

EXAMINATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' COMPASSION AND FEAR OF COMPASSION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion. The sample of this survey study consisted of 274 preschool teachers. Personal Information Form, Adult Compassion Scale, and Fear of Compassion Scale were used as data collection tools. Data analysis showed that the compassion level of the preschool teachers was high whereas their fear of compassion level was low. It was also found that the compassion of preschool teachers did not differ significantly based on their gender, age, marital status, educational level, having children, having a pet, having someone to care for at home other than children and their place of residence. Emotional compassion level of preschool teachers who were married and had children was higher than the emotional compassion level of their colleagues who were single and did not have any children. Compassion level of teachers who had 6 to 10 year-professional seniority was significantly higher than their colleagues who had 0 to 5 year-professional seniority. It was found that the fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers did not differ significantly based on their demographic characteristics. Also, a negative significant relationship was found between preschool teachers' compassion and their fear of compassion. Based on the research findings, it can be suggested that, preschool teachers can be trained on compassion-based activities and compassion can be integrated into daily activities in preschool classrooms. Transferring their knowledge on compassion as a behavior to their classroom activities will help children to take those acts as a role model.

Keywords: compassion, fear of compassion, preschool teachers

INTRODUCTION

Being compassionate is desirable for people from the existence of humanity. However, the increment in negative events such as disasters, wars, famines, infectious diseases, violence, economic crises and migration put individuals in a disadvantaged position and increased the need for compassion even more (Yağan & Sak, 2023). Compassion, which stands out as one of the positive emotions that positive psychology is interested in today, can be considered as a concept that is given importance and benefited from the fields such as religion, education, health systems, justice and mental health (Strauss et al., 2016).

In religious traditions around the world and in the fields of justice, health and education, compassion is regarded as a valuable and important construct (Strauss et al., 2016). It has been stated that compassion is an emotion that emerges when witnessing another's distress and prompts the person to help (Goetz et al., 2010). Compassion is not only felt toward another person; but also, being understanding and kind to oneself during difficult times and painful processes is also expressed within the concept of self-compassion (the state of being compassionate towards oneself) (Neff, 2003a; 2003b). In summary, the concept of compassion has been defined as feeling sorry for one's or others' pain/difficulties and taking action to reduce these pains/difficulties (Nas & Sak, 2020). Compassion is an awareness of one's own or someone else's suffering, combined with a desire to act to alleviate it, that combines cognition, emotion, behavior, and motivation (Nas & Sak, 2021a, p.1).

Compassion is a process consisting of five elements; starting with recognizing pain, understanding the universality of suffering, empathizing with others who are suffering, dealing with disturbing emotions (such as anger and fear) while responding to the sufferer(s); and concluding with having the motivation to take action to alleviate the pain (Strauss et al., 2016). All these elements mean that compassion includes cognitive, emotional, behavioural, purposive and motivational processes (Nas & Sak, 2023).

It has been found that compassion (Nas & Sak, 2020), which is explained as a person's awareness of the negative situation (problem) experienced by another person and exhibiting some positive behaviours in order to solve this problem through helping the person, affects many psychological and social situations (Nas et al., 2021). It can be said that compassion is a factor that reduces people's negative moods and the emergence of situations such as stress, anxiety, depression and interpersonal conflict (Nas, 2021). Compassion can be effective in reducing destructive behaviours (Ribeiro da Silva et al., 2019), negative emotions (Salazar, 2016) and coping with stressful situations (Eldor, 2018). It is also stated that compassion is effective in improving social support (Cosley et al., 2010) and well-being (Jazaieri et al., 2014) while it can be considered as an effective variable in preventing aggressive behaviour (Genç, 2018) and can help to the improvement of social justice (Williams, 2008).

Compassionate individuals can show social support to others as well as empathizing with others (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Therefore, it can be said that compassion has an important effect on the individual's mental health, both in their social relations and in the social context (Nas et al., 2021). Despite these positive effects of compassion, sometimes people are afraid of being compassionate. Individuals sometimes experience difficulty in behaving compassionately both toward themselves and other people that is explained as fear of compassion (Gilbert et al., 2011). Fear of compassion is the fear of negative emotions and situations that a person may experience resulting from being compassionate towards himself or others (Çevik & Tanhan, 2020; Gilbert, 2009a; 2009b).

