

# Relationship Between The “Sexual Abuse Whirlpool” and Gender, Type of Abuse, Victim-Perpetrator Relationship, Disclosure, Psychological Reactions, and Revictimization of Sexual Abuse Victims

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## Abstract

According to the Sexual Abuse Whirlpool framework, when a vulnerable child is noticed by a perpetrator, the state of vulnerability he/she is in will reach a severe level. The SAW asserts that the method applied by the perpetrator has a multiplier effect on the child’s vulnerability and accelerates the process resulting in abuse. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between the SAW and gender, type of abuse, victim-perpetrator relationship, disclosure, psychological complaints and reactions (PCRs), and revictimization of sexual abuse victims. A mixed research method was used: First, the vulnerabilities of the victims were extracted from the forensic interview forms with a qualitative method ( $n=199$ ). Then collected data were tabulated and digitized quantitatively. Victims who were exposed to penetrative abuses, who did not disclose, had serious PCRs, and who were re-victimized had high scores of the SAW. Whirlpool would decrease in places where there is a quality parent-child relationship.

## Keywords

Sexual Abuse Whirlpool, vulnerability, sexual abuse, victim, Routine Activities Theory

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## Introduction

Recently, there has been a remarkable increase in victimization by neglect or intentional violence against children. Children may be in a vulnerable and disadvantaged situation or made vulnerable because of their situation, both of which may accelerate their victimization (Bones, 2013; M. B. Gönültaş, 2018). In some cases, these victimizations may promote other victimizations and result in the child's revictimization, psychological trauma, and inability to disclose the abuse they have experienced (Gewehr et al., 2021; M. B. Gönültaş, 2021; Papalia et al., 2017). Children's situations may also increase their risk of victimization by amplifying the perception of vulnerability (Bones, 2013). Vulnerability is defined as "the state of being faced with the possibility of being harmed or attacked physically, emotionally, or psychologically" (Kasi & Saha, 2019, p.1). Vulnerable children have a higher risk of neglect and abuse than others; therefore, they need special care, attention, and protection (Finkelhor, 1993). When children are in a vulnerable state, they may attract the attention of the abuser (Finkelhor, 1994). In this context, M. B. Gönültaş (2021) suggested the Sexual Abuse Whirlpool (SAW) framework based on the vulnerability of sexual abuse victims.

### *Sexual Abuse Whirlpool (SAW)*

According to the SAW framework, the following two main vulnerability factors impact sexual abuse victimization: (1) the child is vulnerable because of their circumstances and (2) the child becomes vulnerable because of circumstances devised by the perpetrators. The process accelerates with the methods used by the perpetrators, and the child becomes more vulnerable. When children are highly vulnerable, they are exposed to the act of abuse. A whirlpool is a natural circular phenomenon that occurs as a result of the meeting of two waves, and something or somebody being drawn into the whirlpool is quickly pulled toward the bottom. In this context, according to SAW, Factors 1 and 2 represent the two waves. When these two vulnerability dynamics meet, a whirlpool occurs. This makes the child more vulnerable and quickly brings them closer to the perpetrator. According to SAW, the perpetrator makes the child—who is in vulnerable a situation but not enough to be a suitable target—a suitable target through certain techniques and methods. For example, the function of abduction in cases of child abduction for sexual motivation can be better understood in this context. The act of sexual abuse is committed when the child is most vulnerable. According to SAW, the vulnerabilities of the victim help bring the perpetrator close to them.

*Factor 1: Vulnerability Due to Children's Situations: Vulnerabilities of the Child (VC).* Child neglect causes or increases the children's vulnerability. Parents or caregivers are the reason for the occurrence of neglect. Coohy (2003) defined three types of neglect: (1) physical neglect, which includes inadequate medical protection for the child, malnutrition, self-care and hygiene problems, and unhealthy living conditions; (2) lack of supervision, in the form of leaving children alone, being careless about the child's social relations, leaving the child in the care of incapable and uneducated adults; and

(3) emotional neglect related to attachment problems between the child and the parent (Wark et al., 2003). Children with emotional neglect may express emotions of loneliness, social isolation, not being understood by parents, helplessness, and difficulties adapting to the school environment (Glaser, 2002). Children facing these circumstances are more likely to be victims of any form of maltreatment.

