

**What Can University Students Do To Prevent Childhood Abuse?
A Project from Turkey: “Youth Disseminating Life Skills”**

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Aims: Raising awareness of the youth about child abuse and helping them increase their sense of social responsibility may be an important way to prevent child abuse. Research suggests that peer-led training programs are beneficial for both trainers and trainees. A programme entitled ‘Youth Disseminating Life Skills’ was initiated by Child Protection Centers Support Society (COKMED). Its main aims included: 1) helping university students acquire knowledge on child abuse and neglect, 2) increasing their sensitivity towards child abuse and neglect.

Methods: The programme consisted of two components including participation in a 12-week training and engaging in disseminating activities. The 12-week training included topics such as effects of childhood abuse, communication with children, attitudes of families, child development, child labor, childhood marriages and children’s rights. For disseminating activities component, participants developed innovative projects and also organised seminars and conferences about prevention of violence against children for their peers under supervision. A total number of 106 students (age range: 19-23) from three universities in Istanbul participated in the programme. The programme was evaluated in two ways. First, all participants completed a knowledge questionnaire prior the start and after the completion of the programme for quantitative evaluation. Secondly focus group interviews were performed for qualitative evaluation and explored participants’ experience of the programme (N=11).

Results: Participants’ pre-training knowledge scores (47.1; SD 4.6) were statistically significant from those of post-training (61.5; SD 14.7) ($p < 0.001$). Focus group meetings identified specific themes. These included nature and mechanisms of child abuse, feelings about it, barriers to and interventions for preventing it and feelings about the programme, its benefits and ways to improve it.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that the program has been beneficial to the participants and highlight the value of delivering such programs for the youth. Moreover, qualitative findings contribute to an evidence-base for improving the programme.