

Interfaculty Chair and Department of Public Health, Skubiszewski Medical University of Lublin

MACIEJ LATALSKI, HANNA SKÓRZYŃSKA, ANNA PACIAN,
MARLENA SOKÓŁ

*Intensification of the phenomenon of violence
in the family environment of teenagers*

Childhood and adolescence are the periods of life when the experiences of violence accumulate. As socially weaker individuals, children and teenagers are exposed to violence. The factors that increase the risk of child maltreatment include, above all, social and cultural factors and the stress that family suffer from. The literature on this subject distinguishes four categories of child maltreatment, namely: emotional, physical, negligence and sexual abuse.

The aim of the paper was to estimate the intensification of the phenomenon of violence in the family environment of high school youth as well as to try to distinguish the factors that influence the choice of educational methods. The results show that there is a clear relationship between social and cultural factors as well as social stress burdening family and the intensification of violence against children in the family.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The survey involved 250 representatives of high school teenagers aged 15–20, including 145 girls and 105 boys. The respondents came from the selected places of different size which were divided into three categories: town (population up to 20,000), city (population between 20,000 and 100,000) and big city – population above 200,000).

The research method was the survey estimating the Scale of Battered Child Syndrome (for teenagers and adults). Statistical analysis was carried out by means of χ^2 test for independence assuming the significance level of 0.05. Statistical package SPSS for Windows was used for this purpose. The results were analyzed in respect of dependence between: parents education, residence, alcohol abuse, employment or unemployment of parents and the intensification of the phenomenon of violence against children at home.

RESULTS

Among 250 respondents girls accounted for 58%, while boys – for 42% of the total. The age of the respondents was between 15 and 20. Residents of town areas constituted 35% of the total, city residents (population up to 100,000) accounted for 25% and 40% of the respondents came from big cities.

The first statistically significant conclusion is the interdependence between the level of education and intensification of emotional violence of mothers. 1/4 of the women with elementary education use emotional violence once or a few times a week as an applied educational method. 50% of the mothers with secondary education never use it, while as many as 74% of the women who graduated from

university would not accept it as an applied educational method. The following dependence is presented in Figure 1.

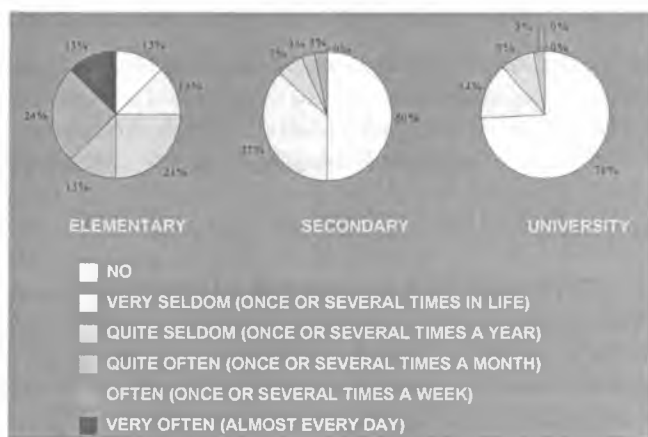


Fig. 1. Dependence between education of mother and intensification of emotional violence used in family ($\chi^2 = 31.721$ $p < 0.05$)

Slightly different conclusions can be drawn as we analyze the use of physical violence by fathers according to their education. In the group of fathers with elementary education, 67% never use it, but 33% use it frequently (once or a few times a week). 7% of the fathers with secondary education use physical violence quite often (once or a few times a month), 83% of men with university education never use it, while 11% of the total use it very seldom (once in a lifetime) or quite seldom (several times a year). This dependence is presented in Figure 2.

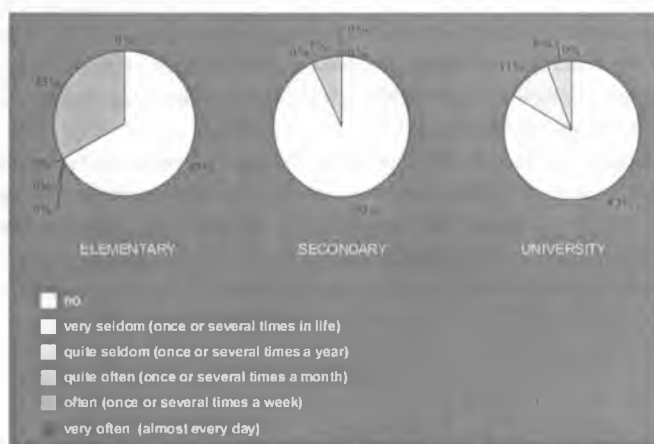


Fig. 2. Dependence between education of father and intensification of physical violence

Another separate pathology in family environment is alcohol overuse by parents. In the survey group that gave a positive answer to this question, 37.5% of mothers have used emotional violence once or several times in their life (other answers accounted for 12.5% each), ($\chi^2 = 15.529$, $p < 0.01$). In the same group a strong tendency to use physical violence by fathers was observed. 25% of them used it once or a few times a year, while 37.5% used it a few times a month. This dependence is presented in Figure 3.

