Psychological Security Among University Students: Highlighting Pre-Service Teachers of Children with Disabilities and Pre-School Children

Eman Al-Zboon

Ibrahim Jumia'an

Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood,
Hashemite University,
Zarqa, Jordan

DOI: https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2020-0062

Abstract

A survey of psychological security among pre-service teachers is significant for policy-makers in health and education services sectors to certify skilled teachers to work with children. So, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service special education and early childhood teachers. A descriptive method design was adopted. A survey was used to collect data about the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service teachers. Participants of the study were 216 special education and early childhood teachers. Results showed that teachers cited average levels of PS and 10.6% of all participants had a low level of PS. Teachers rated thinking about the future, life being interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. Results revealed no statistically significant mean differences due to gender, average achievement or religious commitment. Recommendations for field and future research are presented.

Keywords: psychological security, mental health, youth, special education, preschool, teacher

1. Introduction

Psychological Security (PS) is a central feature of mental health and is vital to shaping a healthy personality (Al-Agraa, 2005). The PS concept appears from the hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1943) that once security need are not met, a person may develop feelings of being threatened, may feel anxious and may not seek higher level needs.

Adolescence is considered a challenging phase of development characterised by insecurity (Brown & Clute, 2003). Many college students have psychological problems which may have interrupted their education (University of Maryland Counseling Center, 2011) due to numerous life transitions as well as stressors that could increase the risk of substance abuse (SA) (Hunt et al., 2010).

Jordanian studies have reported many challenges faced by pre-service teachers which could affect their PS, such as negative attitudes towards their specialisation (Al-Zboon, 2018), exposure to abuse during childhood (Al-Zboon, Ahmad & Al-Dababneh, 2015) and substance abuse (Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh, 2017). Many Jordanian studies have also (e.g., Al-Jaddou, 2015; Abu-Nair, 2016) indicated that humanistic specialist students suffer from a shortage of opportunities and services, marginalisation and negative attitudes. This status will negatively influence the quality of life of
future teachers, who will already experience burnout and chronic stress (Onder & Sari, 2009). This stress causes diseases and mental health problems, and sufferers become fatigued and may leave the job (Brown, Howcroft, & Jacobs, 2009).

Having a high level of PS is a characteristic of a teacher’s creative personality (Farella, 2010) and is connected with teachers’ performance (Hamre & Pianta, 2004) and the efficiency of the educational process. Achieving this environment requires teachers with acceptable PS levels, so, investigating PS prevalence during pre-service teacher training will offer vital information.

Some universities become actively involved in providing mental health services (MacKean, 2011; Al-Zboon, 2017). Programmes contain support services for students with mental health issues and counselling centres (Harris et al., 2010), which have accomplished much in supporting university students to complete their education (Perron et al., 2011). Unfortunately, there little such service for students in Jordanian universities, with a particular lack of mental health services and substance abuse education at university (Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh, 2017; Al-Zboon, 2017).

A survey of PS among pre-service teachers is significant for policy-makers in health and education services sectors to certify skilled teachers to work with children (Wilcox, Putnam, & Wigle, 2003). There is also a gap in knowledge of the prevalence of PS among university students, so we have to investigate this topic to offer robust data to assist in bridging this gap. This study reports the findings of a survey which aimed at exploring teachers’ PS by asking:

1- What is the level of PS among SE and ECE teachers?
2- Does the level of PS in teachers differ due to the teacher’s gender, achievement level, and religious commitment?

2. Contextual Framework

Jordan faces political and economic problems, which have increased recent years following the arrival of refugees from conflicts in bordering countries (Al Khatteeb, & Hadidi, 2015). This has affected the health and education services. Jordanian universities cannot afford to conduct PS programmes and give them low priority because of the economic situation (Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh, 2017); as Tumuti et al. (2014) reported, such programmes are extremely costly. This contextual atmosphere will negatively affect the PS, as it is a status in which individuals feel that their environment is safe and free from threat (Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, & Honigmann, 1945).

The Hashemite University has the Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood (QRFFC) which contain two departments: special education (SE) and early childhood (EC). Teacher preparation programmes at QRFFC are introduced at the undergraduate level as a four-year programme of study. These programmes prepare students to be teachers of children with disabilities or pre-school children. Much Jordanian research has reported the importance of the reformation process for these programmes (e.g., Al-Zboon, & Ahmad, 2015; Fayez, Takash & Al-Zboon, 2014).

