

# Impact of selected socio-demographic characteristics in adult parents on the frequency of child abuse cases

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Received: 2012.01.16 • Accepted: 2012.03.01 • Published: 2012.03.27

## Summary:

**Introduction:** The authors are conscious and concerned of the issue of domestic violence and decided to define the frequency of child abuse by adult parents.

**Materials and Methods:** The survey included 285 parents aged 21-72 years, who were individually interviewed on the matter of ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessively criticizing and blaming their own children. The following socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were considered: sex, age, education level, age of their children.

**Results and Conclusions:** It was proved that 51.6% of the subjects surveyed habitually ridiculed, embarrassed, humiliated, excessively criticized and blamed their own children; every tenth subject admitted to frequent or very frequent employing those means of abuse towards own children. Male subjects statistically significantly more frequently claimed to have employed abusing own children than female subjects. All subjects under 65 years of age employed child abuse towards own children on very similar levels when compared to subjects over 65 years of age, who statistically significantly more frequently employed ridicule, embarrassment, humiliation, excessive criticism and upbraiding towards own children. The level of education of the study subjects was not a significant factor in using abuse towards own children with the exception of cases of basic, basic vocational and vocational education. The age of an abused child was not a statistically significant factor of child abuse frequency.

**Key words:** survey – individual interview, child abuse, impact of selected socio-demographic characteristics.

## Introduction

Child abuse has become one of the most important issues of modern society. It is assumed that about three hundred million cases of child abuse occur every year around the world. Among various forms of child abuse, four main types are distinguished: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and child sexual abuse [1].

In the present report, the authors deal with psychological abuse, which is exposing a child to behaviors that may result in severe psychological traumas, along with chronic depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in extreme cases. Psychological abuse means causing psychological pain and suffering by employing excessive control and restriction of child's contacts with its peers,

friends or acquaintances, forced isolation, bondage, intimidation, threats and emotional blackmail. Also such repetitive behaviors as ridicule, excessive criticism, humiliation, refusing hugs and loving gestures, denying emotional responsiveness, name-calling, yelling or swearing at the child, degradation, embarrassment and persuasion of mental illness which aim to corrupt or diminish the child's self-esteem are pronounced to be symptoms of psychological abuse. One of the types of child abuse is sexual child abuse which is most generally described as engaging a child into sexual activities. The other type of child abuse is neglect. Severe neglect or lack of care could seriously endanger child's health or even life. Neglect may include failure to fulfill basic physiological or psychological needs of a child: failure to provide appropriate clothing, malnourishment, denying required health care, lack of attention to schooling, failure to provide the feeling of parents' love and safety which cause health problems and/or developmental difficulties. Abuse could also be economic which means withholding money or controlling all money and the direct victims are usually adults but children could suffer greatly as a result of it [2,3,4,5,6,7]. Moreover, one of the problems, mainly in the least developed countries, is forcing children to labor. Recently, there have been more reports on more "subtle" types of child abuse such as prenatal abuse and institutional abuse. The authors are conscious and concerned of the issue of domestic violence and thus decided to define the frequency of child abuse among adult parents considering the following socio-demographic characteristics: sex, age, education level, age of own children.

## Materials and Methods

The survey included randomly chosen parents residing in the following Polish boroughs: Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Jarosław, Żyrardów, as well as cities: Łódź and Kraków (Tables 1,2,3,4).

**Methods:** qualitative research by means of individual interview

**Number of subjects:** 285

**Age of subjects:** 21-72 years

**Duration of research:** October 2010–February 2011

### Statistic analysis

All data were analyzed using Statistical Analysis System 6.0. Differences between analyzed groups

of subjects are on the significance level of  $p < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $p < 0.001$  (chi-squared test) <sup>2</sup>.

## Results

Among 285 study subjects, 147 (51.6%) habitually ridiculed, embarrassed, humiliated, excessively criticized and blamed their own children, 115 (40.3%) subjects surveyed claimed to have done it frequently, and 7 (2.5%) very frequently. The correlation between the above mentioned types of child abuse and selected socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, age, education level, age of own children, was presented in Tables 1,2,3,4,5.

