

Ecological System Model Approach to Self-Disclosure Process in Child Sexual Abuse

Çocuk Cinsel İstismarında Kendini Açığa Vurma Sürecine Ekolojik Sistem Modeli Yaklaşımı

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Abstract

The child has a potential of action initiated spontaneously and voluntarily which is also a precious tool against abuse: named self-disclosure. However, the disclosure of self is, in fact, a complex phenomenon related to a bunch of multileveled effects such as the child's developmental characteristics, family background and also the cultural and societal attitudes towards the child and children rights. The obstacles that cause child victims not to appear and recognized are even threatening the effectiveness of intervention strategies for dealing with sexual abuse. This paper aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of the aspects that influence the self-disclosure in child sexual abuse. To handle the relations of the main factors inclusively involved in child self-disclosure; the Ecological System Model of Urie Bronfenbrenner was utilized.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, self-disclosure, ecological system.

Öz

Çocuğun kendiliğinden başlattığı ve gönüllü olduğu bir eylem olma potansiyelini taşıyan; çocuğun kendini açığa vurma, istismara karşı koruyucu ve değerli bir stratejidir. Bununla birlikte, çocukların cinsel istismarı açığa vurma aslında; çocuğun gelişimsel özellikleri ve aile geçmişi, çocuğa ve haklarına yönelik toplumsal, kültürel ve sosyal tutumlar gibi pek çok düzeyde yer alan ve bağlantılı etkenlerin rol aldığı, karmaşık bir olgudur. Çocuk mağdurların ortaya çıkmaması ve tanınmamasına neden olan engelleyici etkenler, cinsel istismarla baş etmeyle ilgili müdahale stratejilerinin etkililiğini de tehdit etmektedir. Bu makalenin amacı, çocuk cinsel istismarında kendini açığa vurmaya etkileyen birçok etkenin derinlemesine birer açıklamasını sağlamaktır. Çocuğun kendini açması sürecinde yer alan temel etkenlerin birbiriyle ilişkilerinin de kapsayıcı bir biçimde ele alınması amacıyla Urie Bronfenbrenner'in Ekolojik Sistem Modelinden yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çocuk cinsel istismarı, kendini açığa vurma, ekolojik sistem.

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The self-disclosure behavior is an individual strategy that leads the child, in adverse situations that the child's consent cannot even be in question like abuse, to reach people who can protect the child's rights. Children can express the abuse in a variety of ways. By gathering previous research and own findings Alaggia (2004), proposes four ways of the disclosure. The first way is purposeful disclosure, in which children directly and verbally or indirectly and behaviorally discloses. The second way of disclosure is a behavioral manifestation that contains both intentional nonverbal and nonintentional behaviors to disclose. This type of disclosure behaviors in young children can be temper tantrums and clinging. Also angry outbursts, withdrawal, becoming distant, substance abuse, and eating disorders can be indicators of this type of behavioral manifestations during adolescents.

Disclosure intentionally withheld is the third way. Disclosure intentionally withheld implies that even after abuse uncovers; child purposely does not come out and deny the incidence. Abuse only can be revealed when the bystander witnessed the abuse. Memory incompetency or incomprehension of the abuse does not lie behind this kind of strategy. On the contrary, this strategy, which the child consciously uses, includes the beliefs as no one will ever believe, self-blame, shame, feelings of fear, and a desire not to hurt others. Besides, threats of the abuser, lack of the victims' safety after disclosure, or unreluctance to fall into an ambiguous situation is efficient in keeping the sexual abuse in the closet.

Finally, triggered disclosure or delayed memories are a way of reaching inaccessible memories due to certain types of developmental features and recalling memories that have forgotten. It can be said that childhood amnesia, which is explained by the inability of the children in the pre-language period to express memories with the language (Simcock and Hayne 2002), led to this kind of developmental feature.

As is seen, disclosure of sexual abuse is an issue related to child's developmental and individual features, family dynamics, and cultural and social attitudes (Alaggia 2010). Self-disclosure, stated to be an individual coping strategy, may not spontaneously come out in children depending on the inhibitory characteristics of these features. In such cases, those working in the legal system provide some methods and techniques to make the child disclose. These three methods are respectively retrospective studies with adult survivors, forensic interviews with children, interviews, and surveys with children and adolescents. Practicing these methods, above all, anyone must be informed about children's rights, have knowledge about children's developmental features and have awareness about the uniqueness of abuse experiences of each child. Ideally, forensic psychologists are the ones to conduct the first interview with the abused child.

In this article, we aimed to provide a better understanding of the disclosure, which is a remarkable individual coping strategy, by conceptualizing it as a process. While carrying out this aim, we utilized Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner 1986, Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998) to present the subject in the broader perspective and at different levels. In the following chapters of the study, the factors that contribute to self-disclosure and the follow-up process of self-disclosure will be explained respectively. The article will end with a discussion of recommendations for investigators and practitioners working with children experienced sexual abuse.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

In this study, it is crucial to give brief information about the framework theory that we utilized to examine the nature of the relationship between sexual abuse and self-disclosure behavior in the child. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed in the Ecological Model (cited in Bronfenbrenner 1986) and also later in the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998); the idea that a child's developmental process takes place in more extended systems, including the family. In studies based on this perspective, the adaptation of the child to five different levels of systems (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono levels) is investigated (Feldman 2006, Minuchin and Shapiro 1983). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model explains the development of the child; through the characteristics of the sub-systems and the changes over time depending on individual's relationships with each subsystem (Bronfenbrenner 1986). Within the scope of the study, the microsystems that the child lives in every day like school and family including the caregivers, relatives, neighbors, friends or teachers who are in direct communication and interaction with children will be taken into consideration. In the following chapters, the meso, exo, macro and chrono systems will be covered by the empirical findings for the self-disclosure and the protection of the rights of the children, respectively.

Factors Playing a Role in Self-Disclosure

Many factors make self-disclosure either easier or harder for the child. Determining these factors will both help to prevent from the adverse effects of childhood sexual abuse and even sexual abuse itself. In a study conducted with 67 adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood, revealed that 50.7% of the participants had not disclosed abuse before the age of nineteen (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015). In similar studies, remarkable individual differences regarding the elapsed time between childhood abuse and self-disclosure are found (Paine and Hansen, 2002). The time for self-disclosure points to the existence of facilitating and compelling factors for the child. In this section, utilizing system approach the factors that may have an impact on the child's self-disclosure in the case of sexual abuse will be examined following a route from more proximal to distal systems surrounding the child.

