

Child maltreatment in two generations of families

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ESSOP annual conference

Kusadasi, Turkey, 13 – 17 October 2010

Introduction

How to punish children: this issue became an up-to-date and frequent topic of public interest and discussions in our country

It was brought up by several school-site events and ever-more frequent surfacing cases of domestic violence on children. We are probing for causes and effects.

The specialist reason and give answers often only on the general level. Empirical data is scarce and those existing unfortunately only draw little interest.

What if the data could bring unexpected results?
Experiences and opinions are varied.

The study ELSPAC (European Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood) monitored in the framework of personal history questioning in the first generation of its participants – parents of the studied children – if and how they were punished in their childhood

The responses allowed the comparison of:

- 1 – how the participants, who were punished in their childhood in such way that it can be classified as maltreatment of abuse, were different – themselves, their parents and original families – from those who were not maltreated
- 2 – in which aspects their own families differed, families into which their longitudinally studied children were born

This contribution aims to demonstrate on empirical data obtained from fathers which circumstances represent in the common family population a higher risk that children will be maltreated there and how these risk circumstances are spread in our families

Study sample and methods

The data was collected from families, where the mothers had permanent residence in Brno and their child was supposed to be born between March 1st, 1991 and June 30th, 1992

In the Brno part of ELSPAC study we obtain the data from:

- a) Prenatal questionnaires to the future fathers of monitored children, filled out in the half of pregnancy of the mothers. Because the prevalence of maltreatment is higher in males, the male part of study sample was used for analyses (questionnaire P3)
- b) Questionnaire for the fathers when the age of their children was 18 months (PN 18/3) and 3 years (T 3)

Statistical methods which were used:

Analysis of variance (F – test), chi-square tests and relative risks (RR – risk ratios).

Which items were crucial for inclusion in individual monitored groups?

a) Have you ever been beaten by a belt, stick or something similar?

1 - often, 2 - sometime, 3 - never

b) Have you ever been locked in a room as a punishment?

1 - often, 2 - sometime, 3 - never

c) Has anyone ever threaten you as follows: „If you do/don‘t do it, I will send you away, sell you etc“?

1 - often, 2 - sometime, 3 - never

„Common parental educative slaps“ are not included.

Results 1

From 3580 fathers 42,1 % responded negatively to all three items. These were considered non-maltreated (control sample), the remaining 57,9 % constituted the group of men in some way maltreated in childhood.

It is manifested that all of the maltreated men experienced a harsher physical punishment; in addition - locked-up in isolation was one eighth and psychologically abused (by threats and intimidation) another one quarter of them.

Results 2

From a large number of analyses only those that yielded statistically significant differences are selected:

- The group of maltreated men states the following from their childhood:
 - Impaired health in both parents and impaired educational capabilities
 - The relationships between parents are more often classified as coarse to hostile, without love, respect, with frequent collisions and divorces
 - Five times more often the parents of mistreated men are classified as physically brute
 - Three times more often as psychologically cruel

Results 3:

Much closer association to maltreatment of boys was manifested in parents' health impairment, deterioration of mutual partner relationship and family cohesion:

- Mothers with impaired health had 38 % more maltreated boys ($p < 0,000$)
- Mothers with impaired capacity to educate their boys had 48 % more maltreated boys ($p < 0,003$)
- Fathers with impaired health had 57 % more maltreated boys ($p < 0,000$)
- Fathers with impaired capacity to educate their boys had 48 % more maltreated boys ($p < 0,001$)

Results 4:

Mutual relationships between parents of our respondents:

- coarse – by 48 % more often in families of maltreated boys (p < 0,000)
- detached – by 27 % more often in families of maltreated boys (p < 0,002)
- parents afraid of each other - by 32 % more often in families of maltreated boys (p < 0,016)

Results 5:

- parents of maltreated boys: *had severe conflicts* 1,57 times more often ($p < 0,000$)
separated 1,33 times more often ($p < 0,002$)
divorced 1,24 times more often ($p < 0,000$) than the parents from the control group
- maltreated males described their parents as physically brute to each other 5,05 times more than control ($p < 0,000$)
- maltreated males described their parents as emotionally cruel to each other 3,29 times more than control ($p < 0,000$)

Results 6:

- Participants who were maltreated in **childhood**:
 - Were born with average birth-weight, however when compared with control their gestation age was shorter ($p < 0,038$)
 - In childhood suffered higher number of infectious diseases ($p < 0,000$)
 - Underwent a higher number of operations/surgeries ($p < 0,002$)
 - As well as accidents ($p < 0,000$)
 - Serious illnesses and severe accident injuries happened to them with 30 % higher rate than to those who were not maltreated in childhood (both cases $p < 0,001$)
 - 57 % more had a physical defect compared to those not maltreated ($p < 0,019$)
 - Therefore they required more often rehabilitation ($p < 0,029$)
 - With 70 % higher rate they required psychological and psychiatric care ($p < 0,000$)

Results 7:

- In adulthood, the maltreated men had the following:
 - More accidents, stress, psychological distress
 - Problems at work, lower income, conflicts with the law, higher alcohol consumption
 - Higher occurrence of quarrells with friends as well as their wives

Results 8:

- These women themselves state in their questionnaires that the men maltreat them physically and psychologically and that they treat their children that way as well

Conclusions:

Children of participants maltreated in childhood more often „got on their nerves“, they resented their crying and moaning so much that they wanted to hit them and the best way of disciplining a child they consider a slap

- This starts another phase of inter-generation maltreatment of children

Thank you for your attention!

*This contribution was supported by the IGA MHCR grant no.
NS 9668-3/2009*

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