Fear of compassion is addressed in three dimensions. The first dimension is when the individual fears being compassionate towards others. The individual is afraid that people will constantly take advantage of him which brings the feeling of being used and has worries that people will become dependent on him contingent on being compassionate. A person who is afraid of being compassionate towards others, considers being compassionate to be an indicator of weakness. In addition, when he is

compassionate, he may think that people may abuse his compassion and therefore he may get harmed at the end (Çevik & Tanhan, 2020; Gilbert et al., 2011; Whetsel, 2017). The second dimension of fear of compassion is the fear of compassion from others. The individual, who is afraid of being treated compassionately, has an insecure feeling towards other people. He worries that people will not express compassion towards him when he needs it. Instead, he thinks that people will treat him kindly and compassionately only when people have a benefit from him (Gilbert & Choden, 2014). For this reason, the individual does not trust the compassion that someone else can show him, and therefore he may perceive the compassion expressed from someone else as a threat. In addition, some individuals in this situation may think that they do not deserve compassion from others (Çevik & Tanhan, 2020; Whetsel, 2017).

The third dimension of fear of compassion is the fear of compassion for self (Asano et al., 2017; Gilbert et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2011; Watson, 2018). The individual, who has the fear of compassion for self, may think that he does not deserve compassion or may perceive it as a weakness. Fear of compassion for self may also be related to situations such as ignoring being compassionate (Gilbert et al., 2011). In addition, the individual in this situation is afraid that if he feels compassion for self, he will become a weak person. He may think that when he expresses compassion for self, he would become someone he does not desire to be. Therefore, being kind and forgiving towards himself may not be considered as right and beneficial for that individual (Gilbert & Choden, 2014).

People are becoming more and more insensitive to someone else's perspective and negative life experiences. It is seen that people move away from dealing with other people's problems, listening to them and helping them. One of the places where compassion is low and not seen at an adequate level is schools where there is an environment of undesirable behaviours and violence. Many children in early childhood classrooms have aggressive, and bullying behaviour patterns (Arumugam, et al., 2020). Undesirable behaviours such as peer bullying, violence, maltreatment, physical and psychological abuse in schools are all linked to compassion. Behaviour problems experienced by children in early childhood programs are considered as disruptive which interrupt the teaching and learning processes (Arumugam, et al., 2020).

The fact that compassion can be developed and teachers can be role models for children in displaying compassionate behaviours, emerged the need for teachers being compassionate. It is also emphasized in the literature that, teachers' attitudes can be considered as an important determiner of the quality of the education provided by the teacher (Vezne & Sardohan Yıldırım, 2022). Therefore, teachers' compassion levels should be studied with different constructs.

However, the possibility that teachers may also have fears in being compassionate is an important obstacle for being compassionate. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the fear of compassion of teachers working in educational institutions (Yagan & Sak, 2023).

Schools are not just places where academic knowledge is taught to children. At the same time, schools are the places where the values that need to be gained in terms of being a good person and a good citizen are given to children. However, in scientific studies, it is stated that the fear of compassion develops in professions that are working

with people, especially in the education and health sectors. In other words, people working in those professions may avoid being compassionate (Yağan & Sak, 2023). Therefore, it can be said that there is a need for studies to determine the compassion and fear of compassion of teachers working in educational institutions.

When we investigate the literature on compassion in the field of education, it is generally seen that, focus is mostly on teachers (Aydemir, 2018a; Bayrak & Akdemir, 2021; Bayırlı, 2020; Kırıl & Başdağ, 2017) and secondary school-high school-university students (Akdeniz, 2014; Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 2020; Alibekiroğlu et al., 2018; Altıntaş, 2020; Aydemir, 2018b; Durmuş & Gürkan, 2005; Nas et al., 2022; Nas et al., 2021; Sarı & Conoley, 2019). Although the importance of early childhood experiences in human life is understood, it is seen that there is almost no measurement tool (Nas & Sak, 2021b) or studies focusing on compassion levels of preschool children (Gül, 2019). Besides, no study has been encountered within the literature that addresses preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion as role models for preschool children.

