The Abuse of Children Growing Up in Conflicting Families

Neaga Susanu[1]

Abstract: Children must be respected as separate beings. Their privacy, personal life and normal development must be respected. Children's rights to protection and liberty must be recognized and a safe environment for the life or development of children must be guaranteed when they are abused or exploited. From a humanitarian and legal perspective, the social need to care for children and protect them from unfavorable and sometimes dangerous family environments is relatively recent. Unresolved conflicts between husband and wife affect children because they have endless love and loyalty to their parents. Conflicts can occur in any couple, but unresolved ones create serious problems. Child abuse has been a public debate since the 1960's. Today, however, killing children, forcing minors to work long hours, or treating minors as "young adults" is considered abusive behavior, but in the past, it was common practice. Children who are abused or abused at home change their social behavior.

Keywords: child; family; abuse; conflict; behavior; personality; post-traumatic stress disorder

1. Introduction

The child's development depends on two important factors: the biological heritage and the environment in which the child was raised, they influence each other. The family and society should be the "sanctuary" in which children grow, develop, form, become human and are educated to be fully successful in life. The well-being of a

---

[1] Senior Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, program: Psychology, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., 800654 Romania, Tel.: +40372361102; Fax: +40372361290, Corresponding author: neli_susanu@univ-danubius.ro.

child depends on the well-being of the family, because there is no denying that the family is important for a child's quality of life.

Children are a social class for which there is no waiting time. If left unchecked, the personality of future adults will surely be damaged and will be a lifelong burden to society, even copying the violence with which they have been treated.

Children must be respected as separate beings. Their privacy, personal life and normal development must be respected. The rights of children to protection and liberty must be recognized and a safe environment for the life or development of children must be guaranteed when they are abused or exploited.

Until the twentieth century, there was no society that recognized the individuality of children, but only their work from an early age in particularly harsh conditions. Without protection, they were victims of war, disease, premature loss of parents, and social unrest.

From a humanitarian and legal perspective, the social need to care for children and protect them from unfavorable and sometimes dangerous family environments is relatively recent. Today, all civilized societies accept the view that children do not belong to their parents or to the nation, but to themselves under the protection of their parents.

2. The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

As a result of exposure to violence, children become anxious, aggressive, restless, have nightmares, sleep disturbances, fear of making mistakes, suicidal ideation, very high or very low appetite, urinary incontinence, headaches and abdominal pain, difficulty concentrating, personal injury (hair pulling, red nails), social difficulties, motor agitation, slowing down. When witnessing domestic violence (quarrels, scandals, beatings), children behave very frustratingly, impulsively, aggressively and with serious disorders, they can isolate themselves and have serious discipline problems at school.

Unresolved conflicts between husband and wife affect children because they have endless love and loyalty to their parents. Conflicts can occur in any couple, but unresolved ones create serious problems. They affect children at any age, even adults, but at an early age conflicts have an influence on healthy growth and development. It also impacts their education and general well-being.

In a divorce situation, strong feelings of suffering, nervousness, disappointment sometimes appear and can be stressful for children. However, research has shown that it is not the divorce itself that affects them, but the road to it, which is often paved with conflicts and quarrels and which continues afterwards.

Important issues that lead to a good adaptation of children after divorce:

• Emotional support, supervision of activities, positive discipline, non-violence, creating expectations from the child according to his age;

• The child's access to the non-residential parent (often the father), and his emotional support (involvement in activities with the child, listening to needs), but also financially, by building clear agreements on ensuring the needs of growth and education of the child.

Creating a new relationship between parents after divorce is essential, both for a good cooperation for the good of the child, but also to provide a model for solving the conflicts. Good communication and understanding after divorce will alleviate the child's suffering.

3. The Family and its Role in the Development of the Child's Personality

In contemporary society, it seems that the family tends to be more and more limited to the group of mother, father and child / children, living under the same roof. Raising and caring for children involves ensuring that the adult members of the family diode have the environmental conditions (housing, food, clothing) that create the possibility of normal development of the child's body. However, this process cannot be detached from education, because at the same time as the child grows up, the mental development of the child takes place, the shaping of his personality and on them, the education done in the family has a major importance.

