

CHILD ABUSE

Angela BOGLUȚ
Universitatea Vasile Goldiș, Arad
psiho.angela@gmail.com

Abstract . *The forms of maltreatment same as those of neglect are an old disease for all people of the world. By the nineteenth century, it began to appear certain laws to protect the mother and the child. We want to draw attention to what grave consequences and what effect it may have on children's physical or mental state the use of force on them. We believe that there should be in every school, a counselor that the "adult school", both parents and teachers (some even have the grace to be a teacher) and especially in rural areas, to collaborate in a positive teacher-parent manner, in order to avoid these phenomena. By abuse we understand any voluntary form of action or omission of an act which is detrimental to the child and takes place, taking advantage of his inability to defend itself, to discern between what is right or wrong, to seek help or to self-service (Popescu - Răduță, 1998). Thanks the variables that are influencing maltreatment we cannot give a complete definition. In some countries, where religion greatly influences education (Africa, Asia, South America), certain forms of physical and psychological maltreatment have the rank of territorial or tribal law. We can select three variables - of the many – regarding the forms of maltreatment: a moral boundary between good and ill treatments. It is difficult to establish between normal and pathological, be it lack of care, how to express affection or punishments, "Beating is torn from Heaven". The second variable is the duration of the act of ill-treatment. All families live moments of tension, which can act as inappropriate. Any parent can lose composure in certain situations and can hit or verbally abuse the child. If the parent is balanced and had an education and affection, he will not resort to physical aggression. - Another variable is the socio-cultural context in which the child lives. There are three practices in certain cultures of maltreatment: to hit the child's bottom, scold, let him cry. African girl's mutilation is a tradition, but an abuse in the West. In Canada, beating is a child's educational method. The „Caogao „method in Southeast Asia (to cure diseases, pressing a hot metal coin on the child's body) leaves traces and is considered an act of violence, when it is a faith, a religion of shamans). We tried to expose some forms of maltreatment in the paper. Conclusion: try to avoid as much as possible physical and mental mistreatment so that later the child is not left with complications.*

Key words: *abuse, grave neglect, physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual abuse.*

INTRODUCTION

ABUSE is any form of voluntary action or omission of an action which is in the detriment of the child and takes place by taking advantage of the inability of the child to protect him, to difference between right and wrong, to seek help or to self-service (dr. Popescu and dr. Răduț, 1998).

It is hard to offer a general definition with international value to abuse due to variables that influence the definition.

- First variable is *the moral limit between good treatment and abuse*. It is hard to set the limit between normal and pathological, either be it lack of caring, way to express affection or the applied punishments.

- The second variable is *the duration of the abuse*. All families go through tense moments, when parents can react inappropriately. Any parent can lose its cool in certain situations and can hit or verbally abuse the child. A balanced parent will never reach a chain of violent behaviors which will constitute abuse.

- Another variable is *the social-cultural context* in which the child lives in. There are some abusive practices which are considered as such in some cultures and not in others:

- To hit the child's bottom, to row the child, to let him cry,

- Mutilation of young African women represents a tradition in Africa, but is viewed as an abuse in the western states,
- In Canada beating a child as an educational method is inconceivable and abusive words as „you are bad, worthless” are considered as emotional abuse,
- The „Cao Gao” practice from then South-Eastern Asia (for healing diseases, a metal coin is pressed hard on the child’s body); the marks that are left on the body can be considered as signs of intentional violence, when it actually is a cultural belief.

Nevertheless, all cultures have behaviors that fall outside the sphere of admissible culture.

Taking into account these factors, we could define abuse as being the side/portion of all that is harmful which derives from unaccepted actions; proximity (of people near the child) and that can be avoided.

Usually, *the types of abuse are intertwining* and there is a determinism relationship between them. Thus, physical abuse is always an emotional abuse because of the stress the child is subjected to. A sexual abuse presumes a physical and emotional abuse.

If the ill treatments are intertwining the more their *consequences coexist* which manifest simultaneously or consecutive on all the sides of the child’s personality inducing disorders which can manifest in a cognitive, emotional, moral and sexual plan. So, the physical, moral and sexual abuse can lead to retardation in intellectual development, emotional balance disorders and mental psychosomatic consequences.

