



## A RETROSPECTIVE INVESTIGATION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES ÇOCUK CİNSEL İSTİSMAR VAKALARININ RETROSPEKTİF OLARAK İNCELENMESİ

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**Objective:** This study examines child sexual abuse case files to determine characteristics of sexual abuse.

**Methods:** The study retrospectively analyzed 142 child sexual abuse case files that were finalized from 2012 to 2017. The data were collected using a data collection form developed by the researcher based on literature. In the analysis of data; descriptive statistics, chi-square test and binary logistic regression analysis were used.

**Results:** The average age of 142 children who were exposed to sexual abuse was 13.3±3.4 years, 86.6% were females, and mostly children aged between 13 and 18 were exposed to abuse. The average age of perpetrators was 28.5±13.2 years, 25.4% were children, and all of them were males. Only 10.6% of the children did not know the perpetrator, and they were exposed to abuse mostly by friends/ex-boyfriends. Sexual abuse was found to happen mostly in the perpetrator's home, car, or office. Of all children, 50.7% were exposed to abuse more than once, 33.1% were threatened and they were exposed to mostly penetrative sexual abuse (52.8%). Variables such as the perpetrator's age, the way the case was referred to court, and the number of abuses were found to be variables that had effects on penetrative abuse, and they were found to be the factors that increased penetrative abuse risk.

**Conclusion:** In future, multicenter studies should be conducted to investigate types of child sexual abuse that does not involve physical contact, and associate it with characteristics of children, families and perpetrators.

**Keywords:** Child, Child maltreatment, Child sexual abuse, Judicial cases

### Özet

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmanın amacı, çocuk cinsel istismarının özelliklerini belirlemek için dava dosyalarını incelemektir.

**Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Çalışmada, 2012-2017 yılları arasında kararı kesinleşen 142 çocuk cinsel istismarı dava dosyası retrospektif olarak incelenmiştir. Veriler, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen veri toplama formu ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde; tanımlayıcı istatistikler, ki-kare testi ve ikili (binary) lojistik regresyon analizi kullanıldı.

**Bulgular:** Cinsel istismara maruz kalmış 142 çocuğun yaş ortalamalarının 13.3±3.4 yıl, %86.6'sının kız olduğu ve en çok 13-18 yaş aralığındaki çocukların istismara uğradığı belirlenmiştir. Cinsel istismar faillerinin yaş ortalaması 28.5±13.2 years, %25.4'ü çocuk ve hepsi erkektir. Çocukların sadece %10.6'sının faili tanımadığı, en çok erkek arkadaş/eski erkek arkadaş tarafından istismar edildikleri belirlenmiştir. Cinsel istismarın en çok failin ev, iş yeri ve arabasında gerçekleştiği belirlenmiştir. Çocukların %50.7'sinde istismarın birden fazla kez yaşandığı, %33.1'inin de tehdit edildiği ve en çok penetrasyon içeren (%52.8) istismara maruz kaldıkları saptanmıştır. Fail yaşı, adliye yansıma şekli ve istismar sayısı değişkenleri istismarın penetrasyonlu olmasında etkili değişkenler olduğu ve penetrasyonlu istismar riskini artıran faktörler olduğu bulunmuştur.

**Sonuç:** Gelecekte, fiziksel temas içermeyen çocuk cinsel istismarı türlerinin araştırıldığı, çocukların, ailelerin ve failerin özellikleriyle ilişkilendirildiği çok merkezli çalışmalar yapılmalıdır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Çocuk, Çocuğa kötü muamele, Çocuk cinsel istismarı, Adli vakalar

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## INTRODUCTION

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is children's involvement in sexual activity that they do not fully understand, and to which they cannot consent because they do not have sufficient knowledge or are not developed enough, and which violates the laws and social taboos of the society (1,2). The general prevalence of CSA around the world is 12.7%, 7.6% in boys and 18.0% in girls (3). The prevalence of sexual abuse in Turkey is not known exactly; however, according to the 2020 data of the Turkey Statistics Institute, 12.2% of 150.615 children who came to security units as victims of crime were victims of sexual abuse, and the vast majority of them were girls (4).