Family structure can also lead to the victimization of the child (Turner et al., 2007). Children who do not live with their parents, such as those whose parents are separated or those who live in a single-parent or stepparent environment, face a higher risk of victimization than others (Turner et al., 2007). Children living in single-parent families are at risk of being victimized by strangers or familiar adults outside the family (Lauritsen, 2003). Similarly, children living with stepfamily members are at a higher risk of exposure to sexual violence (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). Considering these family structures that pose the risk of child victimization, socioeconomic problems in single-parent families, and the low quality of relationships in families with stepparents are prominent factors in child victimization (Thompson et al., 1994). In such situations, children may not receive quality supervision.

In some cases, children may be more prone to being victimized because of their daily lifestyles and routine activities (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). Substance and alcohol use, interaction with peers who engage in antisocial behavior, staying out late at night, unsupervised social activities and interactions, and risk-taking behavior are important risk factors for children's victimization (Champion et al., 2004). Children who are not supervised by their parents or adults may more easily access alcohol and drugs during social activities. Sexual violence victimization has been reported more frequently in young people who engage in risk-taking behaviors such as drug and alcohol use (Tilley, 2015).

According to the Routine Activities Theory, perpetrators mostly target vulnerable children with low protection capacity (Felson & Boba, 2010; B. M. Gönültaş & Sahin, 2018). Being disabled or female may also increase the risk of victimization by amplifying the perception of vulnerability (Bones, 2013). In the crime-victimization interaction, children in certain situations are at a disproportionately higher risk of being exposed to abuse. The characteristics of the target may increase the motivation of the offender; thus, vulnerable children are at an increased risk of victimization and seen as suitable targets. In addition, Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996) defined "target congruence" such that if the child is vulnerable because of individual characteristics, this may be sufficient for the perpetrators to attack them. However, these explanations are insufficient in situations where the child's vulnerability is not sufficient for them to be a suitable target, despite being in a vulnerable situation. In such a case the child will not be subject to harmful action. Here, the question that arises is whether a child who is not a suitable target for the perpetrator despite being vulnerable, will be made a suitable target by making them more vulnerable using certain techniques and methods?

*Factor 2: Methods Undertaken by Perpetrators to Make Children a Suitable Target: Vulnerabilities Devised by Perpetrators (VP).* The strategies and methods adopted, before the act of abuse, involve getting physically close to the child (Gonultas et al., 2021). The

situation that determines physical closeness with a child is whether the perpetrator is based inside or outside the household. Perpetrators from within the household are already in close physical contact with the child and can devise environments where they can isolate the child. For example, the perpetrator may already be close to the child who is sleeping at home, and as they are vulnerable while sleeping, this accelerates the occurrence of abuse. For perpetrators based outside the home, factors that determine a child's vulnerability include problems related to child-care. Approaching a child from outside the home is riskier, and decision-making in this regard can be complicated (Plummer, 2018). Therefore, it is easier to approach children in vulnerable situations (Deslauriers-Varin & Beauregard, 2010). After getting close to the child, perpetrators try to gain the child's trust, thereby also gaining control over them (Cornish, 1998). They may be in an advantageous position by already being friends with the child or their parents (B. M. Gönültaş, 2016). Therefore, they may engage the following: bribing and making promises to the child; isolating the child by making them move from one place to another; touching the child in a seemingly innocent manner (e.g., touching the child's genitals while pretending to clean the child); eroticizing the child (e.g., showing the child porn); testing the child's reactions and desensitizing them; and using coercive methods such as physical violence and threats (Plummer, 2018). The bribes and promises employed here are based on the child's vulnerability; the perpetrator may offer something that the child is passionate about to gain their trust, which prompts the child to come to a place where they can be isolated, making it easier for the perpetrator to be close to the child (Cornish, 1998). Coercive methods can be used when one is physically close to a child (B. M. Gonultas et al., 2021). Coercive methods include physical violence and threats, which may the child comply with the perpetrator's wishes, just before the act of abuse (Craven et al., 2006). Thus, the perpetrator commits the act of abuse when they are physically close to the child. In other words, the situation in which the child is the most vulnerable emerges when they are physically close to the abuser. The most vulnerable situation is the one in which fear and negative emotions are most intense depending on the type of violence used, the person who actively harms them is the closest to them, protective mechanisms do not work, and the possibility of getting away from the situation is low.

