

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE ON  
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA**

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The war and ethnic conflicts which prevailed in Sri Lanka over the last 20 years are likely to have created a “culture of violence” among its citizens. Children have been impacted by this violence both directly and indirectly. Preschool is usually a time for increasing school readiness, but children impacted by the war may have difficulty preparing for the social and academic expectations of school. The aim of the current study was to examine teacher perceptions pertaining to different types of violence in the lives of preschool children. A survey was conducted with 275 preschool teachers from 18 districts in Sri Lanka. In addition, 23 preschool teachers were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule. Qualitative analyses reveal that teachers observe many aggressive behaviours in preschool children, which they believe to be due to the impact of the ethnic violence. About 13% of preschool teachers surveyed considered ethnic violence a potential factor which leads to aggressive behaviours in preschool children, while 7% identified it as the most prominent factor leading to aggressive behaviours in preschool children. Of the preschool teachers interviewed, 39% said that aggression in preschool children has increased due to factors associated with the ethnic violence. Teachers also said that the nature of the impact of ethnic violence varied from depression to expressions of anger and irritability. In addition, they reported that preschool children displayed sophisticated, age inappropriate awareness of weapons. Teachers mentioned that children have become immune to aggressive acts and imitate them due to the frequent exposure to violent events such as bomb explosions. The findings clearly warrant further research in the area and an investigation into appropriate psychological and psychosocial interventions.