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A retrospective study with ICAST-R (ispcan child abuse screening tools-retrospective) questionnaire for determination of child abuse in first year medical students in Turkish population

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ABSTRACT

Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) is an important problem both in Turkey and worldwide. Unfortunately, we still don't have enough and reliable data on this important subject. In this study, we aimed to investigate the prevalence of childhood maltreatment in a population of first year medical students in a Turkish university using the retrospective version of the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool (ICAST-R). One hundred seventy three first year medical students, aged between 18 and 24 years, who agreed to complete the ICAST-R questionnaire, were recruited in our study. Of 173 students who completed the survey, 51.4% are found to be subjected to at least one type of child abuse (physical, emotional or sexual). The prevalence is higher in male gender and the difference is statistically significant. Physical, emotional and sexual abuse exposure rates are found to be 23.1%, 40.5% and 11% respectively. Physical and emotional abuse rates are higher in male gender and the difference is statistically significant. We did not find any statistically significant association between gender and sexual abuse. Efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect are growing in our country, as they are worldwide. However, child abuse is still common and a problematic issue. It is important to determine the prevalence of child abuse in order to raise awareness. We need further studies investigating not only prevalence but also risk factors to have reliable data for our country.

1. Introduction

Children need protection, appropriate support and intervention throughout the childhood period. Love, attention and guidance from family and environment will provide proper and healthy growth and development of a child. The progress of a society depends on having physically and emotionally healthy children. Childhood experiences of abuse and neglect are associated with various negative health outcomes, including increased risk for sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse, mental illness, depression, asthma and fractures (Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes, & Harrison, 2013; Goodwin & Stein, 2004; Wade et al., 2016). Development of children is affected directly by maltreatment. Maltreatment is conceptualized as many different types of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, which causes actual or potential harm to victims in terms of health, survival, development, or dignity (Jacobi, Dettmeyer, Banaschak, Brosig, & Herrmann, 2010). It is also well known that child abuse and neglect (CAN) can adversely effect the development of a child's personality (Aral, & Gursoy, 2001, p. 36–40; Ludwig & Fleisher,

2000).

Over the last decade, recognition of violence against children has grown but remained an unsolved problem as it is largely undocumented and underreported (UNICEF, 2014). Data on prevalence of child abuse and neglect is not universally reliable due to lack of sufficient data in low and middle-income countries. Studies indicate that approximately 20% of female population and 5–10% of male population have been subjected to sexual abuse in their childhood. Physical abuse rate among children was reported to be 25–50%. Moreover, many children face emotional abuse and neglect in childhood (WHO, 2013a, 2013b).

CAN is a common problem in Turkey as the rest of the world. Efforts to prevent CAN are gradually increasing in our country. Nevertheless, it is still a major problem. It is important to determine the prevalence of child abuse to raise awareness and to create effective interventions. A study titled "Causes and Results of Intrafamilial Violence" conducted by Turkish Family Research Institution in 1995, reported 40% of children between the ages of 7–14 and 8.5% of children older than 14 experienced violence by their parents. This study also stated that male children experienced more intrafamilial violence than female children (as cited in Altiparmak, 2008). In 2010 another study supported by UNICEF called "Child Abuse and Intrafamilial Violence Research in Turkey" reported results about children between the ages of 7–18 years. This study revealed that reported child abuse rates among all children are 56%, 49%, 10% for physical, emotional, sexual abuse successively and 25% for neglect. The most common type of neglect in this study was being left alone. Sexual abuse was the least common abuse type according to this report. One percent of the study group claimed they had been exposed to pornography and 0.5% of them have been forced to touch or be touched by others sexually, in the year before the study is done (Korkmazlar-Oral, Engin, & Büyükyazıcı, 2010). In 2012, a study conducted in Turkey's capital Ankara, examined abuse and neglect in a population between the ages of 18–24 years retrospectively. The prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual abuse was found to be 16.6%, 37.8%, and 10.8% respectively. Physical abuse was significantly more common in males but there was no significant relationship between gender and other types of abuse (Koç, 2012).

Previously, there were inconsistencies in the identification of child abuse and this restriction prevented obtaining reliable data on the extents and prevalence of child abuse (Kim, Lee, & Song, 2009; Sofuoğlu et al., 2014). Even though the aim was to prevent and treat child abuse, there were difficulties in determining and establishing a targeted policy. Previous research focused on the need for objective criteria to assess and evaluate the level of child abuse (Koç, 2012; Lee & Chang, 2004; Polat, 2000). The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Child Abuse Screening Tools (ICAST) were developed to evaluate the level, type and severity of violence against children regarding United Nations' Violence Against Children report (Pinheiro, 2006). There are three different versions: ICAST-Parent (P), ICAST-Child (C), and ICAST-Retrospective (R). Through the process of a delphi study in which professionals from all around the world (Russia, Egypt, Lebanon, India, Malaysia, Columbia, and Kyrgyzstan) were involved, it has been shown that ICAST is a globally applicable tool not only for native english speakers but also for the population from non-english speaking regions (Butchart et al., 2006; Dunne et al., 2009).

Even though there is growing interest to determine the prevalence of childhood physical, emotional and sexual abuse and negligent treatment in Turkey, we still don't have enough and reliable data on this important subject. CAN is a major problem in Turkey and the process of recognizing, reporting and preparing rehabilitation plans for CAN by health professionals needs significant improvement. Our aim was to determine the prevalence of CAN by evaluating possible history of abuse among first year medical students by using an internationally recommended and accepted tool, ICAST-R. We also hope to provide a working basis for those who want to work towards prevention of CAN.

2. Method

A cross-sectional study was conducted between September 2014 and February 2015 to estimate the prevalence of abuse and neglect during childhood among first year medical students in Turkey. The relationship between socio-demographic features and childhood abuse and neglect was also examined for determining social risk factors that may cause abuse and neglect.

2.1. Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by Dokuz Eylul University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee for Noninvasive Clinical Research (Date: 11/20/2014, Number: 2014/35-31).

Confidentiality was assured and every participant was informed that the responses would not be used should the participant wish to terminate participation. After the purpose of the study was explained, all participants gave written informed, voluntary consent. The consent forms contained contact details of the researchers. Contact details of participants were not taken but each questionnaire was given a unique identification number. The numbers were supposed to be used if a participant wished to terminate their participation. All forms were locked and secured to remain confidential.

2.2. Participants

Research population consisted of 286 first year students of Dokuz Eylul University School of Medicine. Population sampling was not performed because the whole population was targeted. Researchers approached all students once and explained the purpose of the study. Questionnaires were given to 175 students (61.2%) who agreed to participate in the study. Finally, 173 students (60.5%) who completed the questionnaire were enrolled into the study. There was no student who wanted to withdraw from study after submitting the questionnaire.