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SUPERVISED PARENT- CHILD(REN) VISITATION PROGRAMS

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Summary

The parent-child(ren) Supervised Visitation (SV) programs enable children and parents to have safe and conflict-free interactions. The programs vary in their contexts. SV programs in child welfare context aim either the reunion of the parent(s) and child(ren) or maintaining a safe and healthy relationship between parent(s) and child(ren) under the protection of social services. The SV programs in child custody dispute context focus on enhancing conflict free and safe contacts between noncustodial parent and child(ren). The services provided under SV services may vary from one-on-one supervision to supervised exchanges. The requirements of providing SV services, rules and training standards are defined by Supervised Visitation Network(SVN) studiously and broadly applied in Western Cultures. However, the SV services in Turkey are limited to monitored exchange practically. The lack of well-designed services put children and parents in an ambiguous and stressful position in multiple ways both in the short and long term. These services need to be improved immediately to meet the needs of the society.

KEY WORDS: Supervised Visitation, Monitored Exchange, Contact Center, High Conflict Parents, Custody Dispute

DENETİMLİ EBEVEYN-ÇOCUK GÖRÜŞMESİ PROGRAMLARI

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Özet

Denetimli ebeveyn-çocuk görüşme programları, ebeveynlerle çocukların arasında güvenli ve çatışmadan uzak bir şekilde etkileşim olabildiğini sağlar. Çocuk koruma hizmetleri bünyesinde gerçekleştirilen denetimli görüşme hizmetleri, kimi zaman aile ile çocuğun yeniden bir araya gelmesine hizmet ederken, bunun mümkün olmadığı durumlarda çocukla ebeveynleri arasındaki ilişkinin kopmamasını amaçlar. Diğer yandan, velayet anlaşmazlıkları söz konusu olduğunda bu hizmetler, çocukla velayeti elinde bulundurmayan ebeveyn arasında sağlıklı ve ebeveynler arası çatışmadan uzak ilişki tesis edilmesini sağlar. Denetimli görüşme hizmetleri birebir denetimden, çocuk teslimi sırasında yapılan denetime kadar farklılık gösterebilir. Bu hizmetleri verebilmek için gerekli koşullar, hizmetlere ilişkin kurallar ve bu hizmetleri verecek kişilere ilişkin eğitim standartları, Denetimli Görüşme Ağı(SVN) tarafından titizlikle tanımlanmıştır ve batı kültürlerinde yaygınlıkla uygulanmaktadır. Ancak, ülkemizdeki denetimli görüşme hizmetleri çoğunlukla güvenli çocuk teslimi ile sınırlı kalmakta olup, bu hizmetlerin iyi tasarlanmış bir şekilde sunulmuyor olması, hem çocukları hem de ebeveynleri kısa ve uzun vadede belirsiz ve sıkıntılı bir duruma düşürmektedir. Bu hizmetler, toplumun ihtiyaçları doğrultusunda ivedilikle iyileştirilmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Denetimli Ebeveyn-Çocuk Görüşmesi, Güvenli Çocuk Teslimi, Ebeveyn-Çocuk Görüşme Merkezi, Yüksek Çatışmalı Aileler, Çekişmeli Velayet

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 9 (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), outlines that *children have rights to maintain personal relationships with their parents, unless this would not be in the best interest of a child* (“Convention on the Rights of the Child”, 1990, p.3). Thus, social services and courts try to enhance protection for children on one hand while trying to support and sustain parent-child contact on the other hand (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). *Supervised Visitation* (SV), also known as *Supervised Access* (SA), Child Contact (CC) or Parental Contact (PC), refer a generic term that describes parent-child interaction is monitored and supervised by a third party for assuring a protected setting not only for children but also for parents (SVN Standards Task Force and the Standards and Guidelines Committee, 2006; Johnston & Straus, 1999).

Historically, supervised visitation services were conducted within child welfare agencies and in these settings children are in need of protection due to neglect or/and abuse, so the interaction with their parents would only be possible in a safe and monitored environment (Maxwell & Oehme, 2001). Within the context of child welfare services the aim of SV is not only to establish a healthy parent-child relationship and sustain it but also to reach unsupervised visitation gradually, however, within the context of custody disputes the purpose of SV is to monitor and facilitate parent-child interactions in a setting which is both safe and neutral (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012).

Brandt (2007) suggests that supervised visitation case types roughly fall into one of four categories: In the first category “*one or both parents are locked in a pattern of difficult and inappropriate behavior that is thwarting the process of shared parenting*”. Second category represents “*The child’s relationship with a parent is threatened by the risk of parental kidnapping, or there is substantial interference with the non-custodial parent’s access to the child*”. At the third category “*The child’s health and safety are threatened because the parent’s capacity to safely care for the child is impaired by mental-health or substance-abuse issues*”. And in the last category “*There have been incidences of domestic violence between the parents*” (as cited in: Babb, Danziger, Morgan, & Mack, 2009). According to this classification it can be inferred that SV services within the context of social services can be classified under first and third item, while, SV within the context of custody disputes can be classified under all of the items. However, it is important to consider that SV services within social services and child custody disputes have some differences as well as some overlaps frequently.

