difficult dilemmas. Research shows that teachers do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable about the law (Dinehart, & Kenny, 2015). They are afraid that they may be relying on inaccurate information (Eriksson et al., 2013; Markström, & Münger, 2018). They worry that reporting will violate the students’ trust and endanger their relationship with the students and their families (Jenkins & Palmer, 2012; Markström & Münger, 2018), especially in challenging and sensitive situations like CSA.

Parental support is a protective factor that may help CSA survivors cope (Domhardt et al., 2015). However, the complex emotions that surround exposure of abuse may compromise this support (Bux et al., 2016; van Duin et al., 2018). An abusive parent who is reported may fear that others will hear about it, and become angry at the educational system. Educators might be discouraged from reporting other similar cases (Jenkis & Palmer, 2012).

**Kindergarten Teachers’ Coping with CSA**

Because educators encounter CSA in their workplace, they can serve as agents for early detection, disclosure, support, intervention, and prevention (Feng et al., 2010; Goldman & Grimbeek, 2015; Loomis, 2018; Phasha, 2008; Sigad & Tener, 2022.). Young children are more dependent on the caregiving framework than older children are. They rely on caregivers as a source of comfort and protection, especially if they have experienced trauma or are at risk of it (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). Compared to other professionals, educators have more opportunities to notice physical signs of abuse and to observe changes in the children’s behavior (O’Toole et al., 1999).

However, few studies have looked at educators’ experiences, knowledge, and skills in identifying, reporting, and dealing with CSA (Blakey et al., 2019). Previous studies mainly looked at teachers’ perceptions. A study on school teachers’ experiences of reporting CSA found that they felt a sense of isolation on all fronts: from the children, the students’ parents, authority figures, and in their personal lives (Tener & Sigad, 2019). Accordingly, they adopt three coping styles: the “lone hero” (self-coping), the “layman” (see themselves as lacking the ability and knowledge to cope) and the “buck-passer” (quickly passing along responsibility).

A study conducted in Taiwan (Feng et al., 2009) found tensions inherent in educators’ position, which they described as “dancing on the edge”. They want to balance their commitment to protecting the children’s wellbeing and preventing harm (to the children and to themselves) alongside their relationships with the families and their obligation to report. This study referred to kindergarten teachers’ experiences of reporting general abuse of children, but not sexual abuse in specific.

**Uniqueness of the Research**

As mentioned, there is virtually nothing in the literature on how kindergarten teachers perceive their interactions with parents in cases of sexual abuse of young children. Similarly, there is little reference to how the socio-cultural context influences this interaction and teachers’ ways of coping with it. The present study aims to make a contribution by expanding the limited knowledge in the field. Israel is a diverse society that includes multiple ethnic, cultural, and religious groups (Israel Central, Bureau of Statistics, 2022), so it provides an opportunity to examine their impact on the subject.

This study is part of a broader project examining how educators in diverse socio-cultural contexts cope with CSA. Specifically, the study was guided by the following questions: 1) How do kindergarten teachers perceive the interaction with parents in cases of known or suspected CSA? 2) What social and cultural factors influence the interaction with parents in cases of CSA?

**Methodology**

**Research Participants**

The research participants included 31 kindergarten teachers: 30 females and one male. Their ages ranged from 32 to 64. There were 18 Israeli Jews; ten defined themselves as secular and eight as religious, and 13 Israeli Arabs: four Muslims and nine Druze. All worked with kindergarten students between the ages of four to six. Participation was dependent on ’willingness to answer questions regarding coping with CSA and perceptions of the interaction with parents of CSA victims (Englander, 2012). After locating an initial sample, the researchers recruited others with the “snowball sampling” strategy in which colleagues suggested others in their professional circles (Patton, 2015).

**Data Collection**

The multidisciplinary team of researchers included a criminologist, an anthropologist, a psychologist, and a social worker. The theme analysis was done by the first author. Ethical considerations and the validity and reliability of the data were the responsibility of the entire research team. Throughout the research, team members received special training and supervision from expert researchers in the field.

Four open interviews were conducted by three team members who study educators coping with CSA. These were followed by 27 semi-structured interviews based on a culturally-informed interview guide (Spradley, 1979). The interviews, which lasted 45-90 minutes, were recorded. All interviews took place during 2019-2021. The first author conducted semi-structured interviews with the Jewish kindergarten teachers. Researchers from the Arab sector conducted the interviews with teachers from the Arab sector. All interviews were transcribed and selected quotes were translated into English.

The interview guide included questions about professional information and knowledge that are relevant and important for kindergarten teachers who discover or suspect incidents of CSA in their kindergarten. The interview guide was written jointly by the team members and included questions such as:

* Describe an example of a case of sexual abuse that you encountered in your kindergarten.
* Tell me how you handled the situation.
* What was your experience with the families/parents of the students involved in the CSA?
* Describe your relationship with them.
* How does your immediate community perceive and deal with this phenomenon?
* In your opinion, what are the unique problems/challenges that the Arab/Jewish religious sector faces regarding CSA?
* What relevant professional training, support, and information is needed for you to manage and coordinate an intervention in cases of CSA(?

**Data Analysis**

The first stage of analysis included a careful review of the interviews to achieve full understanding of interviewees’ perceptions of their interactions with parents of CSA victims. Next, the research team categorized the repeated descriptions, ideas, and statements that emerged as fundamental to the participants’ definition of their experiences (Roulston, 2010). The researchers ensured the identification process and resultant analyses were inductive and did not rely on established coding frames or biased preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the third stage, the meaning units derived from the analysis were coded and consolidated into themes and subthemes that give significant insights into the study findings. Information saturation was affirmed by the resolution of all issues raised in the analysis. The researchers reviewed the interview transcripts again to expand on the established themes (Maykut & Morehouse, 2005). Finally, the participants’ perceptions and the meanings they attributed to incidents of CSA in their kindergarten were framed in an overall conceptual model (Charmaz, 2014).