CSA is the invisible part of the iceberg both in the world and in Turkey. According to a metaanalysis study, the true prevalence of CSA in world is 30 times higher than the figures officially recorded by government agencies in annual incidence reports (5). The estimates of the prevalence of CSA vary widely depending on the country studied, the definitions used, the type of CSA studied, the extent of coverage, and the quality of the data (6). In addition, most of the studies on CSA have been done in developed countries. At the same time, studies and meta-analyses/systematic reviews conducted in a national sample; It includes information about the age, gender, age of onset, race, socioeconomic status, region and education level of abused children (3,5, 7-9). Since the studies that have been conducted do not include all factors related to victims, perpetrators and abuse, and information about CSA should be constantly updated, ongoing studies are needed in this field (7-10).

When both the short-term and long-term effects of CSA are taken into account, not only the biopsychosocial health of the child is affected, but the whole life of the child (11,12). Despite this, in the world; is

reported 80% of 155 countries have at least one national action plan to prevent violence against children, only 1/5 of countries have national action plans fully funded, only 21% of countries have relevant quantitative baseline and target indicators (13). Turkey has ratified international and regional agreements to combat CSA. Although many services are provided to protect children, there are still some issues that need improvement (14). These issues include: Turkey's national legislation is still not in full compliance with international standards, official statistics are not up-to-date by two years, the lack of a national database for CSA and negligence, the lack of any national action plan for the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, and a serious lack of data on the number of children victimized by different types of sexual abuse (15,16). This situation requires that CSA be addressed more sensibly, and that more studies of it be conducted.13 Information from legal authorities and courts is an important resource for determining some of characteristics of CSA, and for taking protective and preventive measures (17,18).

This study was conducted to examine case files on CSA and to determine its characteristics. In line with this purpose, the study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) Are there any differences between child's age and gender and perpetrator's age and abuse-related characteristics?
- 2) Are there any differences between the type of abuse (penetrative and non-penetrative) and child, perpetrator, and abuse-related characteristics?
- 3) What are the factors that have effects on penetrative abuse?

## METHODS

### Design

This descriptive, retrospective study was conducted in a city in Turkey's

Mediterranean region from August 15, 2017 to December 27, 2019. It retrospectively analyzed 142 child sexual abuse case files that were finalized from 2012 to 2017. The criteria for inclusion in the research are that the subject of the lawsuit is child sexual abuse in the Family Court, High Criminal Court and Criminal Courts of First Instance, that the case files are evaluated within the scope of articles 103, 104 and 105 of the Turkish Penal Code and the Child Protection Law, and that the case files whose decisions were finalized. Files that did not meet the inclusion criteria were not included in the study.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected from case files referred to the Family Court, High Criminal Court and Criminal Courts of First Instance using the electronic archives of the National Judiciary Informatics System. The case files were evaluated within the scope of articles 103, 104 and 105 of the Turkish Penal Code and the Child Protection Law. The age, gender, disability characteristics of the child victim, and the age, gender of the perpetrator, perpetrator-victim relationship were evaluated. With these; The type, number of sexual abuse is how the abuse appears, the place where the abuse occurs, whether the abuse occurs, was discussed whether the abuse was threatened in abuse and the relationship of the perpetrator-victim with type of sexual abuse were investigated. This study complemented by complete data available in 142 files. Retrospective reviewing each file took about 60-90 minutes.

### **Data Collection Tools**

#### ***Data collection form***

The data were collected using a data collection form developed by the researcher after a review of the relevant literature (1-3,5,17). After the data collection form was created, it was submitted to the expert opinion of three faculty members who are experts in the field, and the form was given

its final form. The data collection form consists of four parts. In the first part, the name of the court where the decision of case file was made, the file number, the decision number and the file subject are included. The second part includes the characteristics of the child victim, and the third part includes the characteristics of the perpetrator. In the last part, there are features related to the type and characteristics of abuse, how many times it has been experienced, the way it is reflected in the courthouse, the place where the abuse took place, whether there is a threat or not.

