

Forensic reporting of a case of sexual abuse broadcast on periscope

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Abstract: Children who are investigated or prosecuted for an action that is considered a crime by the law, or children who were placed in security facilities due to his/her actions are defined as “children forced into crime”. The period between ages 12–18 years is adolescence, during which crime rates are relatively high. The incidence of sexual behavior of adolescents on social media, which may be considered a crime, has increased in recent years due to technological improvements and increase in the use of social media. Also, the crime rates involving adolescents have increased due to environmental influences, familial factors, and mental disorders. Mental disorders such as conduct disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mood disorders have been found to be associated with sexual abuse in young persons in previous literature. In this study, we present the case of a boy who sexually abused his younger brother at the age of 14 years 2 months and broadcast this abuse on “Periscope”. In this case study, we aimed to discuss the relationships between sexual abuse, social media, and psychiatric disorders.

Keywords: social media, child, sexual abuse

Introduction

Sexual abuse of a child is defined as the involvement of an underage child in an act that sexually satisfies a sexually mature adult.¹ Children who are investigated or prosecuted for an action that is considered a crime by the law, or children who are placed in security facilities due to his/her action are defined as children forced into crime.² The period between ages 12–18 years is adolescence, during which crime rates are the highest, as children have an ambiguous imagery of their self-identity during adolescence.³ Adolescents who cannot cope with stressors such as psychiatric problems and congenital factors, in addition to negative environmental and familial factors, cannot show positive and acceptable behaviors, increasing his/her tendency toward committing crimes.⁴

The use of social media and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook is on the rise, and a body of research that has emerged over the past few years has identified these platforms to reflect individual and population’s psychological states and milieu.⁵ Similarly, recent work has shown the utility of social media data for studying depression, but limited studies have investigated other mental health conditions using social media data.⁵

When national and international scientific investigations are reviewed, crimes committed involving children on the Internet have been observed to be progressively increasing. It is important to study the regional and city-wise distribution of this increase to understand the causes of crimes involving children, which is why we believe that discussion of this case is important.

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The case

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient and parents to publish this paper. A boy aged 14 years and 2 months was the first of two brothers in his family. He was referred to the Sakarya University Department of Pediatric Psychiatry in 2015 under police custody for a forensic report to determine whether he was aware of the legal meaning and consequences of his act and if he had developed the ability to guide his behavior. He was studying in class 9 and with a normal school success level. He reported having sexual intercourse with his 9-year-old brother for a total of three times, and on the last time he reported that their two cousins were also present in the room and they had sexual intercourse with the victim live on the social media platform periscope. He added that apart from him, the two cousins also had anal intercourse with his brother. He reported that he deeply regretted his actions and that he was presently in shock. He reported that he started experiencing sleep disturbances after these incidents were uncovered, started losing his temper quickly, and was continually yelling at home. The forensic investigations of this case had started after the Interpol informed Turkish authorities about the recordings of periscope being found on a pornographic website in the US. After the interview, it was concluded that he had a normal mental capacity. According to *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV*, a working diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and comorbid conduct disorder were considered. An interview with the parents of this case was carried out, along with the inquest file, after which definite conclusions could be reached in the forensic report. Also, an order for social investigation of this child was given and health precautions to be taken were advised.

Discussion

A rich body of work in the social sciences, especially urban sociology and criminology, has examined the relationship between crime rates in urban environments and the general well-being of the residents.⁶ During the last 5 years, the number of preadolescents and adolescents using social media sites has increased dramatically. According to a recent poll, >22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than ten times a day, and more than half of all the polled adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day.⁷ Relation between ADHD and violent offences is due to such as a high prevalence of externalizing behavior, fewer close friendships, and problems with educational achievements. Study showed that youth with ADHD more often committed crimes against people than property.⁸ The boy in the present case reported using his Facebook account daily but said that he did not accept friendship requests of people

he did not know personally. Sexual intercourse between two children, when the difference in age is 4 years or more, and exposure of a young child by force or by persuasion to commit actions aiming at sexual pleasure are considered sexual abuse.⁹ In our case, the age difference between the brothers was determined to be 5 years. If “criminal responsibility” is to decide if the child may be held responsible for his/her criminal behavior with his/her individual judgment and understanding, that is, by understanding the legal value of crime, understanding this value is closely related to the ability of “judgment and decision”. If reaching a judgment and conclusion (decision making) is considered solely in terms of cognitive functions, decision making is a mixture of cognitive and psychosocial factors. Decision making is not one dimensional. Although reasoning and judgment are both effective for decision making, they differ from each other. While reasoning is the capacity required for data processing, judgment means evaluation and processing the possible outcomes of decisions with different importance levels.¹⁰ In a study on children aged 7–14 years, while all said that stealing and harming other persons prevented justice and peace, younger children said that stealing and harming other persons was not wrong because “they were against the laws or they brought punishment in the end” but because “they prevented the justice and prosperity of others.”¹¹

Intervention and prevention of crimes involving children is not a factor that can be solved by security forces alone. There has been a recent increase in crimes against children especially via social media, and crimes committed via social media are also increasing. We frequently observe cases of adolescents sharing nude photographs, taking and sharing images of sexual intercourse, and creating false accounts to make severe accusations against other adolescents. Most of the children pushed into crime were found to be male adolescents. In medical literature, hostile behavior and being pushed into crime were reported more frequently in male children and adolescents.¹² The individual in our case was also male, which is in line with the reports of these studies. Additionally, 60%–70% of sexual abusers are relatives, teachers, neighbors, and authority figures that the child knows and trusts.¹³ In our case, the child that had committed sexual abuse had repeatedly abused his brother. Galli et al had diagnosed conduct disorder in 94% of 22 adolescent sexual abusers, ADHD in 71%, major depressive disorder in 23%, and bipolar disorder in 27%.¹⁴

History of abuse in children is a risk factor for future criminal behavior. A history of sexual abuse was found in 10%–80% of adolescents showing criminal behavior.¹⁵ But in the first interview of this child, no history of sexual

abuse was detected; and it is known that in some cases of trauma, children and adolescents relate their traumatic events only after a relationship of trust with the therapist has developed.

In studies, the frequency of mental disorders was found to be increased in adolescents involved in crime, and conduct disorder and ADHD were the most frequently found mental disorders among adolescents. Development of conduct disorder and being pushed into crime rates were higher than children without ADHD and conduct disorder, and they were reported to be more inclined to commit crimes.¹⁶ Similarly, in our case, the patient showed symptoms of ADHD, but he had not received any psychiatric treatments until then. This condition may have prevented this adolescent from calculating the risks and his development of impulse. Social media has good potential as a tool in detecting and predicting affective disorders in individuals. People are increasingly using social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to share their thoughts and opinions with their friends and acquaintances.¹⁷ We did not consider the diagnosis of mood disorder or depressive disorder in this case.

Conclusion

It is believed that early mental evaluation and treatment may contribute to decreasing the number of children moving toward committing crimes. These prevention attempts should target social media and children. Children and adolescents require rehabilitation, follow-up, and mental treatment at each step of the legal process. A specialized education and a specialized unit on pediatric and adolescent psychiatry is necessary to meet these requirements.

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Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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