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Evaluation of the incest cases in Hatay

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Abstract

Incest is traditionally defined as any sexual activity between family members who are forbidden to marry by law. The inability of apply contemporary interview techniques to the victims and the fact that the family members do not cooperate due to intimacy of the event, make it difficult to determine the actual prevalence of incest cases. In this study, the aim was to determine the prevalence and evaluate characteristics of incest cases.

We examined the sexual crime cases have sent to forensic units in 4 years between 2013-2016. Demographic data and the relationship between the victims and defendants were evaluated. The Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to analyze the data.

There were 737 sexual crime cases and 57 of them (7.7%) were incest cases. Among these, 15.8% (n=9) of the victims were men and 84.2% (n=48) were women. The average age of victims was 15.3 ± 5.43 . We determined that the defendant was mostly the father (n=24, 42.1%). The penetration rate was 33.3% (n=19).

Because of late notification and incidental recognition, physical examination findings usually are not detectable. Increasing the education and sensitivity of the individuals who can encounter with these cases like medical staff, teachers, etc. is an important process in the protection of children and their acceptance by society.

Keywords: Incest, child abuse, sexual violence, Turkey

Introduction

Incest is traditionally defined as any sexual activity between family members who are forbidden to marry by law. While some authors describe incest as an incestuous relationship within the nuclear family only, more accepted definition of incest is sexual actions of all those who are obligated to care of them [1-3].

Incest is a complex phenomenon that is tried to be explained by many psychiatric or genetic theories. It used to be defined depending on a blood bond. The incest relationships between people who have parental bonds and trust have been ignored for years. Therefore, in recent studies, instead of a blood bond, parental dominance and power over the victim and dependence of the child for care have become more important [1-4].

Incest covers a wide range of behaviors from molestation and fondling to penetration with an organ or object. It is a problem that can be seen in all the social classes in developed and undeveloped societies [5]. In history, incest was a taboo in many civilizations, in spite of considered ordinary in some tribes such as ancient Egypt and the Greeks [6].

Victims usually cannot explain the event because of guilt, shame, fear, and many other reasons. Even if families are aware of the event, they prefer to not disclose the event to keep it confidential in most cases [3,7].

Determining the real prevalence of incest cases is difficult because family members do not cooperate owing to the nature of the event. Studies concerning incest are limited to questionnaires, case reports and local researches [2,3,7,8].

In this study, the aim was to determine the prevalence and evaluate characteristics of incest cases have sent forensic units in Hatay, Turkey.

Material and Method

In this study, we examined the incest cases were sent to Forensic Medicine Institute Hatay Branch Office and Mustafa Kemal University Department of Forensic Medicine in the 4-year period between 2013-2016. Demographic data like age, gender, marital status and educational status were evaluated. The relationships between the victim and defendants, the stage of action, psychological findings detected in the victim due to the incident were also investigated. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to analyze the data.

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Results

We determined that 737 sexual crime cases were sent forensic units in Hatay between the years 2013-2016 and 57 of them (7.7%) were incest cases. Among these, 15.8% (n=9) of the victims were men and 84.2% (n=48) were women. The youngest of the victims was 4 and the oldest was 36, with an average age of 15.3 ± 5.43 . The distributions of cases according to age groups are given in Table1. Most of the cases were in the 13-18 age group (n=37, 64.9%). There was a significant difference between the age group and sex. Male victims were exposed to incest at younger ages. We determined that 66.7% of male cases were 12 years or below and 8.3% of female cases were 12 years or below ($p < 0.0001$).

Table 1. Distribution of cases according to age groups

Age groups	n	%
Younger than 7 years old	2	3,5
7-12 years old	8	14,1
13-18 years old	37	64,9
Older than 18years old	10	17,5
Total	57	100,0

Table 2. Distribution of the victims' gender by age groups

Age groups	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female			
	n	%	n	%	n	%
12 years and below	6	66,7	4	8,3	10	17,5
13 years and over	3	33,3	44	91,7	47	82,5
Total	9	100,0	48	100,0	57	100,0

Fisher's Exact Test $p < 0,0001$

The relationship between victims and defendants is presented in Figure1. We found that the defendant was mostly victim's father (n=24, 42.1%). The educational status of the victims is given in Figure2. Most of the victims were still in primary education (n=24, 42.1%). We determined that 4 of the women victims (7%) were married during the action.

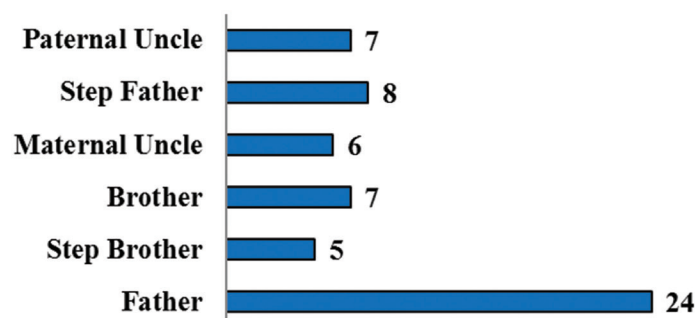


Figure 1. The relationship between victims and defendants

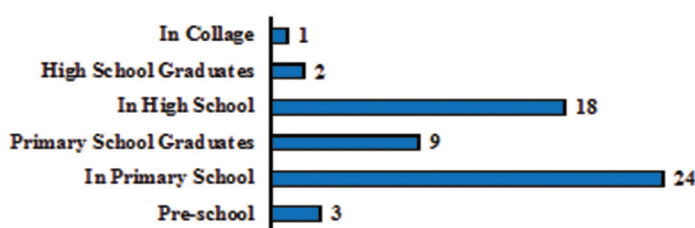


Figure 2. Distribution of educational status of victims

There was penetration in 19 cases (33.3%), vaginal penetration alone in 3 cases (5.3%), anal penetration alone in 11 cases (19.3%), vaginal and anal penetration in 5 cases (8.8%). The remaining 38 cases were sexually abused with friction and fondling. The distribution of penetration status by age group and sex is presented in Table3.

