

Chapter 17

Centers for the Investigative Interviewing of Children in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Conducting interviews with witnesses and suspects is a core function of policing across the world. Child sexual abuse is broadly described as any sexual activity involving a child where consent is not or cannot be given. Child sexual abuse differs from other types of childhood victimization in that there is usually no witness apart from the victim and the accused and often no physical evidence. This chapter aims to summarize the components that play important role during the investigative interviewing of children. In addition to that, the role of the interviewers, interview aids, cognitive interview, risks of repeated interviewing of children, and effects of child sexual abuse on children will be outlined. This chapter will also give information about the child interviewing centers that are still being used actively in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sexual abuse has become a universal problem that affects the whole world's agenda and causes psychological and negative consequences in the short and long term (Karakartal, 2020, p.145). Child sexual abuse can be considered also a public health problem with a global prevalence estimated at 11.8%, or 118 per 1000 children (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011 as cited in Sumampouw et al., 2020, p.170). More and more often, children are becoming involved in the legal system to provide courtroom testimony, especially in sexual abuse cases (Ceci & Bruck, 1993). For instance, in the United States, the number and the rate of victims have fluctuated between 2014 and 2018. Comparing the national rounded number of victims from 2014 (675,000) to the national rounded number of victims in 2018 (678,000) shows an increase of 0.4 percent (Child Maltreatment, 2018, p.ii).

In Turkey, according to statistics of the Ministry of Justice 650 children are sent to courthouses due to child sexual abuse cases each month (Child Sexual Abuse Report, 2016). The actual prevalence of

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sexual abuse is more difficult to document accurately, because few victims disclose such abuse for various reasons, including fear, guilt, repression, and shame (Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1983; Schultz, 1973 as cited in Palmer et al., 1999, p.230). Child sexual abuse is broadly described as any sexual activity involving a child where consent is not or cannot be given (Dominguez, Nelke, & Perry 2001, p.202, as cited in Horwath, 2010, p. 143). Child sexual abuse is not only harmful to the child, jeopardizing child safety and well-being; it is also a crime (Faller, 2015, p.37).

Historically, in many countries children have been regarded by legal practitioners and other concerned professionals as unreliable eyewitnesses. Indeed, before the 1980s, children were believed to be poor witnesses, prone to making things up, highly suggestible, and not able to distinguish fantasy from reality in essence, second-class witnesses (Holliday et al., 2014, p.119). However, recent psychological research has shown that children are capable of reporting previously experienced events in a meaningful and accurate manner (Sattar, 2000, p.9). Malloy, Wright, and Skagerberg (2012, p.105) allege that even young children can provide the police with invaluable information if they are interviewed appropriately.

Investigative interviewing is a broader term than interrogation, describing fair, dualistic, and open-minded communication to obtain accurate and reliable information carried out within a framework of national and international law (Holmberg, 2014, p.146). Any investigative interview with a witness aims is to elicit the most accurate and detailed account of an alleged offense in a manner that does not place undue stress on the interviewee (Milne & Bull, 1999 as cited in Wright, Powell, Ridge - Damien, 2007, p.395). The most crucial step in a child sexual abuse case is to get the testimony of the child (Polat, 2017, p.110). Children are usually the only eyewitness of these traumatic events (Brubacher et al., 2013). Only 5% of the perpetrators of child sexual abuse and 1% of incest cases can be found (Child Sexual Abuse Report, 2016). Timing of the interview is very important to get the right information from children (Güler et al., 2016, p.100). Children should be interviewed as early as possible, because the longer the delay between an experience and the initial interview, the more likely it is that children will forget the experience and consequently be vulnerable to suggestive influences. Increased delay is especially a problem in sexual abuse cases (Gitlin & Pezdek, 2009, p.74). Children also should be informed about the aim and the duration of the interview (Atılğan, Yağcıoğlu, & Çavdar, 2014, p.13). Interviewees need guidance, for most of them, an interview about sexual abuse is a possibly frightening experience (Faller, 2015, p.41). They should also have a right to say “I don’t know” during the interview (Ermağan, 2015 as cited in Çağlar and Türk, 2020, p.14), because children may not know all the answer to the questions.

It is really difficult to determine the reasons why some children are more susceptible to abuse than others. Several factors may put children at risk of sexual victimization. The primary reason is social isolation. “Children who are left alone, are unsupervised, and who do not have the physical presence of numerous friends and neighbors are more likely to be abused (Sgroi, 1982; Finkelhor, 1984).” In addition to that mother also plays an important role in the child’s vulnerability. Research show that a mother “who is absent, who is not close to her child emotionally, who is sexually punitive or religiously fanatic, who never finished high school, or who keeps herself isolated is more likely to have a child who will be abused” (Sgroi, 1982; James and Nasjleti, 1983; Finkelhor, 1984 as cited in Tower, 1999, p.126). Moreover, children who have handicaps (physical limitations or emotional disturbances) are particularly vulnerable to victimization (Young, 1982 as cited in Tower, 1999, p.127). This chapter aims to give information about important components of an interview with children, discuss the risks of multiple interviews and effects of child sexual abuse on child. Also, it aims to summarize the development of investigative interviewing of children in Turkey.

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