Compassion is an essential feeling that teachers should hold while performing their profession. Teaching is a sacred profession that requires patience, conscience and talent. Research shows that compassion is a teachable value. Therefore, since teachers are considered as role models for their students in every subject, their compassionate behaviours have a potential to serve as a model and be a guide for their students to become compassionate (Kızılkaya & Sak, 2023). Young children are separated from their families for the first time and spend most of the day in preschool contexts with preschool teachers. Therefore, preschool teachers are expected to be compassionate. However, it is thought that fear of compassion may prevent teachers from being compassionate. Individuals with a high fear of compassion may avoid being compassionate or refrain from showing such compassion as they do feel (Sak et al., 2023). It can be said that compassion and fear of compassion are located on the opposite poles. Therefore, examining the compassion and fear of compassion of preschool teachers that are working with young children, is not only important for children to gain the value of compassion but also crucial in learning to be compassionate in preschool education institutions. Within the framework of this research, it is aimed to examine the compassion and fear of compassion of preschool teachers. For this purpose, answers to the following questions will be sought:

- i. What are the compassion levels of preschool teachers?
- ii. What is the fear of compassion levels of preschool teachers?
- iii. Does the compassion of preschool teachers differ according to their gender, age, marital status, professional seniority, place of residence, educational level, having children, having a pet and having someone to care for at home other than children?
- iv. Do preschool teachers' fear of compassion differ according to their gender, age, marital status, professional seniority, place of residence, educational level, having children, having a pet and having a family member who is cared for at home other than children?
- v. Is there a relationship between preschool teachers' compassion and their fear of compassion?

METHODOLOGY

In survey research, researchers use the processing steps used in quantitative research to describe the attitudes, views, behaviours or characteristics of the sample selected from the population (Creswell, 2012). In this research, data is collected in order to describe current situations, make comparisons of current situations, or identify existing relationships between certain events or situations without any manipulation (Cohen et al., 2007). This study is a survey based quantitative research because it was aimed to examine preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion without any manipulation.

Participants

Totally 274 scales filled out appropriately were used in data analysis. Participants' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Characteristics	n (%)
Gender	Female	200 (73)
	Male	74 (27)
Age	26 and younger	30 (10.09)
	27-31	112 (40.9)
	32-36	59 (21.5)
	37 and older	73 (26.6)
Marital status	Married	143 (52.2)
	Single	131 (47.8)
Professional seniority	0-5 year	115 (42)
	6-10 year	78 (28.5)
	11-15 year	41 (15)
	16 and more	40 (14.6)
Place of residence	Village	58 (21.2)
	District	90 (32.8)
	City	85 (31)
	Metropolis	41 (15)
Educational level	Undergraduate	233 (85)
	Graduate	41 (15)
Having children	Yes	112 (40.9)
	No	162 (59.1)
Having a pet	Yes	33 (12)
	No	241 (88)
Having a family member who is cared for at home other than children	Yes	40 (14.6)
	No	234 (85.4)

As seen in Table 1, approximately three quarters of the participants are women and participants are mostly between the ages of 27-31. About half of them are married. Participants mostly have an undergraduate degree and 0-5 year-professional seniority.

Approximately more than half of participant teachers live in towns and cities. More than half of them do not have children while most of the participants do not have a pet and do not live with a family member (father, mom, grandma, grandfather etc.) to care for at home other than children.

Instruments

Personal Information Form, Adult Compassion Scale and Fear of Compassion Scale were used as data collection tools in this research.

Personal Information Form

It includes information such as gender, age, marital status, place of residence, education level, professional seniority, having children, having a pet and having a family member who is cared for at home other than children.

Adult Compassion Scale

It was developed by Nas and Sak (2022) to measure the compassion levels of adults. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 20 items and four sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions are: Behavioral Compassion, Emotional Compassion, Cognitive Compassion, and Motivational Compassion. Based on the Exploratory Factor Analysis results, these four sub-dimensions explained 64.95% of the total variance. It was determined that the fit values determined by Confirmatory Factor Analysis showed good fit. ($\chi^2/df= 2.291$; RMSEA=.057, RMR=.024, IFI=.95, CFI=.95, NFI=.92, RFI=.90, GFI=.91, AGFI=.89, SRMR=.060). There is no reverse item in the scale. The internal consistency coefficient of the Compassion Scale for Adults was determined as .92 for the total scale. As a result, the scale is a valid and reliable scale that can determine the compassion levels of adults.