### **Ethical Approval**

Ethics Committee (decision no: 2017/105, decision date: 07.06.2017) and permission from City Public Prosecutor's Office were obtained prior to the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of Declaration of Helsinki.<sup>^</sup>

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Standard Concurrent User Version 25 (IBM Corp., Armonk, New York, USA) software package. The data were presented in percentages (%), and mean and standard deviation ( $\bar{x} \pm SD$ ). The analysis of the categorical variables was performed using the chi-square test. Post-hoc analyzes were performed in chi-square analyzes and Bonferroni method was used. The factors that are considered to affect penetrative abuse were firstly analyzed using single variable binary logistic regression analysis. Variables with a value of  $p < 0.10$  in the single variable binary logistic regression analysis were taken to the multivariate binary logistic regression model. The backward wald elimination method was utilized to determine the final factors. The significance level was accepted as 0.05.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Socio-demographic characteristics***

The average age of the 142 children who were exposed to sexual abuse was  $13.3 \pm 3.4$  years, the average age of female is

13.9±2.9 and that of male is 9.2±3.9 years. 86.6% of them were females, and mostly children aged between 13 and 18 were exposed to abuse. While mostly male children were victims around ages from 0 to 6, mostly female children were victims around ages 7 to 12 and 13 to 18 (Table 1). Of all the victims, 4.9% had a disability, and all of the children who were disabled were mentally disabled. The average age of the perpetrators was 28.5±13.2 years (aged ranging from 12 to 72) and all of them were males. The majority of the perpetrators were adults (74.6%) and 25.4% were child perpetrators. When the relationship of perpetrators with children was analyzed, it was found that only 10.6% of the children did not know the perpetrator and were exposed to sexual abuse by a stranger. Of all the children, 32.4% were exposed to abuse by their boyfriend/ex-boyfriend, 23.9% by family members, and 33.1% by other people.

#### ***Perpetrator and abuse-related characteristic according to child's age***

Table 1 demonstrates perpetrator's age according to child's age. Children from all age groups were found to be abused by child perpetrators, and generally, children aged between 0 and 6 were abused by child perpetrators. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between child's age and perpetrator's age. A significant difference was found between child's age and the relationship of the perpetrator with child. An analysis by age showed that children aged 13 to 18 were abused mostly by their boyfriend/ex-boyfriend.

An analysis of the places where abuse happened showed that 39.4% were the perpetrator's home, office, or car; 17.6% happened in open public places, 15.5% happened in victim's house, 12.0% happened in an acquaintance's house, and 15.5% happened in other places. No significant difference was found between the child's age and the place where abuse happened (Table 1).

Table 1 demonstrates how sexual abuse was referred to the court. Of all the cases, 40.8% were referred to the court due to child's disclosure and family's complaint, 33.8% due to applications to the police or judicial authorities, and 25.4% due to other ways. Referral to the court demonstrated changes according to child's age; abuse was referred to the court mostly due to the child's disclosure to family and the family's complaint in children aged 0 to 6 and 7 to 12. As for children aged 13 to 18, abuse was referred to the court mostly due to the child's complaint to the police or judicial authorities (Table 1).

Of all the children in the study, 49.3% were exposed to abuse once, and 50.7% were exposed to abuse more than once. In addition, 33.1% were threatened. However, no relationships were found between the number of abuses and being threatened and child's age ( $p>0.05$ ).

#### ***Perpetrator and abuse-related characteristics according to child's gender***

Table 2 demonstrates perpetrator and abuse-related characteristics according to child's gender. A statistically significant difference was detected between child's gender and perpetrator's age. It was found that while girls were abused generally by adult perpetrators, boys were abused by child perpetrators ( $p=0.003$ ).

An analysis of child's gender and relationship with perpetrator indicated a significant difference between gender and relationship with the perpetrator. Children from both genders were abused least by strangers; it was found that while girls were abused generally by boyfriends/ ex-boyfriends, boys were abused by other individuals (Table 2).

