

Psychiatric Aspects of Child Abuse in Egypt

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Child abuse with its subsequent hazards vary from culture to culture. In an attempt to understand its dimensions in Egypt, we explored this issue in primary school children. Two schools were selected, one of a very high social class and the other of very low social class. A questionnaire was constructed and self-reported, the essential topics studied were: parental respect of child's needs, degree of parental care or negligence, parental attitude towards child's behaviour, firm aggressive rules in the family, magnitude of family aggression, parental psychological disturbances and addiction, predisposing factors, abusing behaviour and the possibility of the child to be a future abuser. The total number of children was 1202; 718 from low class schools and 485 from high class school. All forms of abuse were reported at higher rate of occurrence in low social class than in high social class. The figures for physical abuse were 32.22% & 12.681, for sexual abuse 3.42% & 0.62% and for psychological abuse 5.72% & 1.77% respectively for low and high classes. Searching for etiological components of this problem, we observed that firm aggressive rules in family and general aggressive behaviour were over-represented in low than in high social class. Parents of high social class seem to respect their child's needs more than in low class and the reverse with parental care. Also, low class families tend to resort to physical punishment more than verbal; and the later was preferred by high social class. These tendencies were explained as - the rules & low class family authority /obedience rules, while in high class family, it is right /wrong orientation. Concerning precipitating factors; cruelty was over - represented in both classes; but more in low class families, followed by social economic home and work troubles in low class while marital problems in high class family.

In the light of our results, we discussed this problem as it exists in our Egyptian sample. Also, we discussed the possibility of intergenerational transmission and the future of these children as potential abusers.

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Introduction

Recently in last few years; great interest was directed to the problem of

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child abuse in Egypt, in a trial for community preventive approach. This issue is markedly related not only to psychiatric speciality, but to child casualties and intensive care units and the police; The first real problem to face is its definition. However, the most accepted one

is that considered by Shearer et al. (1990), who pointed to abuse of a child that: the child is being subjected to intensive and pervasive and continued demand from its parents. They added that the individuals in a child's environment related his or her development by hurting the child. Three forms of child maltreatment are generally described: physical, sexual and psychological or emotional types of abuse, with a growing awareness of its hazardous possibilities of impairment in psychological development and subsequently in psychiatric manifestation.

Actually, factors behind this problem with its implications and outcome is exactly the focus of interest to psychiatrists. In Egypt; epidemiological studies which contribute to the body of knowledge about its prevalence, associates and adverse influences are still lacking. So also, applications of sound evaluative management procedures for these poor children.

As this problem with its tremendous reflections on society vary from culture to culture. It's unsurprising to appreciate the rigorous researches done abroad, but a more reliance should be placed upon valid materials and observations interactive processes which contribute to the genesis of this problem, and therefore a radical and more practical preventive approach may be planned.

Subjects and Method

As rates derived from criminal or social service statistics are likely to give a gross under-estimate, so, in an attempt to overcome such distortion, a trial study was done on non-clinic population; primary school children. This sample is likely to give a more valid estimate. However, such estimate will be influenced by culture and selectivity.

A preliminary exploration was done on all children of 2 primary schools.

This selection was based so that one of them will represent a very high social class and the other a very low social class in order to facilitate studying this problem in different social classes and to try a critical analysis of child abuse topic in these two social strata. This may provide useful information on the prevalence and associate of the problem as it exists in school age children - away from those estimates delivered from psychiatric clinics, casualties, intensive care units or police which reflects only the serious cases, and therefore, under-estimation of the problem. The age ranged from 6y to 12y and both sexes are included.

To fulfill this issue, a questionnaire was constructed of 41 items - in Arabic language - focusing on various aspects of child abuse, especially with respect to type and etiology, the content of this questionnaire is so structured to fit Egyptian culture. 28 of the questions are answered by yes or no and the remaining number have graded answers: nothing, threatening, frightening, bearing and violent forms of punishments. Direct inquiry about abuse or any question related to history of abuse to parents themselves was avoided so as not to provoke any parental defences especially denial, uncooperation or anger.

The questionnaire was then classified into 9 topics; with overlap - each measuring certain aspect of child abuse:

- 1- Parental respect of child's needs.
- 2- Degree of parental care or negligence.
- 3- Parental attitude towards child's behaviour
- 4- Firm aggressive rules in the family
- 5- Magnitude of family aggression.
- 6- Parental psychological disturbances and addiction
- 7- Predisposing factors.
- 8- Abusing behaviour = physical, sexual and psychological

9- The possibility of the child to be a future abuser.