Fear of Compassion Scale

It was developed by Nas and Sak (2021b) to measure adults' fear of compassion. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale with two sub-dimensions consisting of 20 items. The first 11 items of the scale are in the first sub-dimension (Fear of Compassion to Others) and the last 9 items are in the second sub-dimension (Fear of Self-Compassion). The two-factor structure (Fear of Compassion to Others and Fear of Self-Compassion explained) explained 60.19% of the total variance. Based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis, the obtained fit values ($\chi^2/df= 1.912$; RMSEA=.057, RMR=.032, IFI=.96, CFI=.96, NFI=.92, RFI=.91, GFI=.90, AGFI=.87, SRMR=.045) showed good fit. There is no reverse item in the scale. The scores that can be obtained from the scale can vary between 20-100. The higher score is, the higher fear of compassion is.

Data Collection Process

All data collection tools have been transferred to the online google form in order to collect data more easily and in an environmentally friendly way. Participants were invited to the study through social media platforms, announcements given by the faculty members of some universities for the students enrolled in master's programs. The snowball sampling was employed for data collection. Preschool teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were asked to fill in the scale items after marking the online consent form.

The Context of Early Childhood Education in Turkey

The Preschool Education Program is administered by the Ministry of National Education of Turkey (MONE, 2013) for 36 - 72-month-old children. This national preschool education program of Turkey has been developed in order to ensure that children attending pre-school education have a healthy process of development accompanied by enhanced learning experiences. It is of utmost importance to support children in various developmental areas (physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language) as well as helping them to acquire self-care skills in this program. The Program adopts a "developmental", "cyclical" and "eclectical" structure, which focuses on developmental features, interests and needs and environmental conditions of children. In order to become a Kindergarten Teacher in Turkey, it is necessary to be graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Early Childhood Education Departments of universities, which provide four-year education. In some institutions, graduates of child development and education departments can also be employed. Within a four-year bachelor degree education, early childhood teacher candidates are equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge related with child development, preschool curriculum and have taken courses on teaching profession, field education and general culture.

Data Analysis

First of all, the assumptions required for the use of parametric tests have been tested. As related to normal distribution, the skewness and kurtosis values of the scores were calculated. As a measure of the assumption of normality, it is acceptable for the skewness and kurtosis coefficients to be between -1 and +1 (Morgan et al., 2004).

Table 2

Skewness and Kurtosis Values Regarding Normality of Data

		n=274	Skewness	Kurtosis
Adult Compassion Scale	Behavioral Compassion		-.423	-.401
	Emotional Compassion		-.845	.387
	Cognitive Compassion		-.803	-.193
	Motivational Compassion		-.466	-.382
	Total Compassion Scale		-.538	.197
Fear of Compassion Scale	Fear of Compassion to Others		.512	-.204
	Fear of Self-Compassion		.906	-.009

continued

Total Fear of Compassion Scale	.718	.703
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Kolmogrov-Smirnov test's results showed that data were distributed normally ($n=274$, $p > .05$). As a result of this analysis, parametric tests were used. After the descriptive statistics were calculated, independent-samples t-testing was used to make comparisons between two groups' variables. One way-ANOVA was used to make comparisons between three and more groups' variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between preschool teachers' compassion and their fear of compassion. In reporting the findings, only the sub-dimensions were reported for the variables with a significant difference. For the variables without significant difference, sub-dimensions were not reported.

RESULTS

Compassion Levels of Preschool Teachers

Considering the lowest 20 and the highest 100 points that can be obtained from the Compassion Scale, it can be said that the compassion level of the preschool teachers is high because the mean score of the preschool teachers from the scale was 85 (Table 3).