Disclosure Factors at the Microsystem Level

The microsystem describes the environments in which the child develops and is involved. Among these environments is the child himself/herself, family, school and neighborhood where he lived (Bronfenbrenner 1986). Nowadays, it can easily be said that internet-based virtual environments are within the child's microsystem. In this section, we will focus on the features of the child, family, school and internet environments as the microsystems that have a place in self-disclosure.

Developmental and Individual Characteristics of the Child

Our memories represent our personal events in the autobiographical memory. A drastic personal episode such as sexual abuse is also associated with the child's autobiographical memory. In their theory, Nelson and Fivush (2004) build a socio-cultural perspective to understand the development of autobiographical memory, and propose advances in the autobiographical memory through the development of language, memory and self

during the early childhood. Grammar rules achieved by a five to six-year-old child has almost reached the adult level and this is a milestone in narrative skills concerning basic fiction (Aksu-Koç and Ketrez 2017).

The autobiographical memory integrates into the other memory systems from the earliest stages of life by the sense of self. Therefore, it is assumed that the ability of a child to disclose the sexual abuse he/she experienced in the court or to match the picture of the abuser correctly has the necessity for the development of autobiographical memory skills (cf. Aydın 2017). The expressive language of the child must also be sufficiently developed to reveal himself/herself. Getting accurate and correct verbal statements to reveal information about a personal event, it is recommended to get either their free narratives or to use a particular set of open-ended reminding questions (Ceci and Bruck 1993, Fivush 1993; cited in Fivush 1998). As a matter of fact, as Lemaigre et al. (2017) showed in their meta-analysis, asking direct questions about whether the child was abused or not is an important facilitator to disclose. Developmental studies show that many personal and cultural factors contribute to having this sufficient personal memory process such as basic memory skills, language and narrative skills, adult talk, advanced understanding of timing, and the understanding of self and others (for more details see Nelson and Fivush 2004).

Accessing information from memory takes place in two fundamental ways. The first is the recall, in which people are asked to open-ended questions to find previously learned information, a witnessed event or a heard song from memory. However, the recognition reflects a different kind of memory process that requires first representing some previously learned information and making the individual to choose one among these. Many studies have shown that on tasks such as free recall, eyewitnessing and identification; younger children (e.g. three year olds) are significantly show lower performance than older children (e.g. six year olds). In contrast, these 6-year-olds who demonstrated a similar recognition memory performance compared to adults, reported fewer details in the free recall type of a task (Goodman and Reed 1987; London and Ceci 2013; cited in Aydın 2017). While these studies indicate that autobiographical memory has developed during the preschool period, children's autobiographical memory performances do differ from adults. Although children can reveal their autobiographical memories easily when they arrive at primary school, there may be some individual differences in the development of autobiographical memory and this may be reflected in children's memory performance.

Practitioners in the field of child abuse are also expected to benefit from the findings of the studies on memory development in the early years of life. Forensic interviews with young children have some practical difficulties. It is impossible for very young children to answer every question; due to the child's undeveloped cognitive, linguistic and social abilities that make impossible to narrate memory. Another issue is situational factors (for example, the child tries to answer questions of a person he/she does not know in an unfamiliar place, or the forensic interviewer make the child feel that the interview is overimportant). Young children give limited answers to open-ended questions with free association. Therefore, when the judicial interviewers ask directive questions, the children are likely to give wrong answers (Lindsay 2006).

In a study involving 1352 Dutch students between the ages of 18-25, some individual level and interpersonal level factors revealed to be the reasons for disclosing or not

disclosing the childhood sexual abuse. Basic findings showed that girls disclose more than boys. Also, boys prefer more to leave the question about “the reason not to disclose their sexual abuse” unanswered. Even after controlling the effects of shame, the quality of the relationship with the abuser, and the severity of the abuse the gender factor continue to have its significant impact on self-disclosure. Another remarkable finding of this study is that; being abused by a family member triples the probability of children’s self-disclosure (de Jonge 2013). These findings from a large sample draw attention to the importance of focusing on gender differences related to disclosure (males’ reluctance) and the joint effects of abusers physical closeness to the child and severity of the abuse.

The child may blame himself/herself for the abuse; feel embarrassed and feel responsible for the abuse (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015). All these within individual processes caused by abuse are unhealthy reflections of the negative thoughts and emotions directed to self. A representative example provided by an in-depth interview (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015). This former sexual abuse victim explained the failure to disclose as: “I kind of wanted to say (what I was rebelling against) but I still firmly believed that I had gotten myself into the situation and it was my fault you know, and so that was the biggest barrier.” As is seen, when the sexual abuse yields feelings such as guilt, shame in the individual, the individual's desire to disclose may decrease. In this case, we suggest that the child's self-disclosure behavior might more intensely be effected by some individual-specific factors, such as the perception of the individual and the accompanying emotional reactions of the abused person rather than the characteristics of the abuse itself.

Developmental immaturity during the abuse an causes inability to be objective and reach a full comprehension. Especially in childhood, traumatic experiences are far above the child's capacity to cope cognitively and emotionally. The fact that children have no idea what they are experiencing prevents them from informing abuse to others. Some children, as mentioned above, cannot explain abuse due to lack of language development; they do not know the exact words that can describe their situation (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015). Besides, Bae et al. (2017) found that sexually abused children with low intelligence capacity -especially in the verbal domain- also less voluntarily disclose than children with average intelligence.

These findings show that certain individual traits, skills, and developmental status do influence the type and timing of the child's self-disclosure. Therefore, it seems necessary to control the effects of individual and developmental characteristics such as child's age, gender, language ability, autobiographical memory, understanding and the level of intelligence during self-disclosure evaluations.

Family

The hierarchy or dynamics of power between individuals is another factor in the self-disclosure of individuals. The abusers may manipulate the sexual abuse and show the child differently or may use threats. Thus, in this way, individuals may encounter one or more obstacles in self-disclosure (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015).

