

THE COMPETENCIES OF SELECTED STUDENTS FROM THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION, CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE, IN THE AREA OF THE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA) SYNDROME PREVENTION

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Abstract. The study explores the readiness of future experts (selected last grade students of a master or follow-up master study programme at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague) for the prevention of sexual abuse of children. For data collection a quantitative questionnaire and the CAWI (Computer Aided Web Interviewing) technique were used. Research sample was selected using the method of stratified random sampling. The sample consisted in total of 300 respondents – last grade students of a master or follow-up master study programme in the academic year of 2007/2008 and 2013/2014 at the selected faculty of Charles University. For evaluation a point grading system was used to establish the order of the results. Based on the information a minimum knowledge standard was drafted, including a proposal on the functioning of the interdisciplinary cooperation.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse Syndrome, Child Abuse and Neglect Syndrome, commercial sexual exploitation of children, interdisciplinary cooperation, Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague

Introduction

The technological development in the 20th and 21st centuries has not only improved the standard of living but also brought new ways of child abuse. Almost every day media bring regional or world news reporting on disclosed cases of child ill-treatment, abuse or neglect. It is evident that the government will have to take measures that will be more efficient in combating child abuse. For more than twenty years, the Czech Republic has been the signatory of The Convention on the Rights of the Child; however, many tasks in the Czech law are still pending. The rights and protection of children were not developing only in the 20th or 21st centuries. It should be realized that the understanding of a child and childhood came much earlier. For example in connection with the name of J. A. Komenský who is mentioned as

one of the representatives of the so-called ambivalent child approach. It is a stage in history of the child and childhood understanding development when the first findings of child development and needs were made and when childhood started to receive a higher importance. Komenský came with many findings on the child and on how to care about it and educate it. Unfortunately, despite Komenský's requirements addressed to parents, many children are not cradled and do not live in a warm-hearted formative environment full of ease. Indeed the opposite is the case and parents do not respect child's interests and put their own interests first. In the worst cases, the child experiences violence, neglect and psychological abuse from its immediate family.

In the Czech Republic as well as in other civilized countries sexual abuse is defined as an inappropriate exposure of a child to a sexual contact, activity and behaviour. It includes any form of sexual touching, sexual intercourse or exploitation by anybody to whose custody the child was entrusted or by anybody who abuses the child. Such person may be a parent, relative, friend, professional/volunteer or stranger (Dunovský et al., 2005).

The authors of the study firmly believe that we cannot effectively combat the child sexual abuse syndrome (CSA syndrome) or the syndrome of an ill-treated, abused and neglected child (CAN syndrome) without quality interdisciplinary cooperation. They have based their basic research question and hypothesis on this belief. The underlying idea of the entire research is that if we are to be successful in combating the CSA and CAN syndrome in our population, it is necessary to create interdisciplinary teams from experts who are trained for this purpose, at the best within a pre-gradual training. This does not concern only physicians, psychologists and social workers who are the most frequent members of expert teams but also other experts working with children practically on a daily basis. The authors therefore focused primarily on students at their own workplace (Faculty of Education, Charles University, Prague), i.e. future teachers. Because it is mainly the teachers who can detect a problem at an early stage and call for appropriate help.

Research study

The study aimed to ascertain the preparedness of selected future professionals (last grade students of the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague) in the area of child sexual abuse syndrome prevention.

Other goals

To carry out a framework analysis of knowledge regarding the child sexual abuse syndrome (CSA syndrome) and to identify strengths and weaknesses of training on this issue.

To define "standards of minimum knowledge regarding the CSA syndrome" for students of the full-time study programme entitled Training Teachers of General Subjects at Primary and Secondary Schools.

Hypothesis

The level of knowledge of students studying in the academic year of 2007/2008 and 2013/2014 will differ at least by 10%. There will be a tendency of improvement.

Methodology

The quantitative education research was carried out as follows: problem definition, formulation of hypotheses, verification of hypotheses, and presentation of conclusions.

Research sample was selected using the method of stratified random sampling. The authors contacted full-time students of the “Training Teachers of General Subjects at Primary and Secondary Schools” programme at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague. Both parts of the research focused on last grade master or follow-up master study programme students. In each case 150 students were randomly selected from the sample. The quantitative education research was carried out as follows: problem definition, formulation of hypotheses, verification of hypotheses, presentation of conclusions.

The authors used a quantitative questionnaire and the CAWI technique. In terms of individual research steps, a pre-research was carried out first. Data obtained by means of closed-ended questions were encoded for further processing and analysing. Scales consisting of 5 categories were used (classification scale: 1 – excellent, 2 – very good, 3 – good, 4 – satisfactory, 5 – unsatisfactory). If a respondent answered “I don’t know” or did not fill in the question, he/she was evaluated as “unsatisfactory”. If a respondent checked no answer in a particular section of the questionnaire (he/she disregarded this section and skipped it), such section was not evaluated.

