

# UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF INCEST IN TURKEY





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June 2009, ANKARA



# UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF INCEST IN TURKEY (SUMMARY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH)

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The financial support for printing of this book has been provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

First Print      June 2009

Designed & Printed by **Damla Matbaacılık, Reklamcılık ve Yayıncılık Tic. Ltd. Şti.**  
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## Foreword

The Population Science Association's goal is to conduct studies in the field of demography, take part in relevant studies carried out by different disciplines and provide support, contribute to the dissemination of information produced by such studies, and ensure professional solidarity, communication, cooperation and interaction amongst those who work on demography and population related issues.

Our Association is non-governmental organization, and undertakes research activities on demographic issues with regard to sub-groups of the population with a view to provide data to law-makers and enforcers. We also perform advocacy efforts in order to sensitize the society on the identified problems of different sub-groups of the population.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that all children be protected from violence and free from any form of exposure to violence. The signatory states are obliged to ensure that children live in safety. It is known that in Turkey, one of the signatory states, the children have difficulties in enjoying some of their rights, like in many other countries. There is a need to conduct different research efforts to identify the extent of non-enjoyment of rights of the child. The outcomes of the researches shall enable determination of intervention areas.

Incest, as an important social and health problem, is amongst the areas of interest for our members who work on different dimensions of demography. In Turkey, the evidence points out to the fact that the number of diagnosed cases of incest is far less than the actual number of cases. The children victimized by domestic sexual abuse manifest physical, psycho-social and sexual health problems. Incest is also defined as a domestic moral problem, and the incidents and victims are concealed by other members of the family. Taking measures for the health status of children within the family must actually be the primary intervention, but the family members might end up prioritizing the moral dimensions of the problem. That's why it is quite difficult to identify the real extent of incest that is defined as all forms of domestic sexual abuse against a child.

The “right to sexual health and bodily integrity” constitutes a major right and information on the violations of this right can be supplied by diagnosing these incidents. This study comprises an evaluation of the general features of incest cases and services provided to victims by way of using the experiences of 98 experts who encounter incest cases in different disciplines. The identification of the general features of incest cases encountered by different experts and sharing this information with professionals from different service delivery mechanisms, who are likely to encounter incest cases, shall contribute to the early detection of such incidents in the society. Early diagnosis shall ensure earlier initiation and better performance of treatment and rehabilitation services. Besides; portrayal of the extent and different aspects of incest shall help in devising the necessary interventions for preventing new cases in the society. We sincerely wish that this study would contribute to the formulation and successful effectuation of an action plan, aimed at prevention of domestic sexual abuse – including incest, by the public institutions and non-governmental organizations.

On behalf of the Population Association; I would like to express my gratitude to As. Prof. Dr. Filiz kardan, As. Prof. Dr. Ayşen Ufuk Sezgin, Dr. Alanur Çavlin Bozbeyoğlu, Ms. Ece Koyuncu – Specialist and Mr. Altan Sungur for their contributions to the planning, execution and reporting of this study. I also want to thank to United Nations Population Fund Turkey Office, Ms. Meltem Ağduk, Dr. Gökhan Yıldırımkaaya and Dr. Selen Örs for giving us support throughout the study. I hope through our joint efforts we can do more in the field of demography.

Cordially,

Prof. Dr. Hilal Özcebe

*Population Association, Chairperson of Board of Management*

## Foreword

The United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA is committed to promoting the right of everyone to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity through its efforts worldwide. Such a life must be free from all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse for every woman, man and child without exception. UNFPA, accordingly, works on protection and promotion of women's and girls' human rights, improvement of reproductive health for all individuals, dissemination of reproductive health rights, and addressing the need for data and information with regard to formulation of relevant economic and social policies.

UNFPA supports research activities, in Turkey and around the world, that focus on social wounds. UNFPA has therefore drawn public attention to these fields, and put signature to important studies in terms of formulation of measures and policies.

In this respect; UNFPA has been undertaking research activities since 2005 that point out to severe problems in the world and in Turkey. “The Dynamics of Honor Killings in Turkey” (2005), “Media and Violence against Women” (2006) and “Turkey Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey” (2007) have resounded in the public opinion and played significant role in the formulation of relevant policies.

UNFPA is now clamping down on yet another highly bitter and equally tabooed problem; Incest...

Incest's definition differs by cultures, and however it remains a covered up and unspoken phenomenon in Turkey and around the world. All international conventions underline the fact that incest constitutes a violation of human rights. The phenomenon; which deprives individuals from their right to bodily integrity, privacy and reproduce; usually starts in childhood and goes on for a long time in concealment in the name of preserving “family integrity”. It poses a serious psychological, social and sexual threat for the future of individuals.

Incest, apart from its social outcomes, causes short, mid and long-term reproductive health problems as a phenomenon of sexual violence. These problems can be

summarized as follows: physical health problems such as injuries and hemorrhage-primarily on genitals, sexual desire disorders, dyspareunia, sexual dysfunction, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, urinary tract infections, unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages and unwanted birth; mental health disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thinking, smoking and alcohol and drug abuse.

“Understanding the Problem of Incest in Turkey” has been conducted by the Population Science Association and with the support of the United Nations Population Fund in order to unveil and improve the visibility of an almost unspoken and unknown-except a few academic studies-subject. It is the duty of the state to provide victims of incest with the necessary social, legal and healthcare support. This can only be achieved by the existence and functioning of a system of coordination. The study aims to identify the gaps and requirements in this field, and fill those gaps and serve as a basis for future studies.