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between child's gender and the place where abuse happened. However, no significant differences were detected between child's gender and the way the case was referred to the court, number of abuses, and being threatened (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Child, perpetrator and abuse-related characteristics according to child's age

	<b>Ages 0-6 n (%)</b>	<b>Ages 7-12 n (%)</b>	<b>Ages 13-18 n (%)</b>	<b>Total n (%)</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	4(44.4)	21(67.7)	98 (96.1)	123 (86.6)	<0.001
Male	5 (55.6)	10 (32.3)	4 (3.9)	19 (13.4)	
<b>Perpetrator's age</b>					
Child/Peer	5 (55.6)	6 (19.4)	25 (24.5)	36 (25.4)	0.084
Adult	4 (44.4)	25 (80.6)	77 (75.5)	106 (74.6)	
<b>Relationship of the Child with the perpetrator</b>					
Family member	3 (33.3) <sup>a</sup>	12 (38.7) <sup>a</sup>	19 (18.6) <sup>a</sup>	34 (23.9)	<0.001
Stranger	2 (22.3) <sup>a</sup>	4 (12.9) <sup>a</sup>	9 (8.8) <sup>a</sup>	15 (10.6)	
Boyfriend /Ex-boyfriend	-	-	46 (45.1) <sup>b</sup>	46 (32.4)	
Other*	4 (44.4) <sup>a</sup>	15 (48.4) <sup>a</sup>	28 (27.5) <sup>a</sup>	47 (33.1)	
<b>Places where abuse happened</b>					
Perpetrator's house, car, office	2 (22.2)	12 (38.6)	42 (41.2)	56 (39.4)	0.212
Victim's house	1 (11.2)	7 (22.6)	14 (13.7)	22 (15.5)	
Open public places	2 (22.2)	7 (22.6)	16 (15.7)	25 (17.6)	
An acquaintance's house	-	3 (9.7)	14 (13.7)	17 (12.0)	
Other**	4 (44.4)	2 (6.5)	16 (15.7)	22 (15.5)	
<b>The way abuse was referred to the court</b>					
Child's disclosure and family's complaint	8 (88.9) <sup>a</sup>	17 (54.8) <sup>a,b</sup>	33 (32.3) <sup>b</sup>	58 (40.8)	0.002
Child's application to the police or judicial authorities	-	5 (16.2) <sup>a</sup>	43 (42.2) <sup>b</sup>	48 (33.8)	
Other***	1 (11.1) <sup>a</sup>	9 (29.0) <sup>a</sup>	26 (25.5) <sup>a</sup>	36 (25.4)	
<b>Number of abuses</b>					
Once	2 (22.2)	14 (45.2)	54 (52.9)	70(49.3)	0.183
More than once	7 (77.8)	17 (54.8)	48(47.1)	72 (50.7)	
<b>Child's exposure to threat</b>					
Yes	5 (55.6)	13(41.9)	29 (28.4)	47 (33.1)	0.126
No	4 (44.4)	18 (58.1)	73(71.6)	95 (66.9)	
<b>TOTAL</b>	9 (100.0)	31 (100.0)	102 (100.0)	142(100.0)	

\*Other (father/brother's friend/worker, care-taker's son, attendant at school, a friend's friend, sister's ex-boyfriend, boss)

\*\*Other (school/school road, telephone or social media, child under institutional care, forestland, coal cellar, industrial zone, under a bridge, prison, construction site)

\*\*\*Other (teacher's notice, judicial case after application to hospital, report of loss, institution officer's notice, eye witnesses' complaints, victim's injuring the perpetrator after abuse, parents' disclosure to a pedagogue in the divorce process, eyewitness of the police)

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of age categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level.

