

A NEW MODEL IN THE EVALUATION OF ABUSED CHILDREN: THE CHILD MONITORING CENTER

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Abstract

Any act that harms the emotional, physical, social and psychological development of a child under the age of 18 is considered child abuse. Child sexual abuse, which is one of the sub-types of child abuse, is force a child into sexual activity that the child cannot fully comprehend, is not yet developmentally ready, and does not have the capacity to consent and approve. It is one of the most severe forms of abuse due to the traumatic effects it leaves. In this study, Child Monitoring Centers established to eliminate the secondary trauma of sexually abused children and provide forensic, medical and psychological support to the child and his family will be introduced. There are 45 centers in 42 cities in our country, where forensic interviews, family interviews, forensic and psychiatric evaluations and physical examinations are carried out in cooperation with different public institutions under the coordination of the Ministry of Health.

Keywords: child, child abuse, child monitoring center, sexual abuse.

Introduction

Children, by their basic characteristics, are known as the group that most in need of protection in both physical and psychological aspects. Both in Turkey and in other countries around the world, child abuse and negligence are examples of frequently encountered ill-treatment. This abuse and neglect for children has been regarded as a cultural situation among societies for many years and has been ignored as a condition that must remain within the family unity. The size of the traumatic situation in the recent years has now emerged with the examples reflected in the press. Thus, in order to protect the best interests of the child in our country, it has been tried to be strengthened by making legal arrangements especially in recent years. The fact that our children have a healthy childhood has a crucial importance for the future of our country.

Child neglect and abuse, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its widest definition, are bad behaviors that result in physical / emotional / sexual abuse, neglect and other forms of abuse, which adversely affect the health, survival, development or trust in children under the age of 18. Yet, according to WHO data, it is stated that 25% of adults are physically abused in childhood, 20% of women and 8% of men are exposed to sexual abuse in their childhood. In addition, it is reported that

31,000 children under 15 years of age in the world lose their lives due to child abuse (WHO, 2016).

The reports of sexual abuse for both boys and girls, often reflected in the press in recent times, are only the visible part of the iceberg. It is estimated that the actual figures are much more than the number reaching the officials.

Children are the group most frequently exposed to neglect and abuse because they do not have sufficient power to protect themselves. Accordingly, they are the group that needs to be protected and supported the most. At this point, the definition of the concept of child is seen as an important premise. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the protection of children from all kinds of physical, psychological, sexual abuse and neglect was signed by 197 countries including Turkey and gained the status of the law on 2nd September 2010 (Kurt, 2016). According to the first article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), every person until the age of eighteen is considered to be a child. This indicates that every individual between the ages of 0-18 should be accepted as children and that the rights of their basic life should be protected.

The notion of child neglect and abuse encapsulates; all physical, emotional or sexual attitudes, such as the parents of children who are responsible for looking after them, by causing harm to their physical and/or psychological health by persons or foreigners with whom they have a

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of responsibility, power and trust (Şahin, 2006). All conditions where the health or well-being of a child under the age of 18 are harmed or threatened are considered in the context of child neglect and abuse (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). In the context of these definitions and assessments, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) has separated child maltreatment into four groups: physical abuse, emotional / psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

Children's mental health is seriously damaging by child abuse especially sexual abuse. Psychiatric disorders were observed in the majority of children evaluated after sexual abuse (Şimşek et al., 2011; Soylu et al., 2012).

Often in the absence of material evidence, the perpetrators continue to wander freely in the society and victimize many more children, since their acts cannot be proven. Victims are more victims because they cannot prove their victimization and they are trying to survive as unhealthy people. The existence of a teamwork is very important in order not to have all of this. Child monitoring centers established in our country have been established to evaluate this problem.

Child monitoring centers are the centers that aim to prevent secondary trauma to children with suspected sexual abuse and to provide services in cooperation with institutions working in the best interests of the child (Danış et al., 2019). Child Monitoring Centers in our country started with a pilot project in Ankara in 2010 under the Ministry of Health and then spread to many provinces of the country. Currently, 45 Child monitoring centers are in service in 42 provinces in our country (General Directorate of Public Hospitals, 2020).

In this study, the child monitoring center model will be introduced in the light of the findings of the child sexual abuse literature.

Child Abuse

Child abuse in childhood traumas is a form of trauma that is the most difficult to identify and treat because it is reproducible and is mostly performed by the child's closest ones.

