

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND FAMILY, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS AMONG CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Child abuse is a social problem that affects children's life in the society. Although there is not a sophisticated statistic on this problem and its epidemic issue in Iran, its short and long-term effects have been shown in several studies. Thus, this research aimed at investigating the epidemic effect of child abuse and its relationship with other factors including family, logical and social factors.

**Materials and Methodology:** This study was a cross-sectional descriptive research that examines 592 children at the sixth grade of primary comes (i.e., 12 year-primary school students) who were selected based on clustering sampling at the girl and boy's primary schools. The research tools for data collection were the questionnaire of multi-section including the profiles of the children and their parents and the questionnaire of child abuse. Data were coded and analyzed through SPSS, version 19.

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Results: Findings showed that 41 percent of the students were abused. 99.3 percent of them were neglected or ignored. 83.6 percent of children were abused through affective (psychological) factors and 47.2 percent of children have experienced at least a case of physical (bold) abuse. 51.2 percent of the abused children were girls and the rest were boys. The highest rate of child abuse belonged to the parents (i.e., 23.9% from fathers and 18.2% from mothers). Child abused showed a direct correlation with gender ( $p=0.02$ ), divorce ( $p=0.05$ ), father's age ( $p=0.03$ ), mother's age ( $p=0.03$ ), number of children ( $p=0.04$ ), and the child rank of birth ( $p=0.05$ ). Moreover, there was negative correlation between the fathers' income ( $p=0.05$ ) and the mother's educational level ( $p=0.005$ ).

Conclusion: Results of the study showed that child abuse is seen in families, especially the parents frequently neglect and ignore the children. Thus, there is a need to protect the children through establishing strict rules and preventing programs. This requires training programs in the mass media to prevent the spread of child abuse in the society.

**Key words:** Affective factors, Child abuse, Physical factors, Negligence

## INTRODUCTION

A child is a bounty of the Allah given to the parents and he/she was shaped based on the parents' behaviors. Thus when there fresh creatures are abused by the parents, they were deprived of healthy life in future and their parents cannot have healthy adolescent and young boys and girls (Ghasemi, 2008). Since the earliest years of life are the most import period of children's life in forming any person's social behavior and training, the adults' behaviors can deeply affect their children's characteristics and habits (Kushan, 2002). Hiem and the Colleagues' (2000) research found that the earliest life stress causes a severe and permanent sensitivity of hypothalamus- Pituitary - Adrenal in children's life than the mild stresses during the rest of life (Hiem, 2000).

One of the maltreatment of adults found children is child abuse. This means children who are below 18 years old suffer from spiritual physical, sexual damage. They are abused by the parents or the adults who are responsible for their caring and hospitalizing (Widom, 2015; Miri, 2006). Child abuse is not a phenomenon belong to a specific area, it may be seen in any area with various cultural, social and economic characteristic. This problem has been seen in any society as a widespread issue (Madani, 2005). There are four million children under 15 years old who were

annually abused as 25 to 50 percent of these children were bodily bitten (Van derkooij, 2015). According to the latest census, there are two million cases annually reported on the child abuse in the US. This census can be seen in Germany with 15%, the UK with 13.6, and in the Netherlands with 4.9% in each one thousand children. The Association of protecting children Rights in Iran has reported more than 100 cases of child abuse in each year in Iran. Some of cases cause children's death and they have been reported to this Association (Miri, 2005).

As it has been mentioned above, child abuse could be resulted in social-affective, physical, sexual, and neglected abuses. Its physical forms can be seen in terms of maltreatment, injuries or body loss among children (Aliverdina, 2014). Physical punishment means to use physical force in order to make a sense of pain in children who need to be trained and controlled in a right manner (Gofin, 2004). Physical punishment is a kind of abuse in the family that affects the children rights and makes psychological effects on the children's behavior (Lopez, 2000). Unfortunately, this problem accepts as a widespread method in child training although there is much information on avoiding the physical punishment (Montes, 2001). Sexual abuse is the other form of child abuse through which the child is victimized by elders. Child sexual abuse includes asking the children to be raped, showing sexual parts to be shown for provoking the adults' erotic behaviors, raping or using naked children pornography (Jinna, 2017). Any activity which causes children negligent, blaming, isolating or punishment could be named as affective child abuse which targets the children's feelings. It can make stress and decrease the children's self-confidence. In any types of child abuse, the children experience physical, affective and sexual maltreatment that is against the children's rights. Negligence is the time when the parents or adults who are responsible for protecting the children ignore their responsibilities. The first rights of children including feeding, health care, shelter, having enough clothes, protecting against dangers, receiving parents' kindness, educating and training (Read, 2017).