Any type of abuse means profiting on the difference of power between an adult and a child, depreciation of the latter’s personality. Abuse means violence of the adult against the child, phenomenon that is present in today’s realities, closer or further from our homes, depending on not only our values but also on the traditions we follow in raising our children and our capacity to control our impulses.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Analyzing the moment of abuse

- Abuse: a new phenomenon or the perpetuation of a scourge of all times?

Violence and neglect have always existed; belong to all societies and all of social classes. Even though it is not a new phenomenon, abuse is a social phenomenon which has caught the attention only at the end of the XIX th century. The research has ignored the problem of ill treatments until the 60’s when a doctor from Chicago, Colorado, C. Henry Kempe, presented the results of studies regarding multiple fractures, visible with X rays of the abused children.

- How is the child viewed today...

The progress made approaching the abuse phenomenon has been quick due to the mobilization of different professional categories from the social, medical, judicial, scientists, journalists, etc. in an effort to understand the phenomenon. The media coverage of the phenomenon is sensitizing and attracts the attention of the population in regards to the ill treatments. Organizing resources (child protection centers, free phone numbers, intervention programmes for abusers, specialized magazines etc.) allows the dissemination of the information.

Today there is a new idea about the child, his value as an autonomous human being and the rights that are recognized (the International Convention of Children’s Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1989).

In societies characterized by a reduced demographic growth, the child is a rare presence, precious. Due to contraception the child is no longer a fatality, but a choice.

So, the juxtaposition of two phenomenon's can be seen:

- The higher consideration we have for children makes society condemn ill treatments;
- Excessive expectations which we have towards the child constitute a contemporary cause of the abuse.

So, abuse is not a new phenomenon, but our conception of it!

The factors which are at the origin of an abuse situation:

- material difficulties – insufficient resources, unsuitable living conditions, promiscuity which can accentuate the intolerance against the child;
- Isolation, uprooting – families that move create such a detrimental climate;
- Cultural poorness represents an obstacle in the face of verbal or emotional expression „hits replace words“;
- Difficult periods of time for parents, mourning, separation, disease, and depression based on pregnancy.

Specialists have „always been interested in the causes of violence. From the cases perspective with which they have dealt, three major categories have been detected:

- Causes which relate to **individual characteristics** – the personality and behavior of the aggressor or the victim,
- Causes that are not related to the **characteristics of the relationship** and
- Causes that are related to the environmental factors – such as **social characteristics**.

The specialized literature doesn't indicate a causal relationship between domestic violence and the existence of some *mental affliction in the aggressor*. Such an approach of an etiological explanation would justify violence by health factors. The situations in which such mental disorders are registered are exceptions and do not explain violent behaviors.

Alcohol consumption is frequently incriminated, in 85-90% of the cases. Nevertheless, a singular, univocally causal relation cannot be established between alcohol and violence, which comes to confirm theories according to which alcohol lowers inhibitions without causing violence directly.

The existence of *criminal acts* in the aggressor's history, especially when talking about acts of violence, grows the risk of continuing the violent behavior.

The presence of a *history of violence* in the victim's childhood and/or the aggressors. This causal element is identified in the specialized literature and highlighted by those specialists who use as an explanatory model of domestic violence the *theory of social learning*.

Social isolation intervenes as a conservation mechanism of control in a relationship, by maintaining the victim away from some influences that might show them the abnormality of violence.

Child abuse types

In DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1996), the abuse concept regroups three basic components: *physical abuse (or violence)*, *sexual abuse and neglect*. In physical abuse we add *emotional abuse* (psychological violence).

- *Violence and sexual abuse* refers to inadequate behaviors from some persons that are usually in a rapport of authority with the child. It is, usually, about adults, but it can be about teenagers. Abusers can be persons which are usually near the children (in relationship with them) or which have singular and accidental with the child (ex. an unknown rapist, a mugger etc.).

- *Neglect* refers to the omission of some necessary gestures for the good development of the child. These gestures are omitted by persons which care for the child.

From the *action period* point of view abuse is of two types:

- Crisis abuse – appears usually in families with a harmonious functioning but whose life cycle goes through adjustment moments which endanger the internal balance, tensions which are then reflected on the children.