### *Assumptions of SAW*

SAW asserts that the perpetrator is a prominent factor in abuse in the context of the child's vulnerability. The applied method has a multiplier effect on the child's vulnerability and accelerates the process that results in abuse. SAW framework does not suggest that every vulnerable child is a victim of sexual abuse. They are not victims until they gain the attention of the perpetrator. Children may be in vulnerable circumstances such as having working parents who fail to provide effective protection. These vulnerabilities do not result in sexual abuse unless they happen to meet a perpetrator; however, they may open children up to another type of victimization.

According to SAW, the methods and approaches of the perpetrator have a multiplier effect on abuse. The multiplier is a factor that amplifies or increases the base value of

something else. For example, in the multiplication statement  $3 \times 4 = 12$ , Multiplier 3 amplifies the value of 4 to 12 (Math Vocabulary, 2021). In this context, the vulnerabilities devised by perpetrators (nVP) are the factors that amplify or increase the effect of the vulnerability (nVC) of the child. The factor that determines the strength of the whirlpool is the intensity of the child's vulnerability.

$$\text{Strength and persistence of SAW} = \text{nVP} \times \text{nVC}$$

Before the act of abuse, the perpetrator's act results in a multiplier effect on the child's victimization, and the intensity of the whirlpool is a sign of its severity. In other words, it can provide a concrete perspective on the seriousness of children's vulnerability before the abuse. As the score increases, the child's vulnerability also increases. Therefore, it is important to determine whether the severity that occurred before the abuse is related to the vulnerable situations that occurred after the abuse. Nondisclosure, for example, has been found to relate to children's situations before the abuse. Therefore, SAW (intensity of vulnerability) is expected to share a relationship with the post-abuse vulnerabilities (disclosure, psychological complaints and reactions (PCRs), and revictimization).

### *Aim of the Study*

Nondisclosure, PCRs, and revictimization are related to a child's vulnerabilities during abuse (Doğangün et al., 2016; Guyon et al., 2021; Scoglio et al., 2021). However, the relationship between factors responsible for a child's vulnerability has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature. This study focused on the vulnerabilities of child victimization within the SAW framework, and aimed to investigate the relation between SAW and gender, type of abuse, victim-perpetrator relationship, disclosure, PCRs, and revictimization of the victims. For this purpose, victim statements in the judicial files of sexual abuse cases were analyzed, and the children's vulnerabilities were extracted.

## **Methods**

### *Research Design and Sample*

This study used a mixed-methods research design. First, the vulnerabilities of child victims were extracted from victim reports obtained from forensic interview forms in cases using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods provide rich information on the vulnerabilities that the child is in and those devised by perpetrators. The collected data were tabulated and digitized. Initially, the Ministry of Justice was contacted for permission to conduct interviews with victims of sexual abuse; however, permission was not granted owing to the possibility of any psychological harm to the victims. Instead, permission was granted to retrospectively analyze the cases of sexual

