



Evaluation of Healthcare Professionals' Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect**

Sağlık Çalışanlarının Çocuk İstismarı ve İhmali Konusundaki Yaklaşımının Değerlendirilmesi*

Meryem KANAT¹, İtir ERKAN²

MK: 0000-0002-4965-940X IE: 0000-0002-5902-1936

¹ Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Sociology, Istanbul, Turkey

² Istanbul Yeni Yuzyil University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Healthcare Management, Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study is to investigate the awareness of healthcare providers about child abuse and to propose solutions by identifying possible problems.

Material and Methods: In this study was administered to 256 healthcare providers who were in charge in three private hospitals in Istanbul and who accepted to study between January and July 2017.

Results: When examining the status of education for child abuse and neglect during the education of healthcare providers participating in the study; 60% of midwives, 49% of nurses, 70% of doctors and 18% of health professionals specified that they had an education. Nevertheless, 38% of midwives, 58% of nurses, 71% of doctors and 87% of healthcare professionals stated that they did not have enough education. They have stated that about 30% of midwives and nurses have not reported in the past five years, despite the fact that child abuse and neglect confronts the suspected event. It was also found that approximately 80% of midwives, nurses and healthcare professionals who participated in the study were not sufficiently knowledgeable about Shaken baby and Munchausen syndrome by proxy.

Discussion and Conclusion: The results show that the education was not enough on this issue. In this respect, it is suggested that education programs for the healthcare providers and administrators on child abuse and forensic nursing issues should be arranged to overcome the shortcomings in this issue.

Keywords: Child abuse, health institutions, forensic sciences

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, sağlık çalışanlarının çocuk istismarı konusundaki farkındalıklarını araştırmak ve olası sorunları tespit ederek çözüm önerileri sunmaktır.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu çalışmada Ocak - Temmuz 2017 tarihleri arasında İstanbul'da üç özel hastanede görevli ve çalışmayı kabul eden 256 sağlık çalışanına 20 sorudan oluşan anket uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler SPSS 22.0 programında değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular: Çalışmaya katılan sağlık çalışanlarının öğrenimleri sırasında çocuk istismarı ve ihmeline yönelik eğitim alma durumu incelendiğinde; ebelerin %60'ı, hemşirelerin %49'u, doktorların %70'i, sağlık uzmanlarının ise %18'i eğitim aldığını belirtmiştir. Buna rağmen ebelerin %38'i, hemşirelerin %58'i, doktorların %71'i, sağlık uzmanlarının ise %87'si aldıkları eğitimi yeterli görmediklerini belirtmiştir. Ebe ve hemşirelerin yaklaşık %30'unun son beş yıl içerisinde çocuk istismar ve ihmal şüphesi olan olayla karşılaşmasına rağmen, bildirimde bulunmadıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca çalışmaya katılan ebe, hemşire ve sağlık uzmanlarının yaklaşık %80'inin Sarsılmış bebek ve Münchausen by proxy sendromları konusunda yeterince bilgili olmadıkları tespit edilmiştir.

Tartışma ve Sonuç: Elde edilen sonuçlar bu konuda yeterince bilgilendirme yapılmadığını göstermektedir. İstismar olgularının tanınması, erken dönemde tespit edilmesi ile failerin ortaya çıkarılması, mağduriyetlerin giderilebilmesi toplum sağlığı, hukuk ve adli bilimler açısından oldukça önemlidir. Bu açıdan sağlık çalışanlarına ve sağlık yöneticilerine yönelik çocuk istismarı ve adli hemşirelik konularında eğitim programları düzenlenerek bu konudaki eksikliklerin giderilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuk istismarı, sağlık kurumları, adli bilimler

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INTRODUCTION

All kinds of child abuse can be defined as violence against children is seen very often in every country in the world as well as in Turkey. Child abuse and neglect are considered to be more frequent than those determined by the survey because the nature of the case is a difficult subject to examine (1-3). Exploitation of children is often exposed at home, at school, or in any environment where they may be vulnerable. In this case it is

very important that the family, educators, healthcare professionals and everyone communicating with the child have knowledge of child abuse (4). It is known that healthcare institutions are especially vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. However, child abuse is not considered in the differential diagnosis of approaching children with head trauma frequently by healthcare providers. In terms of forensic sciences, it is necessary to be able to define abuse, to take the anamnesis cor-