At this point; I call upon the entire public and civil sectors, academicians and the international community to work together and fulfill their relevant responsibilities. It should not be forgotten that “saying stop” to incest is a humanitarian duty...

UNFPA TURKEY

## Introduction

The child abuse is a major societal problem. It is known that the children are abused physically, emotionally and economically; and they can also easily be abused sexually.

The children are usually abused by someone they know, and the abuser can be a family member or one of the relatives. A large proportion of childhood sexual abuse consists of incest that is defined as the domestic sexual abuse against a child. The majority of incest cases are concealed in Turkey, like in other countries of the world. The improved effectiveness of international covenants on child rights within the national legislation and the fact that the question of domestic violence has become debatable in legal and social life have at the least engendered the perceptibility of sexual abuse, including incest, in public domain. Nevertheless; incest is ignored by the majority of the society.

The experts of different vocations; whom the victims come across whilst trying to express and prove the abuse, cope with the mental and physical trauma caused by incest, and start a new life even if it means parting with one's domicile; bring light to us in terms of comprehending incest and the surrounding network of issues. It is in accordance with this concept that our research comprises a field study of in-depth interviews with 98 individuals from different vocations such as teachers (guidance counselors and classroom teachers), physicians (psychiatrists, pediatricians, pediatrics surgeons, forensic experts and public health experts), midwives, police, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, psychologists (child and adult psychology), social services experts, sociologists and representatives of the non-governmental organizations.

The acknowledgement of the existence of incest and its occurrence in the form of sexual assault against children is essential for developing a well-functioning system against incest. Such awareness can only become meaningful and sustainable by the joint efforts of a multi-disciplinary group and ownership of this approach by the

public institutions. Hence; our research aims to translate the experiences, functions, problems, pursuits and recommendations of individuals from different vocations and institutions to the public opinion.

It is of utmost importance to formulate effective policies against child abuse. The sexual abuse of children, in particular, requires further research. It is not possible to detach incest-related studies from policies to be enforced against incest.

“Understanding the Problem of Incest in Turkey” will, hopefully, offer a multi-disciplinary scientific view to societal and institutional sensitivity against sexual abuse of child that still is in the making.

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## Research objective

There are very few studies in Turkey that focus on child sexual abuse, and incest in particular. This research aims to increase the visibility of incest in Turkey, and comprehend and translate the system requirements for combating incest and faulting components of the existing practices.

The field work under the research included interviews with 98 professionals from different disciplines working for institutions that are or might be approached by individuals experiencing incest. The interviewees were teachers (guidance counselors and classroom teachers), physicians (psychiatrists, pediatricians, pediatrics surgeons, forensic experts and public health experts), midwives, police, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, psychologists (child and adult psychology), social services experts, sociologists and representatives of the non-governmental organizations.

The field research enabled data collection on the following questions: how is incest experienced; why doesn't it become known; how is it unveiled; the ways by which the victims reach the interviewed experts; the forms of legal, psychological, social and medical support provided to victims and perpetrators following revelation of the incident; and the functions of the interviewed professionals and their respective institutions in identifying and solving the problem. The field research also enabled collection of recommendations by the interviewed professionals on how to ensure better fulfillment of professional and institutional functions and ways to lead up to institutional/professional cooperation.

It is not possible to trace a single and precise definition of incest in the literature. The definition changes for each discipline. The United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare defined incest, in 1980, as the sexual abuse of the child by individuals that domestically represent parental figures, power and authority. The recent studies have come up with the following common definition of incest: all forms of verbal-nonverbal, physical, and visual conduct of erotic nature amongst family members who are not married. This research defines incest in the broadest

<sup>1</sup>Justice, B. & Justice,R. (1979) *The broken taboo: Sex in the family*. Human sciences Press. New York

possible manner by taking into account the societal, legal and religious norms in Turkey. The definition of abuse, which falls into scope of incest, includes all forms of physical or non-physical conduct against a child or adolescent for sexual arousal or satisfaction in the abuser. The main criterion applied by our research in defining the abuser is not based on blood relation. The blood relatives such as the father, mother, sibling, uncle, aunt and grandfather; and a wider group of relatives and kin with parent-like authority and respectability over the child are all considered as abusers in the definition of incest. The brothers in law, step-parents and half-siblings are, for instance, within this latter group.

## Research design

There are no previous examples of field studies in Turkey on the question of incest. Hence, a series of pre-interviews with one expert from each one of the fields of forensic medicine, child health, law, mental health and social services; which work on incest; were carried out by using the unstructured in-depth interview technique. The field study was launched following a two-days training aimed at preparing the interview guideline. A total of 92 individuals were interviewed by using the structured in-depth interview technique. The field study was conducted in the provinces of Adana, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, İstanbul and Kocaeli.

The research aimed for reaching individuals employed by specific institutions, and with professions selected in accordance with the research objective. A consistent sampling method was therefore used, and the relevant units of relevant institutions were contacted. The experts were identified as a result of their orientation, the appointments were made, and the interviews were eventually realized.

The research does not aspire to produce quantitative data on incest and generalize. It intends to profoundly comprehend incest and the problems of the system used for combating incest. That's why a qualitative research method was used, and the sample was selected accordingly.

The majority of the interviews, which involved two researchers-an interviewer and an observer, were taped (78 of the 89 interviews with 98 individuals) and these recordings were then deciphered. For the remaining interviews, during which the institutions or relevant experts had not approved recording, the observers took notes.