**Rigor and Trustworthiness**

The following steps and techniques were used to promote standards of rigor and trustworthiness: 1) Performing investigator triangulation between the research team members during the analysis, while materials were being analyzed and coded; 2) Throughout the research, source materials and interpretations were discussed in documented peer debriefing sessions and meetings to reflect upon and increase awareness of biases and influences on the analysis; 3) Formal and informal conversations were conducted with advisors, team members, and colleagues in the field and detailed notes and a field diary were kept to promote reflectivity; 4) Four open qualitative interviews with guides were conducted first, followed by semi-structured interviews with a guide built in consultation with peers, in order to avoid bias related to the researchers’ professional familiarity with the field of study.

Credibility of the findings was established by presenting direct quotes from participants and then openly giving details of the researchers’ interpretation and analysis, providing transparency regarding the researchers’ interpretive choices (Maxwell, 2005). This allows readers to assess the quality of the analysis (Patton, 2015). The research approach was verified by conferring with experts on CSA and qualitative research (Henry, 2015). The researchers used member checking, reaching out to participants during data collection so they could refine, illustrate, and expand their comments, or react to points that they had not responded to previously (Morse, 2015).

**Professional Ethics**

Maintaining ethical standards was based on: 1) Approval of the study by the Ethics Committees of the authors’ affiliated institutions and conducting the research in accordance with their guidelines; 2) Participants signing an informed consent form; 3) Ensuring confidentiality regarding identifying information through all stages (locked files, transcribing interviews without identifying data, and use of pseudonyms; 4) Participants were informed and reminded that they had the option to not answer any question or to stop the interview (Malone, 2003). Extra emphasis was given to the participants’ emotional wellbeing. They were repeatedly told that if they experienced any emotional distress due to the interviews, they could contact the researchers in order get professional help, and they were given a list of referral resources at the end of each interview.

**Results**

The current study examined kindergarten teachers’ perceptions regarding interactions with their students’ parents regarding known or suspected CSA and their methods of coping with it. The study was conducted in the diverse socio-cultural contexts of the Jewish sector and Arab sector in Israel. Analysis of the findings revealed two central themes: the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the interaction; and the methods the kindergarten teachers use to cope with the situation.

**Theme 1: Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions of Interactions with Parents**

The teachers view reporting known or suspected CSA to parents as complex, even before it happens. This undermines their motivation to carry it out. The first subtheme presents the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions regarding intrapersonal complexity, and the second presents interpersonal complexity.

***Subtheme A. Intrapersonal Complexity***

Reporting CSA to the parents and being the bearer of such news causes the kindergarten teachers discomfort, anxiety, and fear. Gilat, a kindergarten teacher from the Jewish sector, said: “I felt like I was squirming. It’s hard, it’s very hard. You then have to face this parent every morning.”

This kindergarten teacher has known the parent for a long time and was apparently accusing him or her of the most heinous crime of sexually abusing a child. Moreover, she is involving other entities, and the family may pay a heavy and long-term price for her action. The difficulty is intensified when the parents are perceived as “nice people” or when they live in the same community as the teacher. Yael, a kindergarten teacher who works in the kibbutz where she lives, said:

“Today, it is very difficult to find kindergarten teachers [who work] in the community where they live. You can count on one hand the kindergarten teachers who teach in their kibbutz, because you are so visible - for better or for worse. It might be a problem to make a report against someone who is my neighbor or … my friend.”

These meetings evoke such complex emotions that some kindergarten teachers delegate the responsibility of reporting to other professionals: “This is my game; I dump it on the school;” “I leave this job to the psychologist because it’s his field.”

Another factor is how the kindergarten teachers relate to the issue of sexuality in general and particularly its existence in early childhood. They may be embarrassed by the topic of sexuality and find it difficult to think about it and deal with it emotionally. This is especially true for those from traditional Jewish and Arab communities, where discussion about sexuality is sensitive and repressed.

Such difficulties are intensified in cases of suspected sexual abuse by a parent against their child. It is hard for the teachers to believe that such things happen: (“Wow, he damaged the soul of the person dearest to him”) and to encounter the offending parent (“I couldn’t look him in the eyes”).

Another issue raised in the research pertained to a kindergarten teacher who had been sexually abused for many years when she was a young child. With great emotion, Yafit described how reporting sexual abuse was emotionally overwhelming for her, and she found it difficult to deal with the parents according to the required procedures:

“There are a lot of discrepancies in the situation. There are a lot of problems in the situation. Many times, I will act spontaneously, do whatever occurs to me. It is impossible to say definitively how I will act when facing the actual situation. There are no rules. I will act from a place of protecting the child, what I can do to protect him. And then at that moment, I will decide what to do.”

Kindergarten teachers feel professionally responsible and entrusted to protect the safety of the children under their care. As a result, they may perceive incidents of CSA as a failure, and feel guilty. Lilach, a teacher in the Jewish sector, described her overwhelming anxiety at the thought of arranging a meeting to make such a report:

“How can I report such a thing to a parent...? Phew, I don’t even want to think about it! Just when you say it, I feel weak all over my body! Really, I’m telling you in all honesty, I feel like I neglected my duty, and didn’t look after the children.”

