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CHILDREN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE I: PARENTAL USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was undertaken to reveal the prevalence of corporal punishment in Alexandria and its' correlates with family background and child's behavior and characteristics.

Methods: A cross sectional survey targeting preparatory and secondary school children was conducted. The multistage random sample technique was adopted to select a representative sample of this population. Subjects were requested to complete a self-administered questionnaire to collect relevant information. Data were analyzed using the univariate and multivariate analyses.

Results: This study revealed that more than one-third (37.47%) of children were disciplined physically in the form of beating and a few were also burned or tied. In 25.83% of them, this harsh discipline led to physical injuries of variable degrees of severity amounting to fractures, loss of consciousness, and permanent disability. Predictive family background for the use of corporal punishment were: living in an apartment shared with strangers; high crowding index; constant fights and quarrels between family members; lack of regular relation with relatives and acquaintance as well as an income insufficient to meet the family basic needs. Predictive child's characteristics and behavior included young age; disobedience; telling lies; destroying others' belongings; acting disrespectfully to parents; communicating poorly with their parents; running away from home; and poor school achievement, in addition to other determinants.

Conclusion: A proportion of children are subjected to extreme physical brutality amounting to abuse in a disciplinary context. Parents' education and the establishment of effective parent-child communication are deemed essential to combat this phenomenon. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd

Key Words—Corporal punishment, Prevalence, Child behavior, Family background, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINARY METHODS include rewards to reinforce good behaviors and punishment for unacceptable ones. Verbal disapproval, an unhappy look, ignoring a particular behavior for extinction, and the temporary removal of a privilege are all means of punishment for

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a misbehavior (Leung, Robson, & Lim, 1992). Although rewards are more effective (Leung, Robson, & Lim, 1992) punitive child rearing practices, both verbal and physical still exist (Hemenway, Solnick, & Carter, 1994).

Corporal punishment is widely practiced (Wissow & Roter, 1994). In Santiago, Chile, three-fourths of parents tacitly admitted hitting their children (Vargas, Lopez, Perez, Toro, Zuniga, & Ciocca, 1993). This disciplinary mean is not peculiar to developing countries. In the United States of America, over 90% of toddlers are spanked or subjected to other forms of corporal punishment, and almost half the adults recall receiving corporal punishment as children (Straus & Kantor 1994). Even in Switzerland, a socially privileged country, over a third of parents use corporal punishment on their children (Tonella & Zuppinger, 1994).

There is no available literature addressing the extent of use of corporal punishment in the Egyptian society. In a culture like ours that values child's obedience and power assertive discipline, corporal punishment does not seem uncommon. The use of physical punishment is governed by the learned parenting style (Leih Mak, Chung, & Liu, 1983; Muller, Hunter, & Stollak, 1995; Webster-Stralton, 1985) and the beliefs in its positive disciplinary effects (Corral-Verdugo, Frias-Armenta, Romero, & Munzo, 1995; Socolar & Stein, 1995). Moreover, it appears to be related to family background (Wolfner & Gelles, 1993), social environment (Kahn & Fua, 1995; Sumba & Bwibo, 1993), economic status (Kahn & Fua, 1995; McLoyd, 1990; Wolfner & Gelles, 1993), as well as the child's characteristics and behavior (Cherian, 1994; Engfer & Schneewind, 1982; Herrenkhol, Herrenkhol, & Egolf, 1983; Smith, 1984; Vargas, Lopez, Perez, Toro, Zuniga, & Ciocca, 1993).

This study was undertaken to reveal the prevalence of corporal punishment in Alexandria as a means of child discipline, and its correlates with family background as well as a child's characteristics and behavior.

METHODS

Study Design and Sampling Technique

A cross sectional survey was carried out targeting preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) school pupils enrolled in governmental schools in Alexandria.

In the present study, the seven educational zones were represented. The multistage random sample technique was adopted to select two schools, one preparatory and another secondary from each educational zone yielding a total of 14 schools. The total number of pupils to be selected was estimated using the following equation: $n = (Z^2 * p * q) / D^2$ (Kish, 1965).

Since the actual prevalence of the condition under study is unknown, the probability of its occurrence was estimated to be equal to that of its nonoccurrence ($p = q = .50$) and a value of .02 was chosen as the acceptable limit of precision (D). Based on these assumptions, the sample size was estimated to be 2,401 pupils.

Prior communication with the local directorate of education revealed that, in preparatory and secondary schools, the number of pupils varied between 45 and 65, with an average of 55 pupils per class. To reach the desired sample size, a total of 43.65 classes needed to be selected. This number was rounded to the nearest figure to be divided by the chosen number of schools ($n = 14$). Therefore, from each school three classes were randomly selected, one of each grade, to allow the representation of all age groups. Due to the variability in the number of pupils per class and the high rate of absenteeism encountered in some schools, a sample of 2,170 pupils was reached.

Data Collection

School principals arranged for the investigator to spend 45 minutes in each class. Pupils were oriented about the purpose of the study, encouraged to participate, and motivated to express facts

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