In this article some key definitions about SV will be provided initially, and then descriptions of different types of SA and some background information about these two different types of

programs will be given. Subsequently, the text will focus on supervised visitation services within child custody dispute. For this purpose, client profiles of these programs, a layout of practice standards and program rules will be explained and the implementation of SV services in Turkey will be described. Within the scope of this article, some specific examples of one of the SV programs Buckeye Ranch Common Ground (TBRCG) will be given. This particular program was chosen as an example because the first author of this article worked as a volunteer in this program for two months and the second author of the article has been working as the coordinator of TBRCG Program. Finally, the effectiveness of SV programs in Western Cultures and recommendations regarding to broaden SV services in Turkey will be discussed under the discussion part.

Definitions and Basics

Within this section, it was planned to provide definitions related to types and aspects of SV services. For this aim, the definition and types of SV services will be given first, the definitions and descriptions of SV monitor and SV service provider will be provided subsequently. While giving these definitions it was also aimed to give the terminology that are frequently observed to be used interchangeably as well.

Supervised visitation or *Supervised Access* refers to interaction between visiting parent and one or more children in the presence of a third person, namely supervisor or a trained monitor. In this type of visitation the only focus is the protection and safety of the child and adult participants, thus, the entire visitation takes place at the presence of supervisor ("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). Supervisor may intervene to the interaction when concerns aroused and is responsible to report violations. *Supervised Contact* is another term used for the similar concept which is slightly different. Freeman (1992) suggests that contact includes relatives and friends as well as parents; moreover, exchange of letters, phone calls and presents besides personal meetings is possible under the term of supervised contact (Freeman, 199; as cited in Kroll, 2000, p.183).

Supervised visitations can be done *One-on-one supervision* in which parent/child contact supervised by at least one visit supervisor supervising the interaction as well as *Group supervision* or *Multiple-family supervision* in which more than one family is overseen by one or more visit supervisors ("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). However, group supervision can be defined under *Monitored Visitation* or *Supported Contact* which is another type of visitation that is assisted by a trained monitor or supervisor again but the visit is checked periodically during the visitation time and supervisor attends to visit when help is needed (TBRCG, 2016).

Off-site supervision is supervision of parent-child interaction that takes place away from a facility that is under the management of the provider; in contrast, *On-site* supervision refers to supervision of the contact at the provider managed facility ("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). *Safe Exchanges* or *Monitored Exchanges* are exchanges of child(ren) between custodial and non-custodial parents/parties/family members within the presence of a trained monitor before and after the unsupervised visitation (Babb, Danziger, Moran, & Mack, 2009). The supervision is usually limited to the exchanges at the beginning and at the end of the visit; the remainder of the non-custodial parent-child contact is unsupervised. These supervised exchanges may be on-or-off the site("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006).

Therapeutic supervision is not only a supervised visitation but also a parent-child therapy conducted by a licensed or certified mental health professional that can also provide supervised visitation (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011).

Visit supervisor, may also be called a "child access monitor," "observer", or "visitation specialist", refers to a person who had passed criminal background check and child abuse and neglect screening and this person's role is observing, overseeing and intervening parent-child interaction during visits and/or during transitions from one parent to another("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). A visit supervisor can be an independent contractor and any employee, trainee, intern, or volunteer of an agency provider but any person who provides direct services to a SV client or who does clinical supervision of direct service must complete 24 hours of training including these topics: SVN Standards and Code of Ethics, provider policies and procedures, safety, mandatory child abuse reporting, professional boundaries, conflict of interest, confidentiality, and maintaining neutrality, developmental stages, divorce and its effects on families and on children, mental health services for families who have children that have mental health and developmental issues, cultural issues, family violence and its effects, child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, parenting skills, assertiveness training, conflict resolution, intervention during visits, observation of parent/child interactions, laws related to child custody, visitation and child protection and preparation of factual and neutral observation notes and reports("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). This content is least but last, a person who is going to provide SV services need to attend to practicum training. Practicum training for SV trainees should cover these: Direct observation of parent/child contact performed by a trained visit supervisor (shadowing), co-supervision of the visit by the trainee with a trained visit supervisor, direct observation by a trained visit supervisor while the trainee independently supervises the visit (reverse shadowing) (SVN, 2006).

Any paid or unpaid professional person or agency that is experienced in and trained to deliver supervised visitation services is called *Supervised Access Provider*("Standards For Supervised

Visitation Practice", 2006). Supervised visitation services providers may vary from private for-profit agencies, private non-profit groups, faith-based organizations, and court-centered programs (Babb, Danziger, Morgan, & Mack, 2009). Irrespective of the organization type, the main goal of the SV providers is to provide supervised visitation that is "safe, neutral, sensitive to the needs of children, and accessible to the local community" (Park, Peterson-Badali, & Jenkins, 1997). Visitation centers vary in the services they offer but the core service of these programs provide supervised visitation facilities, many centers also offer exchange services (Birnbaum & Alaggia, 2006). The Buckeye Ranch Common Ground program offers supervised visitation, monitored visitation (which is a lower level of supervision), safe exchange for parents and children in Columbus Ohio. Other services offered by programs in the United States include therapeutic visitation and educational services such as parenting and co-parenting classes.