The analysis of the field study was conducted based on the deciphered interviews and notes. The Nvivo 8 Qualitative Data Analysis Software was used.

## The results of the field research

### *The general features of incest cases: Victim*

The incest relationship lives on power, gender and age hierarchy to reinforce its grounds. **Girls and boys of all ages** may be victimized by abuse and rape. However; the incidents narrated by this research involve more girls than boys in terms of victimization, in a manner that reflects previous studies. Many experts have given examples of incestuous incidents that start with early childhood.

*“...a father had an incest relation with his daughter for 7 years. He even kept track of her menstrual cycle. She became pregnant twice and the father somehow terminated the gestation. He made her undergo abortion... The incest relation had started when she was around ten years old” (Psychiatrist)*

There might be more than a girl and a boy in the same household that are abused at the same time or at different times. The aggressor can turn towards the little child as children grow, and manage to conceal sexual abuse through long years.

*“...this person has 5 daughters. He started abusing each one of them when they were 3 or 4 years old. He gives up on one when she reaches the ages of 9 and 10 for these ages represent the awakening and knowledge acquisition in terms of sexual cognizance. He then moves on to another one. That's how he abused each one of his 5 daughters one by one.” (Prosecutor)*

The abuse in incest usually begins with acts of molestation involving touching and fondling. Some cases continue with such acts of molestation for a long time, while others involve escalating molestation that might end in anal and vaginal rape. In some cases, however, it has been observed that sexual assault begins directly with rape. The aggressors generally use rewarding and intimidation in order to break victim's resistance. The acts of rewarding aimed at maintaining incest might vary from exhibition of affection and small gifts to settling the house on the child. The methods of intimidation include physical violence and threats to kill the child or loved ones.

*“... she was a little girl. He was older than her. He exploited her for many years. The mother was stupefied upon witnessing his acts. Excuse me for using such obscene words; the mother saw them when he was attempting an anal intercourse. That's how the complaint was first filed. The girl's statement covered all details and the mother confirmed that she had witnessed everything. I issued an arrest warrant for the boy, I sentenced him.” (Judge)*

### ***The general features of incest cases: Aggressor***

The interviewed experts listed down the following whilst identifying the aggressors: fathers followed by grandfathers, siblings, uncles and other male relatives. Our research revealed a wide range of incest examples involving aggressors of all age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds, and abuse and rape against girls and boys of all ages. According to the experts on incest; the worldwide observations point out to the fact that incestuous aggressions are related to the personality traits of the aggressors rather than their socioeconomic or socio-cultural background. The research findings indicate that the aggressors can not be sociologically categorized. The interviewed mental health experts stated that aggressors of incest are not usually pedophiles, do not always use physical violence, have no psychological problems preventing them from pursuing their daily lives, can tell which is wrong and right, and are not alcoholics or chronically unemployed.

The most frequent form is the abusive relationship between father and daughter, and father and son. These fathers do not bear any similar characteristics when observed from the outside. The sexual abuse between the grandfathers and grandchildren was also frequently narrated by the interviewed experts. The grandfathers have both a direct and indirect authority-through the parents of the child-over the child.

*“...Her daughter was 14 years old. She started experiencing post-trauma stress disorder upon learning from her daughter that her grandfather, in other words the woman's father, forced her to sexual acts. The woman had also experienced unwanted sexual acts by her father until the age of 16. She had shared this with her siblings, and found out that her elder sister had been*

*raped by her father. This was true for her younger sister too. The woman was 34 years old, her younger sister was 28-30 and her elder sister was 40 years old. The youngest sister was 23 or 24 years old. The man had raped the elder sister, abused her without rape until she was 16, and her younger sister had also experienced incestuous behavior until she was 14-15 years old. He did not do anything to the youngest sibling....” (Psychiatrist)*

The incest relationship between siblings was also noted by many experts. In such cases, the aggressor is usually the elder male sibling, and the victim is usually the younger female or male sibling.

*“The elder brother was a minor; he was only 17 years old. He had an intercourse with his sister, both anal and vaginal... In another case, there was an elder brother who had raped his younger male sibling after being influenced by endless exposure to porn CDs. This came to light when the younger sibling was hospitalized.” (Prosecutor)*

The accounts also reflect sexual abuse between uncles and nephews/nieces and maternal uncles and nephews/nieces. Apart from these prevalent examples there were also references to incest cases between father in law and daughter in law, elder brother and brother's wife, stepfather and daughter, and between cousins.

In some cases, the children are abused by more than one family member; such as father and elder brother, elder brothers, uncle and elder brother.

*“...there were two sisters... sexually abused by their father and one by her elder brother too. The younger sister abused by her elder brother runs away to her elder sister's home who is married and had sexually been abused before...” (Psychologist)*

There are also cases of incest where the aggressors had personally been abused by their families before. The experts from different professions shared their relevant observations with the team. One of the accounts was about an educated and employed father who abused his son. He told that he and his younger brother had also been abused by their father during childhood. *(Forensic expert)*

There were two experts specialized in working particularly with perpetrators of sexual crimes. They underlined that the aggressors might objectify their victims, normalize the act of abuse by denying the criminal/evil aspects, and reject abuse in spite of all evidence.

*“He abused his child after the earthquake in Adapazari, and this came to light after she had become pregnant. She gave birth and the DNA test results confirmed his fatherhood... There were some ambiguities about whether he was the girl's father or grandfather. His crime was proven and he was imprisoned. However he still believes that he was framed.” (Psychologist)*

### ***The general features of incest cases: Family Environment***

The incidents narrated throughout the research and quoted in the report depict that families with incest experiences are mainly nuclear families. Nevertheless; it has been also been observed that incest might take place in all forms of family structures, including extended families and families with single or no parent.

