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Prediction and Prevention of Sexual Assaults on Children

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Abstract: Unfortunately, in the reality of modern society, more and more negative phenomena appear, which affect us directly or indirectly, both directly us and the direction to which the society is heading, the most affected being the children. Their vulnerability makes them targets of various types of abuses and aggressions committed by adults. The studies show an alarming dynamics of some phenomena where the children have an important place among the victims. Unfortunately, in Romania, this phenomenon has not been one of the priorities. In this study, we shall try to identify the reasons that represent the basis of children victimization, the immediate and long term effects upon the victims, the social environment that favors it as well as the prevention and fighting measures against these aggressions.

Keywords: child abuse; sexual abuse; prophylaxis

1. Introduction

Giving and defending children's right to a private life, to intimacy and a normal life, we have the guarantee that they shall have an optimum development in normal conditions, being able to prevent the situations when his existence and development are endangered due to abuses in general, the sexual ones in particular..

The effects of sexual abuses are profound and negative, and many times they follow the under age child in all his growing stages, including maturity, in most cases the victim becoming, in time, a copy of his aggressor. From this we can infer the importance of a proper treatment of sexual abuse and pay a special attention to the traumas experienced in childhood.

The best method of treatment and prevention is to know and understand the child's needs based on his development stages, a correct understanding by parents and adults with whom he interacts (educators, teachers, social workers, psychologists, or other health professionals), an important role among them being played also by mass-media as aggressions can be identified or prevented in their early stages.

Another important aspect is related to abusers. The measure consisting only of deprivation of liberty is not enough, the statistical data showing that many of the abusers commit the same crimes once they are released from prison. Considering that the way this problem is approached in USA is not a solution as there the convicted pedophiles (and here we also include incestuous fathers) are stigmatized this meaning that they have the obligation to inform local authorities if they move to another community, and in their turn and by open means (newspapers, posters, notifications to educational institutions) the authorities inform that "a pedophile" is living near or among the people belonging to that community. If in terms of child protection this practice has results, we cannot say the same thing from the other perspective, namely the rehabilitation and social reintegration of an abuser. The abusers' problem has been discussed for a long time in some countries, and an alternative was the chemical castration.

The pedophiles, incestuous fathers or violators, those who suffer from an anomaly of sexual preferences have to be listened and helped not stigmatized or ignored. The doctors have a leading role

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in this mission, namely to give them care and necessary treatment, or using the already existing treatment at their disposal and there is no doubt that in the near future other solutions will come to daylight.

Only repression does not prevent the repetition of an offence as it was until not long ago in the Romanian judicial system. *To sentence a pervert without helping him means to see the list of his victims increase after him being released from prison. Therefore, we have to understand the matter of sexual perversity in all its complexity, even with his horrible aspect.* (Astărăstoae, & Scripcaru, 2005)

The solution is not to close our eyes even if we prefer looking away and to forget or ignore the fact that our ways crosses day by day with the way of sexual perverts who are “*close to you, close to us, some of them being put behind bars only temporarily...while other will appear tomorrow in the newspapers*”. (Cioclei, 2007)

In those to come we will present some sexual assaults prevention programs as well as rehabilitation programs for the victims, which have been elaborated by prestigious international specialists, supported and implemented by various international and national organizations including “Save the Children”. These programs are addressed to children, parents, journalists, psychologists and teachers. In this chapter of our work, we shall analyze each of them for the purpose of a maximum efficiency in preventing sexual assaults on children.

2. Family

The family represents the vital social group in which the child benefits from care, protection and education and to the family, the center of concern should be the child. The diversification of family models increased at the same time with the social changes, the new family forms (single-parent families, cohabitation, the liberty of women of having children without being married) coexisting with the traditional family.

The personality of a child is a product resulted from a multitude of factors, familial and extra-familial (school, community), but the familial factors are definitely the most important for the child to grow in harmony. That is why we consider necessary to detail an “education method” for parents in order to prevent abuses of any kind, but especially sexual abuses on children, the latter having the most obvious consequences upon the entire development of the child.

Generally, the familial environment is made up of:

- family members having complex relationships on whose functionality the efficiency and success in child’s social integration, targeting and development are based;
- living space with all facilities available that may or may not meet the family needs.

The family is the most suitable to meet the child’s needs as they are the closest to him and his needs from the affective point of view, because only affection can help a parent intuit the child’s needs and his childhood state. Material security, education and love are instruments that help the family ensure a harmonious development of the child.

The professionals have settled a set of family educational.

1. Love your child:

- accept him the way he is;
- enjoy him and do not hurt him, do not punish him unjustly, do not humiliate him, give him the chance to love you.