Studies such as Kerr (2004) have shown that the appropriate and kind behaviors toward children with mild punishment are correlated to the decrease of children misbehavior. In opposite, the severe punishment is correlated with children's projection, misbehavior and aggression (Kerr, 2004). Mental disorder like depression, misbehavior, mental problems, criminal or anti-social behavior, double or multiple characteristics, aggressive behaviors towards family, self-harm, lack of speech or physical development, cognitive progression, low self-confidence, having negative idea about his/her and others (Sahbaei, 2006).

There are many issues causing the child abuse including family, social and psychological factors. For instance, in the families whose husbands bit the wives, the rate of child abuse is 1.5 more than other normal families. Therefore, family aggression could be one of the main factors in abusing children (Lemmey, 2001). In this respect, the factors like parents' educational level, family income, the number of children, birth rank, home location, parents' disease records, handicapped children in the family, race, drug or alcohol abused can affect the child abuse ( Sahbaei, 2006; Zargar,2006).

In conclusion, the findings of this research may help the medical and social practitioners who deal with children to recognize prevent this inappropriate phenomenon. Thus the present study is one the research priorities at the Abadan School of Medical Sciences. The aim of the research was to investigate various types of child abuse concerning family, social and mental factors at governmental and non-governmental primary schools in Abadan and Khoramshahr in 2017.

## **METHOD**

This research is a cross-sectional descriptive study that investigates various types of child abuse in terms of family, social and mental factors at primary schools of Abadan and Khuramshahr in 2017. The research sample included the girl and boy primary school students (i.e., 12 years old) in Abadan and Khoramshahr, Iran. Since there were 34 primary schools in these cities, the sampling method of clustering was used. Consequently, 10 schools were selected according to the statistics of child abuse in other studies (Sahbaei, 2006; Miri, 2006; Aliverdina, 2013). Thus totally 600 students were selected and with the permission of the ministry of education and their teachers. Then following the technical values, the participants, their parents and teachers were assured that all the results were confidential. The students answered the oral questions of the questionnaire and then the responses were recorded. The research instruments were Child abuse questionnaire, personal profiles (i.e., demographic information of students and their parents concerned with family, social and mental child abuse).

### **Instrumentation:**

1. Personal profile (sampling information)

This questionnaire gathered some information on the participant's related to their history of child abuse (Zargar, 2006; Torkashvand, 2013). These factors included children's age,

gender and parents' educational level, job, race, criminal history, the child's birth rank, the place of living, residential status, income, the family size, having handicapped family members, parents' addiction, divorce, healthy, etc.

## 2. Child abused Questionnaire

This questionnaire included three categories of affective-mental (10 items), physical situation (10 items), and negligence (or ignorance) section (6 items). Questionnaire scoring is based on 3-point Likert Scale including No (never), Yes (sometimes) and yes (always). According to Finkelhor (2005) and Zolotor (2009), if the children give positive answer at least to one of the items, they were included in one of the categories of abused children. Moreover, if they give positive answer to each item in all categories, they were totally included among the abused children. Therefore, the child may be categorized in one or the as partial inclusion or in all these categories totally. Then the abused children filled in the demographic questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire are met after the designing of the literature (HossienKhani, 2014). Revising of the earlier draft with clarity and its validity was estimated through Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The internal validity was calculated through internal clustering coefficient (ICC). The reliability index was calculated through test-retest with the interval of two weeks. The result of the average of reliability indices were the clarity as ( $r=80.36$ ) and relevancy as ( $r=92.5$ ) for the two questionnaires. The average indexes for ICC were estimated through Cronbach Alpha as ( $\alpha = 0.95$  and  $\alpha= 0.92$ ) for both questionnaires respectively.

