Incest Relationship between a Sister and Mentally Retarded Brother which Resulted in Pregnancy and Birth: A Case Report

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Abstract

Incest is an illegal sexual relationship which is encountered in all societies and more often seen in childhood with psychologically destructive effects. Most cases of incest remain hidden when there is no tangible evidence such as a witness or a subsequent pregnancy or become more chronic until the child reaches a mental level where they can understand the wrongness of the event. The study presented between an anatomically virgin girl who experienced sexual relations resulting pregnancy and birth, with her older brother who didn't have adequate sexual relationship information and thought he was playing games, re-enacting what seen on films and television. The girl 12 year-old at the time of incest, didn't realize that she was pregnant so the pregnancy couldn't be terminated and she gave birth to a baby. Applied tests, the accused brother were determined with mild mental retardation, but he had been educated to high school level. The girl was determined to have developed a severe mental disorder because of the event. In this case of incest which resulted in a birth, the girl was found to be victim, the sister and the infant's mother and the boy with mental retardation was the perpetrator. Our aim was to draw attention to destructive effects within the family of incest. In addition, incest cases are rarely seen, it should be pointed out that besides the girl as victim, the mentally-retarded brother and the newborn infant were also victims.

Keywords: Mental retardation, incest, forensic medicine

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Introduction

Incest is estimated to comprise 20-25% of sexual abuse cases and is defined as abuse of children for sexual gratification within the family [1-6]. In previous studies of incest, most incidents have been reported between father and daughter (39%), followed by brother and sister (15%) and other family members at lower rates [4-8].

However, there is a degree of undervaluation in this when examples are taken from a wider network. A certain population not related by blood to the child, such as step-father, uncle etc are evaluated in incidents of child abuse, including incest [1-3]. Although incest is encountered more often in children, incestuous relationships may also be seen in adults. Incest is illegal for everyone in society. While some countries state this directly in separate laws (eg, up to 20 states in the USA, United Kingdom), in countries such as Turkey, the sentence is increased because of a blood relationship when evaluated within the context of sexual abuse [8-10]. The aim of this paper was to draw attention to the destructive psychological aspect of incest, which is encountered more in children and can be seen in families of every social level in all societies, and to increase the awareness and sensitivity of community workers and healthcare personnel to be able to make a diagnosis.

Case

The incident happened between a 14-year old boy and his 12-year old sister. Their parents had separated and the children lived with their mother in a rural area close to the city, while their father lived with another woman. The mother undertook casual daily work and the boy was apprenticed to a tradesman. On the day of the incest incident, the mother had gone to a village for summer seasonal work in the fields, leaving the children alone at home. Having been affected by a film on television (a love story with no pornographic or erotic content), they had sexual relations, thinking that they were playing a game.

As a result, the girl became pregnant. The pregnancy was diagnosed at 24 weeks from tests made at hospital when the girl presented for another reason. When the physician was informed of the situation, forensic investigations were started. According to Turkish legislation related related to pregnancy termination in cases of sexual abuse (defined in the regulations related to the implementation and management of uterine evacuation and

sterilisation services in the Turkish Penal Code), the pregnancy could not be terminated as the upper limit of 20 weeks had passed.

In the genital examination, although the girl was pregnant, the hymen was seen to have an elastic structure and had not been ruptured by the coitus event. In the early stages of the judicial enquiry, the victim stated that the incident had been perpetrated by a stranger. Later, following information to the police from an anonymous witness, investigations were made that it could be a case of incest. When the pregnancy was full-term, a healthy girl infant was delivered by caesarean section. As the girl did not wish to be both the infant's mother and sister, the infant was given to the Social Services and Child Protection Institute. In the examination made by a psychiatrist specialist of the *victim-child-mother* child while she was in hospital for the birth, an adjustment disorder with depressive symptoms was seen to have developed.