Another aspect pertained to teachers’ insecurity about whether they had the necessary professional knowledge and ability to manage these difficult and sensitive meetings. They need to know how to raise the issue with the parents and how to deal with their objections, denial, and cover-up. They worried they might make a mistake that could cause irreparable damage.

***Subtheme B: Interpersonal Complexity***

This subtheme pertains to the how the kindergarten teachers perceived the difficulties they observed in the parents’ responses to the report. The kindergarten teachers must have the emotional strength and professional ability to deal with the parents’ reactions to being told about something “not right” with their child, especially since it has sexual content. Parents may express helplessness, anxiety, shame, guilt, failure and self-blame, which can lead to a “mental breakdown”. They may fear the stigma and labeling from other people who become involved. Leila, a teacher from the Arab sector, described an example of a mother’s distress after being told of the suspicion that her child was being sexually abused by an uncle:

“The mother started crying. She was also in a difficult situation. How could she explain this? Because her sister-in-law, she was also involved... she cried a lot, she was also in trouble. What would she do? How would she respond? This is a very, very sensitive and very difficult subject...sometimes things are hidden out of fear...it can get to the point that someone kills himself...as I told you, it’s family honor. If a girl is assaulted or something, then who will take her? Who will marry her? It’s not easy. It’s very complicated for them, constantly thinking about this matter, who is talking about them.”

Parents, especially those from religious communities, often feel a sense of shame regarding sexuality. As Chaya, from the Jewish sector explained it:

“I think in the religious sector, it’s really, really bad if a situation like this happens. They don’t talk about it. I have a friend who is a kindergarten teacher with a son in first or second grade. He saw movies, he was exposed to sexual things on the computer... She’s secular. Do you understand? She came and told me about it ... she installed filters and she went to get some training for herself. In our community, we don’t tell, not even to a good friend. You have to understand that we are in a different culture. If it happens, it’s taken care of and that’s it. They wouldn’t spread it around, they’d be ashamed ... even if, God forbid, it happened to me, I wouldn’t tell her. Secular people are more open, religious people are more closed. I’m not saying that they don’t care. They do, but quietly, secretly. They do everything to prevent it....”

Noya, a veteran kindergarten teacher and coordinator from the Jewish sector, explained that all parents feel emotional turmoil, panic, anxiety, fear, and worry in response to a report of sexual abuse. Their feelings are universal, legitimate, and understandable, and evoke a sense of identification and empathy.

Manal, from the Arab sector spoke about the source of her fear:

“We all know about the barbaric behavior that takes place in our society these days, whether it’s burning cars or murders... this harmful behavior makes us afraid, and we don’t dare to speak up.”

Some parents, especially from non-normative families, threaten to “settle accounts” with the kindergarten teacher, excommunicate her, or even threaten her with violence. As Ahlam, from the Arab sector, described:

“If I want to report, my world will be turned upside down. A fight will break out between families and between relatives. You will become the enemy, and they will threaten to kill you. Like what happened to one teacher... they came to her house, threatened her, and burned her car. It’s like ‘Nooooo’! You brought shame to the whole village and it won’t go well for you. Then the grandfather’s family and the uncles and all the relatives got involved and excommunicated her. It’s a black mark for life that won’t ever be erased. That kindergarten teacher ruined her life, even though she’s not to blame. There will always be a black spot on her reputation, and she will be remembered as the one who destroyed the family.”

Another complication is that parents may object to or minimize the content of the report and try to normalize or downplay their child’s responsibility or involvement in the incident: “After all, he’s just a child”; “They’re still in kindergarten, we shouldn’t make an issue of it”.

Some parents interpret the report as an accusation and react with denial or anger towards the kindergarten teacher. Parents may blame the accuser, and shift responsibility for the incident to the kindergarten teacher. This intensifies the teacher’s sense of guilt and failure. Alona, a veteran kindergarten teacher and coordinator, spoke about parents’ reactions that manifest as a loss of trust in her:

“As soon as the child is abused, you’ve lost trust. You can give your whole life, your whole soul. In our work there is such a thing as ‘ungratefulness’. That is, the same parent can connect with my ‘I believe’ and everything, but as soon as his child was hurt, he feels hurt too, and it’s very difficult.”

**Theme 2: Approaches to Coping**

Kindergarten teachers utilize a variety of coping approaches to cope with the complex interactions with parents. Subthemes are presented for the three main approaches: active, cautious, and avoidant.

***Subtheme A: The Active Approach***

Kindergarten teachers who follow this approach proactively set up a meeting with the parents. Some do this independently, while others request assistance and support. Kindergarten teachers who have direct and close relationships with the parents said they were motivated by a strong sense of responsibility for protecting the children and caring for their safety and future. They see reporting as necessary to immediately end the abuse. Reporting helps clarify the reasons behind the situation and how to address it, especially when there is a suspicion of sexual abuse of a child by an adult. They believe that despite the difficulty and turmoil that the meetings cause the parents, conveying this information is eventually for their benefit, as those responsible for raising the child. In the interviews, the kindergarten teachers expressed frustration and anger about the abuse. Soha, a kindergarten teacher from the Arab sector said:

“I am not responsible for the parents. I share and I say honestly and professionally what I have to say and tell them, even if the truth hurts, even if the truth is unpleasant... I am here for the child, not to soothe the ears of parents who don’t want to hear, or do want to hear. It’s none of my business, that isn’t it. At most, they won’t say hello to me on the street, everything’s fine.”