Collected data were collected and calculated through SPSS, version 19. Descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage with the related tables and the inferential statistics including Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) and regression analyses were used to analyze data.

## RESULTS

In the present study, 592 participants among 600 children filled in the questionnaires. Their average of age was  $12 \pm 0.5$ . There were 254 abused children among the sample (41%). Results indicated: 51.2 percent were female and the rest (48.5%) were males. The majority of their fathers held free (non-governmental) jobs (57.1%). The rest of fathers were governmental employees. Majority of their mothers were homemakers (81.7%) and

the rest of mothers were governmental employees or had free non-governmental jobs. 48 percent of the abused children's fathers were educated and 52.9 percent of mothers held primary educational level. 22.2 percent of fathers and 15.5 percent of mothers held higher educational level. Two percent of the abused children experienced the parents' discovered status. 2.1 percent had stepmothers and 1.6 percent had stepfathers. 5.1 percent of abused children were imprisoned and 0.4 of these children had alcoholic fathers. Results showed that 2.4 percent of their fathers were addicted.

2.4 Percent of the abused children lived with mental related family members 3.5 percent of their mothers and 3.5 percent of fathers had experienced handicapped or physical problems. 1.6 percent of mothers had mental disorder. Finding showed that the most rate of abuse belong to their parents including fathers with 23.9 percent and mothers with 18.5 percent.

The positive response to each item in a category showed that the child was abused in that category. Therefore, 99.3 percent of those children involved in ignorance (or neglected) domain. 83.6 percent were in the affective-mental domain and 47.2 percent were included in the physical (or bodily) domain.

The relationship between the child abuse and family, social and mental elements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between child abused and gender, fathers' income, mothers' educational level, divorce, number of children and children's birth rank. Girls more than boys were subject to be abused. The low family income caused the worse situation of children to be abused by others. The mothers with low educated levels had more abused children. Moreover, the higher number of children and their birth rank affected the higher level of child abuse. The divorced families had more children with the high risk of child abuse. These children were neglected or ignored by their parents. Parents' age showed a significant relationship with child abuse. In other words, with the higher rate of the parent's age, the rate of child abuse went higher. However, the level of fathers' education, orphans, step-fathers or mothers showed no significant relationship with child abuse.

**Table1.** The relationship between the child abuse and family, social and mental elements

Elements	P-value
Gender	0.02
Residential area	0.29
Father's Income	0.05
Father's educational Level	0.88
Mother's educational Level	0.005
Orphane	1
Step-mother	0.68
Step-father	1
Divorce	0.05
Father's age	0.03
Mother's age	0.03
Number of children	0.04
Birth rank	0.05

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Children are one of the sensitive creatures among the human beings (Brown, 2015). Child abuse is one of the serious which has been overlooked (Stoltenberg, 2015). Recently, this phenomenon has been increasing in the world (Jud, 2016). The present study, investigates whether family, social and mental factors are significantly correlated.

Results showed that 41 percent of children were abused by others. This rate is more than other reports in the recent studies (e.g., Vize, 2008 ; Zargar, 2006). 99.3 percent of children were categorized in the domain of the negligence (or ignorance). 83.6 suffered from affective-mental abuse, and 47.2 percent have been experienced at least one physical (or bodily) abuse. Ignorance or negligence is a kind of behavior, which deprives children from their primary rights. This is estimated according to the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA).