SV Services within the Context of Child Welfare Services and Family Court Disputes

The development SV programs can be dated approximately to mid-1980s in several western societies, however the main concern that had catalyzed development of these programs were slightly different; continental Europe and British axis, especially French programs had been founded with the primary concern of preserving bonds between child and non-custodial parent while Australian, New Zealandia and North American's primary motivation to develop these programs had been ensuring safety against DV and child abuse (Dickens, 1999). It is still considered as the heart of the SV philosophy that whether to adopt a rights approach that conceptualizes contact as a fundamental parental and children rights issue or a welfare based approach that prioritizes child protection in dealing with parent-child contact disputes (Perry & Rainey, 2007).

Cases that parent-child interaction is evaluated that need to be supervised due to the child is in need of protection and cases regarding child's best interest after parental divorce or separation due to custody disputes are considered as two different types of supervised access (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012). The first type of supervised access can be provided both by child protection services and SV programs; however, the second type of visitation is conducted by profit or non-profit SV programs.

SV services have been utilized by child protective system for child abuse and neglect cases in the US; but since more than two decades the US courts began using SV services in DV cases and child custody disputes as well (Oehme & O'Rourke, 2011). One study evaluated 94 SV programs in operating in the United States and Canada revealed that 51 percent of the programs serve both child protection services and 64 percent of the programs are provided by nonprofit, private agencies (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999).

In Britain, the first program that provides post-divorce SV services was founded in 1985 in a church as a neutral place to ensure comfortable contact between parent and child (Knox & Orr, 2001). There are over 350 SV service provider institutions that are connected with National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) in Britain however, the scope of the services of those programs are limited to child custody and visitation disputes (“*What we do*”, n.d.). However, in Sweden the SV services became available after the legislation that enabled volunteers under the funding and supervision of social services to give social support including supervised visitation both in child protection and custody-visitiation dispute contexts (Andersson & Arvidsson, 2008).

The Scope of Supervised Visitation Services in Child Welfare Services

“Child maltreatment” is defined as a generic concept that takes in not only all physical abuse or ill-treatment and sexual abuse but also, psychological abuse, psychological neglect, negligence, commercial or other exploitation (WHO, 2016). According to WHO (2016), the acts of the perpetrator take place in context of a relationship of responsibility trust or power and can be resulted with actual harm as well as potential harm to the child’s physical health, survival, psychological or physical development or dignity. In response to the high rates, dismal consequences, and great expense of child maltreatment, multifaceted child protection systems have evolved in many industrialized nations (Smith, Shapiro, Sperry, & LeBuffe, 2014). Where there is a risk to the life of a child or the possibility of serious immediate harm, an agency with statutory child protection powers (police, Children’s services agencies etc.) act quickly to secure the immediate safety of the child. Depending on the case, child could be placed “out of home” either permanently or short-term and at this point child welfare services not only aim to promote the continuing contact between children in care and their parents, but also they are obliged to ensure that the child is protected from any likely, or actual, abuse or exploitation (Roulston & McColgan, 1997). One of the reasons SV services are used by child protection services is promoting and developing a healthy parent-child relationship to achieve unsupervised visitation and reunification gradually (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012). It is theoretically supported by attachment literature (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2013) and family involvement for children in residential care was incorporated as a basic right for children in care (Huefner, Pick, Smith, Stevens, & Mason, 2014). However, it is not always possible for child to return parental care and home due to their own best interest. In these situations it is still important to maintain parent-child relationship for various reasons. According to Foord (1986), there are six purposes of this type of access within child protection service settings; maintaining a relationship that is existing and worthwhile, ensuring children know their origins, clarifying the reasons for out of home placement, protecting child’s self-image from harm due to a loss of touch with parents, assuring the child about parent’s safety and well-being when the

child has such concerns, ensuring that the child do not develop unrealistic and probably harmful fantasies about his/her parents that she/he has not got any contact (Foord, 1986: cited as: Roulston & McColgan, 1997).

In Turkey, Law on Agency for Social Services and Child Protection No. 2828 (promulgated on 24 May 1983) regulates social services provided for people in need of protection, care and assistance. The scope of the law is not limited to children but also the handicapped, the aged, and others (*"Rights of the child"*, 2006). Children are placed to either a child home, dormitory or child support center after the decision of Law Court due to exposing violence or neglect. Parents whose children are under state protection and placed in an official care center are allowed to visit their children if there is no legal restriction from Law Court and if their children are willing to do so (Regulation of Child Protection Center:10-a) The visit of parents and their conversations with their children are monitored and reported by Social Service staff such as Social Worker and/or Psychologist. The visit of parents must be monitored very carefully. Because victims may be motivated to withhold information, deny that they were abused, or they wish to protect familiar perpetrators, especially family members (Pipe, Lamb Orbach&Cederborg, 2013, pp.116-117).

Supervised Visitation within Family Court Dispute Context

The transformation in the family structure, raising divorce rates, and increased number of children conceived out of wedlock are the main reasons of the need for post-divorce SV services in Western cultures. According to statistics from European Union since, the crude marriage rate (marriage rate per 1000 people) in the EU-28 has declined by close to 50% in relative terms (from 7.8 per 1000 persons in 1965 to 4.2 in 2011) while the crude divorce rate (divorce rate per 1000 people) increased from 0.8 per 1000 persons in 1965 to 2.0 in 2011 (Eurostat, 2015). According to the same data the proportion of live births outside marriage in the EU-28 raised 27% to 40% from 2000 to 2012 and it has been interpreted as transformation of family formation from traditional pattern where children were born within marriage to cohabitating and single parents. The scene in the US is slightly different from Europe, in 1960's the crude marriage rate was 8.5 and decreased to 7.3 in 2006, however, crude divorce rates increased from 2.2 to 3.6 between 1960 and 2006(Turner, 2009, 172-173).