Such a hierarchy may exist in the family structure itself. In the non-democratic family environment, the child is at the bottom of the hierarchy. Family members of patriarchal and authoritarian home environment also fail to recognize or ignore the self-disclosed child. After a confusing or ambiguous situation the rates of children's

self-expressions decrease; as family's expectations of obedience from the child increases (Schrodtt and Phillips, 2016).

Another condition associated with family structure is family functioning. The functionality of a family means that it meets all the needs of its members properly. Each family member takes responsibility for maintaining the functionality of the family and, if an individual's or a familial problem arises, members accept and try to solve the problem. Attitudes are critical in the functionality of people in the family. In functional families, family organized according to the needs of their members. Adolescents who grow up in functional families seem to have selves that are more positive and higher social competencies. Adolescent children from clinical and normal groups who have functional families report that they get equal support (Berg-Cross et al. 1990).

Parenting styles within the framework by Baumrind (1977) and developed by Macoby and Martin (1983) constitute a context for children. Parenting styles include processes known to affect some essential psychosocial and cognitive elements of the child such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and adaptation to the environment (Darling and Steinberg 1993, Lamborn et al., 1991). Parents show parenting behaviors shaped by styles and become a model for their children. Family functionality is reflected on the child by parenting styles, and positive parenting styles can be created by supporting positive familial functionality (Matejevic et al. 2014). In the literature, it is suggested that democratic parenting, which is the style associated with the most positive developmental outcomes for children, protects the child from risk by increasing the instrumental competence (eg academic performance) and behavioral control in children and adolescents (Baumrind and Thompson 2002, Darling and Steinberg 1993, Newman et al. 2008). Some argue that parents positive effects on the child is realized over the warmth, and that the parental control's psychosocial effects on the child are relatively inconsistent (Lim and Lim 2004), and highlights the cultural differences in parenting styles. The research findings show that, when the controlling parents who have restrictive and high expectations aim to obtain information about their children's academic life, the friend preferences and his /her daily life; they also tend to use high levels of accusatory, embarrassing and critical communication (Barber 1996) and their child dispose more compliance or obedience (Farokhzad 2015). In this case, the child may refrain from sharing negative experiences by thinking that he/she will be punished or lose the warmth of the parents who implement strict control.

Parents with permissive parenting style who are reluctant to control the child but also show endless compassion and warmth; are also incompetent in monitoring the child's non motivation and change in academic attitudes and success (Lamborn et al., 1991). Permissive parents also show positive parenting behaviors less, such as remote monitoring and guidance (Baumrind 1989). A study conducted with 4100 adolescent students (14-18 years of age); showed that permissive parenting and a strong sense of self-efficacy in children are related. Strong sense of efficacy in children is also positively related to the reports of more substance use, non-attendance to school, and less commitment to school (Lamborn et al. 1991). In addition, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 years of age with both parents were permissible were found to have higher inconsistent personal and negative academic behaviors compared to ones having a single permissive parent (McDermott Panetta et al. 2014). In another study, it is suggested that stronger self-esteem makes both girls and boys attending the 8th grade

more susceptible to the effects of others with high-risk behaviors (Wild et al. 2004). In particular, it can be argued that high self-esteem during adolescence leads unresistance to the peer pressure and take risks (e.g. substance use, sexuality, perverted behavior, at traffic).

Styles are a group of attitudes that the parent expresses with some behaviors and conveys to the child. This set of attitudes also creates an emotional environment in the family (Nancy and Laurance 1993). Although there has been no direct study of linking self-disclosure after sexual abuse and parenting styles during childhood, findings above suggest that authoritarian and negligent parental attitudes solely can cause detrimental consequences for the child. In particular, parents who use authoritarian and negligent styles appear to yield either unquestioning compliance or unrealistic self-esteem in their children and may lead to psychological and behavioral maladaptation especially during adolescence.

School

Schools are the most reliable social environments for children to have direct access to assigned adults (teachers, administrators) who are capable of rights education and answering questions about children's rights. Teachers, like mental health professionals, also are responsible for protecting the child from sexual abuse. The positive effects of the school are not limited to preventing abuse or providing the environment for disclosure to a peer or teacher, but also increasing the commitment and reducing the social problems among students through the rights education (Öztürk, 2017). It should be noted that children who receive rights education have increased confidence and the most positive effect is the children from the socially disadvantaged (poor, refugee, living in the suburbs) groups (Covell et al. 2011; cited in Öztürk 2017). However, rights education for children generally is not common in school curricula, or there are some practical problems even if they are included. Teachers who give importance to rights education for children, unfortunately, face some personal and institutional difficulties (Finkelhor 1997; İbiloğlu, Atlı, Oto & Özkan, 2018).

In two separate studies conducted to determine the need for education on child sexual abuse in school showed that, most of the teachers did not get adequate training about child sexual abuse, while few teachers who received in-service training evaluated it insufficient. Psychological counselors also were found to be more prone to reporting child abuse to the authorities and cooperation with administrative management than class-branch teachers (Aksel and Yılmaz Irmak 2015, Küçük et al. 2017). These findings are promising in that psychological counselors can play a more active role in school-based intervention in child sexual abuse cases. However, it is a clear fact that both the teachers and the administrators of the school system have a facilitating role in the child protection system, even if they are knowledgeable about children's rights and all kinds of abuse and are not capable of direct psychological intervention.

In addition to being a face-to-face environment in which children participate in a rights-based education, the school is an environment that facilitates access to technological opportunities. A game-based learning application in a school-like educational setting; It is also valuable as a tool for the digital game to enable teachers to instrument learn by doing (Futurelab 2009), which aims at educating their children based on the rights education or physical health that they are planning (Kirriemuir and McFarlane 2004).

Internet and Virtual Environments

Internet and online environments are virtual spaces where children not only contact with their peers but also strangers. While adolescents or younger children may not know whom they connect to, they favour these new social interactions as new friendships. For example, a thirty-year-old person can pretend as if he is thirteen in a virtual environment (Broughton 2011). Perpetrators who hide their identifications can use virtual context for underage sexual exploitation. Grooming means manipulating the child and the environment in a way that easily enables abuse. Grooming can be realized within the framework of some tactics created by using the self-concealment features of the Internet (see Williams et al. 2013). After getting information about the child's interests and hobbies through chat rooms; an abusive adult can present himself/herself as a child with the same interest. Thus, by pretending to have common interests with child the abuser may continue connection online or later in the face-to-face environment (Broughton 2011).