Instructions to parents were considered on the questionnaire. This is to overcome their denial, suspicion or reluctance. First to insure about the quality and importance of the research. Also, that this research is held with the permission of all authorities concerned with child's safety, education and family privacy. Parents were, also, asked to close envelopes and to avoid writing any personal data that may lead to identify, their personnel. Finally it was clearly insured that these informations are completely confidential.

Answers were collected. Incomplete answers were excluded, finally results were tabulated and statistically analysed.

Results

The number of complete answers were 1202; 485 for the high social class level. (80.56% of that school), and 718 for low social class level (82.04% of that school). We reported higher rates of occurrence of all type of abuse physical, sexual and psychological, in low social class for physical abuse, it was 32.17% & 12.58% for low and high classes respectively. However, questions referring to this topic is essentially addressed on prologed hospital admission, I.C.V admission and occidents, Although it refer to abuse; physical or negligence; yet, there is also a possibility to be due to pathological conditions as well. So, out figures cannot percisely indicate the actual rate of occurrence of physical abuse. However, there is always an element of psychological negligence at the background in so, these cases we consider it a rough estimate for physical abuse.

For sexual abuse; the rate of occurrence in both classes were 3.48% & 0.62% for low and high classes respectively. We think that sexual abuse appeared to be underestimated. The same

Table (1)

Distribution of the Sample of Both Lower and Higher Social Classes

	Total no. of children	Respondents no	Complete no.	Answers %
High Class (H. Cl)	874	785	718	82.04%
Low Class (L.Cl)	602	503	485	80.56%
Total	1476	1288	1203	81.44%

Table (2)

Distribution of the Child Abuse in Lower (L.Cl.) and Higher (H. Cl.) Social Classes

	L. Cl		H. Cl.	
	No.	%	No.	%
Physical Abuse	231	32.22	61	12.68
Sex. Abuse	25	3.42	3	0.62
Negligence	41	5.75	8	1.65

Table (3)

Distribution of the Rearing Attitude and Style in Both Lower and Higher Social Classes

	L. Cl		H. Cl.	
	No.	%	No.	%
Parental Respect.	589	82.03	460	94.84
Degree of Care	465	64.8	267	55.17
Firm Aggressive Rules.	346	48.19	154	31.72
Magnitude of Family Aggression.	271	37.74	105	21.56
Verbal Punishment	124	17.27	131	27.0
Physical Punishment	206	28.70	96	19.92

Table (4)
Distribution of Method of Abuse in Lower and Higher Classes

	L. Cl.		H. Cl.	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nothing	99	13.87	69	14.18
Threat	127	17.68	152	31.24
Fright	130	18.10	110	22.72
Beating	264	36.76	138	28.49
Violence	148	20.61	55	11.24

Table (5)
Distribution of Some Precipitating Factors Related to Child Abuse in Both Lower and Higher Social Classes

	L. Cl.		H. Cl.	
	No.	%	No.	%
Cruelty	231	32.17	61	12.58
Addiction+Psychiat Disorder	130	18.11	3	0.62
Marital Problems.	116	16.15	29	5.97
Home & Work Troubles.	142	19.78	26	5.36
Socio-economic Difficulties	196	27.29	14	2.89

with psychological abuse; where it seemed to be underreported and only severe cases are registered as 5.65% & 1.71% for low and high classes respectively.

Parental respect to child's needs is the concern of high social class more than in low class. Although, in general, there is good and warm relations within the family and a tendency to react as a unit, yet there is a minority in which parents do not respect their child's needs 17.97% & 5.16% for low and high classes respectively so also the degree of care.

Physical punishment procedures are resorted to in a relatively high rate in low class families than in high ones in which verbal punishment is the mode preferred. Also, the rules which governs home, are firm in 48.19% in low class relative to 31.75% in high class. This is reflected in the general aggressive behaviour at home, which was manifest in 37.74% in low class relative to 21.64% in high class families.

Searching for a precipitating factor, there was high representation of cruelty as a behaviour in low families than in high ones. However the second stressful precipitating factor, seems to be related to socio-economic difficulties in low class while it is related to marital, home and work troubles in high class.