Table 3

Preschool Teachers' Descriptive Statistics Related to Compassion

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Behavioral Compassion	274	24,00	45,00	37,63	5,13
Emotional Compassion	274	10,00	20,00	17,70	2,21
Cognitive Compassion	274	8,00	15,00	13,19	1,80
Motivational Compassion	274	10,00	20,00	16,95	2,43
Total Compassion Scale	274	55,00	100,00	85,49	10,03

Fear of Compassion Levels of Preschool Teachers

Considering that the lowest 20 and the highest 100 points that can be obtained from the Fear of Compassion Scale, it can be said that the fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers is low because the mean score of the preschool teachers from the scale is 31 (Table 4).

Table 4

Preschool Teachers' Descriptive Statistics Related to Fear of Compassion

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fear of Compassion to Others	274	11,00	34,00	18,89	5,28
Fear of Self-Compassion	274	9,00	23,00	12,19	3,27
Total Fear of Compassion Scale	274	20,00	62,00	31,40	7,79

Compassion of Preschool Teachers according to Their Gender, Educational Level, Having a Pet and Having Someone to Care for at Home Other than Children

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare compassion of preschool teachers based on their gender, educational level, having a pet and having a family member who is cared for at home other than children. Analysis showed that there was not a significant difference based on their gender ($t_{272}=1.674$, $p>.05$), their educational level ($t_{272}=-1,553$, $p>.05$), having a pet ($t_{272}=1,999$, $p>.05$) and having someone to care for at home other than children ($t_{272}=1,028$, $p>.05$) (Table 5).

Table 5

T-Test Results of Compassion of Preschool Teachers Based on Their Gender, Educational Level, Having Pet and Having a Family Member Who is Cared for at Home Other than Children

		n	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Gender	Female	200	85,28	9,77	.576	.565
	Male	74	86,06	10,75		
Educational level	Undergraduate	233	85,09	10,24	-1.553	.122
	Graduate	41	87,73	8,48		
Having a pet	Yes	33	85,24	8,61	-.153	.879
	No	241	85,52	10,22		
Having a family member who is cared for at home other than children	Yes	40	87,00	8,36	1,028	.305
	No	234	85,23	10,28		

Compassion of Preschool Teachers according to Their Marital Status

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare compassion of preschool teachers based on their marital status. Analysis showed that there was only a significant difference in emotional sub-dimension of compassion scale based on their marital status ($t_{272}=-2.409$, $p<.05$). Married preschool teachers' emotional compassion level ($=18.00$) was higher than single preschool teachers' emotional compassion level ($=17.36$) (Table 6).

Table 6

T-Test Results of Compassion of Preschool Teachers Based on Their Marital Status

Compassion	Marital Status	n	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Behavioral Compassion	Married	143	38,01	5,10	-1.266	.207
	Single	131	37,22	5,15		
Emotional Compassion	Married	143	18,00	2,14	-2.409	.017
	Single	131	17,36	2,25		
Cognitive Compassion	Married	143	13,32	1,83	-1.296	.196
	Single	131	13,04	1,77		

continued

Motivational	Married	143	16,94	2,55	.112	.911
Compassion	Single	131	16,97	2,30		
Total	Married	143	86,29	9,96	-1.383	.168
Compassion	Single	131	84,61	10,07		
Scale						

Compassion of Preschool Teachers according to The Variable of Having Children

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare compassion of preschool teachers based on the variable of having children. Analysis showed that there was only a significant difference in emotional sub-dimension of compassion scale based on the variable of having children ($t_{272}=-2.604$, $p<.05$). Emotional compassion level of preschool teachers who had children ($\bar{x}=18.11$) was higher than emotional compassion level of preschool teachers who did not have children ($\bar{x}=17.41$) (Table 7).

Table 7

T-Test Results of Compassion of Preschool Teachers Based on The Variable of Having Children

Compassion	Having Children	n	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Behavioral	Yes	112	37,94	5,10	.824	.410
	No	162	37,42	5,15		
Emotional	Yes	112	18,11	2,09	2.604	.010
	No	162	17,41	2,26		
Cognitive	Yes	112	13,29	1,83	.771	.442
	No	162	13,12	1,78		
Motivational	Yes	112	17,00	2,50	.277	.782
	No	162	16,92	2,39		
Total	Yes	112	86,36	9,95	1.199	.232
	No	162	84,88	10,07		
Scale						

Compassion of Preschool Teachers according to Their Age, Professional Seniority and Place of Residence

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' compassion across age. Analysis showed that there were no significant inter-group differences linked to age ($F_{3/270}= 1.471$, $p>.05$) (Table 8).