The experts have the opinion that incest can prevail in families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The cases narrated by the experts involved mainly families from lower income groups, but they explain this trend with the fact that families from lower income groups constitute the majority in the society and economic power helps conceal incest. It is more likely to have the incest cases covered up by the families from higher income group without involvement of jurisdiction. Pregnancy is an important factor in the surfacing of incest. It is easier for individuals of higher income and education to impede pregnancy and terminate it through private health services.

*“...the surfacing of these incidents as criminal cases usually takes place amongst middle and lower income groups, the poor worlds. As I have mentioned, it becomes gangrenous and everything comes to light when pregnancy and questions over the future of the child take the stage. Or; the child becomes exploited in a wider sector and things surface. In other words, this does not begin and end in one go. The potential of criminalization is*

*higher in poor lives and that's why such people usually come from such families. This trend can thus be defined as a general determinant. Criminalization is a higher risk for poorer family circles.”*

*(Social Services Expert)*

The families with surfaced incest are mainly those that do not have any visible problems. This does not mean that such families are problem-free apart from incest. Battering, economic violence, and marital sexual abuse are likely to happen in these families.

The interviewed individuals identified certain aspects by sharing their observations regarding the attitude of mothers in families with incest relations. The research shows that the general societal attitude of “mothers' obligation to solve domestic problems” applies to the assessments on incest by the interviewed individuals.

The experts expect the mothers to immediately discern incest. The mothers are also expected to believe in the disclosures of the children or understand the incident immediately when faced with doubt. Moreover; the mothers are supposed to counter incest with the right methods once they are sure of incest. Yet; the mothers might not discern incest and believe in its existence. They might not always have the strength to stop incest even when they believe in its existence. The main reasons behind mothers' inability to provide the necessary support to victimized children are as follows: they yield to societal pressures that perceive incest as the victim's fault, judge not only the aggressor but the entire family, and characterize them as guardians of family unity under all circumstances; they are physically and emotionally oppressed by the aggressors; they lack the economic power; and they do not know who/where to resort. It was nonetheless observed that the mothers play an important role in bringing incest into open and providing support to victimized children in the aftermath.

Incest is seen in all forms of families, but it might be easier to bring it into open if the interpersonal communication amongst family members is strong.

## How does incest surface?

The interviewed individuals agreed that the majority of incest cases remain concealed. Incest does not surface in one stage; it is therefore needed to separately deal with these stages by way of pursuing strategies to facilitate each one of them. These strategies must be developed in a way that enables the child to express him/herself and be heard by the mother or the father. They must also ensure that the mother and the child are taken under protection, when needed, once the case is submitted to the jurisdiction, and the treatment of the child is accelerated and facilitated.

### *Domestic and family environment*

The interviewed individuals think that the children definitely give information on the abuse; directly or indirectly. However the surfacing of the incident as a result of such information provision depends on the circumstances prevailing in that environment, the attention of the individuals living in the same environment and their ability and opportunities to observe the child.

The other family members can primarily support the victim in order for the incest to surface. Many of the interviewed experts stated that the family members only believe in the existence of incest if they witness the sexual assault. This is more effective than the disclosures of the victim.

*“...She was 10 or 11 years old. They had a happy life in appearance. The mother used to go out for shopping every Saturday and she stayed at home. He raped her in one of those weekends. He started with anal rape and continued with vaginal rape. The mother, one day, comes back earlier and sees her husband alongside her daughter. That's how she filed the complaint, but she could not still believe in what she had seen. She kept saying “my husband would never do such a thing, I saw it but, you know, I'm still not sure...” (Forensic Expert)*

The mothers represent the most significant source of support for children in their families. The mothers; some upon finding it out, some upon understanding that it would not end, and others upon seeing that their other children are at risk too; resort to teachers at schools or counseling centers, judicial authorities, shelters, NGOs or SHÇEK (Social Services and Child Protection Agency). Someone else from the family or the immediate surroundings might also guide the child if the mother is not powerful enough to provide the necessary support.

*“... a girl and a boy. They were silent kids. Their father had raped them. They were 8 or 9 years old. The mother could not bear with what happened, and left the home with her children. There was only the grandmother left behind. The father was an alcoholic. She runs away to İstanbul and the father comes after his children. He wants them back and the mother decides to resort to SHÇEK. The children are taken to children's home.” (Psychologist)*

The cases, which involve abuse and rape against more than one child at the same household, might facilitate the surfacing of incest. In some cases; it is initially the elder sibling that is sexually abused, and when the younger sibling becomes victimized too the elder ones might bring incest into light for protecting their younger siblings. It was also observed that the children free themselves from psychological pressures of self-blame upon realizing that they are not the only victims. They start exhibiting a form of solidarity.

### ***Outside the domicile: schools, healthcare institutions, mental health assessments and NGOs***

The schools play a major role in the surfacing of sexual abuse. The importance of schools and their teachers is based on the fact that they come together, unlike other professions, with children from all segments of the society. In Turkey; the schools represent the first ever “government office” for children. Throughout our research, we have come across incidents narrated by the experts that manifest the positive impacts of school environment in the surfacing of incest; such as the education

provided at schools, the observations of the teachers and children's disclosure to their teachers about their experiences of abuse.