Table 3. Distribution of penetration status by age group and sex

Age	Penetration				Total		P value χ^2
	Yes n	%	No n	%	n	%	
12 years and below	3	15,8	7	18,5	10	17,5	$P > 0,05$ $\chi^2 = 0,061$
13 years and over	16	84,2	31	81,6	47	82,5	
Gender	No		Yes		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Male	4	21,1	5	13,2	9	15,8	$P > 0,05$ $\chi^2 = 0,594$
Female	15	78,9	33	86,8	48	84,2	
Total	19	100,0	38	100,0	57	100,0	

There were 6 victims (10.5%) who are unable to defend themselves because of moderate or severe mental retardation. None of the cases was notified within the same day of the action. We found that 5 cases (8.8%) applied to judicial institutions on the 3rd day of the event, 11 cases (19.3%) on the 4-10th days, 12 cases (21.1%) on the 10-30th days, 23 cases (40.3%) in 1-12 months and 6 cases (10.5%) applied more than 1 year after the first attack.

No pregnancy was detected in the cases. In 24 (42.1%) cases, victims expressed that there was physical violence or threat. Trauma findings were detected in physical examinations of 7 victims (12.3%).

Discussion

Incest is the heaviest form of sexual abuse. It is difficult to diagnose because incest is mostly kept secret within the family. Therefore, it is difficult to take precautions [3,7,9,10].

In the literature, it has been reported that incest victims are usually girls in the childhood and adolescent age groups [2,3,11,12]. In a study conducted by Grossin et al. on 418 cases, it was determined that the average age of victims of sexual crime was 15.9 [13]. Consistent with the literature; we found that 15.8% (n = 9) of the victims were male, 84.2% (n = 48) were female and the average age was 15.3 ± 5.43 . In a study conducted in our country on 1002 sexually abused children, it was reported that the mean age of boys (10.7) was lower than girls (12.7) [8]. Similarly, in a study evaluating incest cases in Eskişehir, it was found that the average age was 15.3 in females and 8.5 in males [3]. Consistent with these studies, we found that the mean age of male victims was significantly lower than female victims.

In many societies it is quite difficult to uncover incest events under the influence of social taboos. Incest sometimes only uncover with pregnancy [3,14]. There was no incest case resulting pregnancy in our study.

Only 7 cases (12.3%) had physical findings in the examination. Since the physical examination findings of sexual abuse are not generally detectable, their diagnostic value is limited. Assaults can

be carried out with different kinds of sexual behavior and these actions may not cause a traumatic finding [8,15]. Especially in incest cases, physical findings are rarely encountered [3].

The father-daughter incest is the most common type in the literature. This is followed by brother-sister, sister-sister and mother-son incest types [2,9,16,17]. Consistent with the literature, we found that father-girl incest was the most common type (n=24, 42,1%).

In the studies conducted, it was found that the father-girl incest related individuals have lower levels of intellectual structures and school conditions and their self-esteem was low. It was reported that sexually abused children have not appropriate education with their ages [18-20]. The education level of victims was found low in this study too. We detected that 9 victims were not sent to the school after primary school graduation. This data supports the idea that planning an appropriate education for children may contribute to protection from abuse [10].

Findings of vaginal and/or anal penetration were detected in 3 of 1 case. Yılmaz and his colleagues found that this rate was 35.9% [2]. Penetration is an important reason of increases the harmful effect of sexual abuse on victims [2,3].

The large family structure, substance use, divorce in family, low educational level and low income level are important factors affecting the incidence of incest [2,12,22]. Factors such as substance use, divorced family structure, and low income level were couldn't be evaluated and these are the limitations of our study.

Recognition of incest is often incidental. Abnormal behaviors in child, unexpected pregnancy, taking the child to hospital because of physical injury or genital infection may lead to recognition [2]. Even though they are aware of the incest situation that their children are exposed to, it is known that most of the mothers do not make any attempt [7].

Conclusion

Although it is thought that this study will contribute to the literature on incest, it's known that victims reaching the judicial authorities are only a small portion of all incest cases.

Because of late notification and incidental recognition, physical examination findings which are important in the diagnosis of incest are usually not detectable. It is easy to see how difficult reaching a diagnosis when a part of the cases is thought to be mental retardation in the middle and severe stages.

The fact that there are limitations in the search for the real prevalence, the difficulty in diagnosing, the fact that families and officials do not report incest cases due to various concerns cause the society to live together with this crime of mankind. The situation that seriously disturbs the health of future generations continues today as a shame of mankind as it was yesterday.

Increasing the education and sensitivity of the medical staff, teachers, social service specialists, dorm employees, etc., who can encounter with these cases, is an important process in the protection of children and their acceptance by society.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

Financial Disclosure

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