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Compassion Levels by Age Groups

Age	n	\bar{X}	Sd	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: 26 and younger	30	84,36	10,73	3/270	1,471	,223	-
B: 27-31	112	84,44	10,43				
C: 32-36	59	85,62	9,62				
D: 37 and older	73	87,45	9,31				

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' compassion across professional seniority. Analysis showed that there was a significant inter - group difference linked to professional seniority ($F_{3/270} = 2.591$, $p < .05$). Bonferroni testing further revealed that Group B's mean score ($\bar{X} = 87.65$) was significantly higher than Group A's ($\bar{X} = 83.66$) (Table 9).

Table 9

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Compassion Levels by Professional Seniority

Professional Seniority	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: 0-5 year	115	83,66	10,45	3/270	2.591	0.53	A-B
B: 6-10 year	78	87,65	9,51				
C: 11-15 year	41	85,85	10,30				
D: 16 and more	40	86,15	8,839				

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' compassion across place of residence. Analysis showed that there were no significant inter- group differences linked to place of residence ($F_{3/270} = 1.454$, $p > .05$) (Table 10).

Table 10

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Compassion Levels by Place of Residence

Place of Residence	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: Village	58	83,93	10,10	3/270	1.454	.228	-
B: District	90	84,82	9,66				
C: City	85	87,22	11,09				
D: Metropolis	41	85,58	8,00				

Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion according to Their Gender, Marital Status, Educational Level, Having Children, Having A Pet and Having a Family Member Who is Cared for at Home Other than Children

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare preschool teachers' fear of compassion based on their gender, marital status, educational level, having children, having a pet and having a family member who is cared for at home other than children. Analysis showed that there was not a significant difference based on their gender ($t_{272}=0.087$, $p>.05$) their marital status ($t_{272}=.743$, $p>.05$), their educational level ($t_{272}=0.78$, $p>.05$), having children ($t_{272}=-1.634$, $p>.05$), having a pet ($t_{272}=.677$, $p>.05$) and having a family member who is cared for at home other than children ($t_{272}=.917$, $p>.05$) (Table 11).

Table 11

T-Test Results of Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion Based on Their Gender, Marital Status Educational Level, Having Children, Having A Pet and Having a family member who is cared for at home other than children.

Fear of Compassion		n	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Gender	Female	200	31,43	7,94	-.087	.931
	Male	74	31,33	7,42		
Marital Status	Married	143	31,06	7,71	.743	.458
	Single	131	31,77	7,90		
Educational Level	Undergraduate	233	31,42	7,66	.078	.938
	Graduate	41	31,31	8,60		
Having Children	Yes	112	30,48	7,36	-1.634	.103
	No	162	32,04	8,04		
Having a Pet	Yes	33	33,36	8,11	.677	.124
	No	241	31,13	7,73		
Having a family member who is cared for at home other than children	Yes	40	32,45	7,17	.917	.360
	No	234	31,22	7,90		

Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion according to Their Age, Professional Seniority and Place of Residence

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' fear of compassion across age. Analysis showed that there were no significant inter-group differences linked to age ($F_{3/270}=1.187$, $p>.05$) (Table 12).

Table 12

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion Levels by Age Groups

Age	n	\bar{X}	Sd	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: 26 and younger	30	30,93	7,01	3/270	1.187	.315	-
B: 27-31	112	32,45	8,16				
C: 32-36	59	30,40	7,57				
D: 37 and older	73	30,79	7,66				

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' fear of compassion across professional seniority. Analysis showed that there were no significant inter- group differences linked to professional seniority ($F_{3/270} = 2.510$, $p > .05$) (Table 13).

Table 13

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion Levels by Professional Seniority

Professional Seniority	n	\bar{X}	Sd	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: 0-5 year	115	31,48	8,22	3/270	2.510	0.59	-
B: 6-10 year	78	32,01	7,11				
C: 11-15 year	41	28,56	6,87				
D: 16 and more	40	32,90	8,25				

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the sampled preschool teachers' fear of compassion across place of residence. Analysis showed that there were no significant inter- group differences linked to place of residence ($F_{3/270} = .011$, $p > .05$) (Table 14).