As you can see, it is possible for predators to reach the child and to gain the child's obedience and trust on the internet. Virtual environments make it difficult to identify and disclose the child's sexual abuse, and the principal challenge is that the abuser prevents disclosing abuse by creating secrecy with the child (Craven et al. 2007; cited in Williams et al. 2013).

In a study focusing on virtual environments, the statements of children revealed five common and prepotent phenomenon of sexual abuse. These are; the grooming process, conduct meeting outside the internet, the belief that the abuser can do anything, the secrecy, and the dynamics between the victim and the abuser. Accordingly to establishes the process of grooming; the abusive adult hides his age from the child and speaks as if he/she is a peer and by attaining a trusting relationship. Then abuser convinces the child that he knows everything about a child's life, and he can do anything. Because of this belief, the victims fear that abusers can harm when they expose sexual abuse. Besides, confusion arises that abuse should remain a secret, because of the relationship of trust and the friendship that the victims share with the abuser. The children's statements reveal that every single abuser try to make sure that the child was alone and isolated (sitting alone in their room in front of a computer/electronic device with a locked door). The close relationship that the abuser is trying to establish has become possible in this isolated environment. Later, the isolated child becomes more accessible and exploit by texting or webcam (Katz 2013). Although these findings indicate the internet can be used as an instrument of abuse, the fact that the child is isolated and willing to establish a close relationship and the need for trust from someone he does not know also can give us some clues about the quality of children's relations with the close environment outside the internet. Children who have intimate relations with the family members, teachers and peers are surely less of a possibility to use the "internet" to satisfy such social needs.

Lately, artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming popular to protect children from sexual abuse and to facilitate self-disclosure. In one of these promising studies, artificial intelligence program (e.g. Project G) was trained to speak in a non-judgmental tone and to grasp the mood of the caller. The effectiveness of this relatively new program was tested. Although limited, the findings suggest that people who experienced sexual abuse are more likely to disclose themselves to artificial intelligence than to the real

counselors (The Zero Abuse Project, 2018). These findings are significant regarding that artificial intelligence, which is built to be “empathetic and non-judgmental”, can be replaced with the experts guiding the disclosure of abuse. Also more and more support is now available for the development of game-based training in child sexual abuse prevention programs. One of these programs, ORBIT (Sexuality - Prevention of Sexual Abuse Project), stands out as an example of a game-based online program that protects children's safety with its empirical data (see Scholes et al. 2014). As in this example, the programs provided for the online learning environments of the 21st century enable children to; both access to safeguarding skills and the importance of being able to expose their sexual abuse.

Virtual environment; by its nature and its applications (chat rooms, virtual games) creates a ground for facilitating sexual abuse. Eventually, there will be hope that the same virtual environment will provide a context for the child to enable disclosure of abuse. Evidence-based findings show that virtual environment has the potential to create a solid ground where the abused child can get the help, access quickly to all kinds of information and updated activities carried out for these purposes. The child can open her/himself through an electronic environment immediately and be safe. The internet is just a tool, neither a source of nor the evil itself. Therefore, when we evaluate the consequences of internet use on sexual abuse, the role of emotions, cognitions, and motivations of the intended user is also important to consider.

Mesosystem: Relations between Microsystems

The mesosystem consists of two-way interactions between microsystems. For example; the effect of a divorce experience in the family on the academic success of a child can be addressed in the context of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1986). The mesosystem involves the interactions of both the risky and the protective microsystem characteristics that either prevent or encourage the child for self-disclosure. Microsystems to address under this heading that creates most risky relationships for self-disclosure of developing child are; family, relatives, and school.

The quality of interpersonal relations within the family system both directly and indirectly influences the behavior of the child in the legal system. For example, the communication problems within the family and the lack of sharing create reluctance to reveal the self directly, and yield to the prolonged abuse indirectly. In addition, harsh parenting attitudes can cause the child to accept everything without questioning, hinders understanding the exposed abuse, and even refrains the child from telling others, and through these ways, the abuse may remain unrevealed (cited in Pashı 2017). In the family system, the relationship among the members also is related to the child's self-disclosure behavior. For example, Alaggia (2010) draws attention to the fact that victims of sexual abuse who describe their families as chaotic and non-communicative also pictured themselves as socially isolated images. It is even more frightening to disclose the abuse for the victims whose mothers' are also subjected to violence by their spouses. Physically and emotionally abused children by their families seem to postpone revealing themselves to the authorities (Tashjian et al. 2016). Lack of communication in the family also hinders the child's self-disclosure process. The neglected children in the family also do not inform the abuse is happening in other close surroundings; such as

schools and neighborhoods and this puts the neglected child at high risk of being abused again.

The expectation of compliance from the child, a norm in authoritarian families, is a risk for self-disclosure. Incest is a type of sexual abuse that occurs between family members with kinship. The child may hide his experiences about incest in order to show compliance to the adult, to fulfill the expectations of the family members and not to disturb the family harmony (e.g. his mother's health) and the victims of incest feel lonely (Donalek 2001). The abused child, subjected to abuse by a close relative, also will find it more difficult to trust and open up the self to other authorities such as social workers, psychological counselors, teachers or police.

Research indicates that the academic achievement of children also decreases in the presence of abuse (Li 2005; cited in Liao et al. 2011). The most competent people who can monitor the decline of children's academic success are the teachers. The strong and positive relationships between teacher-child and school-family are effective in child abuse prevention and protection. Accordingly, children with more loose connections between their teachers and their families are more disturbed even bullied by other children in school (cited in Bouchard and Smith 2017). A study confirmed that self-disclosure at home negatively effects bullying others in school (Georgiou and Stavrinides 2013). These findings also indicate that bullied children in school seem not to open themselves at home. As anyone can see, we could not reach any studies that directly examine the interactions of school-family microsystems in self-disclosure. Nevertheless, based on the findings mentioned earlier it can be argued that the emotional nature of the child-teacher and parent-child interactions is the underlying conditions that enable the transmission of information between the microsystems, and thus enables or disables self-disclosure of sexual abuse.

