Psychiatric Aspects of Child Abuse in Egypt

Samia Abdel Rahman and E.R. Nashed

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.


Introduction

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

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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 probabilities 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.

Subects and Method

As rates derived from criminal or social service statistics are likely to give a gross under-estimate, so, in an attempt to over - come 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 informations 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 themselfe 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 ensuring 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 analyzed.

Table (1)
Distribution of the Sample of Both Lower and Higher Social Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>Complete no.</th>
<th>Answers %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Class (H.C.)</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>82.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Class (L.C.)</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>83.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1476</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>81.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2)
Distribution of the Child Abuse in Lower (L.C.I.) and Higher (H. C.I.) Social Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L.C.I.</th>
<th>H.C.I.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex. Abuse</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligence</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (3)
Distribution of the Rearing Attitude and Style in Both Lower and Higher Social Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L.C.I.</th>
<th>H.C.I.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Respect</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Care</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm Aggressive Rules.</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude of Family Aggression</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Punishment</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Punishment</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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% & 12.38% for low and high classes respectively. However, questions referring to this topic is essentially addressed on prolonged hospital admission, I.C.V admission and accidents, 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 perfectly 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 (4)
Distribution of Method of Abuse in Lower and Higher Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Abuse</th>
<th>L. Cl. No.</th>
<th>L. Cl. %</th>
<th>H. Cl. No.</th>
<th>H. Cl. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>13.87</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>14.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>17.68</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>31.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fright</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>18.10</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beating</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>36.76</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>28.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>20.61</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precipitating Factor</th>
<th>L. Cl. No.</th>
<th>L. Cl. %</th>
<th>H. Cl. No.</th>
<th>H. Cl. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruelty</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>32.17</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction + Psych. Disorder</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>18.11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Problems.</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>16.15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; Work Troubles.</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>19.78</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic Difficulties</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>27.29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 complains 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. For psychological abuse, it seemed to be underestimated 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.
mental stressors in life which amounted to 27.29% for financial difficulties and 18.11% for history of parental addiction 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 handing 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.

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 by 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 causes bruises) and 6% for mothers whose children were being cared for by some one else. Kaufam and Zigler (1987) criticizes 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 Saudid 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 explore l'abus des enfants chez les eleves des ecoles primaires. On a construit un questionnaire pour etu-
dier essentiellement: Le respect des parents aux demandes de leurs enfants, le degré de soin ou de negligence, l'attitude des parents contre le comportement des enfants, les regles rigides et agressives dans la famille, le degré de l'agression de la famille, les troubles psychologicaux chez les parents. Le nombre total des enfants etait 1202. L'incidence de l'abus physical etait 32.22% et 12, 681%, l'abus sexual 3.42% 10.62%, et l'abus psychological 5.72% et 1.77% selon la classe sociale.
الجانب الطبي النفسي من إساءة معاملة الطفل في مصر

يناقش هذا البحث مشكلة إساءة معاملة الطفل في مصر، وقد تم إجراء مسح طبي نفسي اجتماعي لدرستين في مدينة القاهرة تمثل أهداف الطبقة الاقتصادية الاجتماعية العليا، والأخرى من الطبقة الاقتصادية الضعيفة. وقد استخدمت قائمة أسئلة للإجابة الذاتية ثم من خلالها استقصاء معلومات عن معاملة الوالدين وإحرازهم لإعتيادات الطفل ومدى شدة القراع داخل الأسرة أو خلل نفسي لدى الوالدين. وقد كان مجموع المجموعات 120 طفلًا منهم 718 من الدراسة منخفضة المستوى الاجتماعي و 48 من الدراسة متوسطة المستوى، وتظهر النتائج إلى وجود إساءة معاملة الجسدية بنسبة 22% و 12%، والمعاملة الجسدية بنسبة 6% و 2% في الدراستين بالترتيب.

ويتناول البحث الدلالات والمعاملة السيئة لوجود مشكلة إساءة معاملة الطفل وقدم توصيات بشأنها المطلوبة في هذا المجال والإيجابات المستقبلية.