Children's negligence was one of the most common issues in 2009. About 75 percent of child death rate belongs to negligence factor (Dobowitz, 2012). Negligence affects the children's lives

and they were ignored by their parents (Donohue, 2004). Living in busy areas of cities, parents' business, economic and social problems can affect the parents to be ignored or insensitive to the children. Donohue (2004) find out that 99.3 percent of child abuse belong to ignorance, 83.4 percent relate to affective domain and 47.2 percent relates to physical (or bodily) cases which are in live with the present study. Other studies showed some different results. Namdari (2003) studies 240 junior high school students and found that 91.6 percent were suffered from affective child abuse and 58.2 percent were affected by physical child abuse. In the other study, 70 percent of children were abused through affective issues (Zahrabi Moghaddam, 2012). Zargar (2006) studies 251 children in Isfahan, Iran and found that the frequency of affective abuse was significantly different from the categories ( $p < 0.05$ ). Saboory (2016) found that affective child abuse was 61 percent and it was more than other types of child abuse.

In the present study, there was a significant correlation between getting divorce and child abuse. This showed that children are very sensitive in the families who get divorce. This can cause the children to be neglected or abused by others (Oliver, 2006).

The results also showed that the girls more than boys were abused ( $p = 0.02$ ). This can be seen in our cultural and virtual beliefs in our research sample since the girls are in the second priority interns of education and training. These findings are matched with Saboory (2016) who believes that the girls are more abused. In our society there were a significant correlation between the child abuse and father's age ( $p = 0.03$ ), mothers' age ( $p = 0.03$ ), number of children ( $p = 0.04$ ) and birth rank ( $p = 0.05$ ). Social and economic problems make the couple to marry late and this makes them to have children when they are older than usual. Thus, they do not have enough patience and capacity to raise children. They also cannot comprehend their children since they have age distance with their children. Torkashvand (2013) also arrived at this result in a study on the 410 children in Zanjan, Iran. The other result refers to the number of children It was found that in the rate of child abuse is frequently seen in big families and the children with higher birth rank are victimized more than the children with less birth rank. Saboory (2016) found the same result that children with higher birth rank were abused more than other children. Namdari (2003) agrees with the results of the present study and notes that there is a meaningful relationship between children's birth rank and child abuse.

Fathers' income was negatively with the existence of child abuse. In other words, if the fathers receive higher income, there is the lower rate of child abuse. This is in line with Tavakoli et al

(2014) who state that there is a relationship between the fathers' income and their children abuses. The fathers' unemployment is one of the effective factors in the family aggression and child abuse (Oliver, 2006). The other researchers (e.g., Noroozy, 1993; Coohey, 2006) showed that the students with low income faced more instances of physical abuse, which is the severe effect of child abuse. The other findings showed that the mothers' educational level was correlated with the child abuse. In other words, the educated mothers do not act aggressively against their children. Since mothers are the first people who take care of their children, they can make a friendly and effective relationship with their children in the beginning period of their children. This result can be justified as the employed mothers have economical independent and engage in social activities, they have less time to get involved in abusing children. The high income of the mothers may cause less stress and make the children feel happy in their life. The findings showed that the unemployed mothers who were homemakers used more aggressive behaviors against their children. This is in line with Ghasemi (2008) who arrived at the same result. Addiction is the other factor that boosts the phenomenon of child abuse. In the present study, there was a meaningful relationship between the fathers' addiction and the frequency of child abuse. This is matched with the Saboory's (2016) study that found the fathers who used drugs or alcohol neglect their children four times more than they neglect the regular fathers. The children who lived in addicted situation are exposed to physical, sexual, and affective factors and they are often neglected since they are not supervised or controlled by their addicted parents. They were also suffering malnutrition due to their parents' lack of concentration and ignorance. Thus, the finding of this research are in line with other studies (e.g., Namdari, 2003; Appleyard, 2011; Saboory, 2016) who found a positive relationship between child abuse and the parents' drug addiction.

There should be noticed that present study faced some limitation including the focus of the research that included the factors related to child abuse with a small sample of abused children in the Iranian context. Between the children who are abused with the one who are not abused in terms of social, environmental, and family factors. The other future study could be conducted through screening on the children below 18 to decrease the effects of the child abuse. It is also suggested that the children with this problem should be referred to social consultants to be guided on how to deal with this problem. Their parents could participate in virtual or face-to-face classes

and learn how to behave children naturally and decrease the aspects of child abuse. They can also know the child abuse short and lantern effects on their children.

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