In the light of all these findings, we can infer that, the microsystems that ables children to express self openly and communicate directly are the facilitators of exposing sexual abuse. Interpersonal intimacy and lack of trust in adults continue to be significant risk factors for disclosing childhood sexual abuse (Easton et al. 2014). Therefore, when the ones in the close circle respect children, and the family (as well as all other contexts like schools) allows self-expression, than the children will become more motivated to inform about all kinds of positive or adverse experiences to parents, close relatives or forensic experts.

Exosystem: Society

The exosystem consists of interactions between the social environments in which an individual is not actively involved and the proximal contexts in which the individual develops (Bronfenbrenner 1986). Measuring and defining the effect of the exosystem on self-disclosure has some difficulties. Conducting qualitative studies is a good start for identifying exosystem's factors (Alaggia, 2010).

Proverbs are stereotyped words representing the traditional intellectual structure and are not open to the changes in social values. Proverbs, as undated texts, still nurture people's perspectives. They convey the core perspective and belief of traditional society to the targeted event, situation and the group through the sub-meanings of the texts. A study aiming to find contextual information related to childhood addressing child rights among 6915 Turkish proverbs, and identified 285 proverbs either pointing directly to

the child or having semantic depth related children's life. In the content analysis process, the proverbs about the children are analysed regarding: (a) being in either one of four categories, including the rights about survival, development, protection, and participation, and (b) having either a positive or a negative tone. The findings show that 285 proverbs related to children are included in the category of survival (38%), protection (31%), development (23%) and participation (7%) respectively. Expressions towards the child in the proverbs are almost even at being positive (53%) and negative (47%). Evaluating the findings, the author points out that in societies that do not accept the child as an individual; the right to participate and the expectations regarding the realization of this fact also diminishes (Türkyılmaz 2015). Although, in the training programmes that protect children rights against transgressions and raise public awareness about child abuse, are especially involving issues about the right to participate (Öztürk 2017).

The ignorance of society makes it difficult for people to disclose sexual abuse. It should be kept in mind that among older samples, awareness about sexual abuse may be low and that sexual abuse prevention programs may not be known (Alaggia 2010). The lack of available health, education, guidance and security services hinders people from obtaining information about sexual abuse and applying to these services when necessary (Collin-Vézina et al. 2015). The stereotypes and beliefs of the society also may prevent the child from exposing the sexual abuse. In cases where teachers are abusers, making official notifications or applying to official authorities is less common than any random abusers. This situation may be because people with credibility in the society, who seems trustworthy and have professions, are not considered as an abuser (Aksel and Yılmaz Irmak 2015).

According to Lemaigre et al. (2017), developmentally appropriate sexual education in schools may be a valuable facilitator for children to reveal themselves. In the content of this training, children should be explained that they have rights on their bodies and that sexual abuse is wrong. It should be emphasized that children are not responsible for sexual abuse and that it is not ok to blame themselves. To reduce one of the most substantial obstacles that can arise - the feeling of guilt and loneliness - can make it easier for children to disclose themselves.

It is quite difficult to evaluate the factors of self-disclosure in the exosystem level with scientific studies. Despite this obstacle, studies on self-disclosure showed that the lack of knowledge of the society on children's rights and sexual exploitation, inadequate social, educational and health services, and the lack of sexual education within children's rights training play role on the self-disclosure behavior.

Macrosystem: Patriarchy, Media, Social Attitudes Towards Children

Macrosystem reflects the individual's culture and values (Bronfenbrenner 1986). As is the case for the exosystem, we do have much knowledge about the effect of cultural and social attitudes on child sexual abuse (Alaggia 2010). In this respect, the findings of different studies will explain the roles of factors such as patriarchy, media, social and cultural attitudes towards children, which may be important in our understanding of self-disclosure behavior.

Patriarchy has led certain forms of history, including the gender identities of being men and women, and the behaviors and relationships of these identities to our day. Hierarchically clustered concept of gender, by society and culture, has built the patri-

archal definitions of “woman” and “man” in a contrasting fashion. According to these definitions, the man (with his mind) possesses an absolute superiority, while the woman is reduced to her body and emotions, overemphasized reproductive capacity and thus underestimated (Berktaş 2004).

Paşlı (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with ten children and eleven mothers, and reported that a participant who has been a victim of a sexual abuse for many years has said that the attitude towards women in the male-dominated society is a factor that approves sexual exploitation and puts pressure on talking about sexuality. The expression of this participant is vital regarding as a reflection of the patriarchal situation: “So we are a society that has been misguided... We are a very captivated society. Women are seen as second-class under the constant guise of religion, or a kind of creature... We (women) are bringing up by accepting it.” In Collin-Vézina et al.’s (2015) study, a male participant states that he could not disclose the sexual abuse he suffered because feared that he would be labeled gay. Another male participant stated that it was not appropriate for men to show their feelings and that would be perceived as weakness. Such ideas that society does not regard as masculinity has kept the participants away from opening themselves. Likewise, in Alaggia’s (2010) study, a male participant feared to be labeled as gay, another participant began to behave overly masculine after sexual abuse to answer his own questions about homosexuality (thoughts arose in his mind for being sexually abused by another man). In the process of self-disclosure, like men, women also face a number of obstacles because of the patriarchal society. For example; victims suffered from being afraid of being accused, feeling responsible for their grievances and even what they said to the abuser. In particular, women develop thoughts that nobody would believe and that they will be blamed for not stopping abuse.

Some values that dominate our social life are usually reflected in the news. Children and women in the news about child marriage and sexual abuse, and the patriarchy system evaluate them according to the values of patriarchy. The representation of children’s rights in the media, including printed press, television and the internet, affects our view of child sexual abuse. In a study examining the child presentations in news on the most-watched national television channels in Turkey (TRT 1, Show TV, Kanal D, Star TV, ATV and Fox TV), revealed that children were represented mostly as victims. Among 81 children related news; children were victims of physical abuse in 18 instances, victims of emotional abuse in 17, and victims of poor economic and educational conditions in 7. The media, which has a twisted understanding of children, also gives children little time in the news. When given children more time in the media, they are on the news that is not suitable for children’s rights (Yüksel Özmen 2012). Thus, children are not represented in the media in a neutral way. If the news about children is not impressive enough, it seems that media reconstruct them to be dramatical. For example, news communicate labels such as “unfortunate child”, “addict”, “terrorist”, and “child bride”, and it is not considered how the concept of childhood will suffer. Children pictured as criminals, victims and consumers in the media are made prone to marginalization (Yüksel Özmen 2012). In an in-depth interview by Alaggia (2010), one participant says that ads on television confused her about how age should be treated. The ad is a trouser commercial, and a 12-year-old girl is lying on the floor with pants. The participant watches this ad at the age of 11, is sexually abused by her teacher and confuses that she is at her (model’s) age; and cannot decide whether this is normal or not.