Discussion

Accurate incidence or prevalence figures of abusive experience are hard to obtain, and even the figures depend on the definition used, the population studied and the primary source of information. Sexual abuse is often hidden within families. Physical abuse is under-reported except some severe and fatal cases, and emotional abuse is less easily detected so much so that the official statistics of child abuse do not provide a true measure of its full extent. In the present study, a trial was made in non-clinical population - school aged children- with no complaints related to such phenomenon. Our figures reflect a high prevalence of physical abuse in various degrees of severity with social class difference; being higher in low and high classes. For physical abuse, it was 32.17% and 12.58% in low and high classes respectively. However, at the back of many of these cases there was an element of psychological abuse. The extent of emotional neglect (alone) as to cause harm to the child was 5.71% in low class and 1.65% in high class. The reverse of what is expected, but this can be explained by environ-

mental stressors in life which amounted to 27.29% for financial difficulties and 18.11% for history of parental addition and psychiatric illnesses. Lastly sexual abuse is markedly under-reported; 3.48% and 0.62% for low and high classes respectively. This may be matched to the study done by Gil in 1965 and reported in 1970 & 1973 in U.S.A. after interviewing 1520 respondents. They reported that 15.9% of his sample - of all social classes - reported having come near to abusing their children and a small percentage 0.4% admitted having once injured their child; within this group there is a continuum of severity ranging from mild to life threatening abusive behaviour - which is the same as in our sample, in spite of being in a different culture. According to Nottingham study Newson and Newson (1976), three quarters of children lived with the reality of corporal punishment at home, about 22% of children 7 years old have received a beating at sometime, while further 53% have been threatened with but not actually received such punishment.

In a study done by Strauss, Gelles and Steinmetze (1980) which measured the incidence of child abuse, violence towards children and violence in family. They based the estimate of violence and abuse on self report made by national representative sample of 2143 individual family members; 58% of the sample had performed some act of violence towards their children during the year of the study, and 71% had done so at some time in the course of raising the child.

Sexual abuse is generally not notified and passed undetected. Philip Barker (1988), in a British study found that 10% of nationally representative sample of men and women reported that they had been sexually abused before the age of 16 years at various degrees from fondling child's breasts or genitalia to vaginal or anal intercourse. Also, in Muller et al,

(1988) study, the rate of children sexual abuse of females was about 9.9%. In U.S.A. figures it seems to be much higher; Finkelhor (1979) reported 19% of female, and 9% of male colleague students - who reported retrospectively that they had been sexually abused as children. However, Marzek et al (1981) screened professional group in U.K. obtained a low figure like ours- 3%, as having sexual abuse at some point in their lives. In the present study we reported 3.42% in low class and 0.62% in high class students to be sexually abused at a time. We consider this topic to be underestimated and accurate figures are difficult to obtain practically, the inquiry about sexual items was very difficult even in self-reported area. Also, there are variable degrees of cultural differences with its social and religious background. Li Mingyuan, 1990, in China after interviewing 158 women, found 27 of them having had histories of sexual experience during childhood.

Concerning emotional abuse; also data were underreported, so much so that we picked only severe case. However, we considered that emotional abuse is there at the back of any case of child abuse. Also, it is linked with other variables. We observed that parental child respect is the concern of high social class more than low class. This is expected as the educational and socio-economic standards are much higher in high class schools than in low class schools, but at the same time; the degree of care was found to be higher in low social class than in high social class - this may be due to the time spent by parents to care for their children, thus allowing a better degree of emotional communication than allowing other personal to handle their children. A point which was highly respected in the child welfare act of the Canadian province of Alberta (Government of Alberta); 1984, They used the term

emotional injury rather than abuse in its legal definitions. Also, Garbarino et al (1986) defined 5 forms of psychologically destructive behaviours: rejection, isolation, terrorizing, ignoring and corrupting behaviours. One or more of these pathological communicative behaviours is a subtype of psychological abuse.

We consider the fundamental causal factors in child abuse to be represented by clusters of interacting elements, which vary from such factors as personality of the parents and illnesses, and characteristics of the child or handicap if present - to such factors as social isolation, various life stresses or socio-economic status.

In the present study, cruelty of the parents in handling their children was represented by 32.17% & 12.58% for low and high classes respectively. Followed by marital problems with its hazards in high class while financial difficulties and home and work troubles in low class. These problems allow for continuous arguments at home or work, that is, it will be anxiety provoking, which will result in irritability, anger and aggression. This is to be faced by the requirements of their children, which will result in serious conflict allowing for the genesis of child abuse. Gil (1970) considered also, a multidimensional aspects of abuse to lie in inadequacy and poverty. Newberger et al (1977) believed that poor and minority families are more vulnerable to abuse their children, also, that the victims are more likely for accidents. Turret and O'tode (1980) added also that socio-economic factors affects even the severity of abuse. Strauss et al (1980) study reflected a higher occurrence of abuse in low class families, but also, observed that in middle class family there are other forms of stresses e.g. unemployment, geographic morbidity, lower level of parental education and inadequate crowding places to be responsible for child abuse.