*“...she said that she was attending a boarding school for the last 1-2 years. The psychologists of the school recognized the problem and interviewed her. She eventually told everything. The psychologist has informed her elder sister who says that they remained silent just for making sure that he does not do the same things to their younger sister. The elder sister then communicates with the other sister...” (Forensic Expert)*

The schools create opportunities not only for the victimized children, but also for family members who do not know how to support them.

Incest can also be revealed whilst researching for physiological diseases. These diseases might actually be independent from the acts of sexual abuse; however they might also be direct outcomes of a sexual assault like the sexually transmitted diseases and lesions on the genitals.

The victims of incest might consult to mental health experts for the mental problems they experience during or in the aftermath of the assault.

*“Of course there are other psychiatric symptoms such as sleeping disorder, wetting one's bed or different symptoms of anxiety. These come up during our conversations. That's how it works for incest, but it is really difficult to bring it into light.” (Child Psychiatrist)*

The NGOs that combat violence against children and women can also play an effective role in revealing sexual abuse incidents.

### ***Indirect surfacing of incest***

Incest usually surfaces because of the outcomes it engenders. The non-virginity of the victim during marriage, pregnancy and birth, expression of abuse as a reason for divorce, killings committed for concealing and punishing incestuous relations and suicides are most prevalent indirect causes in the surfacing of incest.

*“...when her pregnancy was discovered she has disclosed everything about her father; the on-going threats and rape. The father naturally denied everything; he kept saying that it was not him but someone else who had impregnated her. The results were sent to the forensic medicine. He was arrested and tried. He was sentenced to 29 years.” (Psychologist)*

## While trying to reveal incest...

*“In this world our mothers and fathers are the ones whom we trust the most. When abused by the ones you trust the most you will never trust in anyone else in the world” (Psychologist)*

Incest aggressor is a trusted relative and the incident usually takes place at child's home-even his/her bed-where the child is expected to feel safe. These complicate the disclosure of incest by the victim. The victim needs other relations and environments to feel safe in order to break this circle. The victimized child, his/her relatives and the consulted/contacted experts experience certain problems while combating incest. That's why incest can not be considered as a problem which can immediately be revealed or prevented through necessary measures.

### ***Why can not the victims talk?***

The child might feel uncomfortable and still can not understand or express the wrongness of his/her experiences because of being at a tender age. Early abuse and threat might lead to a situation in which the child perceives his/her relation with the father, elder brother or grandfather as something normal.

Another important factor with regard to the child's inability to express victimization is self-blame, and loneliness and desperation under the assumption that he/she is the only one with such problems. The interviewed individuals told that the aggressors threaten to harm loved ones of the children, particularly their mothers and siblings.

*“...it started when the child was 8 years old. The father and elder brother did it together and the child was not aware of anything. Even at the age of 11; he believed that “they were just playing with his father”. He was being raped; I mean both the anal intercourse and normal sexual intercourse...” (Police)*

The aggressor might try everything to ensure the silence of the victim. However; the societal pressure on the child and his/her family to be caused by the surfacing of incidents, apart from the physical threats, might also keep them silent.

*“When asked whether she was afraid of the threats we understood that she was not intimidated that much. She was afraid of being stigmatized as a dirty girl. She probably had the tendency to hide everything not for fear of being beaten or her parents, but for fear of incredibility and stigmatization...”*

*(Child Psychiatrist)*

The authority possessed by the aggressors within the family is one of the reasons for lengthy concealment of incest. It is also difficult for children to express abuse in certain settings where the children are not seen as individuals, considered as a family property, and raised with the concept of unconditional respect and obedience towards elders. It is probable that children, who are taught to bow to ill treatment in other fields of life, would remain silent for a longer period of time. The education system reinforces this process because the system was not structured to teach children how to express themselves and protect their physical integrity.

### ***Who else do we trust: The other members of the family...***

*“..when you talk about your abuser with the people whom you trust the most it is essential that they believe in you, and not someone else. Otherwise; you will not trust anyone again, and you will start considering your problem as something to bear with...” (Psychologist)*

Another factor that complicates the surfacing of incest is the inability of the family members to provide the victim with much needed support, or delays in doing so. The family members might not even realize the incident at all or they might not believe in what the victim tells. Even when they believe in the victim or witness the incident; they might not be able to reveal incest or they might prefer concealing it. These lead to years of victimization. The children might even decide to get married at an early age in order to run away from the abuse.

The prevalent concept of honor and the relevant tensions on girls and boys, and their families prevent the families, under certain circumstances, from taking action against incest even when they find out about it. The society perceives incest as something beyond sexual assault, it is considered to be a stigma to the victim's and his/her family's honor. The aggressors make use of this societal concept of honor in order to keep these incidents concealed, and they try to avoid acts such as defloration and impregnation.

*“...they usually prefer anal intercourse because it's harder to detect. The human body can recover very quickly but it is not true for the hymen. It can not be regenerated. The abusers do not take such risks, and they even start believing that they inhibit problems such as pregnancy for the victim, even when the victim is just a kid.” (Child Psychiatrist)*

*“...in the case of that 9 years old kid, the mother had also been victimized. She had been exposed to violence before, so she was not in a position to make confessions. We found out everything through the kid's aunt. We tried to help the mother but she was afraid of her husband. We tried to inform her about available services such as protection orders, and state's other services such as shelters. However the society is male-dominated, that's how it is structured. The men are always right no matter what they do; their acts can always be tolerated. The women, on the other hand, are never tolerated, not even for small things. There is no forgiving, there is no such structure in place....” (Police)*

The acts of sexual abuse between siblings can create dilemmas for the parents since both the victim and the aggressor are their children. The parent's conduct aimed at protecting the aggressor child might hinder the surfacing of sexual assault under certain circumstances.

