

Social Pediatrics Training in Turkey

Türkiye’de Sosyal Pediatri Eğitimi

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Citation/Atf: Gokcay G, Kural B, Keskindemirci G, Neyzi O. Social pediatrics training in Turkey. Çocuk Dergisi - Journal of Child 2021;21(3):266-269.
https://doi.org/10.26650/jchild.2021.995008

ABSTRACT

Training in Social Pediatrics at Medical Schools has deep roots in Turkey. Nowadays, there are Social Pediatrics divisions under the departments of child health and disease in many medical schools. Academicians in Social Pediatrics Divisions give lectures starting from the first year of medical education. Social Pediatrics is not a subspecialty yet in Turkey. There are universities with institutes providing postgraduate training in Social Pediatrics. This article aims to present the history and developments of training in Social Pediatrics in Turkey.

Keywords: Social Pediatrics, Turkey, child health

ÖZ

Ülkemizde Sosyal Pediatri alanındaki tıp eğitimi köklü bir geçmişe sahiptir. Günümüzde birçok tıp fakültesinde Çocuk Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları Anabilim Dallarına bağlı olarak Sosyal Pediatri Bilim Dalları açılmakta ve çocuk sağlığı alanındaki lisans ve lisansüstü eğitimler bu bilim dallarındaki akademisyenler tarafından verilmektedir. Sosyal pediatri henüz yan dal olmadığı için Sosyal Pediatri alanındaki lisans üstü eğitim bazı üniversite-lerdeki enstitüler tarafından gerçekleştirilmektedir. Bu makalenin amacı ülkemizde sosyal pediatri alanındaki eğitimin gelişimini ve günümüzdeki durumunu ayrıntıları ile sunmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal pediatri, çocuk sağlığı, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the importance of the concepts of social and preventive health to the forefront and helped to galvanize them into the idea of general health. As for child health, a broader approach is needed. In 2005, Spencer et al. described Social Pediatrics as “a global, holistic, and multidisciplinary approach to child health; it considers the health of the child within the context of their society, environment, school, and family, integrating the physical, mental, and social dimensions of child health and development as well as care, prevention, and promotion of health and quality of life” (1).

History

The roots of Social Pediatrics date back to early 1800’s. Louis-René Villermé studied mortality in Paris in the 1830s and concluded that social conditions in poor areas were associated

with increased mortality (2). The connection between child health and the social context in which children live was first documented by Virchow. The discovery of pathogens and antibiotics has started a new era in medical practice. The importance of vaccination, nutrition, and other public health measures had started to be known in the mid 1900s (3). Prof. Allan Macy Butler was a pioneer in publishing measures to improve healthcare delivery in the U.S in 1939 (4). Professor Olcay Neyzi was trained by him at Harvard University in 1956-57 and thereafter continued her training and studies in the İstanbul University Medical School Department of Pediatrics (5).

Ege University Medical School was the first institution in Turkey to start Social Pediatrics lectures in 1957. Lecture notes later were turned into the first book on Social Pediatrics for medical students, and it was published in 1968 in Turkish. In the book, the authors (Professor Sabiha Özgür and Professor Tugrul

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Submitted/Başvuru: 15.09.2021 • Accepted/Kabul: 01.11.2021



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Özgür) defined Social Pediatrics as follows: “Social Pediatrics is a science that teaches physicians the pleasure of being useful to the society and shows the way that they will follow in the development of society” (6).

Departments of Social Pediatrics were founded in accordance with the decision of the Higher Education Council dated December 23, 1982 (number 82/655) at two institutions in Turkey, the Institute of Child Health at Istanbul University and the Institute of Child Health at Hacettepe University.

Professor Nusret Fişek worked in the field of public health and implemented a national program in Turkey which included free immunization and the promotion of breastfeeding. These measures reduced infant mortality significantly in the 1960s.

Professor İhsan Doğramacı was a founding member of the European Society for Social Pediatrics (ESSOP) in 1977 and he was another pioneer of Social Pediatrics in Turkey. In 2012, ESSOP became the International Society for Social Pediatrics (ISSOP), in recognition of increasing international membership and a global society (7, 8).