Within the scope of this transformation in family structure and gradually raising need for SV services several operating programs were founded in Canada and USA until the first half of 1990s but they were isolated from each other and their operations were not well described (Park, Peterson-Badali, & Jenkins, 1997). However in Britain, the SV services have been provided by Contact Centers since 1985 and the first Child Contact Centre was opened in a church by a magistrate and the idea of founding SV programs spread through the church into the wider

community (Knox & Orr, 2001). The Supervised Visitation Network (SVN) which is an association of agency and individual providers of supervised visitation services was founded in 1991 and hosted their first meeting in 1992 in US (SVN, 2016). Meanwhile, in late 1991, it was announced that Ontario government will provide funding for the Supervised Access Pilot Project and set the primary criteria as safety, neutrality, sensitivity to the needs of children, and accessibility to the local community (Park, Peterson-Badali, & Jenkins, 1997). The informal association of Contact Centers became the Network of Access and Child Contact Centers (NACCC) in 1990 and it was renamed as the National Association of Child Contact Centers in 1998 in Britain (Knox & Orr, 2001). During the last two decades era, SV programs have spread throughout North America, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand in response to the needs of high conflict post-separation families (Birnbaum & Alaggia, 2006). Since 1991, SVN transformed to a multi-national non-profit membership network of agencies and individuals who provide safe, conflict-free access for noncustodial parents and children (SVN, 2016). The Standards and Guidelines for Supervised Visitation Network Practice were first in May 1996 (Straus, Blaschak-Brown, & Reiniger, 1998) and the current version is effective since July 1, 2006 (SVN Standards Task Force and the Standards and Guidelines Committee, 2006).

The need for SA may stem from variety of specific reasons. According to Park and his colleagues these reasons are *“concern that a noncustodial parent may pose a threat, either to a child or to a former spouse; alcohol or drug abuse, or psychiatric disturbance; risk of abduction of the child by the noncustodial parent; a history of concern about abusive behavior; poor parenting skills; or a lengthy separation between the noncustodial parent and the child”* (Park, Peterson-Badali, & Jenkins, 1997, p.37).

Supervised visitation services are usually ordered by courts. According to SVN Standards Guidelines (2006) *“Referrals may be made by order of a court or may be from a child protective service agency that has taken custody of a child. In all other situations, including referrals from mental health professionals, mediators, and attorneys, the referral must include a signed agreement by the parents”* (SVN, 2006, p. 24). It is only a small minority of family court cases that are referred SV Services and these cases may be referred SV programs because of several reasons varying from simple scheduling problems to more complex child abuse to domestic violence allegations (Birnbaum & Alaggia, 2006). For TBRCG Program, it has been observed that approximately ninety percent of families referred to the program in Ohio are received from Domestic Relation and Juvenile Court. Other community agencies such as domestic violence services, children’s service agencies, and family law practitioners are the other institutions which provide the remaining referrals to the program. Additionally, other partners of TBRCG from community collaborates may provide referrals in other communities as well.

According to Birnbaum and Alaggia (2006), judges often order supervised visitation under these circumstances: *“when the parent/child relationship has not been developed sufficiently, when either or both parents allege concerns about the other during visitation with the noncustodial parent (e.g., substance abuse problems, mental health issues, risk of child abduction, negative lifestyle influences of the other parent, poor parenting practices, or when children have expressed their wish not to visit with the other parent) and when there is a need to reestablish parent/child relationships”* (Birnbaum & Alaggia, 2006, p.120).

Depending on characteristics of the case, parents, and child(ren), different types of SV services can be utilized by courts. One-on-one supervision is the most intensive method that is needed the circumstance of issues of safety are compelling or there is concern that a parent might manipulate or coerce a child (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). It is most vital in one-on-one supervision cases that the visit supervisor is trained enough to assess the risky situations and possible manipulations during the visits and intervene competently when it is needed. One-on-one supervised visitation sessions most often occur on-site in an agency setting, if the safety is ensured can be held as off-site supervision in a community setting, in a family home or a local neighborhood area conducive to child(ren) activities (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011).

Group supervision occurs in both foster care and non-profit agency settings where the goal is to provide a safe place for families to reconnect with their child(ren) following their removal from the home due to child abuse or neglect and agency caseworkers are usually charged with monitoring the visit (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). This type of supervision is recommended for cases that are not considered high-risk for harm to the child.

Therapeutic supervised visitation model is being utilized by a trained visit supervisor whose function goes beyond maintaining the safety of the visitation to treating the parent-child relationship. The visit supervisor is an active participant or “coach” in the sessions, aiding the parent in repairing or restoring the relationship with the child (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). This service may be used by families desiring to incorporate reunification counseling into supervised visitation. In the case that reunification is the goal of this service, it can be beneficial in some cases to include therapeutic supports that enhance or support family. After the intake interviews, the coordinator may deny the provision of services to the family due to concerns aroused especially because of safety (Park, Peterson-Badali, & Jenkins, 1997, SVN Standards Task Force and the Standards and Guidelines Committee, 2006). It should be considered that not all of the SV centers are set up to handle the same amount of risk. Some programs, especially in private practice setting, do not have officers, cameras, metal detectors and other such safety provisions. Especially when there is a protection order issued, it is sometimes unsafe to provide services without the presence of a police officer.