2. Protect your child, protect him from physical and spiritual dangers, give up your own interests if necessary, even risking your own life;

3. Be a good example for your child so that he lives in a family in which honor, honesty, modesty and harmony reign;
4. Play with your child;
5. Work with your child.
6. Let the child acquire life experience even if he suffers as the over-protected child, safe from any danger, sometimes may become a social invalid
7. Show your child the limits of human freedom
8. Teach him to be obedient
9. Expect from your child only the appreciations he can give, as per his experience and maturity.
10. Offer your child experiences having the value of memories, family celebrations, trips, travels, vacations, shows, sport manifestations as the child nurtures as an adult, from experiences that give him the opportunity to know the world.

The specialists have marked another series of rules for the parents whose child was sexually abused, namely:

- continue to believe your child and do not accuse him for what happened;
- consult the doctor about the need for appropriate medical examination and/ or treatment;
- train your child to tell you exactly if the aggressor is trying once again to have sexual contact with him or if he bothers the child in any way;
- tell the child repeatedly that he is safe;
- answer calm and naturally to the questions and sentiments the child expresses about molestation, but do not insist on him to talk about it;
- respect the child's right to private life, and confidentiality and forbid the questioning of the child by persons indirectly involved in investigating the case;
- the parents or other persons taking care of the child have to encourage him to observe the rules of the house (regular duties, bed time, rules, etc.);
- the parents have to inform the child's sisters/ brothers that something happened to him but now he is safe and everything will be all right. Do not discuss the details of the aggression with the child's brothers and sisters. Make sure that all the children in the family have received enough information so that they can avoid the aggressor;
- the parents should make time to discuss the situation with a trusted person – a family member, a priest, a councilor (but not in the presence of the child). Talk about and express what you feel.

3. The Psychologist

The psychologist is the one who should be involved both in the abuse evaluation process and in the recovery process of the child who had suffered a form of abuse. Within this process, he may perform a psychological evaluation of the child, which can be very useful for understanding:

- the mechanisms on which the behavior and attitude of the child are based;
- the effects of the abuse on the child's psychological-social development;
- the factors determining the appearance of abusive behaviors on children.

At the same time, the psychologist is seen as a specialist in child's development, and he may be considered an expert if his involvement is needed from the legal point of view. Ideally, the psychological evaluation has to include an interview with the parents, a cognitive development test,

personality tests, measuring ranges for various symptoms and observations of child-parent interaction. The psychological evaluation data are cumulated with the data from the other specialists involved.

Express the child's feelings, and help him to accept them, and especially continue the regular activities up to the abuse moment and his reintegration into society are the main targets of a therapist in terms of rehabilitating the child, targets that will be reached by means of a specialized help and by means of therapy. Therapies are varied, the cognitive-behavioral ones being the most common, this meaning that the child can be easily influenced and the purpose of this kind of therapies is to find the subject's autosuggestion and changing possibilities.

4. Medical Staff

The object of the sexual abuse is involving children in sexual activities that they do not fully perceive and understand and therefore their consent is not advised. For a doctor, is very important to take into consideration any complaint of a child that claims that he has been the victim of a sexual abuse. At the same time, it is very important not to put the diagnostic of sexual abuse without evidence to prove that, which imply a social investigation of the family's situation and the psychological and somatic exam of the child.

The forensic examination is one of the most important steps of an investigation and a good coordination of the team members investigating the case is absolutely necessary. If the signs of a sexual abuse are obvious, it is necessary that the forensic expert takes all the confidentiality measures so as to protect the victim's image and at the same time to gain the child's trust by telling him that what had happened will remain confidential and that the perpetrator shall pay for his deed.

The symptoms of a sexual abuse that can be noticed might be physical or behavioral, as we have detailed in a previous chapter.

Preventive medical attitude towards the abuse:

- history – through which the history and the factors that led to the affection for which the child came. it is necessary to talk to the child before the parents do, if the abuse was physical, and this should be an opportunity of affective closeness not an investigation;
- the general medical examination shall describe the status of the child, including clinical elements that may represent the sexual abuse syndrome;
- the specialty medical examination in which psychiatrists, forensic experts, etc. are involved;
- para-clinical examinations having the role of constituting forensic evidence;
- psychological therapy;
- epicrisis – description of child's evolution during medical care.

The family doctor is the most important medical professional in terms of preventing sexual abuses. He should have an open communication with the parents, cooperating also with the authorities, the social worker and with police in order to take the earliest actions.

5. Educational Staff

They have an important role in children development, the teachers being many times a model to follow for a child. The teachers must develop and maintain an open relationship with the children, to gain their trust and to notice any modification in their behavior so that afterwards they can contact the parents and even authorities, if necessary.

