

The Psychosocial Reality of the Abused and Abandoned Child in the Valencian Community

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This work is divided into two fundamental parts. In the first part we will pre-sent an epidemiological analysis of 1641 children between the ages of 1 to 18 years old who have been abused and abandoned in the Valencian Community. In the second part we will analyse the aggression and self-esteem in these children in relation to the variables family structure, the sociocultural level and the geographic immigration.

Introduction

Among the works in the field of the maltreatment and abandonment we can find a great number of factors associated or related to this social problem. They include the individual characteristics of the parents to those related to the economic, cultural and social variables.

If we look at the diverse factors enumerated in different studies, it would be possible to synthesize them in four categories:

- The factors related to the family interaction are probably the most numerous and the most common. They include such variables as family discipline, the parent's attitudes and education, which together appear more or less to be responsible for the cognitive and emotional development of the child (Lewis and Coates, 1980; Musitu *et al.*, 1985).

- Personal and behavioral factors of a child which cause or facilitate abandonment, such as suggested by Fontana (1971) and Green (1971) among others.

- The personal and behavioral factors that refer to biological parents, where it would be proper to include the psychopathological features identified by Gelles (1973) and the lack of per-

sonal skills to control aggressiveness, frustration and hostility (Gil, 1974); or lack of social repertory and the hyperactivity in the face of uncomfortable events.

- Such social factors as low incomes, educational level, profession, etc., summarized in studies by Castello (1986), Gil (1971), Garbarino (1976), Musitu *et al.* (1986) and Escartí and Musitu (1987).

On the other hand, the factor which was considered as fundamental in investigations about maltreatment is related to learning aggressive behaviours. In this way, it was proved that the children who grew up in an atmosphere of maltreatment behave more aggressively towards other children, objects and adults than the children who did not live in such an environment. This fact seems to support the thesis of Bandura (1973) which affirms that children who grew up in an atmosphere of maltreatment can acquire through imitation the aggressive behavior patterns. Others authors such as Musitu (1982) and Gelles and Cornell (1985) affirm that the "ontogenia" of an aggressive repertory could be found in the context of a child's maltreatment and abandonment and in the sociocultural environment that significantly supports aggressiveness. In the same sense an interesting work by Runyam and Gould (1985) concludes that a high percentage of aggressive children and aggressive unsocialized delinquents belong to the families, which consistently use punishment and negligence.

On the other hand, numerous investigations

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support the hypothesis that children living in family contexts of conflict and aggressiveness show a poor social adjustment and low self-esteem (Burguess and Richardson, 1984; Garbarino, 1981; Raschke and Raschke, 1979), therefore a relationship between aggressiveness and self-esteem can be found. It is considered that the lack of positive feelings about oneself could increase aggressive behavior and at the same time the aggressive behavior can be perceived as a negative characteristic and in this way, contribute to the feelings of low self-esteem (Kinard, 1979). In this way subjects with low self-esteem seem to perceive interpersonal relationship as threatening (Rosenberg, 1965). This perceived threat explains the relationship found between aggressiveness and self-esteem.

Investigations that combines social environmental variables with aggressiveness and self-esteem are few. This aspect is of great importance, if we take into account that the majority of these children come from broken generally punitive, family atmospheres. According to the variable knowledges these variables have a decisive weight in aggressiveness and self-esteem.

Within the framework of this shortage of studies and in considering our works about self concept in this paper we propose the following objectives: 1) to realize an epidemiological analysis of children's maltreatment and abandonment in the Valencian Community and 2) to analyse the aggressiveness and self-esteem of institutionalized children also in the Valencian Community. We began with the hypothesis that institutionalized children (Those children who are taken care of by the state) have a lower self-esteem and therefore, show greater aggressiveness than uninstitutionalized children.

Method

Population and Sample: The population is the group of neglected and abused children in the Valencian Community. The sample is more or less half of the population: the population is composed of 1641 subjects between the ages of 1 and 18, 823 of these subjects are males and 818 are females. A sample was also used of 479 children between the ages of 10 and 13. They live with their biological families. From this, 240 were boys and 239 were girls. A group of 83

institutionalized children was used; 150 boys and 33 girls between the ages of 10 and 13 were selected by chance from the total sample of institutionalized children.