The family in which the child is born and lives is also the bearer of a certain cultural level, the result of multiple cultural influences. The family has a huge role to play in teaching the child to live, to form and to act. It provides him with an emotional, social and material frame of reference strongly imbued with a culture after which he will organize his own changes with the environment. The family offers him human examples that he will initially imitate, from which he will gradually differentiate himself, becoming independent. Thus, the family can be recognized a triple

functionality: regulating, socializing and individualizing, manifested to a greater extent than in any other environment in which the child is integrated in his evolution.

4. The Role of the Mother in the Development of the Child

For the child, the mother represents the central figure of her childhood, but also the reference of the relations towards life and the world. Thus, the child will identify two environments: his own identity and the mother. Helped by her, he discovers the universe around him and, defended by her, everything makes sense, emotionally, then mentally and culturally. The initiating role of the mother also entails her authoritarian position. In order to have the love of the mother and to make her happy and proud of him, the child respects his rules, imposes his renunciations and restrictions, thus forming his first moral habits. For this reason, the influence of her educational actions also depends on how the mother uses the brakes of love. According to Adler, it is the mother who has the task of shaping the child, without him becoming selfish and later enslaving everyone he comes in contact with. Therefore, a main duty of the mother is to instill in the child's soul and consciousness the feeling of social communion, cultivating the idea that he lives in a society among people. The mother also conveys a sense of security to the child. The way she will secure him, the initiation and the guide will determine the character of the child. Mother-child relationships are closely linked to other intra-family relationships (parent-child relationship, sibling relationship, parent-child relationship).

5. Types of Conflicts within the Family

Conflicts arise in any family, no matter how homogeneous it may be. The important thing is not to avoid the conflict no matter what, because it is unfeasible, but to avoid avoiding the conflict, treating it with intelligence and assertiveness, so as not to end up separating or breaking the relationship.

Depending on the type of family relationship, the following family conflicts are differentiated:

1. Conflicts of the couple: these appear as a consequence of communication shortcomings or as a result of conflicts between the two partners. Due to daily stress, financial problems, material shortages or cultural differences, insults, reproaches, accusations can occur in the communication between the two. If the conflict situation

gets out of control, the couple's relationship becomes tense and, in the end, they break up.

2. Conflicts between parents and children: These differ according to the age of the child in the family. In childhood, conflicts are related to the development of the child's autonomy, the parents either do not know how to offer this independence, or consider that their son or daughter has gone in the wrong direction. In adolescence there are most conflicts between parents and children and they are caused by the different mentalities of the two generations, adolescent terrifying, the emotional fluctuations of the adolescent. Conflicts with adult children occur when children reach the age of majority and mark the beginning of coexistence between two types of adults: parents and their children, who have different life experiences and are formed as adults in different historical periods, have different types of thinking and to understand how to live or organize their lives.

3. Conflicts between brothers: are the most common and most enduring, regardless of the stage of life in which each is. Often these types of conflicts reflect the education received in the family by the children and of the personal example of the parents' relationship with their siblings. If the parents themselves have a good and beautiful relationship with their siblings / children's uncles, this will be a positive example for the children, who in turn will develop and maintain a similar relationship with their siblings.