**Table 1:** Frequency of child abuse cases depending on the sex of the parent.

Sex	number/% of subjects surveyed	number/% of subjects surveyed who claimed to have abused their own children
Males	123/43.2	104/84.6 <sup>5</sup>
Females	162/66.8	43/26.5 <sup>6</sup>

#5# to #6# :  $p < 0.001$

**Table 2:** Frequency of child abuse cases depending on the age of the parent frequency of child abuse cases against age of parents.

age range	number/% of subjects surveyed	number/% of subjects surveyed who claimed to have abused their own children
from 25 years of age	40/14.0	18/45.0 <sup>1</sup>
26 - 35 years of age	60/21.0	28/46.7 <sup>1</sup>
36 - 45 years of age	60/21.0	28/46.7 <sup>1</sup>
46 - 55 years of age	63/22.1	31/49.2 <sup>1</sup>
56 - 65 years of age	32/11.2	18/56.3
above 65 years of age	30/10.5	24/80.0 <sup>2</sup>

#1# to #2# :  $p < 0.05$

The data in Table 1 show that male study subjects employed ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children more frequently than female subjects. Those kinds of child abuse were employed by 104 male study subjects, which constitutes as much as 84.6% of all male subjects surveyed and by 43 female study subjects, which makes 26.5% of all

female subjects surveyed. The differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

The data presented in Table 2 show that parents under the age of 65 years employed child abuse with a similar frequency. Parents above the age of 65 years employed such kinds of child abuse as ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children, statistically significantly more frequently.

The data presented in Table 3 show that the education level of parents did not have any significant impact on the frequency of cases of abusing own children. Basic, basic vocational and vocational education levels were an exception. Study subjects with basic, basic vocational and vocational education level statistically significantly more frequently employed ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children.

The data presented in Table 4 show that the age of children did not have any significant impact

**Table 3:** Frequency of child abuse cases depending on the education level of the parent.

education level	number/% of subjects surveyed	number/% of subjects surveyed who claimed to have abused their own children
Basic	40/14.0	27/67.5 <sup>2</sup>
Basic vocational	37/13.0	26/70.3 <sup>2</sup>
Vocational	35/12.3	26/74.3 <sup>2</sup>
General secondary	45/15.8	17/37.8 <sup>1</sup>
Post-secondary	59/20.7	22/37.3 <sup>1</sup>
Bachelors	39/13.7	20/51.3
Masters	30/10.5	9/30.0 <sup>1</sup>

#1# to #2# :  $p < 0.05$

**Table 4:** Frequency of child abuse cases depending on the age of own children.

age of own child	number/% of subjects surveyed	number/% of subjects surveyed who claimed to have abused their own children
from 3 years of age	30/10.5	13/43.3
4 - 6 years of age	42/14.7	20/47.7
7 - 12 years of age	40/14.0	27/67.5
13 - 15 years of age	42/14.7	29/66.7
16 - 18 years of age	46/16.1	23/60.0
19 - 26 years of age	40/14.0	17/42.5
above 26 years of age	45/15.8	19/42.2

on the frequency of cases of abusing them by subjects surveyed.

The data presented in Table 5 prove that the sex of the study subjects was significant in rare cases of abusing own children. Male subjects statistically significantly more frequently than female subjects employed ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming towards their own children. In frequent and very frequent cases of child abuse, the sex of the subjects was not significant. According to the statistical analysis, the age of the subjects did not have any statistically significant impact on the frequency of abuse towards own children. Similarly, the age of the abused children did not have any statistically significant impact on the frequency of child abuse cases. The education level of the study subjects did not have any statistically

**Table 5:** Frequency of child abuse cases depending on the selected socio-demographic characteristics of the study subjects.

Socio-demographic characteristic	Child abuse - ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming own children (frequency)			
	seldom (number/%)	frequently (number /%)	very frequently (number /%)	
all subjects surveyed	115/40.4%	25/8.8%	7/2.5%	
Sex	Males	79/64.2% <sup>5</sup>	20/16.2%	5/4.0%
	Females	36/22.2% <sup>6</sup>	5/3.1%	2/1.2%

Socio-demographic characteristic		Child abuse - ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming own children (frequency)		
		seldom (number/%)	frequently (number /%)	very frequently (number /%)
Age	from 25 years of age	15/37.5%	3/7.5%	-
	26 - 35 years of age	20/33.3%	8/13.3%	-
	36 - 45 years of age	22/36.7%	6/10.0%	-
	46 - 55 years of age	25/39.7%	4/6.3%	2/3.2%
	56 - 65 years of age	11/34.4%	3/9.4%	4/12.5%
	above 65 years of age	15/50.0%	8/26.7%	1/3.3%
Education level	Basic	24/60.0% <sup>1</sup>	3/7.5%	-
	Basic vocational	20/54.1%	6/16.2%	-
	Vocational	24/68.6% <sup>1</sup>	2/5.7%	-
	General secondary	11/24.4%	4/8.9%	2/4.4%
	Post-secondary	15/25.4% <sup>2</sup>	4/6.8%	2/5.1%
	Bachelors	14/35.9%	4/10.2%	2/5.1%
	Masters	7/23.3%	2/6.7%	-
Age of own children	from 3 years of age	11/36.7%	2/6.7%	-
	4 - 6 years of age	15/35.7%	4/9.5%	1/2.4%
	7 - 12 years of age	22/55.0%	5/12.5%	-
	13 - 15 years of age	23/54.8%	5/11.9%	-
	16 - 18 years of age	13/28.3%	10/21.7%	-
	19 - 26 years of age	6/15.0%	8/20.0%	3/7.5%
	above 26 years of age	6/13.3%	10/22.2%	2/6.7%