Ahlam, a veteran kindergarten teacher from the Arab sector, described taking an active approach to a meeting, in which she expressed to the mother her concern about the father’s behavior:

“I invited the mother. I told her, as soon as the girl doesn’t want the father to give her a shower, she mustn’t be forced. She should wait until you get home from work... to get in the shower with you.”

Yafit, a veteran Jewish kindergarten teacher who was herself a victim of incest, described this style as stemming from a desire to protect the child from abuse:

“I will meet with the parents together. If I suspect the father, I think my tone of voice will be blunt. I’ve learned to be blunt. I’m not forgiving (loud voice). I can protect the girl. I give him hints that maybe I know...I’m sure the father knew that I knew. The mother in this whole story is not taking sides. Just like happened to me (crying). I haven’t seen many mothers fighting for their children. I don’t know whether the mother will protect the girl or protect her husband.”

Kindergarten teachers who were disappointed or did not trust the professional entities, such as psychologists or the welfare services, to take action to stop the abuse were often motived to use an active approach. Ahlam, from the Arab sector, angrily described an ongoing case of sexual abuse of children, which caused her to distrust the welfare services:

“I invited the mother to talk, and she said it did happen. She didn’t deny it. This was the first time I saw a parent who didn’t deny it... then I also talked to the store owner. Imagine, in 10 years, how many children have gone into that store, and they didn’t take care of him. Why? Because Welfare doesn’t want to listen or help. Imagine how many children have been abused in these 10 years.”

Amina, a kindergarten teacher from the Arab sector, added:

“From the beginning, I only think about the child. I’m not afraid to report. I don’t think there could be anything that would motivate me not to report, or to think about the parents. I think about the child’s emotional and mental resilience, and how I can help him. I will be the first and main source to help him. It’s certain that I will get involved and tell the parents about the abuse. The parents usually don’t know, or they themselves are the cause. I try to maintain a positive relationship with them, in order to minimize damage to the child, so that they don’t throw him out of the family. I explain to the parents what is going to happen and update them, because uncertainty and not knowing is a scary thing.”

Several interviewees said they stopped acting alone when they realized that it might harm the child or change the narrative describing the event, because the child would repeat her words. Additionally, kindergarten teachers who underwent profession training on the subject of sexual abuse and reporting it, often changed their approach. They would cooperate, consult, and ask for support and assistance from professionals in the educational organization or outside it, such as the kindergarten’s psychologist, counselor, or advisor, the person responsible for the kindergartens in the municipality, the Ministry of Education supervisor, or the youth division director.

The interviews illustrate what motivates kindergarten teachers to use this course of action of seeking support before or during the interaction with the parents. They may need advice: “How do I say such a thing to the parents?” “How do I approach the issue?” They may worry about the parents’ reactions to the report: “They might threaten or hurt me.”

Teachers also requested training in how to manage such meetings, and emphasized the need for long-term external intervention in follow-up, treatment, and training. According to the data, this supported approach to the meetings with parents enables teachers to deal with the incident and not gloss over it, while the cooperative effort gives them personal and professional security and strength and sends a message of a “united front”.

Despite these benefits, it emerged in the interviews that the involvement of other professionals sometimes makes the kindergarten teachers feel a lack of control over the process and result. Some described situations in which a psychologist or social worker contradicted or overruled her opinion in the report, or behaved towards the parents in a judgmental, critical, and non-inclusive manner. Ahlam, from the Arab sector, described with great emotion her disappointment and lack of support:

“I spoke to someone from Welfare and explained the whole story to her from A to Z. She listened to the end and then what did she answer? Listen, children develop their imagination at this time. I told her, there are also symptoms [of abuse] that the girl wasn’t displaying before. She repeated: ‘Noooo, stop. It’s nonsense. Maybe children start to imagine and develop curiosity about their body at this time.’ So, I left her, and I left Welfare, and I left the head kindergarten teacher, and I also left the parent... I took the girl for personal talks.”

A similar case was described by Soha, from the Arab sector:

“I saw a girl playing in the kindergarten theater with a doll, and she told it about a certain act that someone had done to her. Then I held the doll and started asking the girl, ‘Where were you hurt?’ She said, ‘My brother’ but I know she has no brothers at home. The psychologist came and talked to the girl and said, ‘There is no problem, everything is fine’.”

Noga, from the Jewish sector, also shared a distressing situation:

“They [the parents] told me that the social worker described it [the abusive act] dramatically, actually stood up and demonstrated it to them. You weren’t there, you didn’t see... there was something very theatrical, exaggerated, judgmental, accusatory. They left upset. I talked to the mother. She really cried. I actually felt that I should support her, and I told her that she has a listening ear in the kindergarten, and we are here to listen to her, and we stand behind her in whatever she and the child need.”

***Subtheme B: The Cautious Approach***

The cautious approach characterizes kindergarten teachers who delay reporting to parents until they are sure that it is necessary. At the same time, they take steps to help them decide whether or not the event must be reported. Gilat, a veteran Jewish kindergarten teacher and organizer said:

“When I turn to a parent, I do it only after I have really seen something a few times, repeating itself. At the same time, I will first make observations, watch and study his [the child’s] behavior. I see which children are in his circle, who else may be experiencing something. I also consult with the people on the outside: a psychological counselor. I’m not left alone with this.”

Noya added:

“We have to think a million times before we invite a parent to such a meeting. Parents get scared very easily. Parents go on the offensive very easily... You need to know how to talk to a parent, tell them things in the right way. Because parents often find it difficult to hear the truth, and you can’t just come and throw it in their face.”

