

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABUSE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD'S PERSONALITY

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**Abstract:** The reaction and structuring of the personality of a child, who grows up in a violent surrounding is not even for all individuals. There is the child's feeling of resilience that interferes, feeling that makes some of them stronger, luckier, able to cope with the destructive force of domestic violence and to get away with less traumas. However, this is a chance that only some children have and based on it the harmful effect of the domestic violence on the new generations' development cannot be neglected.

The current study highlights the main aspects of the problems children are facing in case of abuse, as well as the psychological and physical consequences that emerge from the negative experiences caused by the forms of abuse that they have experienced.

**Key words:** physical abuse, emotional abuse (psychological), mistreatment, neglect.

## Introduction

*“Without a doubt, family, as first background of the child has a tremendous influence on his/her evolution. Every family's history, with its own specific problems, that give it a special note in relation to the others, substantially contributes to forming the child's personality profile, this candidate to humanity”,* according to Pieron's admirable definition (Iancu, S., 2000, p. 23).

From this perspective, the intrafamilial violence is denounced as being an effect of propagation and maintenance of patriarchal ideology, according to which the one who has the power has absolute right over the others, a right imposed and maintained through violence. According to Gelles and Straus (1980, apud Muntean, A., 2000) it is more probable that a person might be hit or killed within

her / his own family, by a family member, rather than anywhere else, by anyone else.

The research regarding the effects of family violence on the child's life quality have been presented in a study conducted by Hetherington, who established a hierarchy of the suffering degree and bad consequences of family's life quality on the child's evolution. The study revealed the following significant aspects: the most intense suffering that has the most severe repercussions is caused by the maternal single parent family in which the conflicts continue, after the separation; children who live in families that are apparently organized, united, but have numerous conflicts, suffer intensely; children who live in a maternal single parent family with no conflicts, have a better situation; the best situation is the one of the children who live with both parents, and have no conflicts (Muntean, A., 2001).

The abuse of the child is a complex phenomenon which durably affects the individual evolution: on a long term, the abuse weakens the teenager, consequently the adult, generating dysfunctional feelings, behaviors, and ways of thinking or interpersonal relationships in everyday life. Placed in the area that Anthony Giddens used to call "the unseen face of the family", in his sociology treaty (2000, p. 175), the abuse of the child generates essential modifications which the younger the child is, the more severe they are and it lasts over a longer period of time. The worst case scenario is when the young adults with such history have their own family and the events repeat, in the same way, with their own children. (Marcelli, Braconnier, 2006, p. 514).

In the published literature, there is an usual differentiation between four types of mistreatment: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglected children (Killen, 1998):

The physical abuse involves the use of physical force against the child and hard work which exceeds the child's potential, hence resulting in harming his / her body integrity. This includes punishments such as: kneeling the child, tying the child, hitting, harming, poisoning, intoxicating or intentionally burning the child, exploiting his / her work (economic abuse).

The emotional (psychological) abuse is an inadequate behavior of the adult against the child, with negative effects on the child's developing personality. The rejection, the obligatory isolation, the terrorization, the ignorance, the corruption, and the exploitation of the child represent forms of this type of abuse (Enache, 2011).

The sexual abuse consists of exposing the child to watching pornographic materials, seduction (harassment, touching and promises) or involving the child in genital, oral or anal sexual acts.

Neglecting is the inability or the refuse of the adult to adequately communicate with the child, to satisfy the child's emotional, biological needs, and those of physiological and physical development, as well as reducing the child's

access to education. Neglecting the child jeopardizes his / her normal evolution – the bio-psycho-socio-cultural evolution.

The child's personality structuring will bear the effects of the abuse and will be marked by a reserved attitude against social networking, by the feeling of stigmatization and negative self-image.

The untreated and undiscovered abuse produces serious changes in the structure of a child's personality, major effects in time that can be encountered in the adult's behavior with difficulties of social adjusting and integration (Enache 2016).