Generally related to the referral reason (such as domestic violence, sexual abuse etc.), sometimes apart from it (just because high level of conflict and envy), SV services have to deal with most emotionally unstable group of litigants in the court system, these parties are in anxiety, fear, anger, despair and grief (Oehme & Maxwell, 2004). The conflict issues caused by the ongoing custody dispute are possibly contaminated with unresolved issues from the past and hidden personal expectations of parents. When we consider four different co-parenting styles that occurs after divorce, only 25 per cent of parents fall in the “cooperative” category (Sullivan, 2008, p.8). Supervised visitation services are most likely used by parents under conflicted and parallel co-parenting categories, respectively. Conflicted parents cannot communicate effectively, instead, they project anger and animosity to each other through repeatedly litigating against each other (Stahl, 2014). Thus, they are called “frequent flyers” of the family court system and they pose 10-20 per cent of the co-parents (Sullivan, 2008, p.5). Because of the high level of conflict as well as the serious accusations that they make against each other, the courts refer those families to SV services. Parents under the “angry associates” category can express both enmity and cooperation (Stahl, 2014, p.55) to each other and their prevalence is no more than 10-20 percent (Sullivan, 2008). These parents are likely to benefit from post-divorce parenting trainings, thus, SV services can pose a useful solution until joint decisions by parents available. Lastly, largest group that fall under “parallel parenting” category with 40 per cent (Sullivan, 2008, p.10) and these parents do not communicate to each other directly, instead they use third party such as parenting coordinators or parenting coaches (Stahl, 2014, p.31). It is a widely used method to assist high conflict parents to become parallel co-parents and to ensure child(ren)’s adjustment by using parenting coordinators (Stahl, 2014; Sullivan, 2008). SV services are useful programs for this parenting transition.

Even though parent profiles and co-parenting styles are important, the actual clients of SV programs are often considered to be the children rather than parents. The significant amount of these children were exposed to traumatic family experiences even many of them have experienced not only a single trauma but also multiple traumas (Johnston & Straus, 1999). These children, especially the ones within the context of custody disputes may show some difficulties before they involve in SV services (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012). According to Jenkins, Park and Peterson (1997), children in SV programs between 4-12 age range are eight times more tend to show internalizing behavioral problems (such as social withdrawal, negative feeling like guilt, loneliness, sadness, rejected, fearfulness, nervousness, concentration problems, irritability, lack of appetite, psychosomatic symptoms etc.) and 14 times more likely to display externalizing behavioral problems (such as physical aggression, destruction of property, underage drug or alcohol use, running away from home). Children who are in the middle of high conflict custody and visitation disputes have been identified as the most “at risk”

group of children and they suffer from emotional and behavioral disturbances (Birnbaum & Alaggia, 2006).

The importance of maintaining the relationship between parent-child is recognized by law of many ratified countries after The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Having agreed to meet the standards in the Convention, mandating supervised visitation decisions should be guided by the “best interest of the child” principle (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012). It is an undeniable fact that the concept of “child’s best interest” and children’s position during SV meetings are both not only questionable but also sensitive (Forsberg & Pösö, 2008). It is crucial that the continuance of the parent-child relationship to be safe, and also it is expected to be corrective experience for child (Johnston & Straus, 1999). Saini et al (2012), suggest that children and families using SV services are presumably in a transition period and experiencing some emotional consequences of this period, and the assumption is SV services will minimize the negative impacts of this transition period through enabling safe interactions between parents and their children (Saini, Van Wert, & Gofman, 2012). For this reason it is very important visit monitors and SV service providers are crystal clear about the process and rules of SV services. When process is examined, it can be easily realized that it begins before the intake appointment. Before the intake appointment is scheduled, children should be given a realistic explanation of the reasons for the SV and custodial parent is the best person to explain this in custody dispute cases (Johnston & Straus, 1999). Family court specialists, guardians, parent coordinators or coaches, child therapists, school counselors or social workers, and SV program staff should be well prepared to provide support the custodial parents about making this explanation.

During the intake process program staff should review the court orders and case plans for the family. While doing this, it is vital for them to evaluate the risks involved in SV process (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). To have a better understanding of the case they may ask some questions about the parents’ views and concerns about the situation. It is another important objective of the intake process to explain processes and procedures of SV program to client (Pulido, Forrester, & Lacina, 2011). While participating in the intake the program rules should be clarified as well as observation report process. Due to these multiple aspects, the intake process can take up to two hours with each family member, including children when age-appropriate.

According to Johnston and Straus (1999), the child should be included to the intake process considering age and developmental level. Briefly, the child are given a tour in the program facilities, then it is important to summarize a typical visit day process, clarify how long the visit take, where custodial parent wait or leave and come back to the facilities, introduce the program

rules and answer child's questions (Johnston & Straus, 1999). When safety concerns are observed, it would be beneficial to show safety precautions that SV has taken and even introduce with the officer to child.