abuse victims whose juridical processes were finalized. To avoid any bias, all permitted files ( $n=199$ ) were included in the sample, and no files were excluded. Thus, to achieve the aim of this study, forensic interview forms of victims were analyzed to observe their vulnerabilities in the abuse process following the standards listed by the American Psychological Association for the analysis. The forms were analyzed using content analysis and vulnerabilities of victims related to sexual abuse were analyzed following the SAW framework. First, the vulnerabilities of victims were identified, and then the number of vulnerabilities was determined.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data were collected from the investigation files of the sexual abuse cases. Each file contained statements of the victim, offender, and the parents of victims, crime scene, and forensic medicine reports, and other evidence. Victim statements were analyzed to extract their vulnerabilities. The statements included detailed data to understand the nature of the offence and the situations of victims and offenders before, during, and after the abuse. These statements were also used for treatment and rehabilitation (B. M. Gonultas et al., 2021).

The statements were analyzed using content analysis to extract the vulnerabilities of the victims. For this purpose, a research team comprising a forensic scientist (the author) and forensic psychologist was formed. Instead of using an analysis program, the research team decided to manually analyze the statements. As the victims' vulnerabilities had to be observed according to pre- and post-abuse processes causing vulnerable situations of victims, the research team could assess the circumstances and situations that may have made children vulnerable. The team prepared a Microsoft Excel table separately and randomly selected 15 statements. Further procedures were carried out in the following steps. First, the statements were de-identified. Second, each statement was read, and probable vulnerabilities reported by the victims were determined. Third, probable vulnerabilities were distributed under the main categories according to SAW. The team compared their distributions and achieved 85% inter-rater reliability; this rate was sufficient according to Miles and Huberman (1994). The team then discussed all distributions and reached a consensus on subcategories of the vulnerabilities. After all statements were read, the vulnerabilities were written according to sub-categories. One point was assigned if the victim displayed a vulnerability related to the subcategory. If not, 0 points were assigned. Finally, the data were tabulated and entered into SPSS for Windows and then analyzed with frequency and comparison of the means.

### *Variables*

*Independent Variables.* The independent variables in this study were sex (female=1, male=2), type of abuse (non-penetrative=1, penetrative=2), victim-perpetrator relationship (intrafamilial=1, extrafamilial=2), disclosure of abuse, PCRs, and

**Table 1.** Descriptive Results for the Sample.

Variables	Groups	<i>n</i>	%	SAW ( <i>m</i> )
Gender	Female	175	88	9.32
	Male	24	12	7.41
Type of abuse	Non-penetrative	92	46	7.33*
	Penetrative	107	54	10.60*
Victim-perpetrator relationship	Intra-familial	74	37	8.54
	Extra-familial	125	63	9.42
Disclosing of abuse	Yes	63	32	7.93**
	No	136	68	9.63**
PCRs	Any reactions	127	64	7.33*
	Serious reactions	72	36	12.20*
Revictimization	No	107	54	7.80*
	Yes	92	46	10.59*

\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

revictimization (Table 1). If the child disclosed abuse after victimization by talking and reporting it to parents, teachers, or any adult, a score of 1 was assigned. If emotional and behavioral problems were observed in the child by adults, and accordingly, interview with the child revealed a case of abuse, a score of 2 was assigned. When reading the victims' statements carefully, it was noted that psychological problems reported by the victims were based on what they felt or suffered. In some cases, victims reported serious problems such as running away from home, suicide attempts, aggressive behaviors (such as causing injury to someone), and substance abuse, in addition to other psychological problems. Therefore, while a score of 2 was assigned to those who reported a serious psychological problem, a score of 1 was assigned to others. A score of 2 was also assigned to those who reported any revictimization.