- Trans-generational abuse – observed in families in which the way of life is chaotic, whose relationships are disorganized, and in which the deficiencies, abuse and confusion of roles is repeated among generations.

Child abuse

Physical abuse is expressed through different gestures applied to the child, intentionally, by another person, gestures that can range from excessive corporal punishments to extreme behaviors, which can endanger the child's life.

The deliberate abuse of the child deliberately by the adult that takes care of him, can cause lesions of different severities, and is defined as abuse.

Some authors include *acts of violence which have caused harm when committed but which presume, by repetition, a high probability of injury* (ex. Throwing at the child with different objects which might hurt him in case he gets hit; bodily punishments accepted from a cultural point of view – smacking the bottom, slaps – are with risk when frequent).

The idea of an extension of the definition is argued by the fact that the mental trauma is not produced just as a result of physical pain but as a consequence of threatening with violence, of its imminence. But, most of the laws judge behaviors not based on intent but on the actual committed acts. The professionals need differentiation criteria's between different types of abuse starting from the level of suffering produced in the child.

The degree of the abuse differs depending on the abuse suffered by the child. Serious types, dangerous for the child can appear in the educational violent types. There is a „legitimate” violence for the abuser, justified in his eyes, when it is linked to the correction of a type of behavior and „illegitimate” violence, unjustified.

Physical punishment are educational methods used to cause pain in the child: hand slapping or with objects, applied on any body part, placing the child on his knees, tying up, shaking, hitting him to the wall or some objects, pulling his ears or hair, dangerous actions such as burning and poisoning him.

Categories of children differentiated by the gravity of the abuse:

- *Children subjected to a minor physical abuse* (red skin, light lesions)

- *Children subjected to major physical abuse* (broken head, hands, ribs, burns etc.)

- *The children with risks* – unknown children population as a number or share, in respect to which we have knowledge of behaviors and situations that indicate the possibility of some ill treatments, but we do not have the certainty of them being committed in the present.

- *Category of children exploited through work* – is part of the physical abuse because it refers to the inclusion of children in activities which cross their physical resistance capacities. Also, can affect the mental balance of the child if are contrary to the specific concerns to his age, are degrading (begging) or impede professional or educational achievement.

Usual signs of physical abuse identified and signaled by doctors from the hospitals, *burns and contusions*. The contusions can appear from pinching, hitting, slamming the child. Burns can come from cigarettes. They can be produced also with the help of electrical heaters or the iron.

Fractures, internal bleeding are extremely grave consequences of physical abuse.

Physiological abuse

All forms of abuse and neglect have psychological components and consequences. Some forms of abuse have as an instrument the psychological side that is why psychological abuse has been proposed as a distinct form of ill treatments.

Garbarino and his contributors (1986) define psychological abuse against a child as being „**the attack of an adult against the development of self-consciousness and of social competence in the child**”.

Types of psychological abuse more frequent are those that the parents resort to as punishments:

- **Isolating** the child (tying, locking him in the closet, in the cellar etc.);
- **Intentional rejection** – consistent ignorance of the child’s needs and merits;
- **Terrorizing** (threatening him with the „boogey man”, leaving him on the streets, giving him to the gypsies, to the wolf etc.);
- **Ignoring the child’s needs**, when the adult holds from the child the essential stimuli for normal development, mental and cognitive stimuli (we include here also the intentional ignoring of the child, over a period of time, as punishment - „I won’t talk to you”, „you no longer exist for me” etc.);
- **Degradation of the child**, depriving him of dignity;
- Excessive demands which put the child in a fail situation;
- Exploitation, using him as a **servant**;
- **Child corruption**, by rewarding or teaching the child inadequate, antisocial, racist, immoral or criminal behaviors.

Emotional abuse has nothing to do with isolated rejection incidents which can be met in most families. Each parent can be irritated and distant towards the child sometimes. Emotional abuse implies a model of continuous and stable behavior towards the child, behavior which becomes a dominant trait of his life.

There are more categories of children found in emotional abuse risk situations. In practice, some situations aren’t different, but we will try to present them individually:

- Children are perceived in a negative way by their parents, sometimes from their birth. They are continuously exposed to different degrees of rejection. Are overlooked, ridiculed, rejected and seen as a source of problems for the parents. Children feel that something is not right with them, that they are „stupid, bad or crazy”. Also the „Cinderella syndrome” refers to the children that are exposed to the emotional abuse of the parents so as to the abuse of their siblings. They are associating themselves with the parents and define the sister or brother as „mean or impossible” and as someone that is guilty for everything that is bad in the family.