Table 14

One-Way ANOVA Results, Preschool Teachers' Fear of Compassion by Place of Residence

Place of Residence	n	\bar{X}	Sd	df	F	P	Significant difference
A: Village	58	31,43	8,11	3/270	.011	.998	-
B: District	90	31,38	7,77				
C: City	85	31,31	7,61				
D: Metropolis	41	31,58	8,05				

Relationship between Preschool Teachers' Compassion and their Fear of Compassion

The relationship between the preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion was examined by Pearson correlation analysis, it showed a significant difference. A negative significant relationship was found between preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion ($r=-.478$, $p<.01$). In other words, it can be said that if the preschool teachers' compassion increases, their fear of compassion will decrease (Table 15).

Table 15

Relationships Among the Preschool Teachers' Compassion and Their Fear of Compassion

Variables	Compassion	Fear of Compassion
Compassion	1	-.478**
Fear of Compassion		1

** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

At the end of the data analysis, it was determined that the compassion level of the preschool teachers was high. Considering the importance of the preschool period in human life, this finding is pleasing for preschool children. Preschoolers need compassionate teachers because compassionate teachers can be supportive as role models for children to be compassionate. In the literature, teachers' compassion levels were found to be high in some studies conducted in Türkiye (Nas & Sak, 2023).

It was also found that the fear of compassion level of preschool teachers was low and there was a negative significant relationship between preschool teachers' compassion and their fear of compassion. These two findings are parallel to the findings in literature. As stated before, compassion and fear of compassion are located opposite poles (Sak et al., 2023). Therefore, it is an expected finding that the fear of compassion is low due to the high level of compassion of preschool teachers. In other words, since preschool teachers are compassionate, their fear of compassion is low.

Another finding of the study was that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on their gender. This finding is parallel with the finding of some studies. For example, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) reported that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their gender while Yağan and Sak (2023) found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their gender. As opposed to these findings, Aydemir (2018a) found that female teachers are more compassionate than their male colleagues. Sousa et al. (2017) stated that compassion was higher in female participants. Also, Harris (2017) determined that men's fear of compassion is higher than women's fear of compassion. Preschool education is a female-dominated profession (Sak, 2018). As a part of preschool education, it is necessary to provide care to children, to be patient, understanding and compassionate.

There is an expectation that these characteristics are more in mothers, and accordingly, female preschool teachers are expected to be more compassionate. In this study, both the levels of compassion and fear of compassion did not show a significant difference according to the gender of preschool teachers. It is thought that both male and female teachers working with preschool children do the same job, do similar activities with children, and have similar communication and interactions with children, and their compassion levels and fears of compassion are similar.

It has been also found that while married preschool teachers' emotional compassion level was higher than their single colleagues' emotional compassion level, there was not a significant difference in fear of compassion level of teachers based on their marital status. There was no significant difference according to marital status of preschool teachers in the Behavioural, Cognitive, Motivational Compassion sub-dimensions and total compassion scale. However, a significant difference was found only in the emotional compassion sub-dimension. It can be said that marital status is not a determinant in both the compassion and fear of compassion of preschool teachers. This finding is parallel with the finding of some studies. For example, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) determined that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their marital status. Yağan and Sak (2023) found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their marital status.

Findings showed that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on their educational level. This finding is parallel with the finding of some studies. For example, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) reported that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their educational level while Yağan and Sak (2023) found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their educational level. Educational level of preschool teachers was compared as undergraduate and graduate. Therefore, considering that the teachers have at least a bachelor's degree, it can be said that the level of education is not an effective factor on compassion and fear of compassion.

At the end of the data analysis, it was found that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on the variable of having children. However, a significant difference was found only in the emotional compassion sub-dimension. Emotional compassion level of preschool teachers who had children was higher than the emotional compassion level of their colleagues who did not have children. While it is expected that preschool teachers' status of having children will affect their compassion levels, in this study, the status of having children did not have an effect on total compassion and fear of compassion levels. It can be related to the fact that preschool teachers see many children in their classrooms as their own children. It is thought that preschool teachers who do not have children may have met their need for child love from their own students in their classrooms. Also, this finding is parallel with the finding of some studies. For example, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) determined that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to the variable of having children. Yağan and Sak (2023) also found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their status of having children.