**Dependent Variable.** To obtain the SAW score of the sample, VC and VP were calculated according to the following:

**Vulnerabilities Due to Children's Situations (VC).** The first subcategory was whether the child has continued their education in a formal setting. In the school environment, children learn information about self-protection rules and are under the professional guardianship of school professionals. Therefore, children are aware of abusive behaviors as a result of training. In addition, the symptoms of abuse are observed quickly by a teacher or friend in school (going to school: 0 points; not going to school: 1 point). The second subcategory was intellectual ability. According to developmental theories, a child a child may develop full intellectual capacity at approximately 12 years of age under normal circumstances (Vygotsky, 1997). Thus, a child older than 12 years would be aware of abusive behaviors and methods of perpetrators more than more than chil-



**Table 2.** The Child is Vulnerable Due to the Situations He/She is in (VC).

Sub-categories	Probable of vulnerability is low	<i>n</i>	%	Probable of vulnerability is high	<i>N</i>	%
Education	Going to school	156	78	Not going to school	43	22
Intellectual ability	Old then 12 years old	85	43	Young then 12 years old	114	57
With parents	Living with parents	153	77	Not living with parents	46	23
The status of parents	Mother and father are alive/ not divorced	112	56	Mother and father (one or two of them) died/ divorced	87	44
Victim of abuse in the past	No	159	80	Yes	40	20
Awareness of parents about abuse	Yes	42	21	No	157	79
The quality of interrelationship with parent	Sufficient	95	48	Insufficient	104	52

dren under 12 (older than 12 years: 0 points; younger than 12 years: 1 point). The third and fourth subcategories were related to the effective guardianship of parents. Children not living with their family or those whose mothers or fathers are absent do not receive effective supervision and guardianship regarding dangerous situations from outside (living with parent: 0 points, not living with parents: 1 point; mother and father are alive/not divorced: 0 points; mother and father (one or two of them) died/divorced: 1 point). Children suffering from past victimization or abuse may be more vulnerable than others. The perpetrators may see these children as more suitable targets (fifth subcategory; No prior experience of victimization/abuse: 0 points, yes: 1 point). Parents' awareness regarding their child's state prevents the continuation of abuse and the further detrimental effects that follow. Thus, further interventions, such as psychological support and juridical intervention, can be performed rapidly (the sixth subcategory; yes: 0 points; no: 1 point). The final subcategory is the quality of the parent-child relationship. In an ideal family environment, parents are concerned with the behavioral changes of their children and are careful in protecting them (adequate parent-child relationship: 0 points; inadequate parent-child relationship: 1 point; Table 2).

*Vulnerabilities Due Perpetrators' Methods (VP).* The first subcategory was anonymity on social media. The perpetrators introduce themselves as children or use a fake identity. Thus, they manage to talk to the child and obtain information about them, their family, and other important details, making further making further contact easier (introducing themselves with real identity: 0 points; introducing themselves with fake



**Table 3.** The Child Becomes Vulnerable Due to the Situations Constituted by the Perpetrators (VP).

Sub-categories	Probable of vulnerability is low		Probable of vulnerability is high		N	%
		n	%			
Anonymity in social media	Introduce himself with real identity	189	95	Introduce himself with fake identity	10	5
Under authority of the perpetrator by using methods	No	69	35	Yes	130	65
Bribe, entice, lure, privilege by perpetrator	No	76	38	Yes	123	62
Intrusive methods such as threat, physical violence	No	48	34	Yes	151	76
Alcohol, substance use before abuse	No	159	80	Yes	40	20
Threat, bribe post abuse	No	40	20	Yes	159	80

identity: 1 point). The second subcategory was that the child is under their control because of their methods. Therefore, while the perpetrator manages to get close to the child, the child becomes isolated from the outside world and from other familiar people (no: 0 points; yes: 1 point). The third subcategory included approaching and getting close to the child, such as offering bribes (money, mobile phones, chocolate, etc.), privileges (playing, going to the seaside by car, etc.), and promises.<sup>1</sup> These methods help perpetrators become physically close to children (no: 0 points; yes: 1 point). The fourth and fifth use subcategories included controlling the child and becoming physically close to the child. These methods include threats, violence, and making children use substances or drink alcohol. Thus, the perpetrator manages to be close to the child, and the chance of getting away becomes very low (no: 0 points; yes: 1 point). The last subcategory involves using methods such as threats and bribes post-abuse. These methods undertaken by the perpetrator may stop the child from disclosing the abuse or make them deny meeting the perpetrator again (no: 0 points; yes: 1 point). Thus, the probability of revictimization also increases. In this context, VP includes constructed vulnerabilities that bring a vulnerable child close to the perpetrator (Table 3).