*“...DNA tests revealed incest-related pregnancy, she gave birth and DNA results confirmed that her elder brother was the father. The parents still argued that the tests were not accurate and they kept saying “we will kill her”. We tried real hard to protect that girl.” (Psychiatrist)*

***When incest goes outside the domicile: Will the outside world hear him/her?***

The existence of sexual abuse can directly be reflected to an expert, outside the family circle, when contacted with different institutions. The victim might directly resort to a school, healthcare institution, law enforcement bodies, prosecutor's office or SHÇEK; and complain about incest. However; the application can as well be made for another reason and the incest can then be detected during the victim's time at the institution. The way things develop following a victim's application to these institutions, regardless of the complaint, depends on how the expert, who first contacts with the victim, assesses the situation. The attitudes of the victim and/or relatives accompanying the victim are also of importance for the way things proceed.

***To what extent can the schools detect incest?***

The school attendance of a child victimized by incest enables him/her to reach an institution where he/she can disclose incest, and the teachers to detect existence of abuse. However; the shortcomings associated with the working conditions and skills base of the teachers might hinder the utilization of the above-mentioned opportunities for the benefit of the child. The lack of a systemic practice against incest at schools might undermine the detection abilities of teachers, like the parents, or prevent them from knowing what exactly needs to be done after detection. This might also result in the formulation of strategies with good intents that are actually harmful for the child.

*“...she was an eight grade student... she eventually disclosed the presence of such an incidence after several interviews. The aggressor was her father. He was a very oppressive and authoritarian man. She told that he would kill her if this thing comes out. She was desperate and she told me that she had to struggle all by herself. She told that she was trying to listen to him in order at least to make some sort of contribution.” (Guidance Counselor)*

***Healthcare Institutions:***

The presence or absence of a multi-disciplined child abuse unit within healthcare institutions determines whether incest is revealed or not. It is possible to overlook incest in institutions that do not employ professionals from different specialties. The healthcare professionals must have awareness on the potential presence of abuse underneath the unidentified health problems.

*“...The child's school performance declined, his behaviors changed, he did not want to spend time with his father. His father took him to shopping and different places with their car all the time in order to raise him as a man. However; he did not want to be left alone with his father, he could only do so if his mother was also around. He started having health issues; there were also problems at school. He actually had digestive troubles; he had complaints about his stomach and bowels... Almost two years later, the child psychiatrist has asked for our consultation and that's how we have entered the...” (Forensic Expert)*

***Appraising suspected cases of incest...***

The interviewed experts had cases which were suspected to involve incest. These suspicions are based on observations in accordance with different professional disciplines: The physicians look at material evidence, mental health experts at behavioral patterns, educators at school behaviors, and social services experts at the family environment. However; the experts also gave examples on how they could not always fulfill this appraisal role.

*“he was 3-4 years old... He was brought to the emergency ward after falling down from a wall. We detected anal intercourse during the general examination... his family; his uncles and mother were all there, except his father... We were convinced that his father had done this to him based on what we heard... He threw down from the fifth floor after anal intercourse...”*

*worked hard in order not to send him back to his family. At the end, things can get quite complicated around here from a socio-cultural perspective, you know, he was sent back. The incident was never brought to jurisdiction.”*  
(Pediatrics Surgeon)

*“..she says “yes, it exists” when she is with us. After a while she says “no” after she catches his father's eyes. “I made it up”. Did it happen or not? How do you measure it? One party claims that it happened, while the others say that it did not. Will you close the case or will you push further? She says no, her father says no and half an hour later she says that it actually happened. One can not investigate these incidents like a routine theft. It is much more complicated...”* (Police)

## Problems experienced after revelation of incest

The revelation of incest does not solve the problems of the victim in a minute, on the contrary, it represents the beginning of an arduous process...

### *Experiences during investigation and trial processes...*

The majority of the interviewed experts underlined the excessive burn out experienced by the victim during the pre-hearing stage and the trial. The institutional practices might differ depending on where the child applies for assistance, and his/her statement can be taken time and again.

*“The child was obliged to repeat everything 20 times. We call this the secondary or institutional abuse. We abuse the child by making him/her talk about the abuse. The child makes his/her first disclosure to a teacher; the teacher makes him/her repeat it to the principle, he/she then talks with a police officer; the officer sends him/her to a forensic expert, the expert sends him/her to another physician, the prosecutor calls him/her once again, the psychologist at the protection center inquires about the same thing, and the social services expert make him/her talk once again in order to review the incident. He/she is forced to speak once again at the court. It is a terrible system and that's why a new provision has been added to the relevant legislation in 2005. The victimized children shall be listened for once during the investigation and the session shall be audio-visually recorded. The recording will then be used during the trial and the child will not be obliged to talk about the abuse anymore.” (Lawyer)*

The statements are now taken by using video cameras and in the presence of experts as a result of the legal arrangements, but as an interviewed lawyer, who is a member of the bar association's child commission, rightfully pointed out: *“The law introduced a terrific article but failed to systemize it”*.

Another eye catcher is the spaces used for taking statements and court hearings that are inconvenient for the children. The court rooms are used for adults and they can be frightening for children, particularly those used by the high criminal courts.

### ***Collection of evidence...***

Following the judicial intervention; it is required that the material evidence and evidence regarding the mental and family life of the victim be co-examined in order to identify the criminal act and the aggressor.