Questionnaire: For the first objective we formed a questionnaire to obtain the information in a systematic and exhaustive way from the archives of the Institution and obtaining the information about the personal history. With this instrument we get the children's and parent's identifications data, the socio-educational aspects, the children's and parent's relatives, the sisters and brothers, the cause of the institutionalization, the social support and finally the children's socio-environmental situation. For the second objective we used four tests, one to measure self-esteem and three to measure the aggression (received, emitted and inhibited).

Self-esteem Scale (Musitu, 1982). This scale is composed of four dimensions: 1) anxiety-insecurity (children's perception of their insecurity, it is defined by fears and nervousness of the children in the situation which they usually act); 2) social (children's perception of their abilities for having a relationship with their peers, teachers and other significant); 3) self-control (children's perception of the inadequacy of their acts in different environments: familial, social and educational); 4) academic (children's perception of their school production, teacher's acceptance and peers's academic acceptance).

Aggression's Scale (Musitu, 1982, 1983). This questionnaire is composed of 3 scales: 1. Emitted aggression, 2. Received aggression and 3. Inhibited aggression.

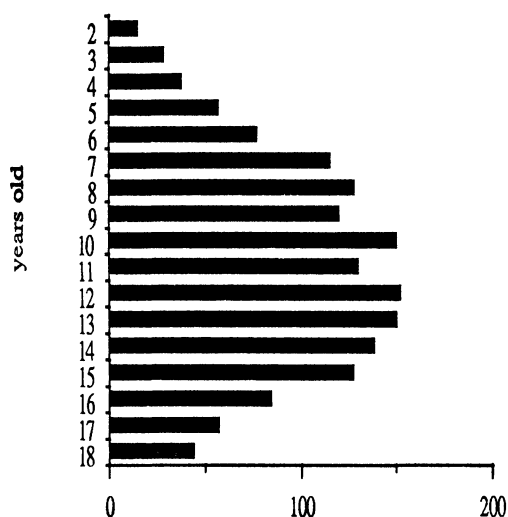
Results

Epidemiological analysis of the neglected and abused children in the Valencian Community

A. Children identification variables

Age. As can be seen in the graphic I, the frequency in the two extreme ages - 18 and 1 years old - is minimal if we compare them with the rest of the age group.

Graphic I.- Frequencies of Abandomment according to children's age



It is important to point out that the frequency is also similar in the middle's years of schooling. The tendency grows up from birth to the last years of schooling, reaching a stationary level in the next 9 years and descending substantially, in the next years from the age of 15.

Sex. The results are very similar for both sexes (48.6% are female and 51.4% are male). There is a major percentage of neglected children in the male group although these differences are not substantially significant..

B. Parent's identification variables

Age. The majority of male parents are between 45 to 49 years old (it gathers at 24%) the next intervals are between 35 to 39 and 40 to 44 years. The intervals that group a minor number of fathers are the first, with the male parents younger than 34 years old and the last, with fathers older than 50. Whereas for the mothers the greatest frequency is that of mothers younger than 34 years old which is 35% of the total. The next largest is the interval of 35 years old with 23%. It is important to notice that these two first intervals represent 58% of the mothers, and that there is some increase in the distribution of frequencies between the first and the last interval. If we compare the result of both groups, we can see that

the mothers are younger than the fathers. Notice also that 58% of the mothers are younger than 39, but in the group of the fathers, the percentage is only 36%. On the other hand 43% of the fathers are older than 45 years old. The percentage of mothers in this age group is only 23%.

Immigration. The major percentage is the group of fathers that was born outside of the Valencian Community (35.5% of the entire sample are immigrant parents). For the mothers the percentage in the same 36.6%.

Profession. The major percentage (56% of the total) is manual labor. To a lesser degree are the fathers who work in shops (19%), and the unemployed fathers are 11%. The rest are small shop owners, clerks or handicapped or retired parents. From this data we can see that more than a half of these fathers are unqualified workers, must of them only work short periods of time. It means earning low incomes and being most of the year without working. Only 23% of the mothers work, of this group 56% are either office help or shopkeepers, another 23% of the working mothers are manual laborers. The rest are retired or handicapped.