The World Health Organization (2002) explained the definition of child abuse as follows: including all forms of commercial advertising or any other form of influence that will cause any physical / emotional / sexual abuse / neglect that may cause a negative impact on the child's health, growth and development. Different types of abuse can be seen at the same time, a child who has been sexually abused and physically abused at the same time, and/or physically abused may also be exposed to

emotional abuse (Tıraşçı and Gören, 2007).

According to Glaser (1991), the most commonly used definition of sexual abuse; "Developmental immature children and adolescents cannot fully understand, are not informed or consent to participate in sexual activities that violate social taboo and family roles" (Taneli et al., 1999; Doğan, 2009). All actions such as incest, rape, attempted rape, disclosure molestation and expulsion are considered within the context of sexual abuse (Akdoğan, 2005). The child's sexual abuse is undoubtedly a very traumatic event that has influenced the child's entire life. In the international literature, 10-34% of girls and 3-18% of boys are sexually abused (Wyatt et al., 1999). In our country, there are studies showing that sexual abuse is in the 11-37% range under the age of 18 (Örsel et al., 2011; Alikashiçoğlu et al., 2006). However, it is difficult to reach real statistical data on its true prevalence, since sexual abuse is generally confidential (İşeri, 2008). It is thought that only 15% of sexual abuse victims are reported (Yates, 1999).

The most common forms of child sexual abuse are child pornography, incest and child rape. Incest is the type of sexual abuse that has the most effect on the child (Akdoğan, 2005). Incest has very destructive effects on the child because it is carried out by family members. Incest as literature provision; marriages are legally, morally and religiously prohibited in terms of male and female sexual relations with close relatives (Akduman et al., 2005). It is often an ignored situation because it is a family issue.

It is a legal obligation to report child abuse in Western countries and America (Goodman et al., 1992). Similarly, not reporting a crime is considered a crime in our country. Therefore, there is an obligation to report a sexual abuse case to legal authorities. Reporting abuse means taking measures to protect the child against possible future abuse. Sometimes children may find it difficult to decide whether these behaviors against them are abuse or not. Even if they realize, they may refuse to say for a variety of reasons. Children may deny this traumatic event they experience when they feel threatened, pressured, afraid, and feel that they will not be understood (Topçu, 1997).

Child Monitoring Centers

Since it constitutes a crime according to the law in many countries, a sexual abuse that is revealed becomes the subject of forensic investigation. It has been reported that the necessity to give repeated statements during the investigation process causes additional stress in children and families. For this

reason, in order to reduce the recurrent forensic interviews and the secondary emotional trauma they cause, firstly child monitoring centers were established in the USA (Faller and Palusci, 2007). In Turkey, the first Child Monitoring Center was opened in Ankara in November 2010 with a project initiated by University of Iowa Children's Protection Program Manager Dr. Oral and studied by Ankara University (Akço et al., 2013).

In our country, the abused child and/or family have a tendency to keep the abused state for many reasons and legal, medical, psychological and social support which must be given to the abused child is not given to the extent required. Due to the lack of cooperation and coordination among the law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities and health institutions, victims are to be evaluated separately and repeated questions, forced to express their experiences in inappropriate conditions, not to provide confidentiality, the professional in the relevant institutions with the mental status of the child to be able to interview the qualifications and education various reasons, such as absence, may intensify the trauma experienced by the child and make it difficult to treat the child mentally.

In order to reduce the effect of possible crimes, traumas, prevent secondary trauma and to intervene in a conscious and effective way for children who have been abused, it was found appropriate to establish Child Monitoring Centers and to carry out the operation of these centers under the coordination of the Ministry of Health in order to ensure that they are carried out in a single center of trained persons and to take preventive measures. Under the coordination of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, Ministry of Interior (General Directorate of Security and General Command of Gendarmerie), Ministry of National Education, Directorate of Religious Affairs, Office of Forensic Medicine and Bench started a study in Ankara in 2010 Child Monitoring Center was established as a pilot center (Bağ and Alşen, 2016).

There are people from different occupational groups working in child monitoring centers. The forensic interviewer, the family interviewer, the representative of the Provincial Directorate of Family, Labour and Social Services, the nurse and the responsible physician are working. A physician, psychologist, psychological counselor, nurse, social worker and child development specialist, who has completed the forensic interviewer training and conducts a forensic interview with the child, taking into account the development of the child,

psychological characteristics and the effects of the trauma on the child during this procedure, could work (Ministry of Health General Directorate of Health Services, 2017).

