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Child Abuse and Its Relation to Quality of Life of Male and Female Children

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Abstract

It is an established fact that family strengths can promote positive outcomes for children; of course these strengths include high quality parent-child relationships. On the other hand, family violence and child abuse can lead to negative consequences regarding child well-being and quality of life. On the long run, child's mental health and psychological adjustment are compromised. This study aims at investigating the relationship between child abuse (physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) and quality of life in children of abusive fathers and mothers. This study operates on the assumption that child abuse affects all dimensions of children's quality of life; however the effect on each dimension is not necessarily the same. Male and female children completed Child Abuse Scale (CAS) and Children's Quality of Life Questionnaire (CQOLQ), both measurements were prepared by the author. Results of the study indicated significant negative relationship between child abuse in two types (physical abuse and emotional abuse) and the total score of CAS on one hand, and the family life dimension of CQOLQ on the other hand. Results also indicated significant negative relationship between total score of CAS and total score of CQOLQ in the male sample, while no similar relationship was indicated in the female sample. The findings of the study concerning the general score of quality of life assessment were discussed in the light of literature of the subject, and clinical implications of the results were also discussed reaching at some recommendations to help alleviating the negative impact of child abuse.

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1. Introduction

Parent-child relationships are vital to children's healthy development psychologically and physically. Quality of these relationships has an important impact on the children's well-being that can be manifest in childhood and, later on, in their adulthood as well. Although individuals may form many interpersonal relationships throughout their lives, parent-child relationships are the most critical determinants of their development, adjustment and well-being

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(Orbuch et al, 2005:171).

In the past, researchers paid more attention to ways of preventing child abuse than to the consequences or effects on the abused child. It was argued that it is more important to prevent abuse than to study its consequences. But due to difficulties in defining the term "child abuse", many researchers now are convinced that more attention is needed to be paid to the consequences of different situations before defining them as abusive or neglectful (Corby, 2006:85).

1.1. *Statement of the problem*

Assuming that child abuse adversely affects all dimensions of children's quality of life, yet it is expected that the impact will not be equal on all dimensions. Identified most affected areas of the child's quality of life could be used in the future as indicators of the severity and types of abuse suffered by children. This study is designed to examine the link between different types of child abuse inflicted by parents (physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect) and the child's quality of life. The study is also designed to assess the differences between male and female children with regard to this link.

1.2. *Literature review*

Child abuse and neglect are highly contested concepts, underpinned by and subject to a range of political and cultural factors particular to the society in which they occur. Therefore, child abuse and neglect are not phenomena that lend themselves to easy definition or measurement (Corby, 2006:79). This means that child abuse or neglect cannot be defined unless we take the cultural context into consideration, for what is considered to be abusive or neglectful in one society could be acceptable in another. Female circumcision, for example, is considered abusive and illegal in Britain, but it is acceptable and even desirable in Egypt.

Although no solid definition of child abuse can be widely agreed upon, the main areas of abuse remain the same: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The American School Counselor Association defined child abuse and neglect in a way that might help us reach a common understanding of the term. Child abuse was defined as: The infliction of physical harm upon the child's body by other than accidental means, and the continual psychological damage or denial of emotional needs. Neglect was defined as: The failure to provide necessary food, care, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care for a child (American School Counselor Association, 1999: 1).

In the context of parent-child relationships, child abuse types are more likely to be: physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect; rarely expected is sexual abuse within the Egyptian family. This study focuses on the physical, emotional abuse and neglect which can be defined as follows:

Physical abuse: Deliberately causing a physical significant harm. This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, punching, slapping or kicking.

Sometimes it is argued that corporal punishment could be a justifiable means of discipline that helps in controlling a child, but serious bodily harm cannot be justified on the grounds that it constitutes reasonable punishment (Corby, 2006: 89).

Emotional abuse: The persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to the children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being placed on children. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened, or the exploitation or corruption of children (Department of Health, 1999: 5-6).

It appears that emotional abuse experience is commonly involved in all types of child abuse, though it may occur alone.

Neglect: The persistent failure to meet a child's physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or caregiver failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs (Department of Health, 1999: 6).

Although this definition of neglect has been criticized for the ambiguity of some of its terms, like: Persistent

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