The mistreated children go through life experiences that limit in different degrees the satisfaction of their needs.

Children's reactions towards such situations strongly vary depending on (Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999, p. 109): the type of mistreatment they are exposed to; their age; their ability to understand reality; the help they receive from the adults close to them; the characteristics of the traumatic events (chronic violence will probably generate more serious effects, compared to the isolated violent acts); their personality characteristics, that partially depend on their natural qualities, their vulnerability or, on the contrary, on their ability to cope with stress.

The mistreatment generates a series of changes in the child's personality structure, such as: the aggressive self-behavior; alcohol or drug addiction; suicide attempts; self-mutilation; aggressiveness towards the others; violent acts; unjustified aggressive language.

Emotional disorders: impulsivity and aggressiveness; social isolation; depression; self-doubt and distrusting others; psycho-emotional mobility; feelings of inadequacy; anxiety; blaming; adjusting disorders.

Social integration and networking: professional difficulties; inability of being in a stable relationship; repeated abusive behavior (trans-generational transmission); somatic disorders.

### **The purpose of the thesis/study**

The main objective of this study is to identify the child abuse.

### **Research methods**

The current study was conducted by administrating our own research instrument. The questionnaire for the children had 18 questions with closed answers – which refer to customs and attitudes related to child abuse. It includes the personal identification data of the subject (the initials of his / her name and surname, sex, age and environmental origin).

The type of child abuse identification questionnaire is composed of three scales – physical abuse, psycho-emotional abuse and negligence. There are 6 questions about physical abuse, 6 questions about psychological-emotional abuse

and 6 questions about negligence. The total score refers to the abuse level perceived by the child. The chosen answering method for this questionnaire: answers that indicate the frequency: *very rare, rarely, sometimes, often, very often*. We used the Likert scale, from 1 to 5.

### 1. Sampling

The sample of participants was composed by a representative number, from the perspective of the main characteristics of the target group – 60 abused children.

The sample has been structured homogeneously, on categories of age (12-14 years old: 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students), sex and environmental origin (urban and rural).

### 2. Working premise

Hypothesis: it is presumed that physical abuse is more frequent on boys, rather than on girls.

### 3. Data analysis

The questionnaire for the 60 participant students reveals that they are all victims of family abuse, more or less, as follows:

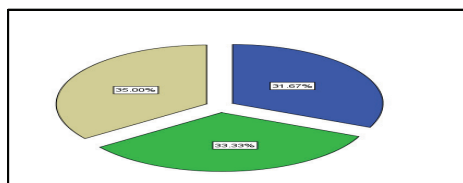


Figure 1 – The Graphic Distribution of the Predominant Type of Abuse

Depending on the predominant type of abuse, 35% of the questioned children are victims of negligence, 33% are victims of psycho-emotional abuse and 31.67% are victims of physical abuse.

As far as the predominant type of abuse depending on the subjects' age is concerned, we notice (Figure 2) that the 14 years old subjects are victims of physical abuse and negligence, the 13 years old subjects are victims of psycho-emotional abuse, and the 12 years old subjects are less affected by the predominant types of abuse.

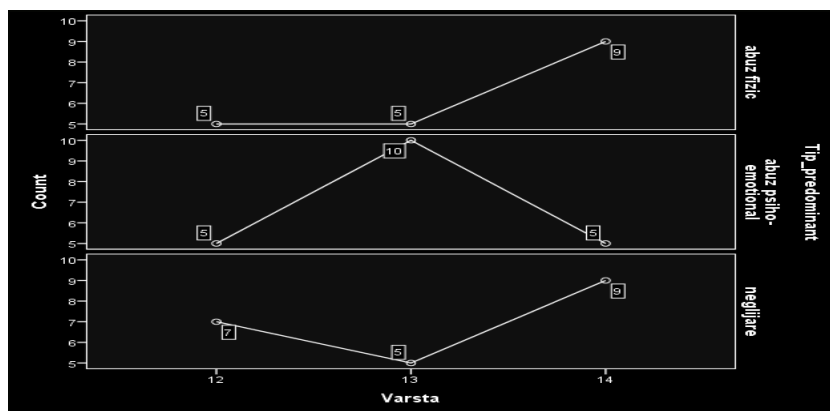


Figure 2 – The Linear Graphic between Participants' Age and the Predominant Type of Abuse