Table 1. Demographic information of healthcare providers

		The midwife n (%)	The nurse n (%)	The doctor n (%)	Healthcare professional n (%)
Gender	Female	10 (100)	122 (67.4)	5 (50)	21 (38.2)
	Male	0 (0)	59 (32.6)	5 (50)	34 (61.8)
Age	20-24	2 (20)	49 (27.1)	0 (0)	20 (36.4)
	25-29	0 (0)	50 (27.6)	4 (40)	10 (18.2)
	30-39	3 (30)	55 (30.4)	2 (20)	18 (32.7)
	40 and over	5 (50)	27 (14.9)	4 (40)	7 (12.7)
	Marital status	The married	8 (80)	82 (45.3)	7 (70)
	Single	2 (20)	99 (54.7)	3 (30)	32 (58.2)
Education Status	High school	2 (20)	43 (23.8)	0 (0)	3 (5.50)
	Associate Degree	5 (50)	56 (30.9)	0 (0)	31 (56.4)
	Bachelor's degree	3 (30)	71 (39.2)	3 (30)	18 (32.7)
	Graduate	0 (0)	11 (6.1)	7 (70)	3 (5.5)
Child Status	Yes	8 (80)	70 (38.7)	5 (50)	18 (32.7)
	No	2 (20)	111 (61.3)	5 (50)	37 (67.3)
	0-2 year	0 (0)	38 (21)	2 (20)	16 (29.1)
Occupational Working Time	3-6 year	2 (20)	49 (27.1)	3 (30)	13 (23.6)
	7-10 year	2 (20)	41 (22.7)	1 (10)	12 (21.8)
	11-15 year	2 (20)	27 (14.9)	2 (20)	8 (14.5)
	16 and over	4 (40)	26 (14.4)	2 (20)	6 (10.9)
	No	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Study Time at Mother and Child Healthcare Centers	0-2 year	2 (20)	19 (10.5)	3 (30)	9 (16.4)
	3-6 year	1 (10)	7 (3.9)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	7-10 year	3 (30)	9 (5)	0 (0)	1 (1.8)
	11-15 year	0 (0)	1 (0.6)	0 (0)	1 (1.8)
	16 and over	3 (30)	1 (0.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	No	1 (10)	144 (79.6)	7 (70)	44 (8)

**Table 2.** The situation of healthcare providers encountering child abuse case

		The midwife	The nurse	The doctor	Healthcare professional	χ^2	p
In the last 5 years, have you suspected child abuse / neglect?	Yes	30,0%	33,5%	50,0%	33,3%	1,240	0,743
	No	70,0%	66,5%	50,0%	66,7%		
If yes, what do you think you are having difficulties with?	Taking anamnesis	0,0%	21,2%	50,0%	4,5%	39,332	0,000
	Physical examination	33,3%	12,1%	0,0%	18,2%		
	Record keeping	66,7%	6,1%	0,0%	0,0%		
	Legal process	0,0%	33,3%	50,0%	18,2%		
	Other	0,0%	27,3%	0,0%	59,1%		

rectly, to collect the evidence properly, to keep it, and to make notifications in accordance with the procedures (5,6). Nevertheless, the child's treatment and abuse prevention process will be affected. The purpose of this study is to identify the awareness of healthcare professionals about child abuse and to emphasize the deficiencies and recommendations in this regard.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research universe consists of 256 healthcare providers (doctors, nurses, midwives and healthcare professionals) working in three private hospitals in Istanbul. This study was approved by the Istanbul Yeni Yuzyil University Ethics Committee (2017/2). In the survey, the "Level of Knowledge on Child Abuse and Neglect" questionnaire was used as data collection tool. While the first 8 items in the questionnaire included questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants, 20 items included questions about measuring the level of knowledge of health workers regarding child abuse and neglect. The obtained data were analyzed with SPSS 22.0 package program and chi-square analysis was performed.

RESULTS

Demographic information of health workers is shown in Table 1. When examining the status of education for child abuse and neglect during the education of healthcare providers participating in the study; 60% of midwives, 49% of nurses, 70% of doctors and 18% of healthcare professionals specified that they had an education. Nevertheless, 38% of midwives, 58% of nurses, 71% of doctors and 87%

of healthcare professionals stated that they did not have enough education.