Undergraduate Education in Social Pediatrics

Undergraduate medical education starts after high school and achievement of the required score in the General University Entrance Examination. There are currently 114 universities with medical schools in Turkey (9). Medical school education lasts 6 years and students graduate as general practitioners. In medical schools, Social Pediatrics lectures are taught from the first year. The main contents of the lectures given by Social Pediatricians are shown in Table 1. If specialization in a medical field is desired, then graduates need to take a medical specialization examination. Subsequently, a four-year fellowship program offered in medical schools or in state training and research hospitals must be completed to become a pediatrician. For subspecialization in pediatrics in fields such as pediatric rheumatology, pediatric emergency, etc., another general exam is required.

Table 1: Main Social Pediatrics topics in medical school

Breastfeeding and breastfeeding counseling
Child survival principles
Child health surveillance
Vaccines and principles of immunization
Children with special needs
Principles of child care in the community
Health of school children
Vaccination in special conditions
Complementary nutrition
Childhood accidents and prevention methods
Approach to cases of neglect and abuse in children
Children's rights
Screenings
Child health situations in the world and in Turkey

Social Pediatrics is not a subspeciality yet in Turkey. However, departments of pediatrics (departments of child health and diseases) define Social Pediatrics as a division since 1982. There are Social Pediatrics divisions in 24 medical schools (Table 2). Academicians in Social Pediatrics in these medical schools give

lectures on the topics shown in Table 1. There are well child units and immunization units in all these medical schools run by the Social Pediatrics divisions and in some training and research hospitals in Turkey.

Table 2: Medical schools with Social Pediatrics divisions in Turkey (City)

Acıbadem University (İstanbul)
Adıyaman University (Adıyaman)
Akdeniz University (Antalya)
Ankara University (Ankara)
Çukurova University (Adana)
Dokuz Eylül University (İzmir)
Ege University (İzmir)
Erciyes University (Kayseri)
Gazi University (Ankara)
Gaziantep University (Gaziantep)
Hacettepe University (Ankara)
İstanbul University (İstanbul)
İstanbul University-Cerrahpaşa (İstanbul)
Kırıkkale University (Kırıkkale)
Kocaeli University (Kocaeli)
Marmara University (İstanbul)
Medipol University (İstanbul)
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University (Muğla)
Namık Kemal University (Tekirdağ)
On Dokuz Mayıs University (Samsun)
Osmangazi University (Eskişehir)
Pamukkale University (Denizli)
Sivas Cumhuriyet University (Sivas)
Yıldırım Beyazıt University (Ankara)

Postgraduate Education in Social Pediatrics

There are six universities with institutes providing postgraduate training in Social Pediatrics. The names of the universities and the types of postgraduate programs are given in Table 3. Social Pediatrics encompasses four main areas of child healthcare: disease prevention (includes vaccination, health surveillance, nutrition, nurturing care practices), health promotion (being brought up with healthy life choices and habits), curative pediatrics, and rehabilitation. Social Pediatrics training programs in Turkey are generally conducted at the doctoral level. The aim of this program is to provide the student with the ability to conduct independent scientific research, to interpret events by examining them with a broad and deep perspective, and to determine the necessary steps to reach new syntheses. Pediatricians are the candidates for these programs. Although the language of instruction is Turkish, sufficient and documented knowledge of English is required. Institutional requirements may differ, but a personal interview and general aptitude test are held for candidates. There is no tuition or

Table 3: Universities providing postgraduate training in Social Pediatrics (type of program)

Ankara University (MSc)
Erciyes University (PhD)
Gazi University (PhD)
Hacettepe University (PhD)
İstanbul University (PhD)
Marmara University (PhD)

application fee for the programs in Turkey. Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TUBİTAK) scholarships are available for PhD students.