## Results

In the present study, 199 victim reports were analyzed. The mean age of the victims was 11.4 years (min=4, max=14), 88% were female, and 53.8% ( $n=107$ ) were exposed to penetrative abuse (anal, vaginal, or oral abuse). In total, 62.8% of victims

were abused by extrafamilial perpetrators. While extrafamilial perpetrators were mostly neighbors and strangers, intrafamilial perpetrators were mostly fathers, older siblings, and uncles. Furthermore, 68.3% ( $n=136$ ) of them could not disclose their victimization after abuse. A total of 36.2% ( $n=72$ ) of them suffered serious PCRs, such as suicide attempts and running away from home, and 46.2% ( $n=92$ ) of them experienced revictimization (Table 1).

Table 2 presents the findings of VC. The mean vulnerability of VC was 3 (med=3, mod=2,  $SD=1.4$ , min=1, and max=6). The victims covered one vulnerable subcategory in 25 cases (12.6%), six vulnerable categories were covered in 15 cases (7.5%). The most rated vulnerability was parents' awareness of abuse. A total of 78.9% of the victims' parents were unaware of abuse ( $n=157$ ). The number of vulnerabilities related to parents (subcategories of "with parents," "the status of parents," "awareness of parents about abuse," and "the quality of interrelationship with the parent") was prominent in the sample for circumstances contributing to children's vulnerability.

Table 3 presents the VP findings. The mean vulnerability of VP was 3 (med=3, mod=3,  $SD=1.04$ , min=1, and max=6). The most highly rated vulnerability devised by the perpetrators was threats and bribes ( $n=159$ , 79.9%) after abuse. The next most common was intrusive methods used by the perpetrator before abuse ( $n=151$ , 75.9%). The circumstances ("under the control of the perpetrator by using methods," "bribe, entice, lure, privilege by the perpetrator," "intrusive methods such as threat, physical violence") devised by the perpetrators related to physically approaching the victims were prominent for the VP.

To determine the strength and persistence of the SAW of the sample, the formulation was used (number of VC  $\times$  number of VP=value of SAW). The mean value of SAW was 9.09 points (med=8, mod=6,  $SD=5.3$ , min=3, and max=30). In addition, victims who were exposed to penetrative abuse types, did not disclose the abuse, had serious PCRS, and were revictimized attained significantly higher SAW scores compared to the others. No relationship was found between SAW and gender and the victim-perpetrator relationship.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between SAW and gender, type of abuse, victim-perpetrator relationship, disclosure, PCRS, and revictimization of the victims. This is the first study to apply and test the SAW framework. Child victims in the sample attained a vulnerability score and at least one of the vulnerability categories under the VC was covered. Even if the child shows only one vulnerability, their state may attract the attention of the perpetrator, who can be thought to be aware of the child's vulnerable situation. In the literature, there is no information on how the vulnerabilities of children are evaluated (more or less vulnerable) when they are targeted by abusers. However, some empirical studies have reported that abusers targeted children who seemed cognitively and physically vulnerable and neglected (Clayton et al., 2018; Erooga et al., 2020). In this sense, visible or noticeable vulnerabilities may cause children to be targeted.