In another study, it was aimed to understand the transmission quality of news (e.g. The content, layout) about abuse targeted children. Turkey's four national newspapers were scanned for the 14-day period in 2011. According to this, one of this high-circulation newspapers, the news of sexual exploitation involving the child was given as a third-page article, not taking into account how the child would be affected after sexual abuse, and that issues related to these children's lives after abuse were not included. For example, sexual exploitation of girls in a rural area has not been considered as a perversity, and the child has been conceived as a sexual object. This article could be educative about children's rights, but instead, it has contributed to legalize the child's sexual abuse. In another newspaper, the news of sexual abuse involving the child was shown in detail. When all four newspapers examined, it is seen that in most of the articles, a positive attitude towards children is shown but lack the comprehension and sensitivity to the children and make them an object for the news (Tutar 2014). In the hierarchy portrayed under adults, children are given a passive role. In the culture and art news that affirms the status of the child, the child is again represented as a passive audience, and in the news related to the education, children are represented as the ones relying on the practices of the adults who make decisions on their behalf. Thus, the child who is passivated by a traditionally structured system cannot be evaluated at a privileged point (Tutar 2014).

Cultural attitudes are opposed to disclosing the child's sexual abuse. In Alaggia's (2010) study, some participants mentioned cultural attitudes towards children. One participant said that children should not be taken seriously and should not be considered as a human being. Another participant stated that he feared that he would be accused because he was a child; In Collin-Vézina et al.'s (2015) study, sexuality as being a taboo emerged as a prohibitive factor to open up in public and to self-disclose after sexual assault. Participants stated that they did not know about what is acceptable about sexuality in their childhood and where to learn what abusive behaviors are.

Nurturing in patriarchy, being exposed to misleading messages from the media regarding sexuality, being challenged by social and culturally determined strict attitudes towards children and not being sufficiently spoken about sexuality are the factors that play a role in the self-disclosure behavior at the macrosystem level.

Chronosystem: Rights Protection for Children

Chronosystem is the pattern including lifetime changes, environmental events, and socio-historical conditions (Bronfenbrenner 1986). The children became a humanistic and national issue within the policy of increasing the population only after the years following 1. World War. Thus, the history of childhood construction in our country has roots on the tradition of protection and raising virtuous children (Öztan 2013: 243).

The first legal steps taken for children are based on the early phase of the industrial revolution in Europe in the early 18th and 19th centuries. At the same time, this movement, which is the first step taken to protect children, is directed towards the rights of children who are employed in severe conditions and long working hours.

The first serious movement on the international level was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1924 by the National Assembly. The main idea was that children differ from adults at many points and continuing their development

(Karakaş and Çevik 2016). Turkey has agreed with this statement with the signature of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the year 1931 (ASPB 2013: 33). In the period that followed, the Convention on the Rights of the Child emerged from the United Nations' idea of developing universal children's rights in 1989 (Karakaş and Çevik 2016). Turkish Government signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 but put it on operation in 1995 at the international level (ASPB 2013: 33). Including rights to live, have education and be healthy by this contract, the place of children in society in all areas of social life has been reconsidered and children are provided with the opportunity to develop themselves. The rights protection studies carried out on the international level, aim welfare for all children in the world and give support to maintain their healthy development (Karakaş and Çevik 2016).

Since the industrial revolution, the developments in the field of children's rights have an eye on the well-being of children. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child is inclusive and internationally valid, children's rights have not yet reached a sufficient level in the world. While talking about the child's participation in the convention, the children had no influence or participation in preparing the contract. Children's rights are a universal issue; a time-conscious awareness should be ensured through continuous, protective policies that are produced by all individuals of the society (Dağ et al. 2015) and with the contribution of all public and public institutions.

The Process Following Self-Disclosure

Although self-disclosure is an important stage in interference of child sexual abuse, it is not the endpoint of the process. A more significant part of the research with abused children includes follow-up studies. In this section we will give information about, the forensic and psycho-social services that abused children encounter, and then the findings that can shed light on what kinds of psychological and emotional situations the children might experience following self-disclosure process.

The most important processes of that can prevent the abusers from committing this crime after self-disclosure are the legal process and psychosocial services. When sexual abuse is suspected, based solely the child's declaration the judicial process must immediately be initiated. In our country receiving judicial statements from the parties in the sexual abuse, investigation is the first step. Afterward, there are the stages of collecting the concrete evidence of the incident, captivating of the suspect/s and the transfer of the investigation documents to the public prosecutor. The reports received from the victim are the most critical data especially for cases of sexual abuse (Gönültaş and Akduman 2016).

Bozkurt et al. (2014) presented a case of psychosocial abuse in the legal process that started after reporting a child's sexual abuse to the family. The most situation in this case is that; the child is subjected to continuous evaluation, and the child has to disclose the sexual abuse in every assessment. However, it is of great importance that the child is evaluated with a holistic approach in a single interview so that the child who is already subjected to an attack is not injured again.

One of the main purposes of the judicial interview is to prevent the child from experiencing a second trauma (Atılğan et al. 2014). The Child Care Centers established in Turkey within the scope of this aim; to ensure the adequate protection of children who are victims of sexual abuse, to prevent secondary victimization, to perform forensic

and medical procedures in the same time by trained persons in this field and to take preventive measures against abuse (www.resmigazete.com).