Behavioral manifestations of children from conflicting families:

The effects of family conflicts on children are: fear, anxiety, aggression, disinterest, inattention, nervousness, poor concentration on activities in kindergarten, may have nightmares or insomnia, get sick more and more often, developing physically slower. They notice their parents' emotions, they hear insults, reproaches, for them the quarrel is dramatic, it scares them, it creates their fear of abandonment. Some children cry, scream, others hide their fear, become silent, withdrawn, no longer socialize with those around them. Most children from such families begin to have discipline problems in kindergarten (and not late to school). When a parent loses his temper and behaves aggressively, in a situation, the child will understand that this is how the situation should be managed and will become aggressive not only in kindergarten or school, but also in society. Conflicting families are dominated by a tense atmosphere due to the "cooling" of relationships between parents and no matter how much they try to hide it, children still feel it and suffer. Non-verbal and para-verbal messages give parents a hard time, because they reflect the conflicted state in

the family: forced smiles, lack of warmth in the voice, affectionate gaze, avoidance of the other's gaze, lack of caresses. All these signs tell the child that something is wrong between the parents. Their concern can be manifested by malaise, sudden manifestations of general mood swings, tics (such as red nails, biting lips, hair pulling), sleep disturbances, active or passive-aggressive aggressive behaviors, irritability

6. The Concept of Abuse - Definition

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, children were considered to be the property of their parents. Aristotle wrote that slaves and children were property. In ancient Rome, people could sell, abandon, or kill their children in order to reduce the number of family members or buy grain. In the Massachusetts and Connecticut settlements, disobedient families were sentenced to death.

Child abuse has been a public debate since the 1960's. Today, however, killing children, forcing minors to work long hours, or treating minors as "young adults" is considered abusive behavior, but in the past, it was common practice. The term "child abuse" was originally used in 1962 to describe Kempe's "beaten child" (Jones & Pichett & Oates & Barlear Peter, 2010, p. 71). This concept is constantly expanding and includes not only physical abuse, but also other forms of emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Despite decades of research, the process of identifying child abuse and developing ways to prevent or treat it remains difficult.

7. There are Currently the Following Definitions of Abuse

"Physical abuse - the use of force on the child and the subjugation of difficult work beyond his means, resulting in injury to his bodily integrity; it is expressed through various gestures applied to the child, which can range from excessive corporal punishment to extreme behaviors that can endanger the child's life".

"Sexual abuse - consists in subjecting the child to viewing pornographic, seductive materials (advances, caresses) or his involvement in genital, oral or anal acts; it is about harming the child's physical or mental integrity, with the adult using it to satisfy his or her sexual needs" (Ionescu, 2011, p. 18).

"Emotional (psychological) abuse - inappropriate behavior of the adult towards the child, with negative effects on the child's developing personality. This form of abuse

also involves verbal violence (insulting, humiliating, denigrating, rejecting), abusive punishment and isolation (such as locking a child in a closet for several hours) and excessive demands, or threats".

8. The Feelings and Thoughts of the Abused Child

Blame. He always believes that he is wrong, that he deserves to be punished, and that he is responsible for offending his parents.

The fear. A child who is often abused learns to live with anxious expectations and struggles with constant violence, especially if he is part of a family that is a victim of domestic violence that affects children. Children end up not sleeping well, not eating well, often getting sick, worrying a lot and constantly waiting to be attacked.

Injustice. Children understand that the strong have control and that physical inferiority turns them into victims, they accept this relationship and assimilate a pattern of behavior, and when they reach physical maturity, they are aggressive with the weakest such as animals, children.

"I'm not in love." For a child who has been humiliated, beaten, or threatened, it can be difficult to trust an adult who has hurt them. He will think that he is unworthy of the love of adults, unwanted, unacceptable and unloved. Even if the parent regrets the child's behavior, he will always be suspicious because he has shown that he can hurt him.

"I will get my revenge". Children may find themselves unable to protect themselves due to the complex of physical inferiority. So, he endures the abuse and begins to secretly plan to take revenge, unable to forgive or overcome what is happening to him as long as he does not have a model of tolerance and understanding. When he acquires the ability to dominate his parents, he finds a way to take revenge, running away from home, through defiance or aggression.

"This is normal." Behavioral patterns are taken from the family. It is better not to underestimate a child's ability to reproduce behavior (good or bad) in detail, especially since in childhood we find it difficult to discern what is good from what is bad. Children raised in violent homes learn that such relationships are normal. When this belief is well understood, it will be reflected in all interactions.