**Table 2.** Perpetrator and abuse-related characteristics according to child’s gender

	Female n (%)	Male n (%)	Total n (%)	<i>p</i>
<b>Perpetrator’s age</b>				
Child/Peer	26 (21.1)	10 (52.6)	36 (25.4)	0.003
Adult	97 (78.9)	9 (47.4)	106 (74.6)	
<b>Relationship of the Child with the perpetrator</b>				
Family member				0.001
Stranger	29 (23.6) <sup>a</sup>	5 (26.3) <sup>a</sup>	34 (23.9)	
Boyfriend /Ex-boyfriend	14 (11.4) <sup>a</sup>	1 (5.3) <sup>a</sup>	15 (10.6)	
Other*	46 (37.4) <sup>a</sup>	-	46 (32.4)	
	34 (27.6) <sup>a</sup>	13 (68.4) <sup>b</sup>	47 (33.1)	
<b>Places where abuse happened</b>				
Perpetrator’s house, car, office	50 (40.6) <sup>a</sup>	6 (31.6) <sup>a</sup>	56 (39.4)	0.019
Victim’s house	21 (17.1) <sup>a</sup>	1 (5.3) <sup>a</sup>	22 (15.5)	
Open public places	20 (16.3) <sup>a</sup>	5 (26.3) <sup>a</sup>	25 (17.6)	
An acquaintance’s house	17 (13.8) <sup>a</sup>	-	17 (12.0)	
Other**	15 (12.2) <sup>a</sup>	7(36.8) <sup>b</sup>	22 (15.5)	
<b>The way abuse was referred to the court</b>				
Child’s disclosure and family’s complaint	47 (38.2)	11(57.8)	58 (40.8)	0.250
Child's application to the police or judicial authorities	44 (35.8)	4 (21.1)	48 (33.8)	
Other***	32 (26.0)	4 (21.1)	36 (25.4)	
<b>Number of abuses</b>				
Once	59 (48.0)	11 (57.9)	70 (49.3)	0.421
More than once	64 (52.0)	8 (42.1)	72 (50.7)	
<b>Child’s exposure to threat</b>				
Yes	37 (30.1)	10 (52.6)	47 (33.1)	0.052
No	86 (69.9)	9 (47.4)	95 (66.9)	
<b>Total</b>	123 (100.0)	19 (100.0)	142 (100.0)	

\*Other (father/brother’s friend/worker, care-taker’s son, attendant at school, a friend’s friend, sister’s ex- boyfriend, boss)

\*\*Other (school/school road, telephone or social media, child under institutional care, forestland, coal cellar, industrial zone, under a bridge, prison, construction site)

\*\*\*Other (teacher’s notice, judicial case after application to hospital, report of loss, institution officer’s notice, eye witnesses’ complaints, victim’s injuring the perpetrator after abuse, parents’ disclosure to a pedagogue in the divorce process, eyewitness of the police)

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of gender categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level.

**Child, perpetrator, and abuse-related characteristics according to type of abuse**

An analysis of the abuse types, as demonstrated in Table 3, shows that 52.8% were penetrative sexual abuse while 47.2% were non-penetrative sexual abuse. Types of non-penetrative child abuse included mostly hugging, kissing, fondling, and rubbing for sexual pleasure. Penetration included mostly vaginal penetration (Table 3).

Table 4 presents child, perpetrator, and abuse-related characteristics according to the type of abuse. No statistically significant differences were found between child's age, gender, the way abuse was referred to the court, and being threatened. Table 4 indicates a significant difference between the child's relationship with the perpetrator and the type of abuse. However, further analysis showed that the child's relationship with the perpetrator did not have effects on penetrative abuse (Table 5).

Single variable binary logistic regression analysis results showed that

variables such as perpetrator's age, the way abuse was referred to the court, and the number of abuses were the variables that had effects on penetrative abuse. The results showed in both types of abuse, adults were higher in number (Table 4). However, penetrative abuses committed by child perpetrators was 2.735 times more than the abuses committed by adult perpetrators (Table 5). In addition, penetrative abuse cases with child's application to the police or judicial authorities were 2.375 times higher than abuse cases with child's disclosure and family's complaint to judicial authorities.

Table 4 shows that non-penetrative abuse was generally experienced once, but penetrative abuse was experienced more than once. The number of abuses was found to be an effective variable in penetrative abuse; penetrative abuse was found to be 2.763 times higher in those who were exposed to abuse more than once in comparison to those who were exposed to abuse once.