Another reason for postponing the meeting is fear of causing the child to regress functionally. Kindergarten teachers must prepare themselves emotionally and professionally for this situation, which may even harm them. As Noya said:

“I think that if a parent is anxious and has difficulty dealing with certain kinds of information, he often puts the problem onto the kindergarten.”

As Dafna, from the Jewish sector, described:

“I need to breath, think, approach the parents in a different way, not as if I haven’t yet internalized it myself. I have to distance myself from the incident. To see it through other eyes, as they say. Because as a mother, I don’t know how I would react to something like this. It sounds so shocking. Even as a kindergarten teacher, I was shocked. I told myself, take a day, two days. Be more alert. Meanwhile, the rules in the kindergarten were already different. I spent two days thinking about how to act logically, and how to convey it to the parents.”

It emerged that these kindergarten teachers also act cautiously when they finally decide to report. They carry out the interaction in stages, in several meetings, choosing their words carefully. Interestingly, this approach did not emerge in the interviews of kindergarten teachers from the Arab sector.

***Subtheme C: The Avoidant Approach***

Kindergarten teachers who take this approach avoid interacting with the parents or professional entities regarding CSA. This is a conscious and deliberate choice based on various reasons: reluctance to deal with the incident, need for a sense of control, professional insecurity, fear of a violent reaction from the parents or community, desire to maintain trusting relationships, concern for their professional and personal reputation, and concern for the child’s safety.

Lilach, from the Jewish sector, is aware of her professional responsibility and the inherent importance of reporting to parents and professionals. She explained:

“Yes, that’s right. I won’t lie. Obviously, I don’t want to deal with it. Just like I don’t want to deal with domestic violence... It’s clear that it’s part of my job, and it’s an important part. But as a kindergarten teacher, I admit that *walla*, I don’t feel like dealing with this headache. It’s a difficult process to start and to get other entities involved…just thinking about it makes me sick! Even what the child is going through - it’s hard to absorb it.”

It was also found that kindergarten teachers will keep incidents to themselves because they do not want to take responsibility for harming the parents by calling the incident “abuse” if in the end it turns out to be “nothing”. Kindergarten teachers may take an avoidant approach when they belong to the same community as the parents, live in the same neighborhood, or have social ties with them.

Another motive is the desire to protect the child from his parents’ violent reaction. Udi, a kindergartener from the Jewish sector, described a parent’s reaction to being told that his child had been involved in a sexual incident:

“The way he came through the gate … he just beat his child horribly! He laid him out on the floor and kicked him. It was shocking and horrifying to watch. I promised myself that I would never tell this father anything again. This experience really affected me... years later, I promised myself that if I see someone who is unstable like that... I mean, really consider everything before you bring anything out. See who is standing in front of you, their past, who the person is, if he is ready to accept criticism of his child. I mean, I learned so many things after this situation. It was not easy. The only thing I learned was not to tell the parents anything; that stayed with me.”

Another aspect of the avoidant approach was to see reporting as worthless: it will not help, contribute, or serve any purpose. Moreover, it may cause harm, stigma, and shame for everyone involved, especially in a closed community.

Some teachers chose the avoidant approach because they thought that the situation was a one-time incident that would not happen again. They prioritize their trusting relationship with the children, and believe this will provide the children with the security to confide in the teacher in the future (there is a pleasant, reassuring feeling in believing the situation will not continue).

In traditional Arab society, avoidance of such issues is a norm. The kindergarten teachers from the Arab sector said that their society is afraid, secretive, and “sweeps everything under the rug”. They compared this to Jewish culture, which they perceive as more developed, courageous, and willing to speak openly about the vulnerability and the welfare of the victim. It emerged that in their society there are families involved in organized crime, who may cause damage and ruin the lives of offenders and their families, including the parents, children, and grandchildren, through “excommunication and labeling that lasts for generations”. The interviews revealed their “deadly fear” of revenge, social punishment, humiliation, and threats of excommunication when “the truth is told to your face”. As Ahlam said: “Turn away from the evil, educate yourself and your children”.

Some kindergarten teachers avoid reporting a sexual incident to the parents if they view it as normative, natural, and in accordance with the children’s developmental age. Alternatively, they may reassure the parents by minimizing the severity of the incident, its consequences, and its meaning. As Chaya, from the Jewish sector, said:

“Come on, really, if you look at it clearly, nothing happened. The girl wasn’t really abused, in my opinion, right? Not that she, God forbid, was penetrated. She just took off her panties and hugged her. Maybe it’s an invasion of privacy, but it’s not actual abuse which can scar her for a long time... not that I’m justifying it. True, it’s not right that it happened, and yet...”

Some kindergarten teachers said they could distinguish the border between innocent childish experimentation and learning, mimicking behaviors, as opposed to abusive behavior. They base this on the criteria such as: personal intuition, repetition of the event (“If it happened once or twice it’s okay”), the reaction of those involved (“He laughed...”), the degree of psychological damage, and the age of the offender. While they see sexual contact by an adult as rape, they view sexual contact between children as natural curiosity or play.

Another explanation refers to the distinction between good and bad. In other words, sexual abuse will not happen in the kindergarten because all the children are “good” and “pure”, and cannot have offensive motives. “These children are pure. They have no harmful sexual motives. They are children, they are cute, they are good.”