"I'd better lie." Children understand that they are punished, scolded, beaten and that their parents do not forgive or accept their mistakes. In order not to receive

severe punishments, children learn to hide and change reality. Because this helps him, the belief that, "lying is better" appears. If it is found that a child is lying, the child will receive a new and more severe punishment for lying, making him improve, not give up. If he lied better, he wouldn't be punished.

Children who are abused or abused at home change their social behavior. Games are a way for children to express themselves, to perceive their inner world and to put into practice the patterns observed in the family. We can see certain types of behavior that can be a sign of abuse in groups of children, especially during games:

• *the child is extremely good*, shy, scared, discreet, very agitated and emotional when asked for something (trembling, redness, stuttering, silence). He understood that he was not paying the necessary attention and that his statements and actions could lead to violence. He is unsure of the outcome and does not like interactions. This child has always been the victim of the strongest or most aggressive child in the group, the role he chooses is the most isolated and weakest that does not require much involvement, but only obedience. He plays his role in the family game and behaves as he is treated there.

• *the child who takes revenge*, who is not tolerant, is violent, pretentious, does not accept disappointment, punishes others for any mistake, wants to lead and disturb the group all the time, does not conceive of forgetting or forgiving. He can't cope with violent situations, so he equates to his dominant father and compensates for his inferiority complex in the game. He is the leader of the team and the game must be played according to the rules created by him to quickly identify the victims. He often chooses a dominant, superior and even violent role (leader, captain, strict master, tough father, president) and behaves aggressively, abusively and cruelly.

• *The child-adult,* who has learned to deal with difficult situations, to behave like adults, to protect, to comfort and to help others, offering to those around him what he wants to receive from the family. The child is a member of a family with an unstable economic situation, works to support his family, is too responsible and behaves like a parent (he takes care of his siblings, the sick parent, whose role he has). Parents can be aggressive, addicted to alcohol, and children learn to take responsibility, empathize, and care for victimized parents. He likes roles that require conscientiousness, responsibility and sacrifice (hero, police officer, soldier, father).

• *The child is depressed,* is isolated, does not want to play, does not take part in the game unless he is forced, is stagnant, difficult, chooses loneliness, does not interact,

is not friendly, has no interest in other people, is not happy nothing. Such a child is resigned and does not have the ability to deal with aggression. He thinks he won't get any help, and he's not looking for it. Children who experience domestic violence often choose to flee their homes. Most street children are children who leave home because they cannot face fear, despair and aggression. From the victims of the family, they become the perpetrators. Many of them are accepted by specialized institutions and are sent to placement centers. A chain of causes and effects is created that marks their entire existence.

9. The Traumatic Nature of Abuse

Many types of abuse affect children who have gone through traumatic events. It is an event in the subject's life, defined by the intensity, the inadequate response of the child, his disability and the long-term pathogenic effects it causes to the psyche. Trauma is characterized by a wave of over-stimulation beyond the subject's tolerance and ability to control and process them mentally. They exceed the limits of normal human experience, have an unpredictable intensity, and frighten affected people.

• Trauma includes natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, etc.), accidents at work, traffic accidents, domestic accidents, and intentional injury. Garbarino et al. (1992) identified two types of victims of traumatic events: primary victims who are directly affected by the event and secondary victims who witness the traumatic events that spread to relatives, friends, strangers.

• Primary victims are children who are physically or sexually abused, children with illnesses not taken to the doctor, minors who are slandered by teachers in front of friends, children who are estranged from their parents or a teenager who is often ridiculed and isolated by his colleagues. When domestic violence occurs, when a teenager witnesses the death or injury of a friend or sister, is present at the rape or cruel beating of his older sister, brother or mother, his reaction becomes the reaction of the main victim, with traumatic effects.