## Results and discussions

By verifying the hypothesis, the following results were obtained:

**Table 1 – The Distribution of Participants According to Sex the Predominant Type of Abuse**

Sex * Predominant Type					
		Predominant Type			Total
		Physical abuse	Psycho-emotional abuse	Negligence	
Sex	Masculine	16.7%	18.3%	11.7%	46.7%
	Feminine	15.0%	15.0%	23.3%	53.3%
Total		31.7%	33.3%	35.0%	100.0%

We notice that according to the predominant type of abuse, 16.7% of boys are physically abused, 18.3% of boys are psycho-emotionally abused and 11.7% of boys are neglected. In total, 46.7% of children, boys and girls, are affected by the previous stated types of abuse.

For girls, 15% are physically abused, 15% are psycho-emotionally abused and 23.3% are neglected by their parents. A total of 53.3% of abused children are girls.

The physical abuse consists of violent methods used by parents against their children. According to the questionnaire, these methods are: beating the child, throwing objects at the child, burning the child with different objects.

Children that are exposed to violence can have low self-esteem, low cognitive and school performance. These school difficulties that can be easily

diagnosed, could be a result of the child who is distracted by thinking of a trauma, which makes impossible focusing at school, developing a problematic cognitive style as far as memory is concerned or fatigue due to sleepless nights.

A child that is beaten by his parents is an abused child, even though the parent stated he / she had tried to correct a negative behavior of the child. Discipline can be achieved by using different ways which do not involve suffering by any means.

In identifying child physical abuse, the following aspects will be taken into consideration: identifying the wound, child's age, the explanation about the way the child has been hurt, the presence of other violence marks on the child's body.

In Figure 3, we notice that 10 boys and 9 girls are physically abused, hence the hypotheses according to which *physical abuse is more frequent on boys, rather than on girls*, is confirmed.

The physical abuse affects the psychological development of the child, it negatively influences his / her behavior and personality, but these consequences remain unknown for the parents or perhaps, unfortunately, they refuse to care about them.

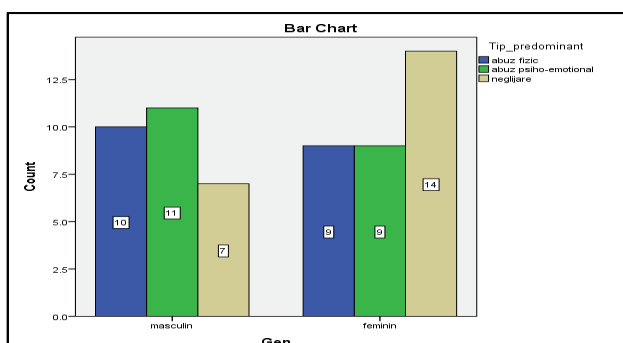


Figure 3 - the Graphic Distribution According to Sex and the Predominant Type of Abuse

### Conclusions.

The study aimed to highlight the significant aspects related to child abuse and its influences on children and the evolution of their personalities.

The neglected and abused children mainly come from separated families, reorganized (usually illegitimately – concubines) or single parent families, as well as numerous families or low social status families: low level of education, poor or lack of qualification, occasional or no job, low or no income. The minors' sex seems to be the relevant variable in exposing them to child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect will continue to exist as long as Romanian Government does not realize that these phenomena are growing more and more.

The results of this study is suitable to following replicas and additional investigations, while offering, on the other hand, many research possibilities.

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