In the case of child sexual abuse suspicion, the first interview that enables the child to disclose (Silver 2016) is as vital as the follow-up the child after notification. In a longitudinal follow-up study by Nagel et al. (1997) found that under aged children's sexual abuse are generally noticed and revealed by others. Based on the information we provide in this and the previous chapters, it is more appropriate to look at the physical and behavioral symptoms rather than waiting for the younger children to reveal themselves. Older children show more voluntary self-disclosure than younger ones (Nagel et al., 1997). Within the scope of the same study, children were again interviewed within the year following the disclosure process. Children whom sexual abuse was exposed by others had received more therapy than self-disclosed children during one year period, probably due to physical symptoms. Children who voluntarily revealed themselves benefited less from therapy. The levels of coping with stress in children who voluntarily exposed themselves were also assumed to be high at the beginning. However, a year later when measured again, they found elevated anxiety and lack of coping skills in voluntarily self-disclosed children. Children who had voluntarily exposed themselves needed more psychological therapy than children whose abuse was uncovered incidentally.

Although self-disclosure is valuable for the initiation of psycho-social interventions after sexual abuse, unfortunately, it is not enough by itself. In a study by Paslı (2017), one (child) participant stated that she had described the abuse but nobody believed her. So the abuse continued, and the child could not get help. In this case, the mother believed her child only after she witnessed it by her own eyes. In the same study, another mother stated that she believed that her child have had suffered more damage and her mental condition would be worse if the incident were heard. In a review of adult child abuse, Ullman (2002) reported that a higher level of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in adulthood were observed after self-disclosure -but unbelievably- in an ongoing sexual abuse history compared to the group who never had a history of self-disclosure, and pointed out the destructive effects of adverse social reactions on well-being and recovery.

More recent studies have also highlighted the long-term negative impacts of exposing sexual assault to inappropriate people. In a web-based screening study, approximately one-quarter of 481 adult respondents reported that they are sexually abused by one of their close circles before the age of 14 they revealed during the same period, and some of the adult males that they opened had also sexually attacked them. Half of the group who opened themselves after sexual abuse in childhood encountered adverse reactions such as disbelief and accusation. This group, who had a adverse reaction after self-disclosure, described a period of amnesia for abuse, that is, psychogenic amnesia, and then reported further that they were sexually abused again (Wager 2013). Not only does it encourage children to explain the sexual abuse they are exposed to, but it also important to inform children about who the appropriate adult can be, and how it might be appropriate for adults to respond, and what should be considered in possible prevention and interventions (Swingle et al. 2016). Exploitation of self-disclosure is not as difficult as getting an inadequate or adverse response from people, which makes the termination of abuse very difficult. The fact that when the adult world does not support

the child at the right time, adverse effects on the child's mental health even in adulthood might be seen.

Social support mainly from the family, in the short and long term, is of critical importance in the self-disclosure and for the child to leave behind the negative consequences of sexual abuse in a healthy way (Cohen and Mannarino, 1998). In a low socioeconomic class, African-American children aged between 8 and 13 years participated in study, the links between characteristics of abuse, mother support, and child and mental health symptoms were examined. The sense of weakness that the child feels is the most crucial variable in predicting child adaptation problems after the self-disclosure process. The younger children who participated in the study reported that they felt more guilt than older ones, probably due to their developmental characteristics. Children who were more depressive regarding the situation tend to blame themselves more. A significant relationship was found between the accusatory attributions of parents to children and children's offensive attributions to themselves. According to the results of this study, children who have unhealthy or incoherent relationship with primary caregiver and who use depressive attributive style are in risky group in terms of developing symptoms related to psychological problems (Hazzard et al. 1995). This study points out that reducing the child's feelings of weakness, self-incriminating attributions, and the mother's accusatory attributions are important steps in social support intervention to the child after sexual abuse. Children who have a qualified relationship with their family and find their social support satisfactory have shown fewer symptoms related to internalization and externalization problems following self-disclosure (Hazzard et al. 1995; Tremblay et al., 1999; Rosenthal et al. 2003).

It is useful to take a closer look at some specific factors that may be useful in the post-disclosure interventions. In a cross-sectional study of 50 children aged 7-12, the possible mediating effects of coping strategies and social support after sexual abuse on children's adjustment was examined. Findings showed that children's self-esteem among the strategy-training group increased when they also perceived higher social support from their friends and parents. Children who were more severely abused perceived less social support from their friends (Tremblay et al., 1999). In another longitudinal study, in which one hundred and forty seven sexually abused children and adolescents (aged 8-15) participated, the effects of change in perceived emotional support and the type of support (support from family or friends) examined on the adjustment of the child over one-year period. Findings showed that perceiving adequate support from parents decreased depressive symptoms in the following year and increased self-esteem but also relates to children's elevated levels of anxiety about sexuality. Participants who were not satisfied with support from their parents showed weaker adaptation skills. The adequate support perceived after the self-disclosure from the circle of friends is associated with lower self-esteem in children in the following one year but they also reported less anxiety about sexuality. At this point, the circle of friends seems to be a criterion that should be carefully considered in terms of getting social support especially after self-disclosure for adolescents. Probably the child shares his / her concerns about sexuality with friends, unlike opening to parents, and it has a positive effect on self-disclosure. The perceived support from parents indeed have the most positive effects on abused children's adjustment in the long run. Children report that they perceive support from their parents most, while adolescents perceive equal support from friends and

parents. When we look at the difference of support perception after self-disclosure by gender; girls reported that social support from the same gender was still more satisfying than boys in the following year (Rosenthal et al. 2003). These findings indicate that the characteristics of the child such as age and gender determine the social group that the child looks for the support. Beginning teenage years, children give importance to the support of peers as well as their families and attaches higher importance to peer support regarding gender.

It is both important to understand the nature of the reactions of those expected to support the child, as well as the underlying emotional state of these reactions. In a longitudinal study with preschool children, it was observed that even if the stress experienced by the parents in the early days following self-disclosure affected the psychopathology that the child develops, this effect eventually decreased after 6 and 12 months later. In the same study, it was determined that the stress experienced by the parents was intensely observed after learning about sexual abuse and then decreased with the positive change in their children. Thus, the significant effect of parental stress on the child's mental health problems decreased and had been lost within one-year period. On the other hand, the social support provided by the parents continues to have a strong positive effect on the mental health of children even after 6 and 12 months (Cohen and Mannarino, 1998).