- Children terrorized by threats, abandonment or banishment.

Threats create a state of anxiety (a permanent and undefined apprehension).

Sometimes the professional use the label „parental rejection” and „emotional abuse” with the same meaning: „Parents that reject or subject their children to emotional abuse are often those that do not like, nor accept or are against children. The rejection is manifested in two significant ways – on the one hand through indifference and neglect, on the other hand”.

- Children that live with parents that are violent one against each other.

These children live in anxiety and often use their energy to take care of themselves and ironically even take care of their parents. The possibilities for these children to identify inside the family are limited, regarding the identification with the parent that abuses and identifying with the one that is abused.

Many years later identity problems can be observed of these children related to the

awareness of their own value and sexual identity.

- Children whose parents are alcohol, drugs and other substances abusers.
- Children whose parents are divorcing without being able to take care of the child.

Klonschi (1993) mentions four aspects related to separation and divorce which can be identified as emotional abuse:

1. The case when the child develops a chronic separation anxiety and a guilt sentiment because „he sided” with one of the parents;
2. The case when the child has been used in a conscious or unconscious way in helping one of the parents „function”, for example, sending messages, spying etc.; in such conditions the child will often develop psychosomatic and behavioral disorders;
3. The case of child abduction or illegal separation from his parents;
4. Cases in which parents are violent against each other in front of the child.

Sexual abuse

Although it contains indubitable elements of physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse represents a different category of ill treatments applied to the child.

Sexual abuse implies **sexual aggressions or sexual exploitation of the child from an adult’s side or from an older person.**

Sexual abuse contains: luring, convincing, using, corruption, forcing and constraining the minor in participating in sexual activities or assisting other persons during such activities which serve the obtainment of pleasure for an adult.

In other words, **sexual abuse** is forcing or pressing the child towards an adult person, in order to participate in sexual activities which serve for the pleasing of the adult.

- Are included in this category all forms of relationships and hetero and gay behaviors which involve an adult and a minor, between related persons or not, from touching with a sexual character to penetration realized by genital, oral or anal penetration.

- Even when sexual touching do not have a force component, when relations seem to have consent the sexual abuse notion is used to characterize sexual relationships between persons where there is a sensitive difference of psychological maturity.

- When the aggressor is the minor himself, the difference in age which means a superior level of maturity – from which we can talk about abusive types of relationships, is 5 years. This removes from the abuse category the sexual games between children, when minors of about the same age are involved or sexual experiments of teens.

Types of sexual abuse:

- Sexual harassment (with all his forms – verbal propositions, gestures and sexual type touching);

- Exhibitionist behavior in front of the child;

- Manipulating the child’s sexual organs or forcing the child to manipulate the sexual organs of the aggressor;

- Intrusion of some objects in the child’s sexual organs;

- Sexual penetration – orally, genitally or anally;

- Sexual exploitation – forcing the minor to prostitute or pornography for the usage (partially or totally) of the adult. **The risk of a sexual abuse** appears when there are elements that prove moral incest or intrafamiliar sexual incitement without physical gratification (inappropriate body searches, touching, parental erotic confidences etc.) or extra familiar sexual incitement without the sexual act.

CONCLUSIONS

Children can be sexually abused starting from tender ages. They are often seduced by

games into a sexual-abusive situation. The abuser establishes positive connections, with the parents and with the child. The child is stimulated or forced to engage in the abusive relationship. This is realized by rewards and/or threats.

Some traits of the sexually abused children are:

- Fear of contact with other children their age;
 - Isolation due to fear that someone „might notice” and see themselves as different from other children, „worse”, „villains”;
 - Low concentration capacity, weak school results;
 - Avoids gym classes where he needs to change clothes,
 - Serious sleep disorders (nightmares) phobias;
 - In the teen period the frequency of thoughts, threats and suicide attempts will increase;
 - Self-destructive behaviors may arise (ex. Drug abuse, prostitution);
- Sexual abuse is always associated with different types of abuse, described before.

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