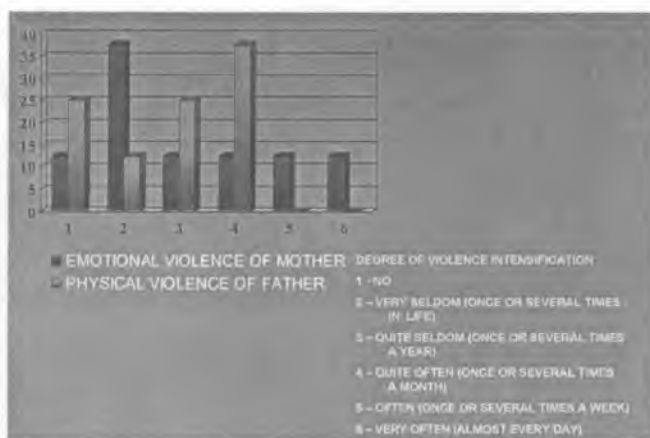


Fig. 3. Intensification of emotional and physical violence used in alcohol-affected families

The level of unemployment in our country has an obvious effect on the relationships within the family. In the paper we have compared the frequency of using emotional violence and negligence of the needs of children and teenagers according to the state of employment of their mothers. It has been proved that the unemployed women did not use emotional violence against the children only in 35% of cases, while the percentage of working mothers who avoid emotional violence was 67%. 45% of the children whose mothers are unemployed experienced emotional violence once or twice in their lifetime as compared to only 12.5% of the children of professionally active mothers. This dependence is illustrated by Figure 4.



Fig. 4. Intensification of emotional violence used, in relation to mother's employment

The unemployment of parents is the phenomenon that influences the negligence of children whose symptoms is insufficient satisfaction of their basic needs for food, hygiene and health as well as wearing clothes inadequate to the season and weather. 50% of the children of the unemployed mothers claim that such situations have not taken place, yet 1/5 of them have been in such a situation at least once or several times a year. The research shows that only 20% of working mothers neglect their

duties towards children and to a considerably smaller extent than the unemployed mothers ($\chi^2=16.319$, $p < 0.01$). This dependence is illustrated by Figure 5.

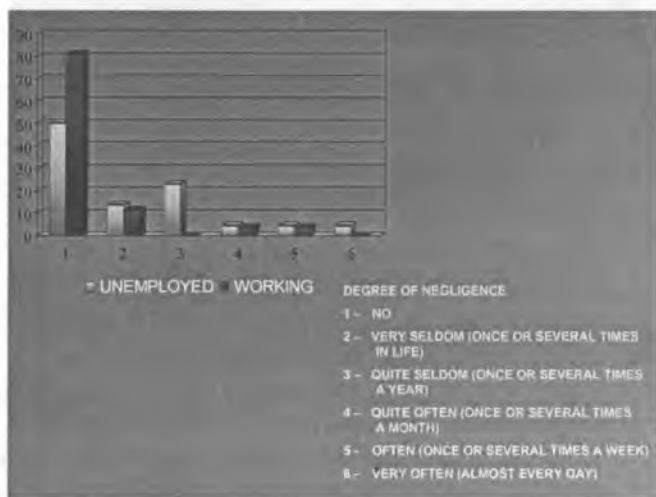


Fig. 5. Dependence between mother's employment and child neglect

Another phenomenon that was examined in this paper was that of sexual abuse of children and teenagers by their fathers. The survey questionnaire included the questions concerning the bad touch by the close members of family, watching pornographic films as well as forcing adolescents to make a living on prostitution. The significant statistical differences between the intensification of this kind of phenomena were observed according to the frequency of going to church declared by the fathers. 93.5% of the fathers attending church services once a week have never used any forms of sexual abuse, while in case of the agnostics the percentage was only 20%. As many as 40% of the teenagers whose fathers are non-religious declare that they have watched pornographic films with their fathers once or several times a year, while in the religious families the percentage was only 4.3% ($\chi^2=39.329$, $p < 0.001$). This dependence is illustrated by Figure 6. 20% of girls from non-religious families have been forced to prostitute once or several times in life while no such cases were registered in religious families ($\chi^2=13.989$, $p < 0.001$). The attempted rape by agnostic fathers has happened once or several times in life in 40% of the cases, in religious families – never.