The main topics of the programs are given in Table 4. The students prepare for and contribute to the seminars. Attendance is compulsory. The students need to conduct and participate in clinical studies. They are expected to complete assignments together with their peers and are trained to be team players. On a regular basis, the students observe the functioning of the outpatient clinic and take part in outpatient clinic rounds. In the outpatient clinic, students take part in examinations and vaccinations of children who are being followed up and take part in the planning of their follow-up and in the counseling of parents. At the end of each term, there are written examinations. Preparing a review article and studies about a given topic are also part of the examination and are evaluated with this perspective. The students are obliged to prepare a manuscript and it must be published or accepted for publication in a medical journal during their PhD training. Contributions to community-based programs, to breastfeeding counseling trainings, and training of trainees programs are required.

Table 4: The main subjects of Social Pediatrics postgraduate programs

Active/passive immunity
Antenatal and perinatal health
Approach to childhood acute respiratory diseases
Approach to childhood diarrheal diseases
Basics of pediatric epidemiology
Breastfeeding counseling
Child health advocacy
Child health services in the community
Child health surveillance
Child and adolescent mental health
Child rights, neglect and abuse
Child care and protection in the community
Childhood contagious disease
Communication skills
Critical reading (provided by seminars and presentations)
Environmental health
Growth and development
Health policy
Immunization
Children with special needs (disabilities and chronic diseases)
Nutrition
Primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention
Research design and evidence-based medicine
State of the children in society
Social pediatrics
Vaccines
Women's health

The program period is 4 years (8 semesters) for the PhD and 2 years (4 semesters) for the MSc program. The first two years of the PhD program consist of structured training. This training also takes up one year of the MSc program. At the end of two years, students are required to take a written and oral proficiency test, which is called a PhD Qualifying Exam. Then the second step of the program starts. There is no proficiency test in the MSc program. Thesis writing takes at least 4 semesters in the PhD program and 2 semesters in the MSc program. Each

semester, students fill out a thesis follow-up form in order to present information on their academic work to their advisors. At least three thesis follow-up forms and summary of academic activity must be presented in the PhD program. When the thesis is completed, the students take the PhD Thesis Defense Examination. Upon successful completion of this exam, they are entitled to a PhD in the field of Social Pediatrics.

There is great demand for and great interest in the field of Social Pediatrics in Turkey and growing support for its expansion all across Turkey. A book called "Child Health Follow-up in the First 5 Years" was published in Turkish by the Social Pediatrics Association with the contributions of PhD students (10). Every year National Social Pediatrics meetings and every two years the International Eurasian Social Pediatrics Congress are held in Turkey. These meetings also provide a nurturing environment for medical students, residents and pediatricians.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 Pandemic showed the world the context and importance of Social Pediatrics. Child health follow-up rates in societies, breastfeeding success, continuation of belief in vaccines, protection of child health in difficult circumstances, provision of school health services, and parental counseling on authoritative parenting for increasing resilience in children are possible by empowering Social Pediatrics training in the country. Therefore, much effort is still required to train a higher number of special experts who provide services in the field of Social Pediatrics and to value their contribution to their community.

Acknowledgements We thank Prof. Aysu Duyan Çamurdan, Gazi University, for her help obtaining historical books on Social Pediatrics in Turkey.

Informed Consent: Written consent was obtained from the participants.

Peer Review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of Study- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.; Drafting Manuscript- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.; Final Approval and Accountability- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.

Conflict of Interest: Authors declared no conflict of interest.

Financial Disclosure: Authors declared no financial support.

Teşekkür: Gazi Üniversitesi'nden Prof. Dr. Aysu Duyan Çamurdan'a Türkiye'de Sosyal Pediatri ile ilgili tarihi kitapların elde edilmesindeki yardımlarından dolayı teşekkür ederiz.

Bilgilendirilmiş Onam: Katılımcılardan bilgilendirilmiş onam alınmıştır.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Yazar Katkıları: Çalışma Konsepti/Tasarım- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.; Yazı Taslağı- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.; Son Onay ve Sorumluluk- G.G., B.K., G.K., O.N.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar çıkar çatışması beyan etmemişlerdir.

Finansal Destek: Yazarlar finansal destek beyan etmemişlerdir.

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