The findings play an important role in proving the assault and exhibiting the physical and mental damage caused by the assault for the purpose of determining the sentence against the aggressor. The penal code requires that presence or absence of penetration during the sexual assault and post-trauma (after the abuse and rape) symptoms be considered while sentencing the aggressor.

The forensic experts play an instrumental role in identifying the evidence on sexual assault. They have, however, different approaches in terms of how to prove sexual assault. One of the interviewed forensic experts referred to the potential insufficiency of material evidence, while another forensic expert underlined that material evidence is imperative and sufficient.

The collection of mental evidence gains more importance when the courts do not find material evidence sufficient. The lack of sensitivity in orienting victims towards mental health experts, and lack of child mental health experts in every other province and institution retard and even hinder the revelation of incest.

*“...We are providing expertise services to the Ministry of Justice, and we provide them with mental evaluation data on doubtful facts. We know that it is not always possible to establish material facts in cases of abuse. You can, for instance, reach the facts many days later and we try to reach a conclusion by using mental evaluation because mental symptoms are more lasting and permanent.” (Child Psychiatrist)*

The forensic medicine group presidencies and divisions do not have child mental health and diseases specialists. This absence necessitates referral to the expertise of the mental health specialists of other institutions.

The reports prepared by the social services experts might as well be used for assessing the suspicions about incest. These reports evaluate children together with their family environment.

### ***Problems at home and family life...***

It is observed that the societal tensions caused by the concept of honor impede the surfacing of incest at every level. The abuse and rape experienced by the victim might be translated into a matter of “honor” by the family, and the child might be blamed despite his/her victimization.

### ***Children taken under protection...***

The children victimized by incest need an environment that ensures their life safety and physical and moral needs, prevents isolation from the society and stigmatization, safeguards their privacy, and provides the necessary support to mitigate the physical and mental damages caused by incest. The children, for whom an injunction order for sheltering has been issued, are placed in SHÇEK's relevant institutions. The interviewed experts mentioned that the care provided by such institutions, no matter how improved they are, can never replace life in a domestic environment. Another on-going debate with regard to institutional care is the question of whether children victimized by sexual abuse need a specialized institution or not. Some experts have the opinion that taking children victimized by incest under protection at general nurseries and children's/youth homes might engender negative outcomes both for those children and for other children at the same institution.

### ***Babies born from incest***

Some of the pregnancies, which are caused by domestic sexual abuse, can only be detected at a later stage; and the termination of pregnancy might sometimes be dangerous for the health of pregnant child. The interviewed experts mentioned that babies born from incest are not owned by their families. The cases of incest, which result in childbirth and are not brought to jurisdiction, might involve behaviors such as infant killings, adoption by someone else from the family and concealment.

### ***Adulthood problems***

It is well known that the incest victims carry over many problems such as puberty, sexuality and marriage into adulthood. Even those children, who can not interpret and recall the incident, can develop reactions against their own bodies and sexuality during the ages of sexual awakening.

*“...a woman visited me; I think she was 67 years old. Before I could even welcome her into my office she started telling me the following: “my uncle and my mother passed away. I can now disclose everything. My uncle had abused me for years when I was a child and I carried this load all my life. I never talked about because those who might be affected were still alive. They are gone now and I am here to tell you.” (Psychologist)*

## Problems experienced by the experts

### *Lack of information*

The interviewed individuals of different vocations and specialties complained about the insufficiency of information provision on sexual abuse during their preservice/vocational training. The information on incest is even more constricted. They also feel the absence of in-service training activities that can improve their awareness on abuse and provide them with guidance on what to do when faced with incidents of incest.

### *Safety issues*

The interviewed individuals of different vocations qualified life safety as one of the problems encountered while notifying relevant authorities about the incest. They are worried that the aggressors might harm them or their families if they bring the incest case to the attention of jurisdiction or encourage the victims to do so.

### *Mental burn out*

The interviewed individuals talked about the negative impact of working with victims and aggressors of incest on their mental health. Experts from different vocations described their burn out while dealing with abuse and underlined their need for psychological support. The experts might prefer drawing away from the field of abuse unless they are provided with such support.

### *Professional dilemma*

Suspected sexual abuse must legally be reported. However; it has been observed that the experts usually experience a dilemma on whether reporting incest would be

beneficial for the child or not. It becomes even more complicated for the interviewed experts to decide if the victim or his/her family is not willing to inform jurisdiction or defer the process. Experts from some vocational groups can particularly be mixed up between legal obligations and professional liabilities. This dilemma was mainly voiced by physicians, psychologists, and guidance counselors during the interviews. One of the above-mentioned professional liabilities was defined as the privacy of their relationship with patients/clients/students and the principle of taking no action unless otherwise requested by them. Moreover; the experts do not believe that judicial involvement would always benefit the victims.

### ***Professional and institutional cooperation***

In almost all of the interviews carried out; it was emphasized that working in the field of incest necessitates a teamwork approach based on cooperation of experts of different vocations and different institutions. The interviewed individuals complained about the lack of professional and institutional cooperation.

### ***The burden of professional liabilities***

The interviewed individuals had problems related with the gravity of their professional liabilities, restricted powers and presence of expectations incompatible with their vocations. Like in many other problem areas; the lack of joint follow-up of cases by experts with different responsibilities and powers seems to prevail. The judges chose not to make use of mental evidence in the absence of sufficient material evidence, or can not reach relevant experts. The mental health professionals working under the courts do not provide the necessary support and the lawyers, who are entrusted with the duty of defending the victim, might end up being obliged to provide them with psychological support.