• A special "official" diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can be applied to children with traumatic psychological trauma was included in the DSM-III manual (revised in 1987) in 1980. Post-traumatic stress disorder is different from post-traumatic stress disorder. acute stress (AST). The two syndromes are manifested by severe generalized anxiety, depression, lack of self-esteem,

avoidance, non-acceptance, nervousness, violent behavior. The occurrence of these phenomena in the first four weeks after the traumatic event and is resolved during this time, the adaptability of the child's body will overcome stress and does not have PTSD. However, if the symptoms last more than 30 days, the psychological effects will last for a longer period of time, often throughout life without professional help. Therefore, the consequences of intentional child abuse are not limited to physical damage, but extend to the mental level and become irreversible damage, even affecting the structure of the child's entire brain.

• There are two types of trauma, depending on the frequency of stress: type I trauma (through a single seizure) and type II trauma (after a series of seizures). All traumas are external causes of the body and, according to both types, can behave unexpectedly or unexpectedly with fear of the child and can cause significant changes both mentally and biologically.

• Type I trauma is characterized by repeated vivid memories, with clear and detailed expressions, misinterpreted and misperceived. Due to the vivid memory, the repeated reappearance of traumatic events, the child becomes excessively cautious, excessive twitching, a high level of anxiety, difficulty sleeping. The explanation for this behavior is that the victim is trying to stay alert to avoid these events. Children often generalize the stimuli of fear and extend them to neutral stimuli (fear of men, fear of going to the toilet, fear of undressing, fear of entering a new room).

• Responses to type II trauma are characterized by decreased ability to react to the outside world, apathy, self-hypnosis, nervousness. Children avoid thinking and talking about chronic trauma and try to forget about it. Victims of violence may explode or remain oppressed without expressing their anger or hatred towards them. Sometimes a gesture or a look around you are enough to remember and respond to the violence that the abused child has suffered towards neutral people who do not understand their reaction. These children have an aggressive attitude to protect themselves from traumatic events.

10. The Post-Traumatic Effects of Abuse

• Post-traumatic stress disorder is common in sexually abused children and occurs when the abuser is close to the child and the child is increasingly helpless.

• Sexual abuse has been shown to have immediate and long-term traumatic consequences for children, and this type of abuse is characterized by frequent

traumatic visual images of the victim during the abuse. The child hears the aggressor's voice, feels his breath and touches. These flashbacks often occur "out of nowhere," but most often occur when an abused child is exposed to a specific stimulus related to a traumatic event.

• In the case of sexual abuse, the victim's nightmares are repeated. This often happens shortly after the child is abused and decreases in frequency after the abuse has stopped

Learning Difficulties

• The difficulty of maintaining attention and the delayed development of abused children entails various difficulties in the learning process, of course with some exceptions. They are children with a very strong inner strength that allows them to ignore the bad parts of their family's situation and to take advantage of the school and the peace with which it comes. The school can be a sanctuary and offers excellent additional skills to children with inner strength.

Child abuse is fundamental to certain well-established cultural patterns. Therefore, it is essential to change the mentality of all the factors involved - children, parents, teachers, medical staff, political factors, institutions. Abuse and neglect should no longer be seen as normal, acceptable, or an internal family problem. This change of mentality towards the phenomenon of abuse can only occur through an information of the social factors regarding the dimensions and psychological, medical, social aspects of the phenomenon (through quantitative and qualitative studies, case monitoring, etc.).

Training of specialists in this field, especially social workers, psychotherapists, lawyers, politicians, but also training courses for teachers, focusing on child abuse and ways to reduce the negative effects of the teacher.

References

*** (2015). *Save the Children Foundation, Child Abuse and Neglect*. Bucharest.

Cojocaru, S. (2014). *Counseling for young mothers*. Iaşi Lumen.

Ionescu, Ş. (2011). *Abused Child - Assessment, Prevention, Intervention*. Bucharest: International Foundation for Children and Families

Killen, K. (2011). The Abused Child. Bucharest: Eurobit.

Osterrith, P. (2018). *Child and family*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House.