When the philosophy and rules of SV services within child custody disputes are examined, it is clear that enhancing safety should be considered as the core element and the basic rule of SV programs. According to SVN, *"programs cannot guarantee parents' and children's safety but it emphasize that the provider of supervised visitation must make reasonable efforts to ensure that security measures are provided"* ("Standards For Supervised Visitation Practice", 2006). The SV service providers' policy and procedures about safety should be written and discussed with their clients at the intake session and clients should confirm that they are accepting to obey these precautions to assure not only their own safety but also the others'. Safety precautions can vary according to the structure of the facility and type of service provided. TBRCG's safety precautions are: separate parking lots, different entrances for custodial and visiting parents, security cameras for parking lots and entrances, lobbies and hallways, providing SV services only in the presence of a police officer, restricting all kinds of guns and weapons on The Buckeye Ranch premises, scheduled staggered arrival and departure times, making all personal items such as purses or personal bags subject to search by staff, collecting keys and electronic devices, approval of all the gifts and snacks by staff, restricting violent and disrespectful behaviors (The Buckeye Ranch , 2015). In Florida, programs are required to have to provide their security protocol written to their clients, additionally; programs are obliged to have a law enforcement officer with the power of arrest on-site during visits (Oehme & Maxwell, 2004).

It is not possible for SV programs take the responsibility for repairing the impacts of the damage that children have been exposed (Johnston & Straus, 1999). However, the safe new experiences seem to have positive impacts on children since promoting children's well-being during visits is another aspect of these SV services (SVN, 2016). According to Johnston and Straus (1999), *"programs should seek, at the very least, to minimize the risk of re-traumatizing the children and providing the child with a physically safe experience may not be enough and visitations may continue to traumatize the child"*. The visitation conditions enhance a controlled environment and safety for both child and visiting party (Turell & Keiffer, 2011).

Assurance of physical safety of not only children but also parents is crucial, but the aim of the SV services goes far beyond. According to Johnston and Straus (1999), focusing only physical safety without paying attention to children's concerns and emotions would fail to provide a corrective experience and furthermore, it may be likely to pose a risk to traumatize the child repeatedly (Johnston & Straus, 1999). To assure that the child is not under the risk of the

ongoing traumatization because of utilizing SV services the visit monitor should be aware of verbal and nonverbal behavior and even body language of parents and children during visits (Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop, Barlow, & Jesso, 2006). To enhance children's safety during supervised visits, trained monitors may intervene when a child needs help. During a supervised visitation session the signals that may show child needs help include some externalizing behaviors such as inconsolable crying, marked aggression and oppositional behavior, high agitation and frenetic activity as well as internalizing behaviors such as frozen immobilized stance, lack of interest that cannot be managed by parent or supervisor during the visit (Johnston & Straus, 1999). Intervention may vary depending on the case from a brief "time out" to referral of the child and/or family to a comprehensive assessment by a mental health specialist. Visitation may be intervened because of parent is unable or unwilling to follow the rules which are basically introduced to assure child's well-being. TBRCG program prohibits derogatory remarks about either party in front of the children, inappropriate conversations and behaviors with the child, questioning child about his/her residential family members, residence, court cases, counseling etc.. Moreover, sending unauthorized messages to the other party through children, whispering, low tone talking, bad language, physical discipline are other emphasized rules on TBRCG instructions (The Buckeye Ranch, 2015).

It is required that service provider to continue a record of every SV sessions. In these records not only the observations but also the observed violations should be tracked. These observation records do not include any evaluation but only observations. Parents should be informed about these records at the intake session. In child custody dispute cases these observations can be seen by guardians and programs provide observation records for court regularly.

"Supervised access is ordered to develop, reestablish, or maintain a relationship between a child and visiting parent, or other relative, generally with the expectation that unsupervised access will become possible at some point" (Bailey, 1999). However, violation of the rules may be a reason for termination of the services, additionally; violations should be reported to court (TBRCG, 2016).

The length of the services may vary from case to case depending on judge's approach to the case, structure of the SV program, content of the litigations, prognoses of the visits and various other needs of the family. Thus, it is not possible to give a prescribed amount of time for any type for SV services in child custody dispute cases. On the other hand, in child protection cases especially in social service settings the length of these services are closely related to the objective of the visits, in other words whether or not the reunification of the family and child is possible or not (Roulston & McColgan, 1997).

Supervised Visitation Services in Turkey

SV Services in Turkey within Child Welfare Services

One study aimed to reveal the primary reasons for children, who lived in 109 youth homes operating in Turkey between 1996-2004, to be referred to these institutions were parents' divorce (17.1%), parents' abandonment (8.3%), parents' death (46.6%), economical insufficiency (14%), incest cases (0.66%), sexual abuse (1.16%), physical and emotional abuse (3.55%), as well as forcing girls for marriage (0.13%), and other factors such as either one or two disabled parents, imprisonment of parents, natural disasters, custom, etc. (8.33%) (Kesen, Karakuş, & Deniz, 2012). According to foster care guide line that was accepted in 2012 and promulgated in official gazette 28497, child(ren)'s contact with biological family was regulated with article 16 and SV services for referred to protect child(ren) against negative incidents during visitations (ResmiGazete 28497, 24 Dec 2012). The primary objective of these visits is to maintain contact between biological family and child(ren), when the reunion is possible child(ren) is sent to home to biological parents and they are visited by staff as well. Unfortunately due to lack of description of these services the practice of these services varies from one institution to another within Turkey and there is not any in service education for supervising those visits.