3. Methods

3.1 Design

This study adopted a descriptive method design. A survey was used to collect data about the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service teachers. Independent variables of the study were teacher’s gender, achievement level, and religious commitment. The dependent variable was the level of psychological security.

3.2 Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select participants. The sample comprised 216 pre-service teachers (175 female and 41 male) who agreed to complete a questionnaire. Participants of the study
were 96 special education and 120 early childhood teachers (table 1). The study was considered by the research ethics principles of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite University and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration.

Table 1. Sample description

| Gender       | N  | Percentages |
|--------------|----|-------------|
| Female       | 175| 81%         |
| Male         | 41 | 19%         |
| Achievement  |    |            |
| Weak         | 47 | 21.8%       |
| Average      | 121| 56%         |
| High         | 48 | 22.2%       |
| Specialisation|   |            |
| Special education | 96 | 44.4% |
| Early childhood | 120| 55.6% |
| Religious commitment | | |
| Weak         | 26 | 12%         |
| Average      | 137| 63.4%       |
| High         | 53 | 24.5%       |
| Total        | 216| 100%        |

3.3 Instrumentation

The study used a modified PS scale (Shqaer, 2005) which contains 2 sections (socio-demographic variables and 33 scale items) based on a five-point Likert scale. The scale achieved an accepted validity and stability score. The designer of the scale gives reliability indicators for the total scale (0.89). In our study, Cronbach’s alpha was (0.94). To determine content validity, experts were asked to review the items and provide feedback to the authors. Items were revised until there was 100% agreement among the reviewers on both the content validity and the wording of each item and its suitability to the Jordanian context.

3.4 Research procedures

The survey was conducted during the second semester of 2017-2018. The questionnaires were distributed to students in their classes. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Data generated from the instrument was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Multiple statistical tests were conducted, namely frequency, percentages, means, t-tests and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). All research procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the research ethics standards of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite University/Jordan and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

4. Results

The total mean score for teachers’ responses on the scale that measures level of PS was 3.60, which indicates that teachers cited average levels of PS. Teachers rated ‘My respect for myself causes me to feel secure’ as a best item of the PS scale with a mean score of 4.6, followed by ‘the country’s security causes me to feel secure’ with a mean score of 4.56. Teachers rated ‘thinking about the future causes me to worry’ as the lowest item with a mean score (2.27), followed by ‘life is exhausting and boring’ (2.49), ‘I feel that love between people is rare’ (2.56), ‘I feel that life is big burden’ (2.96), and ‘I feel
fear of unknown things’ (2.37).

To determine the level of PS among teachers, the total score was calculated for each participant. Results revealed that 10.6 % of all participants had a low level of PS.

Regarding teachers’ gender, independent sample t-tests were conducted and showed no statistically significant mean differences between male and female respondents (t = 1.08, p < 0.71).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of PC According to Gender

| Gender | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|--------|-----|-------|----------------|
| Total  |     |       |                |
| Female | 175 | 3.6220| .48104         |
| Male   | 41  | 3.5327| .43912         |

Table 3. Independent Samples Test of the Effect of Gender on Teachers’ Perceptions of PC.

|                         | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | t-test for Equality of Means |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                         | F         | Sig. | t    | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |
|                         |          |      |     |     |               |                |                      | Lower                  | Upper                  |
| Equal variances assumed | .139     | .710 | 1.08 | 214 | .278           | .08927          | .08215               | -.07267                | .25120                 |
| Equal variances not assumed |        |      |     |     |               |                |                      |                       |                        |
| Total                   |          |      |     |     |               |                |                      |                       |                        |
|                         |          |      |     |     |               |                |                      |                       |                        |

A One-Way ANOVA was administered to help determine the influence of the average of achievement on the total PS subscale score. The omnibus ANOVA statistic for this analysis revealed no statistically significant differences that could be attributed to an average of achievement on the total PS variable for teachers (F = 1.91, p < 0.150).

