

## **Forensic medical examination of all children in cases of suspected physical violence –A cross-sectoral approach**

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In 2020, a cross-sectoral project was established at the Danish Children's Centre (DCC) in Copenhagen with a focus on systematization and standardization of forensic medical examinations of children in cases of suspected physical violence. This procedure ensures that objective medical evidence is systematically documented alongside the child's verbal description of abuse and that the child's general health status is screened. No preliminary selection of cases is conducted once the case has been police reported and the video-interview has been decided.

A special feature of the screening procedure is the multidisciplinary team performing the physical examinations of the children. The team include a forensic medical doctor, nurse, and dentist.

### **Findings**

From 01.04.2020-01.11.2023 357 children have been examined and in 29% we found possible signs of violence indicating non-traumatic origin and 35% had healthcare-problems, that needed follow-up. Our experience is that combining a forensic medical team and expanding the forensic medical examination of the child helps ensure that a qualified assessment can be obtained at a single examination and provide the most legally solid outcomes.

### **Implications**

The new procedure at the DCC has several implications; a) all children are systematically examined in support of the legal rights of the child, b) the multidisciplinary team ensures that various aspects of child health and well-being are addressed within one examination and that referral to additional health care professionals is initiated timely, c) the examination is carried out within a child-friendly setting, the DCC.

In addition, the team facilitates a detection of possible health issues, and signs of neglect for the benefit of the child's case in the criminal justice, social and health care systems.

This project enlightens a set of best-practice guidelines for future cross-sectoral work procedures in cases of child abuse. Furthermore, the collected data from the project is the basis of two ongoing Ph.D. projects focusing on the injury documentation and legal aspect and the aspects of health and wellbeing to make risk assessments or vulnerability assessments in future abused children.