When the mean SAW score of the victims is examined, VP generates a multiplier effect of approximately three times the mean VC score. Here, the victims become close to the perpetrator, with an effect three times faster via VP. A score of 9 may not mean anything on its own. The strength and intensity of the whirlpool is determined by the number of times the SAW score is greater than the VC score. According to our study, victims who are vulnerable with an average of three points enter a whirlpool with the effect of VP, and this whirlpool brings them physically close to the perpetrator with a threefold effect. In this context, the higher the VC score, the more vulnerable the victim is due to their circumstances and the less complex the strategy (being physically close) followed by the perpetrator (or vice versa). This suggests that a child in a vulnerable situation may come to the attention of an offender if their vulnerability is not recognized or ignored (for instance, making statements such as “all children are like this,” “this is how they learn about life’s challenges”). Moreover, by being exposed to some form of vulnerability, their vulnerability can endure, thus quickly leading them to abuse victimization.

SAW scores also differed according to the type of abuse. Victims exposed to penetrative abuse suffer a more intense whirlpool effect. The SAW score in this group was higher than the average score. Penetrative abuse requires more time for preparation and is comparatively more complex. This is because it requires more isolation, absence of eyewitnesses, and full compliance from the victim. Moreover, the perpetrator may brush off the touching as a joke, and the child may consider it normal, but the same is not the case for penetrative abuse. The child must be close and mostly unresponsive. This would also require a strategy with further coercive-intrusive methods that would finalize the vulnerability ( $n=151$ ). Therefore, children forced into penetrative abuse are exposed to more vulnerable behaviors. In these studies, victims were more vulnerable in cases that included penetration. For example, Leclerc et al. (2006) found that those who are female and under 13 years of age were at a greater risk of experiencing penetration, and intrusive methods, except manipulative methods by offenders, increased the risk of penetration by 2.5 times.

In this study, a relationship was observed between SAW and victims’ disclosure, PCRs, and revictimization. In these cases, victims who did not disclose abuse, had serious PCRs, and were revictimized obtained high levels of SAW scores. Vulnerable situations, such as being under the age of 12, family surveillance problems, and perpetrators’ behaviors (such as bribery, coercive behaviors, and threats) may affect the child’s inability to disclose, show more serious PCRs, and experience revictimization. Among these, family factors were the most prominent. In family environments where parents cannot take care of their children effectively, or where poor parent-child relationships are observed, and parents do not notice the changes in their child, it may be inevitable for the child not to share their experiences and harbor the feeling that they will not be believed. In a study, 50% of the children who did not disclose the abuse reported that they were afraid of their parents, and their parents tended to blame them and act angrily (Hershkowitz et al., 2007).

Similarly, if the psychological complaints and reactions experienced by the child due to abuse are not noticed, they may not be helped (e.g., supporting the child or getting the child treated) by their parents. Furthermore, these vulnerabilities—combined

with the perpetrator's pre- and post-abusive violent approaches—may increase the likelihood of engaging in harmful acts, such as suicide attempts and running away from home. In this situation, children may feel more helpless, and running away from home or harming themselves may be viewed as a form of escape. The same is true for children who have been victimized again. Victims of sexual abuse experience depression and attempt suicide, and are more vulnerable to revictimization (Barnes et al., 2009; Doğangün et al., 2016; Gladstone et al., 2004). In this sense, failure to meet the treatment, attention, and surveillance needs of children who have been victimized before may make these children vulnerable to other victimizations, especially sexual abuse.

This study has some limitations. First, the study focuses on cases brought to the attention of the authorities. There may be cases that have not been brought to the authorities or have not been recognized by them. Therefore, SAW should also be tested in cases that have not been dealt with by the authorities. Second, the data were obtained from victims' statements of juridical cases and information about sexual abuse cases was mostly used as evidence. Therefore, more details and information about the victim's intellectual capacity, mental disorders, biological developments, parents, and other vulnerabilities could not be extracted from the statements because permission was not granted to conduct face-to-face interviews, through which more vulnerable categories could have been identified. Therefore, future studies should investigate vulnerabilities by interviewing the victims.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, the prominent factor in cases of child abuse is the parent factor, which affects the quality of the family child relationship. In this sense, SAW reveals how the intensity of the vulnerability of the victim may seriously affect their exposure to penetrative abuse, nondisclosure, serious PCRs, and revictimization. One of the main statements of the SAW framework is "the severity of the vulnerable situation." That is, when being vulnerable and being made vulnerable are combined, it might increase the child's propensity to experience abuse.