The role of the teacher is very important in finding out the abuse cases. Quality and quantity diversification of a child's relations with the environment may determine many cases when the child is physically, psychically or sexually abused. The teacher may have some clues in terms of an abuse produced on children if they present abuse specific symptoms. It is absolutely necessary to know these signs in order to prevent the abuse and, subsequently, to intervene in such cases.

As the child is in contact with his teachers various hours per day, he can manifest his frustration and fears during the classes, by an aggressive behavior, interiorization, decrease of concentration capacity or decrease of performance. All these signs have to be taken into consideration by the teachers and then resolved by contacting directly the persons involved in child's development.

The teachers may find out about an abuse by discussing with the other students/ colleagues or directly observing the child. These symptoms may consist of:

- isolation from the group;
- verbal and behavioral aggressiveness;
- excessively vulgar language;
- running away from home;
- absenteeism;
- sexual behavior inappropriate to his age;
- difficulties in communication.

In these cases, the teacher must contact the family in order to solve this case. In worse cases, the teacher can contact the school councilor or directly the police.

6. Social Workers

As a necessity to solving the social-human problems specific to the transition period, the social care system has developed significantly. The problem of children that are victims of abuses has increased seriously in the last period, which determined the social care programs to take some measures. In Romania there is still not a national intervention and prevention plan adopted and implemented for the abused children and a practical action guide, and this raises new problems in assuring an efficient protection in such cases.

7. Mass-Media

It is very difficult for a journalist to measure his words as sexual abuse is a forbidden subject, the sexual life itself being a subject very difficult to speak about. The journalist is asked to look at the child as he is, a becoming adult, whose life is just beginning, and not to avoid the incriminatory deeds or to evade the truth. A journalist has to inform public opinion about the matters of interest without exposing the child and to increase the effects of his trauma. In what follows, we shall concentrate mainly on protecting the child's image in the press. We live in a world dominated by media, sometimes a world created by it. Even if we are not aware, most of our knowledge or attitude is acquired by mass communication means. Mass-media represents an important factor in extending the reality we are living in, in enlarging the horizon of knowledge and in modifying social behavior.

The reality that reaches the general public through written or audio-visual press bears the print of journalism. Thus, the facts, attitudes, events with their real meaning pass through the filter of journalist's personality before they reach the general public. The message he sends is finally his own representation about the subject put in public debate. Due to this reason, it is very important that the journalist has those qualities that should influence positively the modeling of public behavior and simultaneously to be aware of his own responsibility.

Being a person in full formation process, the child needs protection and calm, and using an event in his life, publishing it regardless of the initial purpose, may have a disastrous effect upon his further development. Thus, in case he suffered a sexual abuse, the feeling of self-blame is extremely powerful. If other persons get to find out about what happened in his life, he shall add a new dimension to his inner feelings; that is the image others have about him. In any abuse situation when a child is involved, it is recommended that his identity should remain unknown.

8. The Police

Taking into consideration the fact that the social support of the child is focused at the family, social and school level, the role of the Internal Affairs Ministry is connected to analyzing the abuse of a child in two complementary directions:

A. Immediate intervention in obvious cases of abuse that endanger the security, development and integrity of the child. This dimension refers to the visible side of what contours the child's abuse and relates to a quick application of the provisions in the legislation;

B. Active participation of police force to the process of preventing abuses on children, re-dimensioning of the services towards population, also including the child's support groups in the positive influencing part (family, school, neighbors, friends etc.). Also the involvement of police officers is very important, acting in principle, with the other institutions in order to prevent abuses on children, which together with the child's family may prevent a possible abuse or may prosecute the offender and mainly, it can re-integrate the victim and "treat" it as soon as possible. Each of the above mentioned is very important but if they do not act inter-dependently on more levels at the same time, the odds are very small. That is why it is very important to have a close cooperation between the family, doctors, police, journalists and social workers.

9. Conclusions

The subject approached is very important as knowing some specific elements may lead to finding out about an abuse, and therefore, we consider necessary a perfect coordination between the institutions that may fight against, prevent and punish this kind of abuses, the families of children/victims and the social environment they are part of, each of them having an extremely important contribution in finding about an abuse, helping the victim and the abuser (as his punishment is not enough) in order to re-integrate them into society, as well as removing as much as possible the traumas suffered by the under age child.

We consider that, for a high efficiency in preventing and fighting against these phenomena, there is necessary to have a legislative framework that should create the premises of a better cooperation between the state's institutions, those with which the under age child has direct contact as well as those that have attributions in identifying and punishing the offender, his counseling, treatment and reeducation programs being extremely important. It is obvious that the offenders are some individuals whose psychic integrity is affected one way or another, and to punish an abuser without trying to help him, by giving necessary treatment or care, mainly by implementing some efficient therapy solutions does not lead but to postpone on shorter or longer term the increase of his victims' list.

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