

The Effectiveness of Psycho-educational School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Program on Turkish Elementary Students*

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Abstract

In Turkey, there is neither systematic nor structured child sexual abuse prevention programs for school-aged children in school settings. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a school-based child sexual abuse prevention program on elementary school (4th grade) students. Quasi-experimental design with pre-test, post-test and control group was used. The subjects consisted of 36 fourth grade students; 18 randomly assigned to the experimental and 18 randomly to the control group. For the experimental group, a 'preventing child sexual abuse psycho-educational training program' as an independent variable was carried out by the researchers. The topics were about personal rights, 'my body belongs to me', good touch-bad touch discrimination, breaking promise, body safety rules, say "No", and bad secrets, talking with a grown up who believes the child, sexual abuse is never a child's fault, etc. One hour session, with a ten minute break, were carried out on four consecutive days. During this period, the control group did not receive any treatment. ANCOVA analysis showed the students who attended the sexual abuse prevention program scored significantly higher than the control group ($p < .05$). The effect size of the study was calculated by Cohen's d , and it was .80 which is satisfactory. As a result, the prevention child sexual abuse program was effective on 4th grade students and this effect was lasting eight weeks later. This study was the first experimental effort to prevent children from child sexual abuse in the school context in Turkey.

Key Words

Child Sexual Abuse, School-based Prevention, Psycho-education Program.

Children who are sexually abused are not special children with special characteristics; they are not of one age, one sex, one race, or one social class (Fuqua, 2008). It is evident that children from all ages, socioeconomic status, ethnic and racial groups are abused sexually (Finkelhor, 1994). The safety of our children should be a concern for not only parents, teachers, and educators, but for the whole society (Finkelhor, 2009). Epidemiological studies estimate that 27% of females and 16% of males experience at least one episode of sexual

abuse during their childhood or adolescence (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990; Rind, Trovitch, & Bauserman, 1998; Timnik, 1985).

Early retrospective surveys of adults who were abused as children reveal that only 3% to 6% of those abused ever reported their abuse during their childhood (MacMillan et al., 1997; Russell, 1983, 1984; Wolf, 1998). However because of mandated reporting legislation, public awareness campaigns and prevention and intervention efforts, reports of sexual abuse have increased dramatically (Gibson & Leitenberg, 2000).

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Review of literature shows that sexual abuse is associated with a wide variety of symptomatic and pathological behaviours among survivors, including hopelessness for future, psychosomatic illness, depression, anxiety, attempted suicide and poor academic achievement (Choquet, Darves-Bornoz, Ledoux, Manfredi, & Hassler, 1997; Eskin, Kaynak-Demir, & Demir, 2005; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Merrill, Guimond, Thomsen, & Milner, 2003; Nelson Goff, & Smith, 2005; Nelson, Heath, & Madden, 2002; Topçu, 2009). The most effective way to decrease the harmful effects of abuse appears to be through prevention (Guterman, 2001; Renk, Liljequist, Steinberg, Bosco, & Phares, 2002) and early detection to begin the healing process (Wolfe). Research shows that comprehensive, multidimensional programs seem to be the most effective in preventing sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 2009; Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; Renk et al.). Although school-based prevention programs have received some criticism, Rispen, Aleman, and Goudena (1997) argue that school-based abuse prevention programs empower children with knowledge, skills, and support for self-protection (Poche, Yoder, & Miltenberger, 1988; Tutty, 1992). Likewise, in their meta-analysis of child sexual abuse prevention programs, David and Gidyez (2000) and Topping and Barron (2009) found that children who participated in prevention programs performed higher on knowledge and skills outcome measurements than children in a control group. Their findings also revealed that effective programs incorporated active participation and behavior skills training, such as modeling, rehearsal and reinforcement. In addition, the researchers found programs that segmented material into three or more presentations were much more effective than one presentation.

After reviewing Turkish literature, no child sexual abuse prevention programs were found in school settings (Çeçen, 2007) thus, it can be thought that this study may cause more awareness of child sexual abuse in the school and indirectly in the society. In addition, there is no research regarding child sexual abuse prevention training programs in the formal school system. Thus, this research can be thought important because it is a pioneer study for child sexual abuse prevention programs in Turkey.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a school-based child sexual abuse prevention program on elementary school (4th grade) students. The following hypotheses were examined related to experimental study:

1) For the experimental group, (applied sexual abuse prevention program) post-test scores will

be significantly higher than control group's post-test scores. 2) The experimental group follow-up test scores will not be significantly different from their post test scores.

Method

In this study, both cross-sectional and quasi-experimental designed pre-test, post-test, and control group were used (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001). The subjects were consisted of 36 fourth grade students; randomly 18 assigned to the experimental and randomly 18 to the control group.