Clear criteria were defined for scaling, e.g. if a respondent checked more answers than indicated in the instructions to the questions, he/she was evaluated as a respondent who strictly followed the instructions.

Selected study results

The authors questioned the total of 300 selected last grade students of a master or follow-up master study programme of Training Teachers of General Subjects at Primary and Secondary Schools at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague. The overall return rate of the survey was 51%, i.e. 154 out of 300 questionnaires. In the academic year of 2007/2008 150 questionnaires were distributed and 49% (74) questionnaires returned. In the academic year of 2013/2014 53% questionnaires returned, i.e. 80 out of 150 questionnaires.

A framework question of the second part of the questionnaire was to find out whether the students had already encountered the issue of CSA in their studies at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague. 49.7% of students responded positively. In the academic year of 2007/2008 52.2% and in 2013/2014

47.5% of respondents at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague, encountered this issue. These percentages might seem quite high; however, partial results of individual questions show that the result was positively influenced by students who have a subject dealing with this issue as part of their study programme. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that all students at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague, have the issue of the CAN syndrome as one of the questions for the state final examination in Pedagogy and Psychology for Teachers and 90% of respondents had already passed this examination and therefore must have encountered this issue at least when preparing for this examination.

Evaluation of the closed-ended question part revealed that most respondents' answers were correct. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the battery of 14 questions included also questions which were generally more difficult for all groups of respondents. We can mention for example question No. 8 (Would you agree to keep information confided to you by the child confidential?) and No. 13 (Is there any Option Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which would deal with the issue of child sexual abuse?).

Table 1. Correct answers of selected students at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague, regarding the issue of the CSA syndrome (questions No. 2 – 15)

Question	Academic year 2007/2008	%	Academic year 2013/2014	%
2. Is the child in danger of sexual abuse by a familiar person?	66	99 %	77	96 %
3. Victims of sexual abuse always intentionally behave in such a way to provoke the offender.	64	96 %	75	94 %
4. In order to recognize whether a child is ill-treated, abused or neglected, we have to consider the following	64	96 %	75	94%
5. What would be your reaction to a child exhibiting markedly promiscuous behaviour or interest in sexual issues?	57	85 %	69	86 %
6. Is it suitable to try to get more information on abuse from a child who was or is subject to sexual abuse?	58	87 %	66	83 %
7. What should you do if a child confides to you that it is sexually abused?	57	85 %	64	80 %
8. Would you agree to keep information confided to you by the child confidential?	27	40 %	24	30 %

9. A victim of sexual abuse must be immediately "withdrawn" from the environment where the violence occurred.	49	73 %	60	75 %
10. Does a healthcare facility have another obligation stipulated by law in addition to the reporting obligation if there is a suspicion of ill-treatment or abuse of a child?	39	58 %	45	56 %
11. A person who ascertained in a credible way that an offence of abuse of a child in custody or murder had been committed and did not report it to a social and legal child protection authority acted against the law.	64	96 %	76	95 %
12. Does any article of The Convention on the Rights of the Child deal with the issue of sexual exploitation of children?	63	94 %	70	88 %
13. Is there any Option Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which would deal with the issue of child sexual abuse	34	51 %	40	50 %
14. Who should conduct investigation in the family in accordance with the law in case child ill-treatment, abuse or neglect is suspected?	65	97 %	72	90 %
15. During the therapy it is best not to talk with the victim about what (happened)	56	84 %	65	81 %
Total average		81 %		78 %

The results in table No. 1 show that students' level of knowledge regarding closed-ended questions did not have an increasing character. In the survey carried out in the academic year of 2007/2008 81% of answers were correct; in 2013/2014 it was only 78%.

The third part of the questionnaire aimed to check the respondents' overview of the CSA syndrome issue by means of open-ended questions. If we made an overall evaluation of the questions using a scale from 1 to 5, the average mark for the academic year of 2007/2008 would be 2.5 and 2.4 in the academic year of 2013/2014. However, this average is affected by individual results which were strongly polarized – either 1 or 5. In our opinion this was caused by either the respondent knowing the correct answer or, in case of not knowing the correct answer, he/she had no chance to guess the answer considering the open-ended question form.

Based on the results we can state that the students answered correctly the questions based on their field of study at the faculty, but struggled with overlapping topics from other specializations.