Significant differences were observed according to the size of the cities the surveyed teenagers came from in respect of neglecting their needs concerning proper clothes, hygiene, health needs and respecting their right to rest, e.g. during holidays. The largest intensification of this phenomenon was noted in the survey group from the towns with the population under 20,000. Only 57.1% of this group claimed they had never experienced neglectance by their parents, and as many as 28.6% admitted that it had happened quite frequently and 14.7% – frequently (once or a few times a week). In the cities of the population up to 100,000, the results show that 62.2% of girls and boys have not experienced neglectance of their basic needs by their parents. 21.6% of them admit that it has happened but very rarely. The residents of big cities (population over 200,000) under the survey have never experienced such neglectance. The results are presented in Table 1.

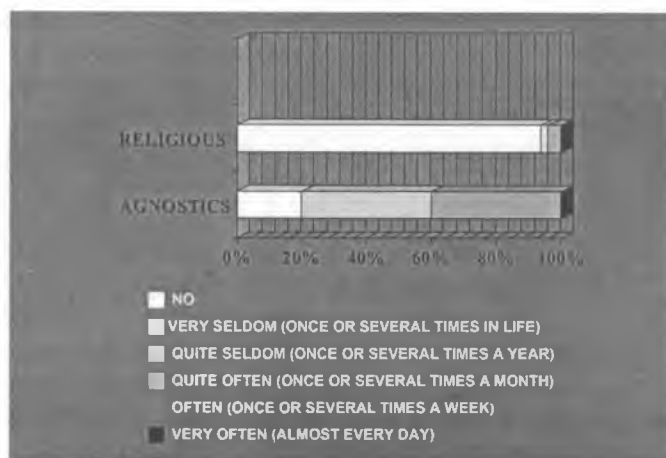


Fig. 6. Dependence between frequency of religious services and phenomenon of domestic sexual abuse

Table 1. Dependence between residence and child negligence (%)

Negligence/ City, town population	No	Very seldom	Quite seldom	Quite often	Often	Very often
Over 200,000	91.9	2.7	2.7	—	—	2.7
20,000-100,000	50.0	50.0	—	—	—	—
Under 20,000	88.0	4.0	8.0	—	—	—

DISCUSSION

The social issue of child maltreatment has a relatively short history in Poland. The process of revealing it started in 1989 with the unblocking of the civil actions. Social acceptance of using corporal punishment by parents has been consolidated by Polish tradition. Police reports show that 47% of adult citizens cannot imagine upbringing without beating. Such an accepting approach to corporal punishment is represented mainly by men, elderly people with lower education and country citizens.

We can distinguish four kinds of family violence: emotional, physical, sexual abuse and negligence of the needs of children and teenagers (1). Emotional maltreatment is most frequently caused by exaggerated expectations of parents towards their children concerning their achievements and personality. Sexual abuse of children means getting them involved in the sphere of sexual activity which is inadequate to their level of emotional development (10). Retrospective accounts of adults indicate that the experiences of sexual abuse in childhood have affected nearly 40% of women and 29% of men. The respective percentage of 10.5% and 3% have had experiences of rape or attempted rape (3, 7). The emotional effects of child sexual abuse depend on the nature of the abuse, type of personality and reaction of the environment. The effects include: concentration problems, aggression, withdrawal, somatic ailments, anxiety, increased emotionality and others (3, 9). Such an experience impairs proper physical and mental development, and at the same time poses a danger to the society (2, 7). The childhood experiences are shifted to subconsciousness but result in impulsive behaviours in adulthood. Furthermore, violence victims later become culprits and the rule 'violence triggers violence' is emphasized by many researchers. These people suffer from all kinds of sexual disorders, homophobia

and problems of sexual role identification (7). What is worth noticing is the fact that the abusers are mainly people who would never be suspected of sexual and mental disorders by their environment (7). In the domestic environment the abusers are fathers, who commit about a half of the recorded acts of sexual violence (6).

34% of the patients of alcohol withdrawal clinics claim that during the time of intensive drinking they used physical violence towards children. The research by Polish authors confirms that infants (36.4%) and young children up to the age of three (35.3%) are most frequently battered (9). The studies concerning the domestic environment of the battered children emphasize low social and material status of the families, high rate of unemployment, alcoholism, spouse maltreatment and low level of education (8, 9). Other studies, however, show that the phenomenon of violence does not refer only to the so-called 'social margin' (5).

CONCLUSIONS

1. A big group of teenagers admitted to having experienced at least one of four kinds of domestic violence. The group is not uniform, however, and the socio-cultural factors that affect the kind and intensification of the phenomenon of violence have been revealed.