Sometimes, the parents already knew about the sexual incident from other sources, such as the child or other parents. Thus, there is a gap between the parents’ perception of the incident as abuse, and the kindergarten teacher’s normalization of it. According to some interviewees, the parents’ interpretation and definition of the event as being sexual in nature was “far-fetched” and led to overly severe, ill-adjusted, and extreme reactions such as anger, crying, and hysteria. Some parents came to the kindergarten and shouted, pushed the child away, or directly confronted the involved child and his parents to “settle the matter”. The teachers reported these parents’ intense reactions and stress as creating chaos, disrupting the routine in the kindergarten, harming the children’s emotional state, and causing distress for everyone involved. They attributed the parents’ overwhelming emotions and anxiety to reports of abuse in the media. Or they might say it came from the parents’ own emotional state and personal scenarios: “It was all in the mother’s head”. They described these parents as “ticking bombs” that would affect the kindergarten teacher’s reputation and affect the other children and their parents. In these situations, the teachers had a specific goal in their subsequent interactions with the parents: to preserve the status quo at any cost, even if they didn’t know all the details of the event. Ella, from the Jewish sector, said:

“I calm the parents down. I find answers that can actually calm them down. They don’t ask too many questions, because as soon as I give them an answer, they give me a feeling that they trust us, and then it’s resolved.”

**Discussion**

Children are at the highest risk of sexual abuse during their kindergarten and elementary school years (Wurtele, 2009). Therefore, teachers may serve as agents of social change, through pro-active involvement and having the skills to identify and respond appropriately to suspicion of CSA, which is essential in prevention, intervention, and promotion of disclosure (Blakey et al., 2019).

The current research made a distinct contribution by addressing three areas that are missing in the literature: 1) the special traits of kindergarten teachers as professionals who become aware of CSA incidents among their students; 2) kindergarten teachers’ interactions with the parents; and 3) considering socio-cultural aspects.

The findings revealed two major themes. The first pertains to teachers’ perceptions of the interaction with parents, and has two subthemes: intrapersonal and interpersonal complexity. The intrapersonal aspect pertains to the teachers’ feelings of failure, inner turmoil, guilt, discomfort, and embarrassment. Similar negative emotions regarding reporting CSA were found in a study conducted among school counselors (Sivis-Cetinkaya, 2015). The interpersonal aspect pertains to social and community relationships. It also involves prior assessment of the parents, which may cause fear of undesirable and negative reactions to reporting, such as guilt, loss of trust, and even real fear, in particular when facing “non-normative” parents who may resort to social or physical violence in the immediate or the long-term.

These findings lead to the conclusion that the interaction with the parents undermines the kindergarten teachers’ sense of mental wellbeing, creates distress, and may threaten their sense of professional and existential security. Additionally, kindergarten teachers’ feelings of identification, compassion, and empathy make it even more difficult for them to successfully manage the meeting to report CSA. The encounter evokes negative, emotions on parallel fronts: panic, helplessness, guilt, discomfort, shame, and fear, which lead the kindergarten teachers and parents to use defense mechanisms and neutralization techniques, such as minimization or denial, which are often displayed by victims (Cederborg et al., 2007; Sjöberg, & Lindblad, 2002). In addition, the mechanism of “blaming the accusers” was observed. These motivational barriers to reporting were noted among all study participants, regardless of background and societal sector.

The second major theme shed light on kindergarten teachers’ coping methods and approaches when required to interact with the parents regarding CSA: active, cautious, and avoidant. The active approach refers to kindergarten teachers are motivated exclusively by a sense of responsibility immediately protecting the child. These kindergarten teachers may seek assistance from professionals before or during the reporting meeting. Kindergarten teachers who take a cautious approach, in contrast, wait for verification and confirmation that the meeting is necessary. By postponing the report, they may lessen the chance for ending the abuse and delay addressing the situation. The avoidant approach preserves the status quo through concealment or normalization. This allegedly restores security, peace, and routine in the kindergarten, as well as the parents’ personal and professional trust.

Individual and structural choice-shaping factors were identified, which influence the kindergarten teachers’ coping approaches during the interaction with the parents.

**Individual Factors**

***Personal background and personality characteristics***. These affect the chosen coping approach, and include: personal resilience, self-image, sense of ability, optimism or pessimism, professional security, and ability to work in a team. For example, the kindergarten teacher who was herself a victim of sexual abuse chose an individual-active approach. A kindergarten teacher who was unsure of her professional abilities chose the participatory style or the avoidant approach. These personal characterizations have great importance and significance in choosing a style of operation for the actions required by administrators and Ministry of Education circulars.

***Focus of responsibility***. This ranges from an approach that puts commitment to the child’s welfare at the center, to one that emphasizes the teacher’s personal safety and professional security. These perceptions can be viewed along a spectrum: Kindergarten teachers who choose the active approach have a high sense of responsibility for the safety and rights of the children. Those who use an individual-active approach are motivated to “save” the child on their own, even in cases where their style violates the law. This approach is in line with the lone-hero style (Tener & Sigad, 2022) in which educators take the task upon themselves, without any assistance regarding how to treat a child who has experienced sexual abuse.

In contrast, kindergarten teachers who take the avoidant approach prioritize protecting their own wellbeing and safety. They are afraid of the consequences of reporting and do not want to pay price for doing so. Kindergarten teachers who use the cautious approach do not take a clear position and do not have a clear sense of commitment. They postpone reporting until they are certain it is necessary.

***Professional isolation***. The findings show that kindergarten teachers feel isolated in this process, and this increases their distress. This core experience was also found in the studies of Tener and Sigad (2019, 2022). Isolation is even intensified because these educators manage a unit who daily operation is not part of a wider organization. In Israel, kindergarten teachers are physically isolated from their colleagues. During the day, they are required to deal with many situations and uncertainties on their own, which makes them feel “alone in the battle” (Levkovich & Gada, 2020, p. 91). Moreover, the teachers’ sense of professional isolation is a risk factor for the development of compassion fatigue (Dekel et al., 2016), an indirect, secondary traumatic stress that can develop due to a therapist’s involvement in their patients’ stressful situations (Figley, 1995, 2002).