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers’ Perceptions of PC According to Average of Achievement.

| Average of achievement | N   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Weak                   | 47  | 3.4950| .46095         |
| Averge                 | 121 | 3.6527| .46780         |
| High                   | 48  | 3.5927| .49154         |
| Total                  | 216 | 3.6051| .47369         |

Table 5. F-test of the Effect of Average of Achievement on Teachers’ Perceptions of PC.

|                         | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F   | Sig. |
|-------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|-----|------|
| Between Groups          | .852           | 2  | .426        | 1.915 | .150 |
| Within Groups           | 47.390         | 213| .222        |      |      |
| Total                   | 48.242         | 215|              |      |      |

With regard to religious commitment, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted. Results revealed no statistically significant mean differences due to religious commitment regarding PS as seen by teachers (F = 1.644, p =0.196).
Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers’ Perceptions of PC According to Religious Commitment

| Religious commitment | N  | Mean     | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------|----|----------|----------------|
| Weak                 | 26 | 3.4879   | .56019         |
| Average              | 137| 3.5953   | .45199         |
| High                 | 53 | 3.6878   | .47796         |
| Total                | 216| 3.6051   | .47369         |

Table 7. F-test of the Effect of Religious Commitment on Teachers’ Perceptions of PC.

|                      | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F   | Sig. |
|----------------------|----------------|----|-------------|-----|------|
| Between Groups       | .733           | 2  | .367        | 1.644 | .196 |
| Within Groups        | 47.508         | 213| .223        |      |      |
| Total                | 48.242         | 215|             |      |      |

5. Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service special education and early childhood teachers. Results indicate that participants cited an average level of PS. This is consistent with the results obtained by Bani Mustafa and Al-Sharefain (2013), which indicated that the level of PS among university students was moderate. The results also revealed that 10.6% of all participants had a low level of PS. This result is worrying. Identification of the students with low levels of PS is a primary step that will help the university deal with those students who will be the future teachers of two critical groups, children with disabilities and preschool children. Farella (2010) reported that having a high feeling of security is one of the characteristics of a teacher’s creative personality which is linked with the effectiveness of educational process. So, if the educational community wants a high-quality teacher and safe environment for children, it has to identify and deal with teachers with PS problems in the pre-service period. Unfortunately, Al-Zboon and Al-Dababneh (2017) reported a lack of psychological services in Jordanian universities, so universities should focus on providing suitable services for their students who are in a critical period of their lives.

Teachers rated thinking of the future, life being interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. This result is rational and could be attributed to the contextual factors of Jordanian people, such as high rates of unemployment, economics and the regional political situation. Thinking about the future for educational and humanistic specialist students could be explained by their suffering from negative attitudes, marginalisation in the community (Al-Jaddou, 2015; Abu-Nair, 2016), lack of job opportunities and low salary.

Results of t-tests revealed no statistically significant mean differences between men and women, average of achievement or religious commitment regarding PS as perceived by pre-service teachers. This result indicated that these are marginal factors in PS level. The literature differs in regard to the effect of these factors. For example, Bani Mustafa and Al-Sharefain (2013) showed differences in the level of PS due to educational achievement and gender, for high achievement and being male, respectively. While Omar (2014) showed that PS among secondary education students did not differ according to gender and specialisation.

However, this result is expected as the literature has reported that PS is connected with other factors, especially early childhood experiences, family state, economic and political factors. There is general agreement on several affecting factors in the PS, mainly genetics and the environment (Aql, 2009). Socialisation is considered an important factor as childhood experiences and parental patterns and styles of treatment of the child have an important effect on PS (Alnawasre, 2016). Another factor is a safe educational institution which contains suitable circumstances for the development of students’ psychophysical characteristics. So, this process is an exchangeable relationship; the
educa
tional environment which teachers bring up in the past will affect their PS, and this will impact
on their students’ PS in the future.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the results of this preliminary study highlight that teachers cited average levels of PS and 10.6
% of all participants had a low level of PS. Teachers rated thinking about the future, life being
interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. Results revealed
no statistically significant mean differences due to gender, average achievement or religious
commitment. This indicates that these are marginal factors in PS levels. There is a need to study the
contributing factors in PS level by qualitative methods. Evaluation of the availability and quality of
university psychological services has to be made, and there is an obvious need to continue this line of
investigation. It is also crucial to continue to study PS, which may be of particular importance to
countries newly concerned with providing a safe environment for children.

Teacher education programmes have to respond to teachers’ needs by providing psychological
programmes at universities for student with problems with PS, including SE and EC teachers who will
have a job that is known to be challenging, tense and stressful.