There is a significant difference between those who are trained and educational attainment levels in terms of child neglect and abuse during vocational training ($\chi^2=11.245$; $p=0.01$). When healthcare providers read at least one article on child abuse and neglect, 73% of the nurses, 80% of the doctors and 71% of the healthcare professionals read the article in order to be informed about this issue. The situation of healthcare providers encountering child abuse cases is shown in Table 2, and the responses given in this regard are given in Table 3.

When the relationship between the subject and the occupation is examined by those who suspect the child abuse / neglect within the last 5 years; 33.3% of midwives are having a hard time on physical examination and 66.7% of them are having difficulty in keeping records. While 21.2% of the nurses stated that they are having a hard time on taking anamnesis, 12.1% said physical examination, 6.1% said keeping records, 33.3% said legal process and 27.3% said the other issues. 50% of the doctors stated that they are having difficulties while taking anamnesis and 50% of them are having hard time in the legal process. While 4.5% of the healthcare professionals stated that they are having a hard time on taking anamnesis, 18.2% said physical examination, 18.2% said keeping records, 59.1% said the other issues. There is a significant difference between the profession and the subjects of doubt about child abuse / neglect within the last 5 years ($\chi^2 = 39,332$; $p = 0,000$).

When healthcare providers' reports of child abuse / neglect within the last 5 years is investigated, 3% of the nur-

**Table 3.** Knowledge levels of healthcare providers on child abuse

		The midwife	The nurse	The doctor	Healthcare professional	x ²	p
Child abuse is generally proportional to the low income level.	Yes	40,0%	29,9%	30,0%	32,7%	4,236	0,645
	No	60,0%	40,7%	40,0%	40,0%		
	I do not know	0,0%	29,4%	30,0%	27,3%		
If the family is late in applying for medical assistance for the child's injury, child abuse should be suspected.	Yes	70,0%	52,5%	90,0%	45,5%	10,479	0,106
	No	30,0%	21,5%	0,0%	23,6%		
	I do not know	0,0%	26,0%	10,0%	30,9%		
In cases of sexual abuse, abusers are mostly foreigners who are mostly out of the family.	Yes	0,0%	22,0%	10,0%	14,5%	11,659	0,07
	No	100,0%	50,8%	70,0%	54,5%		
	I do not know	0,0%	27,1%	20,0%	30,9%		
Which syndrome indicator could be the child's being trafficked in hospitals to expose many unnecessary intakes?	Klinefelter syndrome	0,0%	,7%	0,0%	0,0%	14,411	0,108
	Munchausen syndrome by proxy	11,1%	39,0%	88,9%	30,2%		
	Turner syndrome	11,1%	6,8%	0,0%	9,3%		
	Shaken Baby Syndrome	77,8%	53,4%	11,1%	60,5%		
In shaken baby syndrome, intracranial hemorrhage is accompanied by a head bone fracture and another traumatic lesion.	Yes	40,0%	29,1%	20,0%	16,7%	23,601	0,001
	No	50,0%	20,6%	70,0%	22,2%		
	I do not know	10,0%	50,3%	10,0%	61,1%		
What is your opinion on children and youth centers where children with child abuse and neglect could receive services?	Yes	100,0%	93,4%	100,0%	94,5%	1,539	0,957
	No	0,0%	1,7%	0,0%	1,8%		
	I do not know	0,0%	5,0%	0,0%	3,6%		

ses were reported, and none of the midwives and the healthcare providers were reported. When the distribution of the reported cases according to the abuse type is examined; 14% of the nurses reported physical, 21% reported sexual abuse, and 64% reported neglect. A doctor who participated in the study reported that he was reported because of sexual abuse.

DISCUSSION

Child abuse is a difficult issue as it also identified in the whole world as in Turkey. It is known that healthcare institutions are especially vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. In terms of forensic sciences, it is necessary to be able to define abuse, to take the anamnesis

correctly, to collect the evidence properly, to keep it, and to make notifications in accordance with the procedures. Otherwise, the child's treatment and abuse prevention process will be affected (7).