In general, aggression forms the background of any case of child abuse. They question the etiological factors in child abuse to be related to the phenomenon of aggression which may be instinctive, adaptive, biologically or sociologically deference, to the extent that Cumming et al (1988) proposed on internal factors to contribute in learning aggression and not only the culture as a whole. We view that limited finances in low social classes to be added to firm aggressive rules within family. This means that the child is not going to understand why his requirements are not allowed or accepted, instead there is an aggressive behaviour; be it verbal or physical and he has to be without explanation - that is "authority - obedience" family rule. On the contrary, there is explanation to children of high class and a verbal mode of punishment, or "right - wrong" family rule, based on intellectual level, authority - obedience rule, harshness and higher degrees of aggression in the family together with a tendency for physical punishment may have a role in the genesis of child abuse, and also, intergenerational transmission of abuse.

This later, is an issue of considerable arguments. The individual who have experienced violent and abuse in childhood are more likely to grow up to become child or spouse abuser, than individuals who experienced little or no evidence in their childhood. Egland and Jacobvitz (1984) reported 70% intergenerational transmission of which 34% physical abuse, 30% border-line group (who administered daily or weakly spanking and did not cause bruises) and 6% for mothers whose children were being cared for by some one else. Kaufman and Zigler (1987) criticize the study as measuring intergenerational transmission, as it measures multiple determinants. They considered such a conclusion is difficult and they argued serious methodological

problems, They also estimated this rate to be only 30%.

Another important factor in the cycle of violence is the violent entertainment in the cinema and or T.V., which may also affect how adults and children approach issues of conflict. It fosters violent action. A high level of verbal violence behaviour between family members has been suggested as a risk factor for physical violence - Strauss et al (1980), The same author reported 90% of abusive parents were themselves severely physically abused by their parents or witnessed violence. In the present work, there was great methodological difficulties to assess any elements of maltreatment directed to parents of our children, but, we were able to expect from the general behaviour of those children, potential possibility to be an abuser in future. We reported 14.55% of children of low class and 8.47% of high class to be a possible abusers later on, in life. This point is also subjected to great controversy in between those who admit it - Youssef. El Eissa (1991) in a study in Saudi Arabia, question that if violence is the major mode of communication between parents and their children, the relationship may take one quality that maintains the violence and those who reject it. Altemier, et al (1986), who suggested the link between experiencing abuse during childhood and being reported to a child protective agency as an abuser is not clear. However, we consider that the environment with the stresses in which the child lives and that specific where it will print his personality traits. More-over, there may be a genetic load, which may allow for the genesis of abusive behaviour later on in life.

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L'aspect Psychiatrique de L'abus des Enfants en Egypte

L'auteur a exploré l'abus des enfants chez les élèves des écoles primaires. On a construit un questionnaire pour étudier essentiellement: Le respect des parents aux demandes de leurs enfants, le degré de soin ou de négligence, l'attitude des parents contre le comportement des enfants, les règles rigides et agressives dans la famille, le degré de l'agression de la famille, les troubles psychologiques chez les parents. Le nombre total des enfants était 1202. L'incidence de l'abus physical était 32.22% et 12, 681%, l'abus sexuel 3.42% 10.62%, et l'abus psychological 5.72% et 1.77% selon la classe sociale.

الجانب الطبى النفسى من إساءة معاملة الطفل فى مصر

يناقش هذا البحث مشكلة إساءة معاملة الطفل فى مصر، وقد تم إجراء مسح طبى نفسى اجتماعى لمدرستين فى مدينة القاهرة تمثل أحدهما الطبقة الإقتصادية الاجتماعية العليا، والأخرى من الطبقة الإقتصادية المنخفضة، وقد استخدمت قائمة أسئلة للإجابة الذاتية تم من خلالها استقصاء معلومات عن معاملة الوالدين وإحترامهم لإحتياجات الطفل، ومدى شدة القواعد داخل الأسرة أى خلل نفسى لدى الوالدين، وقد كان مجموع العينة ١٢٠٢ طفلاً منهم ٧١٨ من المدرسة منخفضة المستوى الاجتماعى الإقتصادى و ٤٨٥ من المدرسة مرتفعة المستوى، وتشير النتائج إلى وجود إساءة المعاملة الجسدية بنسبة ٣٢٪ و ١٢٪، والمعاملة الجنسية بنسبة ٣٪ و ١٪، والمعاملة النفسية بنسبة ٥٪ و ٢٪ فى المدرستين بالترتيب. ويناقش البحث الدلالات والعوامل المسببة لوجود مشكلة إساءة معاملة الطفل ويقدم توصيات بشأنها للعاملين فى هذا المجال والإلتجاهات المستقبلية.