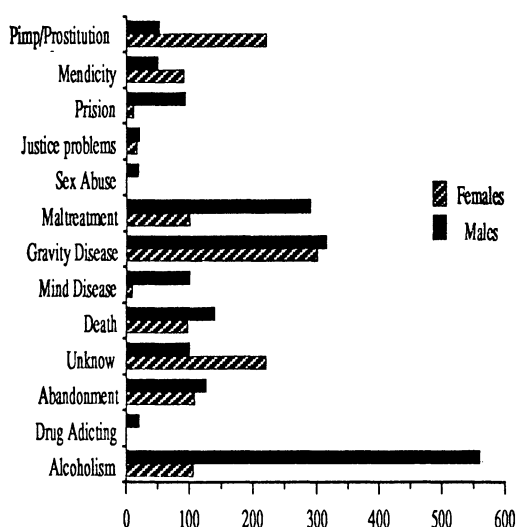
Level of education. The major percentage are in the group of fathers with elementary education (45%), the next is the group with middle education (38%). It is important to notice the fact the 15% of the fathers are illiterate and only 2% have university studies. The same variable in the group of the mothers has a different distribution. The majority are in the group of elementary studies (44%) and the next one is the group without basically any education (25%) which is larger than the corresponding group of the fathers. In relation to the higher education the percentage is minimum both for the fathers and mothers (2% and 1% respectively). From this data we can see that the mothers have a lower level of education and a larger index of illiteracy.

C. Social variables of the family

Civil state. We'll consider the following categories: married, separated, divorced, single mother and other groups. The married group is the largest (48%), the next group is separated

parents with 35%. From the rest of the categories it is important to notice that the group of single mothers are 6% of the whole. It is interesting to consider in this context, the fact that the kind of relationship we are talking about in this research, is the children's relationship to the biological parents at the moment in which maltreatment or abandonment occurred. The data shows us, that after institutionalization the relationship of the parents change with both parents seeking other relationships.

Graphic II. - Parents classification in function of their social problematic



D. Family socioeconomic reality

Starting from these data we can infer that the major part of the children that have been studied are part of families with serious economical problems; the homes are in general deficient in hygiene, and the members of the family live in overcrowded conditions.

Aggression and self-esteem in institutionalized children

Self-esteem: The table 1 shows the results obtained in the variable of self-esteem. All these variables are significant and they follow one expectations, confirming the hypothesis: that institutionalized children have a lower self-esteem than uninstitutionalized children.

Emitted aggression: In the six variables that compose this questionnaire we received significant differences from what we expected except in the variable "fraternal rivalry and aggression" (table 2).

These results tell us that the uninstitutionalized children are more aggressive in their interaction with their brothers and sisters than institutionalized children. These results seem obvious if we notice that the

children who live in an institution with their sisters and brothers, are unable to express themselves in an aggressive or non-aggressive way.

Received aggression: In this scale the differences appear more clearly (table 2). According to the data we can infer that the institutionalized children, more than uninstitutionalized children, perceive the different schooling and familial situations as being more aggressive and threatening.

Inhibited aggression: In this scale we have not found any significant differences among the variables "inhibited aggression in the familial context", "sociability", and "parental attention". However we have found differences in the variables "aggression by personal injury" a higher level in institutionalized children and in "inhibited aggressiveness against teacher", in which the higher means correspond to uninstitutionalized children (table 2). From this one can infer that institutionalized children inhibit more aggressiveness in their relations with their peers in the environment of school and also in the different atypical situations that occur in the classroom. As for "inhibited aggressiveness against teacher", the uninstitutionalized children show more aggressiveness in their relationship with the teacher.

Conclusions

Structural variables

In order to define the structural variables that might cause a child to be institutionalized, we firstly establish that all of the children come from low-income families. Fathers are unqualified workers with a high unemployed rates and the great majority of mothers work in domestic service. This framework which defines their socio-

Table 1. Student's "t" in the self-esteem variables.