SV Services in Turkey within Family Court Dispute Context

According to Civil Code of Law in Turkey the custody of child(ren) should be granted one of the parents after separation or divorce and the court regulates schedule and length of the visits not only for weekdays but also for holidays and special days such as birthdays, mother's, father's days etc. For the contested custody cases this schedule is determined within the scope of information and professional recommendations that emerge in the report conducted by family court specialists team made up of a psychologist, a social worker and a pedagogue. These reports are conducted due to judge's appointment after individual interviews as well as home visits as a result of comprehensive evaluation. Under the circumstances that may put child in a risky situation court can order for a restriction or termination of the visitations. Under the circumstances of non-custodial parent is hindered to visit child(ren) inspite of the order, the concerns about the safety of child(ren) or parties during exchanges due to former domestic violence or ongoing high conflict issues aroused, custodial parent manipulates the child(ren) non-custodial parent may apply for a execution proceeding. Execution proceeding is frequently supervised exchanges within the presence of a mental health professional, bailiff and law enforcement when it is needed(Stahl, 2014). The mental health professional can be psychologist, a social worker as well as a pedagogue or a school counselor. In the execution proceeding custodial parent is referred to judgement debtor and obliged to fulfill the court decision about contact between non-custodial parent in other words judgement creditor and child(ren) who is(are) execution object (Koçyıldırım, 2010).

It is an undeniable fact that the execution system for court ordered parent child contacts is partially affective against custodial parents who are resistant to follow the contact order. These custodial parents so often resist enhancing to contact between the other party and the children due to ongoing divorce issues. However in some cases children are under the risk of abduction and accusations of sexual abuse. Due to lack of SV institutions or programs in Turkey it is seldom possible to provide supervised visitation. When it is provided it can only be onsite supervision which is relatively hard to enhance safety.

Unless there is another regulation the visiting parent is responsible for picking up the child(ren) from custodial parent's home. For this reason execution proceedings take place in the neighborhood where custodial parent and child(ren) lives. This causes the conflict between parents to be publicized in the neighborhood. Due to conflict custodial parent is not expected to be supportive in terms of visitation, child(ren) have to deal with parent's emotional situation before and after the visitation besides their own concerns. Unfortunately there is not any research about the psychological impacts of this kind of mandatory access to the noncustodial parent on children psychological well-being and long term parent child relationship.

Another issue is the expenses of the execution process. Noncustodial parent is expected to pay a fee for every visitation. Besides the fee which is between 200-300₺ (Turkish Liras) the expenses of transportation is also compensated by noncustodial parent (Koçyıldırım, 2010). These expenses often cause noncustodial parent to be exhausted and give up visitations after a while.

During the monitored exchanges it is the visit monitor's responsibility to enhance a safe environment for the supervised exchange. However, it is rarely possible to see the file before the exchange and usually the time with the child(ren) is so limited when other officers are waiting child(ren) to be ready in front of the door. The observations of the monitor is expected to be declared within the presence of other officers and sometimes parties, available for parties which puts monitor in another hardship. It is sometimes family court specialists who are experienced to deal with high conflict families but it is not necessary. Even the monitor is family court specialist unfortunately some appointed family court specialists as pedagogue are appointed due to their education major and they have no theoretical background to handle this complex situation. Lastly and above all, there is no special training even an in service training program available for family court specialists and social service staff in Turkey about monitoring a visit or making safe exchanges.

From child(ren) rights perspective, it is responsibility of the state and social services to enhance safe environment to maintain contact between child and parent. This can be based on to the legal context that stems from 9th article of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, from the child protection context it is again responsibility of the state and

social services to “*undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being*” according to The United Nations Convention on the Rights article 3 (“*Convention on the Rights of the Child*”, 1990). According to Turkish Statistical Institution (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu-TÜİK, 2016) 109.978 children experienced parental divorce in 2015 (“*Basın Odası Haberleri*”, 2016).

In Western cultures, the 2-3 years period is seen as a transition period for co-parents find a way of functional co-parenting (Sullivan, 2008). Since divorce is considered a cultural phenomenon like marriage, the adjustment of co-parents to divorce is closely related to culture and the structure of the society (Sayan Karahan, 2012). Unfortunately there are only limited number of empirical studies that focus on post-divorce experiences of Turkish parents within the context of cultural norms (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005; Yılmaz & Fışiloğlu, 2008). Not surprisingly, mothers are accepted as the primary gatekeepers for their children (Yılmaz & Fışiloğlu, 2008) and according to 2015 of data of TÜİK, mothers are the three times more likely to be the custodial parents of the children (“*Basın Odası Haberleri*”, 2016). The problems with of non-custodial parent visitation after divorce can be explained with many reasons for Turkish society. Firstly, Turkish co-parents are not likely keep in touch even for their children directly due to many reasons such as the fact that patriarchal society structure of Turkey does not approve post-divorce contact between co-parents, existence of domestic violence in roughly one third of marriages. Lack of post-divorce parental contact is likely to lead either ending non-custodial parent to visit child(ren) or puts child(ren) in painful situation that their non-custodial parents visit them at school or they meet them out of custodial parent’s knowledge. Secondly, lack of SV programs puts both custodial parents and non-custodial parents in to contradictory position. From custodial parents’ perspective, who are much likely to be women, especially in the presence of domestic violence history, it would be risky for both to let perpetrator spend time alone with child(ren), however, otherwise child(ren) can lose contact with non-custodial parent. From non-custodial parent’s perspective custodial parents stands in a powerful situation with holding custody and generally fathers who hold the non-custodial parent position cannot involve child(ren)’s routine due to customary once in two weeks visitation schedules. Especially during school semester these visits may directly drop child(ren)’s school performance and custodial mothers are likely to skip visits when child(ren) are sick. Hence, after a while non-custodial fathers stands in a contradictory position to sustain the poor quality relationship that they maintain with child(ren) under the powerful position of custodial parent. Lack of joint custody in our system is another factor that contributes to this situation. Thirdly, especially child support payments can play a precipitant role over visitation problems. In Turkish system child support is due to execution process as well, so irregular payments often end up with custodial mothers to restrict visitations by non-custodial parent. Finally, unfinished marital matters often reflected to