The most important outcome of the study was that the intensity of the victim's vulnerability before the act of abuse relates to their post-abuse vulnerabilities. Therefore, alternative methods should be developed to help start post-abuse interventions. A notable relationship was observed between the SAW levels and PCRs. PCRs can be considered psychological symptoms of victimization and are visible. In this context, PCRs can be a "disclosure tool" that helps notice victimization.

According to the SAW framework, the basic function of vulnerability is to bring the victim closer to the perpetrator. It is theorized that, when a vulnerable child is noticed by a perpetrator, the state of vulnerability reaches a severe level. That is, children do not become victims incidentally, but are made sufficiently vulnerable to abuse after their vulnerability is noticed by an offender. Severity means that the whirlpool accelerates victimization by bringing the child close to the perpetrator. In this study, the impact of perpetrators' tactics increased children's vulnerability by an average of three times. In this context, the probability of children being drawn into the whirlpool is

expected to be reduced in the presence of quality parent-child relationships that lead to effective care of the child. As in such environments the perpetrators probably would not try to get close to the child.

Another outcome of the study was that SAW, as a vulnerability value, was related to children’s disclosure, PCRs, and revictimization. Therefore, there is a need to develop a holistic perspective that includes awareness and knowledge of the perpetrators and their methods, as well as approaches that solely focus on the vulnerabilities of the victim and highlight the judicial procedures under sexual abuse education. Thus, it would be possible to gain a perspective to understand this phenomenon with all its dimensions and deal with perpetrators (recognizing and being aware of abusers and their methods). Parental supervision is more important in the case of visible vulnerability. During the investigation, investigators should be sensitive to the methods and strategies adopted by the perpetrators, focus on child’s vulnerabilities during the forensic interview, and increase the probability of finding evidence related to the case and perpetrators.

Therefore, the SAW framework highly recommends protecting children from abusers, and parents and teachers should be aware of abusers and their methods and should be educated to acquire the skills to understand children’s latent disclosures. The SAW framework also offers empowerment-oriented recommendations for a holistic approach (Table 4). Parental supervision and quality of the parent-child

**Table 4.** Empowering Parties Against Sexual Abuse and Perpetrators.

Fields for empowering/ parties	Chilids	Parents	Professionals working with children (teachers, social workers)	Police, investigators
Interrelationship between parents and children		Consultations for increasing quality of the relationship		
Sexual abuse perpetrators and their methods		Increasing knowledge and awareness toward perpetrators	Increasing knowledge and awareness toward perpetrators	Increasing knowledge and awareness toward perpetrators
Sexual abuse victims	Rapid psychological support as soon as appearing the abuse	Education and consultation for psychological support, juridical process, supporting children, noticing PCRs	Education for noticing PCRs and juridical process	Education for preventing secondary victimization and effective forensic interviewing with the victims
Preventing of sexual abuse	Education for self-protection tactics	Education and consultation for effective relations with children	Education for noticing abuse and preventing further victimizations, being effective protectors	Effective protection of children in children’s settings and social media

relationship, awareness of sexual abusers and their methods, victims, and prevention of sexual abuse are areas of empowerment. These areas provide ideas on how to empower children, parents, professionals, and investigators. Furthermore, effective state policies should be established to prevent sexual abuse such as constituting child-oriented environments that emphasize the best interests of children and their right to participate, protecting children from the negative effects of social media, supporting children and parents psychosocially and socioeconomically, and empowering professionals about sexual abuse and the perpetrators' methods. Policies drafted following this framework will ensure that children are protected from abuse

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### Note

1. For promises about being a family in the future, please see B. M. Gonultas et al. (2021).

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