Var. Result.	Institutionalized			Uninstitutionalized			t	s. s.
	Mean	S. D.	N	Mean	S. D.	N		
A1	27.663	6.115	83	24.929	6.331	479	3.640	.001
A2	26.518	4.565	83	31.599	4.570	479	5.661	.001
A3	28.625	6.157	83	29.849	5.053	479	2.615	.01
A4	21.578	4.976	83	15.309	4.788	479	10.928	.001
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; text-align: center;"> A1 Anxiety-insecurity A2 Social A3 Academic A4 Self-control </div>								

Table 2. Student's "t" in Aggressiveness in the groups institutionalized and uninstitutionalized.

Variab.	Groups	Institutionalized			Uninstitutionalized			t	s. s.
		Mean	S. D.	N	Mean	S. D.	N		
Emitted	E1	11.735	2.58	83	10.397	2.535	479	4.501	.001
	E2	13.060	2.847	83	14.081	2.248	479	3.654	.001
	E3	2.373	0.599	83	2.127	0.432	479	4.485	.001
	E4	8.072	1.752	83	6.499	1.743	479	7.864	.001
	E5	10.904	2.583	83	9.891	2.226	479	3.727	.001
	E6	7.651	2.045	83	5.965	1.397	479	9.373	.001
Received	R1	14.422	3.819	83	11.731	2.725	479	7.757	.001
	R2	5.663	1.647	83	4.305	0.855	479	11.269	.001
	R3	10.205	2.418	83	7.885	1.749	479	10.456	.001
	R4	6.602	1.696	83	5.741	1.361	479	5.107	.001
	R5	7.687	1.667	83	8.739	0.546	479	10.835	.001
	R6	11.590	2.470	83	9.075	1.740	479	11.317	.001
Inhibited	I1	12.892	3.044	83	12.656	3.239	479	0.617	-
	I2	13.084	2.381	83	13.455	1.926	479	1.566	-
	I3	17.590	3.676	83	14.374	3.618	479	7.445	.001
	I4	7.747	1.447	83	7.113	1.059	479	4.773	.001
	I5	1.561	0.652	83	1.714	0.696	479	0.767	-
	I6	10.361	1.620	83	11.140	1.117	479	5.243	.001

E1 - Indirect aggressiveness against the academical authority
 E2 - Fraternal competition and aggressiveness.
 E3 - Displaced spontaneous aggressiveness.
 E4 - Interactional replying aggressiveness.
 E5 - Rebellion against the family pattern.
 E6 - Objectual aggressiveness.

I1 - Inhibited aggress. (family)
 I2 - Guilt for misbehavior.
 I3 - Inhibited aggress. (Peers).
 I4 - Inhibited aggress. (corporal punish).
 I5 - Parent's attention.
 I6 - Inhibited aggress. (Teacher).

R1 - Parent's aggressiveness.
 R2 - Teacher's aggressiveness.
 R3 - Peer's aggressiveness.
 R4 -Parent's verbal aggressiveness.
 R5.-Arbitrary aggressiveness parental
 R6-Coercitive scholar discipline.

economic situation is completed by the fact that many of these children are sons and daughters of immigrant parents who come from undeveloped Spanish communities. What's more, this situation of economic dearth usually remains constant in many of these families, a fact which compels (a great number of these children) to remain in the institutions for many years.

Familial variables

The above mentioned "macrovariable" in interaction with family variables tends to produce institutionalization of the child. We can consider four essential categories within these macrovariables:

1. "Family violence and familial adversity" refers to the violence between the parents, violence against children and alcoholism are highly significant factors.

2. "Physical neglect" is an important motive of child institutionalization as well. Motivations that induce a parent to abandon his/her child can be conscious or unconscious. It is necessary to analyze them in order to understand the final cause of neglect. Our data confirm those obtained by Giovannoni (1971) who considered that the act of abandonment is more closely connected with environmental factors characterized by the poverty than those related with physical abuse. In this sense we concluded that in the families where physical abuse took place, there was a higher socioeconomical status than those families who neglected or abandoned their children.

3. We can complete the framework of familial violence and neglect by adding "familial rupture" caused by separation and home withdrawal, and negative parental educative model i. e. bad examples and prostitution to the previous categories.