**Table 3.** Types of sexual abuse children were exposed to

	n (%)
<b>Types of Sexual Abuse</b>	
Non-penetrative abuse	67 (47.2)
Penetrative abuse	75 (52.8)
<b>Non-penetrative abuse*</b>	
Hugging, kissing, fondling, and rubbing child for sexual pleasure	39 (43.0)
Touching child's body and/or sexual organs	27 (30.0)
Exposing child to images and films with sexual content	7 (7.0)
Telling child things with sexual content	4 (4.0)
Trying to flirt with child	3 (3.0)
Offering child to have sexual intercourse	2 (2.0)
Having sexual intercourse with child and blackmailing with the images taken	2 (2.0)
Using child in the production of pornographic materials and blackmailing	2 (2.0)
Sending messages with sexual content	2 (2.0)
Taking child's photos for personal pleasure or saving the images and threatening	2 (2.0)
Forcing child to prostitute	1 (1.0)
Making child touch his body and/or sexual organs	1(1.0)
Stalking	1 (1.0)
<b>Penetrative abuse*</b>	
Vaginal	59 (73.7)
Anal	17 (21.3)
Oral-genital	4 (5.0)

\* More than one option was chosen since children were exposed to one or more than one type of abuse

**Table 4.** Child, perpetrator and abuse-related characteristics according to the type of sexual abuse

	Non-penetrative abuse n (%)	Penetrative abuse n (%)	Total n (%)	<i>p</i>
<b>Age (years)</b>				
Ages 0-6	4 (6.0)	5 (6.7)	9 (6.4)	0.096
7-12	20 (29.9)	11 (14.6)	31 (21.8)	
13-18	43 (64.1)	59 (78.7)	102 (71.8)	
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	58(86.6)	65 (86.7)	123 (86.6)	0.986
Male	9 (13.4)	10 (13.3)	19 (13.4)	
<b>Perpetrator's age</b>				
Child/Peer	11 (16.4)	25 (33.3)	36 (25.4)	0.021
Adult	56 (83.6)	50 (66.7)	106 (74.6)	
<b>Relationship of the Child with the perpetrator</b>				
Family member	18 (26.9) <sup>a</sup>	16 (21.3) <sup>a</sup>	34 (23.9)	<0.001
Stranger	13 (19.4) <sup>a</sup>	2 (2.7) <sup>b</sup>	15 (10.6)	
Boyfriend /Ex-boyfriend	10 (14.9) <sup>a</sup>	36 (48.0) <sup>b</sup>	46 (32.4)	
Other*	26 (38.8) <sup>a</sup>	21 (28.0) <sup>a</sup>	47 (33.1)	
<b>Places where abuse happened</b>				
Perpetrator's house, car, office	25 (37.3) <sup>a</sup>	31 (41.4) <sup>a</sup>	56 (39.4)	0.001
Victim's house	9 (13.4) <sup>a</sup>	13 (17.3) <sup>a</sup>	22 (15.5)	
Open public places	19 (28.4) <sup>a</sup>	6 (8.0) <sup>b</sup>	25 (17.6)	
An acquaintance's house	2 (3.0) <sup>a</sup>	15 (20.0) <sup>b</sup>	17 (12.0)	
Other**	12 (17.9) <sup>a</sup>	10 (13.3) <sup>a</sup>	22 (15.5)	
<b>The way abuse was referred to court</b>				
Child's disclosure and family's complaint	34 (50.7)	24 (32.0)	58 (40.8)	0.067
Child's application to the police or judicial authorities	20 (29.9)	28 (37.3)	48 (33.8)	
Other***	13 (19.4)	23 (30.7)	36 (25.4)	
<b>Number of abuses</b>				
Once	41 (61.2)	29 (38.7)	70 (49.3)	0.007
More than once	26 (38.8)	46 (61.3)	72 (50.7)	
<b>Child's exposure to threat</b>				
Yes	23 (34.3)	24 (32.0)	47 (33.1)	0.768
No	44 (65.7)	51 (68.0)	95 (66.9)	
<b>TOTAL</b>	67 (100.0)	75 (100.0)	142 (100.0)	

\*Other (father/brother's friend/worker, care-taker's son, attendant at school, a friend's friend, sister's ex-boyfriend, boss)

\*\*Other (school/school road, telephone or social media, child under institutional care, forestland, coal cellar, industrial zone, under a bridge, prison, construction site)

\*\*\*Other (teacher's notice, judicial case after application to hospital, report of loss, institution officer's notice, eye witnesses' complaints, victim's injuring the perpetrator after abuse, parents' disclosure to a pedagogue in the divorce process, eyewitness of the police)

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of type of sexual abuse categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level.