Measurement

Good Touch Bad Touch Curriculum Test: Good touch bad touch curriculum test (GTBTCT) is a 10 item questionnaire designed to measure primary school children's knowledge level of sexual abuse (Church, Forehand, Brown, & Holmes, 1988). This measure related to differentiation between good and sexually abusive touches, basic knowledge about coping with sexual abuse and application of such knowledge to specific situation. Church et al. used GTBTCT in a study and they reported this measurement successfully measures knowledge of children sexual abuse. Each item contains three choices and if the child marks the "correct answer" the child gets "1", and if the child marks "wrong answer" or "I don't know" he or she gets "0" score. Thus, for 10 item the highest score is 10 and the lowest score is 0. Higher scores indicate higher level of knowledge about sexual abuse. In this study to measure children's sexual abuse knowledge, GTBTCT was translated into Turkish and were applied to 235 elementary students. To examine the factor structure of the questionnaire, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the Mplus 5.21 (Muthen & Muthen, 2009) on the binary data. By using WLSMV estimation method, the results indicated that the hypothesized one-factor model represented an acceptable fit to the data (χ^2 : 30.969, df: 25, $p > .190$, CFI=.90, TLI=.88, RMSEA: 0.028). To examine internal consistency of the scale, Kuder Richardson (KR-21) was calculated and KR-21 was found to be .78. Test-retest reliability (for three weeks interval) coefficients for the GTBTCT was .80. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) the results of the test-retest reliability assessment are indicative of high temporal stability for the scales. Thus, The Turkish version of the GTBTCT has shown satisfactory validity and reliability results.

Procedure and Ethics

For this study mainly permission was granted from Ministry of National Education and approved by the Regional Educational Research Committee for research ethics in schools, Adana, Turkey. Additional permission was granted from the 36 students' parents. The parents signed the permission form allowing their children to join this study. The subjects consisted of 36 fourth grade students assigned to experimental (20 male, 16 female). Before treatment all related literature was reviewed the main themes and topics were defined. The topics were about personal rights, 'my body belongs to me', good touch-bad touch discrimination, breaking promise, body safety rules, say No, and bad secrets, talking with a grown up who believes the child, sexual abuse is never a child's fault, etc. In addition to see how to apply this kind a program the first researcher attended a Good Touch Bad Touch Workshop in Plymouth, England, 2008 which organized in USA by Child Help. Some materials used in that workshop were adapted into Turkish culture, for example pre-test post test scale (Good Touch Bad Touch Curriculum Test), pictures which represent what is good touch and what is bad touch, related feelings and videos which explains body safety rules through a puppet. For the experimental group, a 'preventing child sexual abuse psycho-educational training program' as an independent variable, was carried out by the researchers. A sixty minute sessions were carried out on four consecutive days. In the present study, beside the passive approach such as video and lecture, active techniques such as role-playing, modeling, and rehearsal teaching techniques were used. This is important because programs that allow children to be active participants have been found to be three times more effective than programs that use more passive approaches, such as videos and/or lectures (David & Gidyez, 2000). During this period the control group did not receive any treatment. The subjects' attention and concern who attended to experimental group were considerably high. To investigate variance homogeneity across groups Levene test was used and the variances were equal across groups. To analyze data CFA (MPlus 5.21) and ANCOVA (SPSS 16.0) and "paired sample t-test" were used.

Results

The experimental group pre-test score was 5.33 (SD=1.41) and post-test score was 8.66 (SD=1.28); and control group pre-test score was 5.61 (SD=1.38) and post-test scores was 6.16 (SD=1.42). To examine this

differences between experimental and control groups post tests scores ANCOVA was used, ANCOVA results has shown that post-test scores were significantly different ($F=43.138$; $df:1$; $p<.0001$).

After the post-test, for the follow-up study 8 weeks later, Good Touch Bad Touch Curriculum Test was applied to experimental group subjects test score was 8.50 (SD=1.09) and analysed by "paired sample t test". The follow-up study analyses has shown that there is no significant difference between the experimental group post tests and follow-up test scores ($t= .644$; $p>0.05$).

Discussion

Schools play a critical role in preventing child abuse, including child sexual abuse. The results of the study have shown that the child sexual abuse prevention program was effective on 4th grade students. The students who attended the sexual abuse prevention program scored significantly higher than the control group. In the literature it has been reported that similar intervention programs were also effective in gaining knowledge and skill acquisitions (Conte, Rosen, Saperstein, & Shermack, 1985; Hebert, Lavoie, Piche, & Poitras, 2001; Lanning & Massey-Stokes, 2006; Nemerofsky, Carran, & Rosenberg, 1994; Saslawsky & Wurtele, 1986; Wurtele, Gillispie, Currier, & Franklin, 1992) on children. In this context it can be thought that our study results are consistent with the related literature. All children who attended the experimental study stated that this program was useful for them.

This study has some limitations. This study was conducted on 4th grade students thus the results of the study are limited to this sample. The program of the needs to be investigated, the other grade levels. This program was conducted only on students, teachers and parents can be included to program for future research. Further research needs to be conducted with larger samples that represent various geographical regions of the Turkey in order to better understand the extent and effectiveness of child prevention program in schools across the nation. The effectiveness of this program was assessed after 8 weeks interval, but it needs to be further evaluated after one year or more, so that follow-up effectiveness can be evaluated clearly. Evaluation is a critical component of all health promotion/prevention programs. This study needs to be considered as a first attempt to prevent child sexual abuse in elementary school in Turkish culture. The prevention of child sexual abuse program for elementary

school students should be based on a scientific intervention model. During the application of the program, much encouragement was given by Turkish educational professionals, counselors and parents. There was a high level of enthusiasm to expand and implement the sexual abuse education prevention program as well as to train school counselors to effectively manage and deliver this comprehensive prevention sexual abuse curriculum. Research suggests that child abuse prevention programs can improve their effectiveness by embracing certain best practice standards (Daro, 1994; Gutterman, 2001).

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