As is seen, supporting parents of sexually abused children psycho-socially; is a way to increase the social support provided by families during children's adjustment process. Such family-based group interventions may contribute to parental involvement after the disclosure of sexual abuse and thus increase their sense of competence. It is essential for families to maintain the order, rules, and routines that are valid at home before sexual abuse to show the child that he/she is accepted. To protect the well-being of the child after self-disclosure; it is recommended that the family maintain the positive discipline, the behavioral expectations from the child, and strengthen the family structure (Cohen and Mannarino 1998). If parents better support and appreciate their children, children will feel safe (Tremblay et al. 1999).

When caregivers are unable to provide qualified support for the child, we turn to other adults as alternative sources of emotional support for young people. Developing a relationship of mutual trust with reliable adults in psycho-social intervention will contribute to the recovery process of the young person. At this point, we should remind that emotional support from peers in the process after revealing sexual abuse is not a remedy for the support that parents will offer to the child. These young people should be encouraged to develop strategies to establish relationships with non-parental adults (relatives, friends, teachers, etc.) who have the potential to provide a coherent source of emotional support (Rosenthal et al. 2003).

As you can see disclosure to a reliable person, getting support from social environment, and necessary actions for the termination of the abuse will contribute to the elimination of the sense of powerlessness of children following sexual abuse. The self-disclosure behavior alone is not enough to end the abuse, and the reactions of the environment to the child's self-disclosure behavior are important (Robins, 2000). Sexual abuse affects not only the child but also the psychology of the whole family and public conscience (Knoll, 2010). This study also shows that psychosocial intervention aimed at

reducing the emotional and social negative effects of child sexual abuse can only be useful when a self-disclosure behavior is established from a comprehensive perspective.

Conclusion

In this study, we conceptualized the self-disclosure behavior following sexual abuse as a process, and we discuss the self-disclosure literature within a systemic approach. With this article, we revised and redefined the existing conceptualizations about self-disclosure and proposed self-disclosure as a pre- and post-behavior that were triggered by multilevel factors. We utilized Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Approach offering five mutually inclusive subsystems to better understand the self-disclosure process in sexually abused children.

Factors either facilitate or risks the self-disclosure for an abused child play their role at different levels of systems. When the self-disclosure literature is examined, it is observed that mostly microsystem level factors are discussed. This is not surprising since the microsystem includes the inner and outer areas that the child is most often in contact. At child level; the characteristics closely associated with development such as memory, language, intelligence, and the type of social emotions that the child feels and the level of comprehension of events - before the self-disclosure behavior - appear as convergent factors that should be taken into account when interviewing with the abused child. The microsystems like family and school where the child had spent most of his time, and the internet which we propose as a microsystem in this study, had some common features that determine self-disclosure. These real or virtual social contexts; provide the appropriate quality for the child to expose himself as long as it facilitates the child to express himself, supports to get information from the right person to address children's curiosity about their interests and is open and acceptable to his actions and behavior. In the child's mesosystem we examined the interactions between microsystems which are related to the child's self-esteem; thus found that functionality and parenting attitudes of the family do affect the school and friendship of the children and the children's behavioral functionality in these environments. The interactions of the family, relatives, and school, which represent basic mesosystems, may compromise the child's self-disclosure behavior. The nature of the emotional relationships that the child establishes with prominent people in school and family microsystems (e.g. mother, teacher) seems like a key to self-disclosure. While measuring the effects of the ecosystem and the macrosystem on child sexual abuse and self-disclosure behaviors may have some difficulties, qualitative studies draw attention to the specific elements of both systems. In the exosystem we showed that the lack of knowledge of children about children's rights and sexual abuse, guidance services, and child participation in child rights education are the main obstacles. The patriarchy, media and social and cultural negative attitudes towards the child are the main pressuring factors in the macrosystem. In the chronosystem, the social value and meaning of the child and the legal and historical process of the rights of the child mark the protection of children's rights.

Although self-disclosure is very important in the process of preventing sexual abuse, it is not always sufficient. The child's microsystems may not be as supportive or protective to stop sexual abuse. At this point, the judicial process and social services in the ecosystem must intervene the process immediately. On the macro level, development of positive attitudes towards childhood and the representation of the child in the media by

the rights of the child may be a means for the child to have a value in the long process. Thus, as all these systems stand by the child; children may have the right to speak. In order to protect infants and young children who cannot express themselves, children's rights advocacy is important as it is examined at the chronosystem level.

Child's sexual exploitation is a violation of the physical integrity of the child (İbi- loğlu et al. 2018), and by child's self-disclosure of the offense, the abuser can be captured. So self-disclosure is considered as the first step of preventing this crime against other children. Self-disclosure will enable the family, the close relatives, judicial institutions and psychosocial services that can support the child by intervening in sexual abuse process. The child will be able to leave behind the adverse consequences of sexual abuse by getting support and acceptance. In this article, we assert that child sexual abuse is not only affecting the child but also affects the microsystems and macrosystems of the child systematically, like family, society and the *Zeitgeist*. Therefore, it is essential to think intervention and recovery in a sexually abused child including the self-disclosure; which constitutes the beginning of this process.

Reviewing the scientific studies related to self-disclosure of child sexual abuse through a systematic structure; we reached a conclusion that sciences need more information pertaining the child's self-disclosure after sexual abuse. Especially when the national literature on child abuse is examined, it is found that there are mostly reviews (like ours) or case studies. In these case studies, a limited sample size or research technique is often mentioned as a limitation. There is a strong need to overcome these limitations and to obtain new information on sexual abuse. To achieve this goal; future empirical research on child sexual abuse we present as a suggestion to address self-disclosure behavior. We would also like to contribute to these possible future research by method suggestions. We observed that in most studies self-reports of adult participants who were abused during childhood were used. However, for these studies, the problems related to the credibility of the witnesses can be mentioned because these people also postponed opening themselves to someone. Therefore, future empirical research should include the participation of abused adults and children who have not revealed themselves. It is very likely that people who have not told anyone about the sexual abuse they are exposed to encounter different obstacles that the literature haven't captured yet (Lemaigre et al. 2017). Based on this; it may be advisable to include undisclosed people exposed to sexual abuse, to develop facilitative methods for self-disclosure, and to evaluate whether these methods are psycho-socially valid and have positive outcomes, especially in the fields of social and health sciences..

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