**Structural Factors**

***Unclarity and misinformation regarding the procedures***: Kindergarten teachers said they lack relevant training and knowledge regarding the etiology of CSA and how to conduct meetings with parents and manage the mandatory processes as described in the Ministry of Education Director-General’s circular. Previous studies also found a lack of knowledge, training and professional support, along with inaccurate beliefs regarding CSA, which indicate the need for more training in this field (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016). Identification of sexual abuse of very young children is complicated because victims often show no physical signs of CSA (Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2017). Further, legislation and protocols for protecting children from abuse are often convoluted and ambiguous (Feng et al., 2009; Levi & Loeben, 2004). Even prospective kindergarten teachers do not have the sufficient background in sex education and CSA, and this hinders their ability to stop or treat abuse (Simsar & Capar, 2022). For example, when a kindergarten teacher chooses the individual-active approach, she may obstruct intervention, cause parents to react passively or with limited participation, or they may react violently. Moreover, when this approach is used with the responsible offender, it may disrupt investigative procedures and damage the entire criminal procedure. A kindergarten teacher who chooses to participate in this way may lose control of the situation. However, the cautious and avoidant approaches prevent the abuse from being addressed, and may even perpetuate it. In practice, these kindergarten teachers face another issue: beyond the lack of a sense of control, asking for support might sabotage the process. The line is unclear between who is required to report information, who is permitted to do so, and for who reporting is actually against the rules of ethics.

In addition, there are no clear procedures regarding the transfer of information between the kindergarten teacher and the assisting professionals. The report is unilateral, and the kindergarten teacher often finds herself alone in dealing with its results. The offender and victim may remain in the same kindergarten space, with no long-term guidance provided. Children who were abused and/or the offenders may be stigmatized by the parents of other kindergarten students. The teacher may have to continue to meet daily basis with a parent who she reported as a suspected abuser. She may have to deal with threats and even violent behavior against her.

***Communalism***: The more communal the society, the more sensitive the reporting meeting is. News travels faster. The situation is more unpleasant. Stigmatization is greater. The kindergarten teacher is more likely to fear that she will pay a heavy personal and professional price. Sigad and Tener’s (2022) study, which examined this topic among teachers, described this phenomenon as being between a rock and a hard place. Teachers face internal pressure from their community, while their professional values require them to protect the children in their care. They are members of a community, limited by its cultural norms, and are therefore afraid they will pay a heavy price if they try to make a change. Similarly, a study of school counselors who reported CSA found that they were afraid of the perpetrators, especially those from small communities, where daily encounters are unavoidable, and where their school offices are easily accessible (Sivis-Cetinkaya, 2015).

The literature attributes greater emphasis on collective community life, with all its complexities, to Arab culture (Ajrouch, 2004; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). However, our study found this not only true among Arab kindergarten teachers but also among the Jewish teachers who work in small communities such as a village, kibbutz or collective settlement.

***Cycles of reactions***: Feng et al. (2009) found that kindergarten teachers were anxious and worried about damaging their relationship with parents of abused children. They suggested that the administration should create a secure system that would protect them from becoming the target of parents’ anger and revenge. This was particularly strong among all participants of the present study, although a difference was found in the intensity, depending on their societal sector of origin. The Jewish kindergarten teachers focused on the fear of the parents’ reactions. The kindergarten teachers from the Arab sector spoke about great anxiety and “deadly fear” of broad social punishment from the collective: their friends in the village and the families or clans of the victims and/or offenders. This could manifest in severe violence, revenge, personal and professional stigmatization, humiliation, ostracism, and excommunication that last long-term (even for generations).

This affects kindergarten teachers in the present moment and into the future, and may impact multiple social circles, including their own family members. Attitudes towards sexuality are derived from society and culture. In Arab culture, the collective and family are central, and maintaining the family’s honor is essential, with an emphasis on females’ modesty and virginity. This suppresses open discourse and encourages hiding sexual behaviors and problems (Abdullah & Brown, 2011; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Haboush & Alyan, 2013). Therefore, teachers who become aware of CSA face the ultimate taboo in Arab society (Abu-Baker, 2005) and this may affect the way they deal with it. The Arab kindergarten teachers in this study described their society as conformist regarding accepted norms, protecting the collective, primitive and conservative regarding sexuality, discussion of which is oppressed, silenced, and taboo. They viewed the Jewish kindergarten teachers as relatively liberal, enlightened, and able to act in a non-conformist manner. Accordingly, some kindergarten teachers from the Arab sector chose the individual-active approach, out of a sense of responsibility for the child’s safety and lack of trust that others would do this for them, while some took an avoidant approach.

An important finding is that not a single participant from in the Arab sector said they took a “gray” course of action (the cautious approach). They classify the suspicion of sexual contact in a dichotomous way, and accordingly always treat the incident as abuse. We hypothesize that this is due to the clear cultural boundaries and the dichotomous attitude towards sex. It is either a legitimate and pleasurable relationship between husband and wife, or a sinful, illicit relationship between unmarried people (Iikkaracan, 2000), which is seen as seriously damaging to the dignity of the victim, the perpetrator, and the families of both (Touma-Suliman, 2006).