It was found that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion levels of the preschool teachers based on the variable of having a pet. This finding is supported by some studies. For example, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) determined that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their having a pet. In addition, Yağan and Sak (2023) found that the fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their status of having a pet. Although it is expected that having a pet will activate people's feelings of compassion, it was found that having a pet did not cause any significant difference in compassion and fear of compassion in teachers in this study.

Findings of the study showed that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on the variable of having a family member who is cared for at home other than children. As parallel with this finding, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) determined that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to the variable of having a family member who is cared for at home other than children. In a similar vein, Yağan and Sak (2023) also found that the fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to the variable of having a family member who is cared for at home other than children. It is thought that having someone to take care of at home other than children may be a factor affecting and activating people's compassion.

However, in this study, it was determined that having someone to look after the children at home did not significantly differ preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion. It was found that there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on their age. This finding is parallel with the finding of Kızılkaya and Sak's (2023) study reporting that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their age. Yağan and Sak (2023) and Harris (2017) also found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their age. As people age, their level of compassion is expected to increase. However, in this study, no significant difference was found according to the age variable.

According to findings of the study, there was not a significant difference at compassion and fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers based on their place of residence. As parallel with this findings, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) reported that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their place of residence. However, Yağan and Sak (2023) found that the fear of compassion of teachers living in big cities was statistically significantly higher than the fear of compassion of teachers living in villages. People living in big cities are expected to be less sensitive to people in need of help around them. However, the variable of place of residence in this study did not show a significant difference on teachers' compassion and fear of compassion.

It was found that the compassion level of preschool teachers who had 6 to 10 - year professional seniority was significantly higher than their colleagues' who had 0 to 5 -year professional seniority. Unlike this finding, Kızılkaya and Sak (2023) determined that teachers' compassion levels did not show a significant difference according to their professional seniority. However, Aydemir (2018a) determined that the level of compassion of teachers differed significantly according to their professional seniority.

The current finding may be related to the fact that teachers act a little more strictly when they start their new career because of providing effective classroom management, being taken seriously by parents, etc. However, they may start to perform more compassionate actions in parallel with gaining experience. On the other hand, the fear of compassion level of the preschool teachers did not differ significantly based on their professional seniority. Parallel with this finding, Yağan and Sak (2023) found that fear of compassion level of teachers did not show a significant difference according to their professional seniority. Fear of compassion is often associated with negative situations as a result of compassionate actions. It is thought that this result is due to the fact that the compassionate actions of the preschool teachers in the preschool classes did not result in a negative response from the children, parents and maybe their colleagues. Therefore, it can be said that there is no change in the fear of compassion in parallel with the increase in teachers' professional seniority.

CONCLUSION

It is a pleasing result that preschool teachers have high levels of compassion. However, it is also important to transfer this to the classroom as a behaviour and to be a role model for children. Children can learn to be compassionate by being giving an opportunity for such attempts. According to Legaspino and Varela (2023), children have a potential of thinking about others' welfare. Therefore, giving children an opportunity to involve in activities in which compassionate behaviors and skills are taught seem valuable. Teachers who engage in compassionate actions in the classroom may serve as a role model for children. For this purpose, preschool teachers can be trained on compassion-based activities. Compassion can be integrated into daily activities in preschool classrooms. Teachers can be encouraged to implement these types of activities inside and outside the classroom and to be role models for children.

This study has some limitations. For example, in this study, data were collected with quantitative data collection tools. In further studies, preschool teachers' compassion and fear of compassion can be examined through mixed design or qualitative studies. In this study, only compassion and compassion fears of preschool teachers were examined. In further studies, other variables such as preschool teachers' psychological resilience and professional satisfaction can be examined together with compassion. In addition, children have the capacity to express their knowledge, feelings, plans and actions (Legaspino & Varela, 2023). Through appropriate teaching strategies children can be involved in different activities to gather knowledge and skills even about disaster. Therefore, in future studies, compassion levels of preschool children can be evaluated. Furthermore, the compassion levels of preschool teachers and children in their classrooms can also be compared.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

No generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of the findings, or writing of this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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