On the recommendation of the pediatric psychiatric specialist, the child-mother incest victim was removed from the family and given into the care of the Social Services and Child Protection Institute. From DNA tests applied to the mother, father and infant, a definite case of incest was revealed. Pedagogues determined that at the time of the incident, the brother and sister had no knowledge of concepts such as sexuality, pregnancy or virginity. Approximately two years after the event, the case was referred by the Public Prosecutor to Inonu University Medical Faculty Health Board related to the determination of crimes of Sexual Abuse and Assault in order to evaluate whether or not the mental health of the victim sister had been impaired and whether or not the older brother who was active in the incest incident was capable of controlling his behavior and aware of the consequences in a legal sense.

In the evaluation made by the Board, scar tissue was seen to have formed on the wrists of the girl from cuts associated with a suicide attempt. During the examination, she asked several times whether or not her brother would be punished. She stated that she loved her brother very much, he had not intended to do anything bad and she was very sorry for him. She was observed to have great concern for her elder brother. The psychiatric examination determined her to have impaired perception, feelings of guilt, thoughts of suicide and 'major depression and impulse control disorder' following trauma. The decision was arrived at of mental health disorder of a severe degree. In the board examination of the brother, he was determined to be

weak in perception and thought content and to be mentally retarded in the intelligence test. It was determined that his capability to direct his behavior and understand the consequences was not fully developed in the legal sense.

He is either incapable of appreciating the legal meaning and consequences of his act or his capability to control his behavior is underdeveloped then he is shall be exempt from criminal liability. Where the minor has the capability to comprehend the legal meaning and result of the act and to control his behaviors in respective of his act.

Discussion and Conclusion

Most cases of incest remain hidden when there is no tangible evidence such as a witness or a subsequent pregnancy or become more chronic until the child reaches a mental level where they can understand the wrongness of the event [1-7, 10-13]. The frequency of incest has been observed to increase in families where there are long-term problems in the family dynamics, where the parents have separated, where there is alcohol or substance addiction in the family and where there are individuals with mental problems or severe psychological disorders [7,8].

In the case presented here, the mother and father were separated. In cases of incest, the effects on the individuals concerned will be different because of differences in perception and the victim not commenting on the event. While some victims develop eating disorders, some may self-harm. In the current case, the girl victim had physically harmed herself by cutting her wrists in a suicide attempt. Following trauma, various psychiatric problems may develop. In the current case major depression and impulse control disorder were determined.

It is difficult for incest victims to re-enter society because of permanent effects. These individuals have high rates of alcohol and substance addiction, marriage breakdown and a tendency to prostitution [10]. In previous studies, it has been said that in a general sense, there are some notable similarities in the characteristics of the active perpetrator and the passive victim in incest incidents. For example, although the active persons generally may be comprised of those with normal mental performance, alcohol or substance addiction and psychological problems, those in passive situations comprise those with mental performance not fully developed and they may not be able to fully evaluate their own actions. The risk of sexual abuse has been reported as 4 to 10 times greater in individuals with mental retardation

[6]. While the active individuals in incidents of incest have often been reported to have generally normal mental functions, the victims have been mentally retarded [2,6,10]. However, the case presented here is different in that the active brother was mentally retarded. He had been to school up to high school level and the mental retardation was determined in the tests made because of the incident. As a result of the tests, examinations and interviews made after the incident was discovered, it was understood that both the brother and sister as perpetrator and victim only learned sexually-related information during the judicial process.

It can be considered that the incident between the brother and sister developed on the grounds of curiosity and as a result of basic sexual impulses which developed and that the brother was mentally retarded would also have contributed. Besides the newborn infant victim resulting from this incest and the sister-child-mother victim, the brother was also a victim as well as the perpetrator due to his capability to direct his behavior and understand the consequences not having fully developed in the legal sense.

It can be said that there are 3 victims of this incident. In previous studies, it has been shown that the psychological problems formed after events on an individual level such as incest, sexual assault etc. are more permanent and affect the victim's life more negatively than those arising from events which affect the whole community such as natural disasters or wars [1,12-16]. Therefore, healthcare workers and educators must give great attention to the subject of incest. It is important that school teachers, and family doctors at family health centers identify children at risk. There must be a very careful approach to these risk groups and there must be an awareness of this subject. In this way, it can be determined quickly and can be halted without becoming a chronic problem or resulting in pregnancy as in the case presented here.

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