#1# do #2# : p <0.05 ; #5# do #6# : p <0.001

significant impact on the frequency of child abuse either. According to the research results, only subjects with basic or vocational education level employed child abuse towards own children statistically significantly more frequently than subjects with post-secondary level of education.

## Discussion

Child abuse is a socio-psychological phenomenon of diverse origin which is not only narrowed down to such social groups as family, but is also derived from society and culture. Domestic abuse is a result of numerous interacting criteria. In the USA, the percentage of abused or neglected children is 4.5%. In Europe it is slightly lower and ranges from 0.1 to 0.5%. The lowest percentage of child abuse cases is in Scandinavian countries – 0.1%, but in Great Britain it is 0.4%. In Australia, the percentage of abused children aged from 0 to 16 years is 0.5% [3,8,9,10]. In many countries child abuse is becoming more and more frequently noticed and starts to be considered a social issue, which in turn promotes scientific research aiming to prevent escalation of the problem. Poland does not have a long tradition and experience in solving this problem. The lack of

common interest in child abuse in general induced the authors to undertake the presented study.

A staggering percent of study subjects (51.6%) claimed to have ridiculed, embarrassed, humiliated, excessively criticized and blamed their own children. Every tenth subject surveyed claimed to have frequently or very frequently abused his/her own child. Among subjects surveyed by us, males statistically more frequently than women abused their own children. This concerns only seldom cases of child abuse. In frequent or very frequent cases of child abuse, the sex of the parent was of no significance. According to the research results, parents aged under 65 years employed child abuse with a similar frequency. Parents above the age of 65 years employed such types of child abuse as ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children statistically significantly more frequently. The authors were surprised to find out that the education level of parents does not have a significant impact on employing child abuse. Basic, basic vocational and vocational education levels were exceptions. Parents with basic, basic vocational or vocational level of education statistically significantly more frequently employed

ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming towards their own children. Our research results also proved that the age of the abused child did not have any significant impact on the frequency of cases of child abuse.

Similar research results were presented in the report by Bogunia and Gutekunst [11], who in the 1980s reported on values of certain educational methods in parents' opinion as well as on their preferences towards employing certain punishments and awards in children's upbringing. It turned out back then that the most common manifestation of aggression was slapping. The authors will report on the subject of physical abuse separately. In the presented report, the authors focused on psychological abuse. The authors found out that parents are seldom interviewed on the issue of ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children and assumed that the phenomenon of psychological abuse is progressing. If such activities as admonishing and reprimanding or banning are considered to be a type of psychological child abuse, then according to Bogunia, admonishing and reprimanding are employed by 12% of parents and banning is employed by 38% of parents [11]. However, the methods applied in the presented report are different from those in the report by Bogunia and Gutekunst [11], which makes the comparison of the results impossible. The authors understand that in order to define the

nature of the problem of child abuse and its intensity, a large-scale research on numerous groups of subjects without any selection is needed [12,13]. That is why the authors consider this report to be just a contribution to a general discussion on the issue of child abuse.

## Conclusions

- 1) It was proved that 51.6% of subjects ridiculed, embarrassed, humiliated, excessively criticized and blamed their own children. Every tenth subject surveyed claimed to have frequently or very frequently abused his/her own child.
- 2) Male subjects statistically more frequently abused their own children than female subjects.
- 3) Subjects aged under 65 years employed child abuse with a similar frequency. Subjects above age of 65 years employed such kinds of child abuse as ridicule, embarrassing, humiliating, excessive criticism and blaming their own children statistically significantly more frequently.
- 4) Education level of the study subjects did not have any statistically significant impact on employing child abuse, with the exception of subjects with basic, basic vocational or vocational education level, who statistically significantly more frequently employed child abuse towards their own children.
- 5) Age of the abused child did not have any statistically significant impact on the frequency of abuse.

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