When healthcare providers are trained in child abuse and neglect during their education; it is seen that doctors, midwives and nurses respectively receive education on this subject and 82% of the healthcare professionals do not receive education on this issue. While nurses and midwives receiving education in this area are partially satisfied, it is thought that doctors and healthcare professionals should be informed about this issue and education programs should include courses for child abuse and neglect. When healthcare providers



read articles on child abuse and neglect, it is seen that all of midwives read at least one article on this subject, but in other occupational groups there is a significant number of health professionals who have not read any articles in this area. Hence, midwives have been found to be voluntarily informed in this regard, according to other health professionals. According to previous studies that the importance of training in health workers' correct classification of abuse cases (8-10).

In our study, when we look at the fact that healthcare providers are reporting on suspicion of child abuse and neglect, it is seen that midwives and healthcare professionals have not reported any declaration in the last 5 years. This indicates a major problem. Because, as shown in Table 2, 30% of the midwives and 33% of the healthcare professionals are not reported in the past five years despite the fact that they encounter child abuse and negligence. This result may be due to the fact that healthcare providers do not know how and where to make the notification, or they do not want to get involved. When the issue of reporting of child abuse / neglect is examined, complete midwives and doctors, 98% of the nurses and 98% of the healthcare professionals determined that they will report. When examining the reasons for those who did not make a notification, 14.3% of the nurses stated that they would not make a notification because they did not have enough information on the subject, 21.4% said they consider the child would be suffer afterwards, 7.1% said they do not want to interfere with the family affair and 57.1% stated that they would not be notified due to other reasons. There is a controversy when the answers to the question of notifying, healthcare providers when they encounter child abuse in the future are examined. Midwives and all the doctors, 98% of the nurses and healthcare professionals stated that they would report. According to these answers, it is possible to expect almost all of the employees to report on future suspicious events. However, over the last five years more than 30% of midwives and healthcare professionals have been exposed to child abuse and neglect, but have reported nothing. Only 2.8% of the nurses and 10% of the doctors are reported. On the contrary, they stated that they will report when they are confronted with a situation they suspect in the future. In the study of Borres et al, 21% of the doctors stated that they never reported (11). The fact that the healthcare providers who do not report on the study we have done are in great position reveals that more infor-

mation should be given in this regard.

In a survey conducted with 270 pediatricians in 2006, 10% of the participants did not report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, which indicated that they found the court experience to be harmful and regretful for the children (12). Al-Moosa et al reported that more than 80% of pediatricians did not know what to do in the legal process related to probable abuse and neglect cases. In our study, many of our healthcare providers also expressed difficulty in the legal process (13).

Although MSBP is relatively rare compared to other types of child abuse, It was 0.4 / 100,000 for children under 16 years old and 2 - 2.8 / 100,000 for 21 children under 1 year old. However, actual figures are thought to be more than this estimate. It is estimated that there may be a greater number of cases when including the cases that are not diagnosed or followed up at the outpatient clinics. In a study conducted, 77.0% of the cases were reported to be under 5 years of age and the mean age of diagnosis was 20 months (14). According to the professions, when the answers given to the question "Which syndrome is indicative of the child being hospitalized and unnecessarily exposed to many unnecessary interventions," 11,1% of midwives, 6,8% of nurses and 9,3% of healthcare professionals answered this question correctly. 88.9% of doctors responded correctly by giving Munchausen syndrome by proxy (MSBP). Especially the nurses, midwives and healthcare professionals seem to have lack of information in this regard.

In a study conducted in 2002 in the USA, it is reported that 1,300 children are exposed to Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) every year and 300 children die for this reason (15). "Shaken baby syndrome is accompanied by intracranial hemorrhage, which definitely results in skull fracture and another traumatic lesion" expression was evaluated within the profession groups; nurses, midwives and healthcare professionals are not sufficiently informed about more than 50% of them. The fact that 30% of the doctors stated that lack of information on this issue indicates that the shaken baby syndrome in the differential diagnosis of head trauma is not considered. In the study of Jenny et al. (1999), 33% of abuse cases by doctors and physicians for head trauma were not reported (16). Latest studies showed that the large amount of undiagnosed cases, showing



an important aspect to guide the prevention investments (17-19).

CONCLUSION

The results show that the education was not enough on this issue. Identification of the cases of abuse, evaluation of the facts in the early stages and the removal of the victims are very important in terms of community health, law and forensic science. In this respect, it is suggested that education programs for the healthcare providers and administrators on child abuse and forensic nursing issues should be arranged to overcome the shortcomings in this issue.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest arising out of this manuscript.

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