2. The most frequent reasons for using violence are: low level of education, unemployment of parents and material status connected with this fact, low frequency of attendance to religious services, alcohol abuse, and place of living.

3. On account of the intensification of the phenomenon of violence in the domestic environment and both direct and distant consequences of the phenomenon in the form of mental and physical disorders of individuals as well as the dangers for the proper development of the society that result from it, there is a need to continue doing research on this phenomenon.

REFERENCES

1. Badura-Madej W., Dobrzyńska-Mesterhazy A.: Domestic Violence, Coll. Medic. UJ, 14, 2002.
2. Bąk E., Kopczyńska-Sikorska J.: Battered child syndrome J. Pediatr., 3, 405, 1996.
3. Brzozowska A., Kurpiewska R.: Sexual abused child. J. Pediatr., 4, 622, 1993.
4. Kmiecik-Baran K.: Violence experienced in childhood vs rapes conducted on children and other crimes. Psych. Health, 1, 2, 33, 1997.
5. Krawczyński M.: Child abuse. Definition and interpretation of the problem. Psycho-social and legal aspects. Pol. Pediatr., 10, 991, 1998.
6. Makara-Studzińska M. et al.: Family background in a state of well being and illness. PTMOIR, 16, 84, 2001.
7. Lew-Starowicz Z.: Long-term sequela of the child sexual abuse. Post. Psych. Neurol., 2, 197, 1999.
8. Skórzyńska H., Pacian A.: Violence against children as a health for population at growing age in the options of general practitioners. Pol. General Medic., 4, 55, 2002.
9. Trendak W. et al.: Mental state and psychomotor development of abused children. J. Pediatr., 2, 129, 1998.

SUMMARY

Childhood and adolescence are the periods of life when the experience of violence accumulates. As socially weaker individuals, children and teenagers are exposed to violence. The factors that increase the risk of child maltreatment include, above all, social and cultural factors and the stress that family suffer from. The literature on this subject distinguishes four categories of child maltreatment, namely: emotional, physical, negligence and sexual abuse. The survey involved 250 representatives of high school teenagers aged 15–20, including 145 girls and 105 boys. The research method was the survey estimating the Scale of Battered Child Syndrome (for teenagers and adults). The results show that a big group of teenagers admitted to having experienced at least one of four kinds of domestic violence. The group is not uniform, however, and the socio-cultural factors that affect the kind and intensification of the phenomenon of violence have been revealed. The most frequent reasons for using violence are: low level of education, unemployment of parents and material status connected with this fact, low frequency of attendance to religious services, alcohol abuse, and place of living. On account of the intensification of the phenomenon of violence in the domestic environment and both direct and distant consequences of the phenomenon in the form of mental and physical disorders of individuals as well as the dangers for the proper development of the society that result from it, there is a need to continue doing research on this phenomenon.

Nasilenie zjawiska przemocy w środowisku rodzinnym dorastającej młodzieży

Dzieciństwo i młodość są etapami życia, w których kumulują się doświadczenia przemocy. Jako jednostki społecznie słabsze dzieci i ludzie młodzi są głównym obiektem przemocy. Do czynników zwiększających ryzyko krzywdzenia dziecka należą przede wszystkim czynniki socjologiczno-kulturowe i stresy obciążające rodzinę. W literaturze przedmiotu wskazuje się na cztery kategorie krzywdzenia dzieci, tj. przemoc emocjonalną fizyczną, zaniedbanie i wykorzystanie seksualne. Badaniem objęto grupę 250 przedstawicieli młodzieży szkolnej w wieku 15–20 lat, w tym 145 dziewcząt i 105 chłopców. Metodą badawczą była ankieta oceniająca Skalę Zespołu Dziecka Krzywdzonego (dla młodzieży i dorosłych). Wyniki ukazują, iż duża grupa ankietowanej młodzieży przyznaje się do doświadczenia w swoim życiu co najmniej jednego z czterech rodzajów przemocy w rodzinie. Nie jest to jednak grupa jednorodna. Uwidocznione zostały czynniki socjokulturowe warunkujące rodzaj i nasilenie zjawiska przemocy. Najczęstszymi przyczynami stosowanej przemocy są: niski poziom wykształcenia, bezrobocie rodziców i związane z tym zjawiskiem warunki bytowe, niska częstotliwość praktyk religijnych, nadużywanie alkoholu i miejsce pochodzenia. W związku z nasileniem przemocy w środowisku rodzinnym oraz skutkami bliskimi jak również odległymi tego zjawiska pod postacią zaburzeń w prawidłowym rozwoju fizycznym i psychicznym jednostek, jak i płynącym z tego faktu zagrożeniem dla prawidłowego funkcjonowania społeczeństwa, istnieje potrzeba prowadzenia dalszych badań w tym kierunku.