These centers work on the principle of 7 days 24 hours. For this reason, a forensic interviewer is on duty every day. There are two rooms with bath and beds in order to accommodate overnight stays.

Firstly, an interview is made with a child coming to the center. It is aimed to meet the child and to gain the trust and to introduce the center. On the other hand, the family interviewer discusses with the family or the child's companion. A lawyer request is made from Bench to prepare for forensic interview.

Forensic Interviews held at the Center

All states that have signed the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse are encouraged to make some legal arrangements in their laws. Especially in article 35, it is worth noting that the personnel who will do this should be professional and well-trained.

Children brought to the child monitoring center have semi-structured interviews with forensic interviewers. These are carried out by the Ministry of Health with certified trainings. Interview standards are shaped according to the Corner House RATAC protocol, which is the most preferred in the American Juvenile Justice Center model (Bağ and Bilginer, 2018).

Forensic interview is an interview held in a mirrored room with semi-structured questions. In the room on the back side of the mirror, there is a prosecutor, lawyer, family interviewer and the representative of the Provincial Directorate of Family, Labour and Social Services. The forensic interviewer tries to learn the details of the incident and the identity of the abuser with various questions in accordance with the age of the child. The main purpose here is to obtain the necessary information from the child for other professionals. The interview is recorded with video and audio. At the end of the interview, a short training is given, which is reminiscent of the child body's confidential. During the meeting, the representative of each institution keeps its records, but one written record of the interview is signed. The investigation by the prosecution is initiated by this report. This interview is adapted to a report by the forensic interviewer who made the interview and added to the child's file in the legal process (Bağ and Alşen, 2016).

If a suspicion of sexual abuse arises during the

forensic interview, the Public Prosecutor's Office will inform law enforcement officers to conduct an investigation according to the type and importance of the abuse; consultant physicians for examinations such as internal body, assault, and mental health; health institutions to detect pregnancy or infectious diseases; the representative of the Provincial Directorate of Family, Labor and Social Services to take protective and supportive measures. Again, if the victim's change of school will be in her best interest, a referral is made to a representative of the Ministry of National Education with the approval of the victim and the family (Orhan et al., 2019).

After the forensic interview, the child is taken to the forensic examination room and informed by a nurse. After the confirmation of the child is taken, if necessary, the internal body examination is performed by the forensic specialist. These examinations are recorded by video coloscope to avoid having multiple examinations. In the center, the pediatrician also carries out a general health examination of the child and the necessary treatments are applied. If the child does not have a safe place to return to, the child is placed to an orphanage by representative of the Provincial Directorate of Family, Labour and Social Services.

Result

It was opened for the first time in 2010 in Ankara as a pilot application with the Prime Ministry Circular No. 2012/20. Currently, 42 Child Monitoring Centers are operating in 45 provinces in our country (General Directorate of Public Hospitals, 2019). Child monitoring centers are centers established by the Ministry of Health to minimize secondary harassment of children who have been sexually abused, and to ensure that the forensic and medical procedures are carried out in a center consisting of trained people in this field. In these centers, forensic interviews, family interviews, forensic examinations and psychological evaluations are conducted.

In a study of the Ministry of Justice, the child had to make an explanation 17 times during the expression process after the abuse (Akço et al., 2013). Child monitoring centers are also centers established to prevent the child from making repeated statements.

The main objective is to prevent the child from making explanations again and again about his situation in the process that begins with the arrival of the child. On the other hand, by gathering the stakeholder institutions under a single roof, transactions are carried out in a faster and more

organized way. Yet, working with different professions, develops professional approaches by sharing professional experiences. All transactions in the center are carried out in complete confidentiality.

If professional staff obtains information or suspects that a child has been sexually abused, he or she has to report to law enforcement or the public prosecutor's office. The police force receiving the notification will send the child to the center. In addition, professionals and families can apply directly to the center for consultation or they can redirect the child for it.

Child monitoring centers contribute to speeding up the judicial process, shortening the trial period, ensuring that the investigation regarding this process is carried out by experts trained on this issue, and has an important role in preventing the victim child from being repeatedly victimized and traumatized at every stage of the investigation (Aydemir and Yurtkulu, 2012).

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