Further, contrary to the popular perception, the Jewish kindergarten teachers who are perceived as liberal, took either the avoidant or individual-active approach. Therefore, it is inaccurate to make sweeping generalizations regarding cultural context, or to make unidirectional observations that link activism and liberalism, or vice versa link conservatism and concealment.

From this, it can be concluded that factors that shape choices also create the narratives that influence the way the kindergarten teachers cope. We observed multiple unstable and even contradictory modes of action and interventions, some of which contradict the law or mandatory procedures, i.e., the Director-General’s circular (2008) and the Mandatory Reporting Act. For example, there is a procedure requiring kindergarten teachers to report sexual abuse among children to the parents. There is another procedure for reporting abuse to the police without notifying the parents when there is suspicion that the child may be harmed by the person responsible for him or her. In the avoidant or active approaches, the kindergarten teacher acts independently and as an individual.

It was also found that kindergarten teachers sometimes changed their coping style. For example, professional training led some to shift from the individual-active approach to an approach of working in cooperation with others. Witnessing a child being punished by a parent, or disappointment with the system, led to shifting from an active to avoidant approach.

In conclusion, interaction with parents regarding known or suspected CSA is sensitive and complex, raising many dilemmas and motivational barriers that prevent reporting. Kindergarten teachers’ coping approaches are not uniform. Individual and structural factors shape their emotions, perceptions, and social, cultural, environmental, professional, and personal narratives, and hence impact which course of action they will choose. Therefore, one must take a broad look at the complexities involved in meetings between kindergarten teachers and parents, and consider the diverse personal and professional factors. Every culture has conflicts, dilemmas and difficulties surrounding this type of interaction with parents, and therefore it is not accurate to look only at the society and its culture and norms. Further, the society does not dictate the dynamics of reporting to parents. There are many relevant issues such as: the kindergarten teacher’s personality, professional knowledge and security, personal ability, support circles, past experiences, perceptions of obligation and responsibility, personal encounter with sexual trauma, attitudes towards sexuality in general and among young children in particular, the community in which the kindergarten teacher works and lives, previous relationships with the parents, communication patterns, etc.

**Recommendations**

Many of the personal, social, and professional factors that shape how kindergarten teachers with CSA may be changed. More studies are needed to examine their experiences and perceptions regarding how to address CSA, because a deeper understanding of these issues may help identify the challenges to optimal intervention. On a practical level, it is recommended to implement processes that will strengthen and improve teachers’ capabilities and sense of responsibility with regard to known or suspected CSA.

A professional support network should be developed, to alleviate kindergarten teachers’ sense of isolation and sole responsibility. This network would include a professional who is available for consultation and assistance, ongoing support from colleagues during normal work days, and increased hours of the therapeutic staff. Since most intervention programs for CSA are aimed at school-age children (Manheim et al., 2019), there is a need for dedicated, practical trainings and professional development, for those working with young children, including kindergarten teachers, teaching assistants, apprentices, and paramedical staff. Such training should cover topics such as the etiology and consequences of sexual abuse. The Director-General’s circular refers to kindergarten teachers as a unique professional sector, and outlines how they should act in cases of sexual abuse in early childhood. The most recent Director-General’s circular, issued in 2008, applies to all educators, and its administrative, criminal, therapeutic, and educational aspects are not different for kindergarten teachers. These circulars and laws must be accessible and reinforced in continuing professional training courses, so as to enable uniform implementation and provide external support for kindergarten teachers and guarantee their personal security when interacting with parents. Moreover, community cultural norms must be treated with sensitivity; this is not the case for the existing circular. It is further recommended to cultivate support from respected community members and professionals who can serve as agents of social and cultural change.

Kindergartens should be included in the education system’s youth division, so they have access to a multi-professional team. Other changes would involve implementing a broad policy involving social workers and psychologists, which is anchored in operating procedures, communication, and trusting relationships.

In contrast to widespread perceptions, professional reference to sexual abuse among preschool children should be clearly defined as “abusive sexual behavior”. This will dispel the kindergarten teachers’ fear of defining the incident as abuse (taking the cautious approach), and will lessen the harsh social reaction and stigmatization. Finally, kindergarten teachers should not be assigned to work in the communities where they live, so as to create and maintain professional boundaries.

**Study Limitations**

Along with the strengths of the study, there are also a number of limitations. The findings are based on the interviewees’ personal narratives and perceptions and therefore cannot be generalized to all kindergarten teachers who face meetings with parents to report CSA. The study referred to the Jewish and Arab population of Israel, without looking at the religious, social, cultural and political differences and diversity within these societies; future studies should refer to the differences between subcultures. Additionally, a comparison should be made between the Arab population and the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population, which also has conservative characteristics and “strict” boundaries regarding sexuality.

The study referred simultaneously to two areas with different characteristics: suspicion of sexual abuse of children by adults and abusive sexual activity between children. Each of these involves unique dynamics. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a follow-up study that focuses on each of these phenomena separately. Further, the study did not distinguish between known and suspected CSA. Future studies could look at how kindergarten teachers relate to events that definitely occurred and those about which they have doubts.

It is recommended to explore kindergarten teachers’ struggles and difficulties in relating to the parents after the incident is reported to the authorities. As in this study, there should be a multicultural comparison regarding their preconceived ideas and assumptions. This would clarify if there is a gap between the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of what the consequences of reporting will be, and its actual impacts and consequences for them. A future study should examine multicultural aspects of kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of their responsibility regarding sexual abuse that takes place in the kindergarten. Finally, a study should be conducted that differentiates between experienced kindergarten teachers’ attitudes of regarding CSA and the attitudes of those who are just beginning to work in the field.

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