4. Special attention should be paid, as well, to those categories which are referred to as "familial adversity", defined variables such as parent's death and physical and mental illness which together with limited socioeconomical situations (begging, unemployment) lead to the institutionalization of a great number of children. In this regard we might mention Kempe and Kempe's work (1969) which considers the demographic traits, social and economic factors, lack of com-

munity roots, lack of support in immigrant families, social isolation and unemployment as causes of abuse and neglect.

Self-esteem

In relation to the second aim of this work, from which we derive our hypothesis, we conclude that institutionalized children have less self-esteem than uninstitutionalized children. The received emitted and inhibited rates are higher in institutionalized children than uninstitutionalized children. These results confirm our hypothesis.

Aggressiveness

However, we confirm the existence of a relation between aggressiveness received by the children from their parents and teachers and the aggressiveness expressed by the child which is directed either to others or to objects. These data permit us to assert that institutionalized children behave more aggressively with their peers. They are less tolerant and are more suspicious and distrustful in their interactions.

At the same time, they show hostile feelings toward their teachers and educators. The children also perceive their teachers as being unfair; and they feel discriminated against in the application of discipline.

In regard to inhibition of aggression we didn't find any significant differences in the variables: "inhibited aggressiveness in familial context"; "sociability", and "parental attention". However, we did find differences in those referred with the "inhibited aggressiveness among peers in the school environment"; "inhibited aggressiveness by personal injury" and "inhibited aggressiveness against the teacher". Those who show the most aggressive behavior in school situations are the institutionalized children, especially when they feel damaged or non accepted by their schoolmates. However, the opposite occurs in the inhibition of aggression in relation to their teachers. Institutionalized children are the ones who most appear to be inhibited.

Finally the results of our investigation show that the, institutionalized child is the result of the interaction of two groups of variables closely

related: *Structural Variables* defined as serious social and economic deprivation, and *Familial Variables* which is the probable consequence of previous variables, the most important: being alcoholism and drug addiction, psychological and physical neglect, high rates of violence and bad examples, physical or mental illness, delinquency and imprisonment, or death, or desertion of the child by either or both parents leaves a child who shows closely connected a low self-esteem, high rates of hyperactivity, distrust and aggressiveness in different social and academic situations.

Intervention

At the present time we are planning the application of a programme for treating children who suffer abuse and neglect from an ecobehavioral perspective. This programme has the following characteristics: 1. Parent-child training; 2. Stress reduction and assertiveness training; 3. Self-control training; 4. Basic skills training of children; 5. Leisure time counseling; 6. Marital counseling; 7. Alcoholism treatment of referral; 8. Social support groups; 9. Job-finding training; 10. Money management training; 11. Health maintenance and nutrition training; 12. Home safety training; 13. Multiple-setting behavior management training; 14. Prevention services (unwed mothers).

This programme has been applied with good results by J. R. Lutzker of the University of Carbondale in Illinois. We would like to have the same success in our programme in the Valencian Community.

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Résumé

Musitu Ochoa, G., García, F., Gracia, E., & Castelló, N. La réalité psycho-sociale de l'enfant maltraité et abandonné dans la communauté de Valence. *Cadernos de Consulta Psicológica*, 1988, 4, 65-72. Ce travail est divisé en deux parties fondamentales. Dans la première partie on présente une analyse épidémiologique de 1641 enfants âgés de 1 à 18 ans qui ont été

maltraités et abandonnés dans la communauté de Valence. Dans la deuxième partie sont analysées l'agression et l'auto-estime chez ces enfants par rapport aux variables structure familiale, au niveau socio-culturel et immigration géographique.

Resumo

Musitu Ochoa G., García, F., Gracia E. & Castelló, N. A realidade psicossocial da criança maltratada e abandonada na comunidade valenciana. *Cadernos de Consulta Psicológica*, 1988, 4, 65-72. Este trabalho divide-se em duas partes: na primeira apresenta-se uma análise epidemiológica de 1641 crianças, de idades entre 1 e 18 anos, que foram vítimas de maltrato e abandono na comunidade valenciana. Na segunda parte analisa-se a agressividade e a estima de si próprio nestas crianças em relação com variáveis da estrutura familiar, nível socio-económico e imigração geográfica.