*Work load*

All experts experience difficulties because of heavy work load. The negations caused by this problem differ by institution, and have repercussions on all areas including the detection of incest, collection of evidence and supporting a child victimized by incest.

## Evaluation and recommendations...

### *In order to reveal incest...*

Incest is a form of abuse that can be experienced by girls and boys of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Prevention of abuse by a relative such as the father, elder male sibling, grandfather and uncle primarily requires an enabling environment for the child to express him/herself and awareness. All educational and training institutions can be used to improve relevant skills of children in expressing incest. Incest, however, starts at an early age and it is during this period of life that awakening with regard to self-expression, self knowledge and protection can be acquired a lot easier. The pre-school and primary education institutions are thus more appropriate for launching relevant works.

The incidents narrated and evaluations made by the experts throughout the research point out to the fact that family members, particularly the mothers, play a major role in the revelation and prevention of incest and provision of support to children in the aftermath. That's why there is also a need to better equip the parents. The schools, community training centers and NGOs can be used for adult education.

### *Satisfying the training needs of different vocations...*

Each one of the interviewed individuals had sensitivity on child abuse. Channeling this sensitivity towards a useful function in terms of child abuse demands due orientation by professionals. Such orientation can only be provided if individuals have the necessary skills and know-how in their respective fields. The research findings note the need to overcome knowledge deficiency in individuals of different vocations by way of appropriate training programs. Incest must specifically be accentuated in these training programs.

***In order to ensure healthy functioning of judicial processes...***

Hearings in incest cases are quite compelling. All material and mental evidence pertaining sexual abuse must fastidiously be collected and assessed.

The problem of forcing children to testify and creation of further disturbance has been stated by many experts throughout the research. The victimized child must be listened once during the testimony, evidence collection and judicial stages; and this must be done in an appropriate setting with audio-visual recording and under the supervision of mental health experts in order not to create further disturbance.

***Improved knowledge and communication***

The victims of incest or their relatives need reliable and accessible ways to reveal incest. The 183 Social Services Counseling Helpline for Families, Women, Children and Handicapped must be well promoted in order to facilitate personal applications by the victims and denouncements. It is also important to know, promote and support NGOs that work in the field of combating domestic violence and sexual abuse.

***Institutionalization of practices***

There needs to be standardized methods in place for appraising suspected cases and carrying out the necessary practices following the revelation of incest. It is particularly critical for the employees of schools and healthcare institutions, which are more likely to encounter victims of incest, to be informed on what needs to be done. The standardized methods must also apply to the institutions of referral within the case.

***Recommendations on institutional care***

It is important to enhance the number of safe children's homes and women's shelters for children and their mothers; and the number of relevant professionals - such as managers, specialists and support staff - as well as their awareness.

### ***Rehabilitation***

Once the judicial proceedings start, it is essential to conduct a mental evaluation of the victim, other members of the family and the aggressor; provide mental health and rehabilitation services and deliver the necessary economic support to the victim and his/her family.

### ***Presentation by media***

The following points must be taken into account while presenting incest, like all other forms of abuse, in the media: provision of guidance for the victim and encouragement for the revelation of the incident; attention given to not reflecting suspected incidents as finalized cases; respecting privacy; avoiding news reports that might aggravate the victim's mental trauma; avoiding reports that tend to stigmatize a specific socioeconomic group and refraining from abetting abusive conduct.

### ***The necessity and importance of defining incest...***

In Turkey, the penal code does not contain a separate definition of incest. The sentences against incest are regulated in accordance with the kinship level of the aggressor. Establishing a legal definition for incest shall improve awareness.

The needs of the child differ depending on whether the aggressor is from the family or not. There is no legal definition of incest, and, consequently, it's up to the know-how and skills of the practitioners to take measures as per different needs. Defining incest shall facilitate joint action.

### ***Multi-disciplinary approach***

Incest must be evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team, and in the form of a case study. It is required that the duties and responsibilities of different vocations and institutions be defined in multi-disciplinary teams.

There is no sufficient number of units that can comprehensively appraise a case and abide by crisis management principles in order to provide multi-disciplinary support. That's why, unfortunately, victim's contact with an expert would not necessarily pave the way for the necessary interventions.

## Conclusion...

Our work depicts the extent and complexity of the problem we face with regard to incest. It is not possible to entirely eradicate domestic sexual abuse, but it is possible to develop a well-functioning system to combat abuse. In countries with existing legal definition of incest, where the cases are handled in multi-disciplinary fashion and the social support structures are systematized, it is possible to reveal incest and divert the aftermath in favor of the victim. For instance, Canada represents a good example of anti-incest systems. As for Turkey; the efforts to develop a system for combating abuse should pattern good practices and adapt them in accordance with the unique conditions of the country.

A final review of the questions and relevant solution proposals narrated in the report highlights the following four main points in order to develop a response against incest in Turkey:

- Training of guidance counselors,
- Improved awareness of legal professionals ,
- Delivery of mental assessments by specialists,
- Establishment of multi-disciplinary centers at healthcare institutions that bring together pediatric specialists, child mental health specialists, forensic specialists and social services experts.

Provincial pilot implementation or implementations, which address these priorities jointly, can be a good beginning for rolling out a well functioning system in Turkey. To this end; a cooperation mechanism needs to be realized between the public institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations. The sustainability of the system would still require ownership by the public institutions.