post-divorce relationship and child(ren) might be subjected to questioning by either parent about the other's life, asked for carrying messages from both parties or one parent, subjected to be alienated by one or both parties to one another. As soon as these problems emerged, the conflict begins to raise gradually that ends up with ending visitation between non-custodial parent and child(ren).

Once the consensus between custodial and non-custodial parent is broken down, the child(ren) is put in another stressful position psychologically. Although there is only a limited number of (Koçyıldırım, 2010) concrete studies on post-divorce visitation problems, there are some evident patterns that emerge. Koçyıldırım's qualitative study with family court professionals, lawyers, custodial and non-custodial parents reached many impressive findings. Some of the children do not want these visits due to their concerns depending on past unhealthy experiences like domestic violence history while some others are manipulated by their parents; some of them resist noncustodial parent just in front of the custodial parent and their mood changes as soon as they come together with the noncustodial party(Koçyıldırım, 2010). It is an undeniable fact that some of the children are being manipulated by custodial parent makes a scene in front of mental health professional and officer that put the mental health professional in a position to evaluate the ambiguous position of the child for resisting to visit. During monitored exchanges it is not possible to make this very critical evaluation. Even the mental health professional could make some observation and evaluation in this process, they claim to the execution file and these observations and evaluations are rarely being used by courts if they are not presented as an evidence for litigation. Within the scope of this information about practice of SV services in Turkey, unfortunately it would not be wrong to claim that system is more likely to traumatize the children rather than promoting a safe space between to parents in which they can freely contact with the noncustodial parents.

Apart from disputes between custodial and non-custodial parents SV services may protect child(ren) from bad effects of problems that custodial parents may have such as mental health or health issues, drug or alcohol abuse etc. Physical discipline is another destructive behaviors that children is frequently subjected to in Turkish culture. According to one study on causes of divorce with 300 sample size, one in four parents claimed that their the other party use physical discipline methods on child(ren) (Demirkan et al., 2009). SV may prevent usage of physical discipline against child(ren) as well.

Finally, a nation-wide study conducted in Turkey in 2009 made by Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (HacettepeÜniveristesiniNüfusEtüdleriEnstitüsü-HÜNEE) revealed that the overall lifetime prevalence of IPV was 36 percent in Turkey in 2009 (HÜNEE, 2009). A more recent follow up study by the same institution shows that 37.5 percent of married Turkish

women were subjected to sexual or physical partner violence at least once in their lifetime (HÜNEE, 2015). Considering these high rates of domestic violence in Turkey, SV services may be a useful way of enhancing safety of victim custodial parent as well.

Conclusion

To conclude, the SV programs not only enable children and parents to have safe, healthy and conflict-free interactions but also support community with continuing SV services (“Supervised Visitation Network(SVN) Code of Ethics”, 2009). The SV programs in child welfare context aim whether reunion of the parent(s) and child(ren) or maintaining a safe and healthy relationship between parent(s) and child(ren) who is under the protection of social services. The SV programs in child custody dispute context is focused on enhancing conflict free and safe contacts between noncustodial parent and child(ren). The lack of these programs put children, especially children with high conflict parents, in a bilateral risky situation. On one hand these children are under the risk of losing all their contact with the non-custodial parent, on the other hand they may be under the risk of an ongoing traumatization and danger.

In the context of child welfare services SV can be long term solution when the reunion is not possible while these services were founded as a relatively short term solution for child custody disputes. These services can be seen as an antidote for promoting the child(ren)’s adjustment to parental divorce and protecting children from risks due to high conflict between custodial and noncustodial parents but they were never intended to be a long-term cure for inter-parental relationship difficulties (Holt, 2016).

Both in Civil Code and regulations related to foster care, SV services were mentioned but there is neither consistent application of these services nor available in service trainings to provide SV services. In the scope of child welfare services these services are provided to some extent but the problem is lack of clear description of the process. Therefore, the application of the SV services varying from one institution to another. Standardization of these services would minimize the possible negative effects of negative consequences for child(ren). When these services are considered within the scope of child custody disputes, SV services can be an antidote to Turkish system for various reasons. These programs can help minimize post-divorce conflicts and reduce the risk of re-victimization of domestic violence victims, they can enable a healthy parallel co-parenting model to be reached and they can help system to deal with manipulative parents. Safety contact between non-custodial parent and child(ren) would not only maintain child-parent relationship but also protect children against negative effects of this relationship as well. However, rather than simply importing these services, we should consider differences of Western cultures and Turkish culture, be aware of differences in Law and legal

systems, and adjust these services to Turkey. These services should be founded under the Ministry of Justice and supported with parenting coordination services. That would enable an effective communication between court and service providers.

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