**Table 5.** Single variable logistic regression analysis results of the penetrative sexual abuse

	Univariate			Multivariate		
	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p
<b>Age (years)</b>						
13-18	1					
0-6	0.911	0.231-3.593	0.894	-	-	-
7-12	0.401	0.174-0.923	0.032			
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	1			-	-	-
Male	1.009	0.383-2.654	0.986			
<b>Perpetrator's age</b>						
Adult	1			1		
Child/Peer	2.545	1.138-5.694	0.023	2.735	1.170-6.393	0.020
<b>Relationship of the Child with the perpetrator</b>						
Stranger	1					
Family member	5.778	1.128-29.605	0.035	-	-	-
Boyfriend /Ex-boyfriend	23.400	4.515-121.274	<0.001			
Other*	5.250	1.064-25.897	0.042			
<b>Places where abuse happened</b>						
Open public places	1					
Perpetrator's house, car, office	3.927	1.363-11.315	0.011	-	-	-
Victim's house	4.574	1.309-15.979	0.017			
An acquaintance's house	23.750	4.179-134.987	<0.001			
Other**	2.639	0.761-9.152	0.126			
<b>The way abuse was referred to court</b>						
Child's disclosure and family's complaint	1			1		
Child's application to the police or judicial authorities	1.983	0.913-4.310	0.084	2.357	1.037-5.355	0.041
Other***	2.506	1.063-5.909	0.036	2.375	0.959-5.884	0.062
<b>Number of abuses</b>						
Once	1			1		
More than once	2.501	1.272-4.919	0.008	2.763	1.354-5.639	0.005
<b>Child's exposure to threat</b>						
Yes	1			-	-	-
No	1.111	0.552-2.236	0.769			

\*Other (father/brother's friend/worker, care-taker's son, attendant at school, a friend's friend, sister's ex-boyfriend, boss)

\*\*Other (school/school road, telephone or social media, child under institutional care, forestland, coal cellar, industrial zone, under a bridge, prison, construction site)

\*\*\*Other (teacher's notice, judicial case after application to hospital, report of loss, institution officer's notice, eye witnesses' complaints, victim's injuring the perpetrator after abuse, parents' disclosure to a pedagogue in the divorce process, eyewitness of the polic

## DISCUSSION

CSA affects children of all socioeconomic levels, races and cultures in all the countries of the world. However, some risk factors put children even more at risk. One of them is age. Like the studies in the literature, this study found that the risk of sexual abuse increases with age, and that adolescence is a risky period (7-9,17-20). Risky behaviors during adolescence increase the risk of being a victim of sexual abuse and the vulnerability of children (20,21). Studies have reported that childhood sexual abuse is associated with risky sexual behaviors in adolescence and adulthood, and sexual abuse increases the likelihood of children being repeatedly abused (8,22-24). Considering these effects of sexual abuse on children, it is necessary to provide sex education to children to protect them from sexual abuse. Schools are a key point for sex education since they are places where it is easy to reach children (25). With age-appropriate sex education beginning at an early age before adolescence in school, children can learn to reject false information, resist inappropriate offers and pressures, and to make complaints. In addition, sexual education can be integrated into the official curriculum at school or take place as a stand-alone subject.

Another important factors in CSA is gender. Studies have reported that girls are exposed to sexual abuse more than boys; however, more boys are exposed to sexual abuse in early childhood, while more girls are exposed to sexual abuse in adolescence (9,20,26). The results in our study are similar to those in the literature. Especially in patriarchal societies, sexual abuse is seen as a taboo for males, and this can prevent it from being disclosed. Perceptions of sexual abuse as shameful for men, fear of being homosexual and fear of being stigmatized can prevent victims from reporting sexual abuse (27-28). This may be why this study

found a low number of school-age and adolescent male victims.

The characteristics of CSA perpetrators are also important. The literature reports that most child sexual abuse is committed by men, but some studies have reported that it is also committed by women (3,5,6,9,29). In this study, all the perpetrators were male. This result is consistent with other studies conducted in Turkey, but is different from those conducted in other countries.<sup>30-31</sup> The reason for the lack of female perpetrators in the study is not clear. Do women really refrain from sexually abusing children, or are female perpetrators not reported? There is a need for future studies that can answer these questions.