1. Compliance with ethical standards:

1.1. Conflict of interest: author A declares that she has no conflict of interest. Author B declares
that she has no conflict of interest.

1.2. Ethical approval: all procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the
research ethics standards of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite
University and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

References

Abu-Nair, N. (2016). The phenomenon of the University violence and the role of Universities in reducing the
spread from the point of view of the faculty members in Jordanian Universities. Derasat for Education,
43(1), 21–32.

Al Khateeb J, Hadidi M. (2015). Special Education in Arab Countries: Current Challenges. Int J Disabil Dev Educ.,
62, 518–30.

Al-Agraa, I. (2005). The feeling of psychological security and the impact of some factors to the students of Al-
Najah National University. Najah National University.

Al-Jaddou, E. (2015). Attitudes of special education students towards their major concerning a sample of students
at the World Islamic Sciences University in Jordan. Derasat for Education, 42(3), 36–47.

Alnawasre, Faisal (2016). The Relationship between the Feeling of Psychological Security among Talented
Adolescents at Gifted and Talented Schools in Ajloun Governorate in Jordan and Academic Achievement
Level. International Journal of Psychological Studies; 8(1).

Al-Zboon, E., Ahmad, J. (2015). Pre-service special education teachers’ professionalism and preparation in terms of
child sexual abuse. European Journal of Special Needs Education., doi: 10.1080/08856257.2015.438108126

Al-Zboon, E. (2017). Combating substance misuse: Competences and preparation of special education department
students. Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy. 12(1).

Al-Zboon, E., Ahmad J. & Al-Dababneh K. (2015). Prevalence and types of childhood abuse among special
education students attending Jordanian Universities, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, DOI:
10.1080/02673843.2015.1093008

Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh (2017): Substance abuse at Jordanian universities: Perspectives of pre-service special
education teachers, Journal of Substance Use, DOI: 10.1080/14659891.2016.1271031

Brown, O., Howcroft, G., & Jacobs, T. (2009). The Coping Orientation and Resources of Teachers Educating
Learners with Intellectual Disabilities, South African Journal of Psychology, 39(4).

Brown, B. B., & Clute, C. (2003). Friendships, cliques, and crowds. In. G. R. Adams, & M. D. Berzonsky, (Ed.),
Blackwell handbook of adolescence (pp. 330–348). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing House.

Fayez, M., Takash, H. & Al-Zboon, E. (2014). Combating violence against children: Jordanian pre-service early
childhood teachers’ perceptions towards child abuse and neglect. Early Child Development and Care, DOI:
10.1080/03004430.2014.901013
Farella, E. (2010). The influence of teacher characteristics, beliefs, and program quality on children’s creativity. (Thesis, Master of Science). The University of Alabama.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2004). Self-reported depression in nonfamilial caregivers: Prevalence and associations with caregiver behavior in child-care settings. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 19(2), 297-318.

Harris, K., Baker, A., & Cleveland, H. (2010). Collegiate recovery communities: What they are and how they are supported. In H. H. Cleveland, K. S. Harris, & R. P. Wiebe (Eds.), Substance Abuse Recovery in College: Community Supported Abstinence (pp. 9–22). New York, USA: Springer.

MacKean, G. (2011). Mental health and well-being in postsecondary education settings: A literature and environmental scan to support planning and action in Canada June 2011 For the June 2011 CACUSS pre-conference workshop on mental health. Available online: cacuss.ca/Library/documents/Post_Sec_Final_Report_June6.pdf (accessed on 14 March 2014).

Maslow, A. H. (1954). Motivation and Personality. New York: Harper.

Omar, H. (2014). Psychological security and its relationship to motivation for learning (field study). Journal of Human Sciences, 16, 191-210.

Onder, F. & Sarim, M. (2009). The Quality of School Life and Burnout as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being among Teachers. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 9 (3), 1223-1236.

Perron, B., Grahovac, D., Uppal, S., Granillo, T., Shuter, J., & Porer, C. (2011). Supporting students in recovery on college campuses: Opportunities for student affairs professionals. Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 48, 47–64.

Shqaer, Z. (2005). Psychological security scale. Egyptian Angelo for publish, Egypt.

Wilcox, D., Putnam, J., & Wigle, S. (2003). Ensuring excellence in the preparation of special educators through program evaluation. Education, 123(2), 342-350.