Table 2. Average grading from the third part of the questionnaire (Question No. 1 – 15)

Open-ended questions	Academic year 2007/2008	Academic year 2013/2014
1. What does "incest" mean?	1,1	1,3
2. What do you understand by "commercial sexual exploitation"?	3	3,1
3. Explain the notion of "contact sexual abuse".	2,2	1,6
4. Explain the notion of "non-contact sexual abuse".	2,9	2,9
5. State at least 4 differences between "common" sexual abuse (incest) and commercial sexual abuse from the perspective of a victim.	4,6	4
6. State at least 4 myths about sexual abuse.	2,2	2,4
7. Give at least 4 signs or symptoms which might indicate that a child is being sexually abused.	1,8	2
8. What examinations are needed if sexual abuse of a child is detected (state at least 4 examinations).	1,8	1,6
9. What do you understand by "anatomically correct doll"? What is it used for?	2,1	2
10. Indicate what is meant by the notion of "reporting requirement".	1,7	1,5
11. Explain the notion of "interim measure".	1,9	2
12. Indicate age limit for sexual intercourse (in the Czech Republic).	1,8	1,7
13. Name at least 4 acts or other documents related to the CSA syndrome.	3,1	3
14. What is meant by the notion of "secondary victimization"?	3,3	3
15. Explain the notion of "quaternary prevention".	4,3	3,5
Total average	2,5	2,4

Respondents' answers to open-ended questions (table No. 2) were obviously biased in the sense of certain stereotypes typical for the way of addressing the given issue within the teaching profession.

It is striking that the respondents from the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague, did not state practically any teaching profession to be part of an interdisciplinary team. The authors believe that the situation of teaching

professionals in interdisciplinary teams will get better for example due to a legal obligation of educational facilities to give feedback to social and legal child protection authorities upon request, participation in drafting and implementing individual plans of child protection, creation of an interministerial committee or a registry of vulnerable children.

In the following overview (table No. 3), the authors summarize weaknesses and mention areas where these weaknesses can be found in selected students of the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague.

Table 3. Weaknesses identified in thematic areas

Thematic areas	Academic year 2007/2008	Academic year 2013/2014
Basic concepts (terminology)	X	X
Signs of CSA syndrome	X	X
Diagnosis of CSA syndrome	X	X
Legislative framework	X	X
Syndrome effects	X	X
Therapy	X	X

The aim of this summary is to show to the staff preparing training in individual areas topics which should be given special attention within the training. However, the presented results always state basic information that has to be shared with all members of an interdisciplinary team.

Considering the fact that according to the author's information no similar research has been carried out so far, it was not possible to compare these results with relevant results of a similar research. The only comparison available for the time being is of the first and the second part of the research. The original hypothesis assumed that the results acquired in 2013/2014 will differ at least by 10% from the results of the academic year of 2007/2008. The assumption has not been confirmed. In case of closed-ended questions the level of knowledge decreased by 3%, in case of open-ended questions there was an improvement by 0.1% in average which is insignificant.

There was a significant worsening in closed-ended questions (at least by 5%), for example: „What should you do if a child confides to you that it is sexually abused?“ or „Would you agree to keep information about abuse confided to you by the child confidential?“ In case of open-ended questions there was an improvement (at least by 0.5%). It was a question which identified differences between plain sexual abuse (incest) and commercial sexual abuse

or a question explaining the notions of “contact sexual abuse” and “quarterly prevention”.

One of the authors of the study (Hanušová, 2009) developed a “standard of minimum knowledge” in 2009 already. This handbook was repeatedly verified within the master and follow-up master study programmes, in several study fields (e.g. Health Education, Pedagogy) at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague (Hanušová, 2014). The standard can be described as basal and is designed for university teachers. The standard lists basic terms and contexts. It is assumed that at each faculty on the level of individual fields of study, the material will be appropriately supplemented and developed by adding further necessary information directly connected with the studied specialization.

Conclusion

In 2013 the Czech Republic ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The document stipulates that the states shall ensure due training of personnel working with child victims of crime, in particular training in the area of law and psychology. The emphasis is on awareness-raising using all suitable means, education and training. An essential part of awareness-raising is ensuring informedness of general public including children, which falls within the competence of teachers.

After evaluating the results of the study, the authors came to a conclusion that students’ knowledge does not often provide for early and effective diagnostics of an emergent problem. Another negative effect of this grave ignorance is the situation when an expert himself/herself gets lost in the system, does not know competencies of individual players and in a decisive moment he or she is not able to deal with the situation himself/herself or to find out an appropriate expert partner for dealing with the crisis.

NOTES

1. Hanušová, J. *Kompetence studentů vybraných fakult Univerzity Karlovy k prevenci syndromu sexuálního zneužívání dětí*. Nепublikovaná disertační práce. České Budějovice: Zdravotně sociální fakulta.
2. The Communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs No. 74/2013, Coll. of Int. Conventions, on the conclusion of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

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