Many people think that child sexual abuse is perpetrated by adults. However, it should not be ignored that children can be victimized not only by adults, but also by their peers (9). This study found that there perpetrators who were children. These results are similar to those of other studies in the literature, and once again show that adolescence is a risky period for CSA, and for both victims and perpetrators.<sup>8,9,18,19,21</sup> Most perpetrators of CSA do not grow up to be criminals. Studies conducted with young perpetrators have reported that they have been physically, emotionally and sexually abused, and subjected to domestic violence. Negative developmental, traumatic and familial factors also increase the risk of being a perpetrator (6,8,11-13). Therefore, evaluating children who are victims and perpetrators of CSA and early interventions will be of great benefit in preventing sexual abuse and its long-term negative effects.

This study found that most of the victims were exposed to sexual with physical contact, and that a large majority of the CSA cases involved penetration (vaginal, anal or oral-genital). Unlike this study, other studies have reported that sexual abuse without physical contact is more

common in CSA cases, that most cases do not involve penetration or involve penetration with low rates, and that the incidence of penetration has decreased for both genders (18,22,32). The results of this study and those of other studies conducted in Turkey suggest that types of sexual abuse that do not involve physical contact are not seen as harmful or reported in Turkey (18,31,33). Hence, in this study, application to the police in case of penetrative abuse is a factor that supports this view. These results indicate a need for more studies, especially in Turkey, of sexual abuse that does not involve physical contact. On the other hand, penetrative sexual abuse, independently of age, is generally regarded as a destructive life experience by children and parents (5).

One of the important findings of the study was that there was a higher risk for penetrative abuse committed by child perpetrators in comparison to adults. Also in the study, considering both victims and child perpetrators, the higher risk for penetrative abuse for abuses experienced more than once is worrisome. The literature reports that penetrative sexual abuse is associated with psychopathology, risky sexual behaviors, sexual dysfunction, posttraumatic stress disorder, and being victims again in adulthood (6,8,11-13,22,34). In this case, although legally protective and supportive measures are taken to protect both perpetrator's and victim child's health and well-being in the short and long term, there seems to be a need for more interventional studies on prevention.

The relationship between children's gender and CSA perpetrators is important. Like this study, other studies have found that the majority of CSA perpetrators are acquaintances and family members rather than strangers (17,18,22). An important finding in this study is dating violence; in other words, CSA is often perpetrated by boyfriends and ex-boyfriends. This result is similar to those of studies conducted in different cultures (9,13,18,35). Dating

violence is an important problem which often victimizes girls. It can also characterize future marital relationships and be passed on to future generations.<sup>10,12,13</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to help children resolve their romantic relationship problems on the basis of gender equality and to prevent dating violence. In this context, it is important and necessary to include the perpetrators of dating violence in this picture and to carry out perpetrator-oriented prevention and intervention studies.

### **Limitations**

The major strength of this study is that it presents findings from an understudied place. One of this study's limitations is that it was conducted at a specific time and in a single center due to time and cost. Another limitation of our study is no data on the parents and family characteristics of the victims and perpetrators.

### **CONCLUSION**

Child sexual abuse continues to be an increasingly growing major problem in Turkey and in many other countries. Since it threatens the health and safety of children, it is very important that cases be disclosed and reported, and that children be treated and rehabilitated. Multi-center studies of CSA types that do not involve physical contact, and studies that associate CSA types with the characteristics of children, families and perpetrators should be conducted to guide professionals who work with children. Longitudinal studies should also be carried out with children, families and perpetrators. Risk factors and protective factors that will give professionals a broader perspective should be identified in order to develop protective and preventive interventions for children. In line with the findings of this study; The lack of knowledge, false beliefs and practices of adolescent children about sexual education should be determined. Sex education content should be created and sexual education should be provided by cooperating between institutions. In relation

to sexual abuse, interventions should be developed not only for child victims, but also for child perpetrators. In this regard, more than just the participation of women and girls, programs for men and boys can be developed. In particular, it can be ensured these programs that will facilitate the reporting of abuse by young children and boys are based on age characteristics, gender equality and prevent social taboos.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

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