



## Original Article

# Prevalence of child abuse and its relationship with parenting styles among Sanandaj primary school children, in 2016-2017



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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Child abuse can cause psychological and delinquent and antisocial behaviors in abused children. Family factors and parenting styles are among the important causes of child abuse. The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of child abuse and its relationship with parenting styles among primary school children in Sanandaj in 2016-2017.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on primary school children who resided in Sanandaj during 2016-2017. Study sample size was 393 children and sampling method was cluster random sampling. Data was collected using Majdzadeh's standard child abuse questionnaire and Baumrind's parenting style questionnaire. Dispersion indices were used for continuous variables and the chi-square test was used for categorical variables. The level of statistical significance was set as  $P < 0.05$ .

**Results:** Out of 393 students 44.8% were boys and 55.2% were girls. The prevalence of psychological-emotional child abuse was 74.2%, while physical and neglect child abuse were observed 58.4% and 99% of the children respectively. Neglect child abuse was more prevalent among girls while physical child abuse was more prevalent among boys. There was a significant relationship between paternal occupation and physical child abuse ( $P = 0.017$ ). Child abuse was significantly related to the birth order of children ( $p=0.008$ ). Among the parenting styles, authoritative parenting had a reverse and significant relationship with physical child abuse ( $P = 0.009$ ). There was no significant relationship between other parenting styles and child abuse ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Regarding the high prevalence of child abuse and its reverse relationship with authoritative parenting style and physical child abuse, it is suggested for parents to use this parenting style in child rearing in order to reduce child abuse by their children in future.

### Introduction

Children are one of the vulnerable groups to various psychological problems (1). Behavioral problems in children are usually seen in the first years of primary school and peak at the age of 8 to 15 years old (2). Child abuse has a negative effect on the quality of life, physical health (3), behavioral and psychological health (4) of the victims. Child abuse may result in severe trauma or even death of children (4). The World Health Organization describes child abuse as physical, mental or well-being threat to children under the age of 18 years old by their parents or care givers (5). Child abuse can be categorized into four main types, including neglect abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse (6). Annually nearly

40 million children younger than 15 years old are abused (7). Child abuse causes of death in 850 children under the age of 15 years old each year (8). The rate of child abuse has increased in the recent years (9). This statistic is only related to the children who required health, medical or social care, therefore the published figures only represent a fraction of the real condition of this social issue. There is no exact data on the prevalence of child abuse in Iran due to the cultural conditions. In a review study, the prevalence of physical and emotional child abuse was reported to be 67.5% and 9.7% respectively among girls and 91.1% and 17.9% respectively among girls in Iran (10). Children are

mostly abused by their close guardians, who are mainly parents (11).

Child abuse can cause psychological disorders including aggressiveness (12), depression and anxiety (13) in children. These psychological disorders may result in oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) (14), tendency towards drug abuse (15), impaired sleep quality and finally decreased educational achievements in future (16).

Causes of child abuse include parental psychologic disorders, like depression or anxiety (17), child physical or mental disabilities, parental education level (18), parental drug addiction (19) and cultural beliefs. Family factors are among the important etiologies of child abuse. Among the family factors, parenting styles have been studied frequently as parenting styles influence personal and behavioral characteristics of the child. The most common interventional studies in preventing child abuse were focused on increasing parental awareness regarding parenting methods, anger management, changes in parental beliefs and stress reduction (20, 21). Parenting styles include methods that parents use to raise their children and reflect their attitudes towards their children (22). These styles were categorized as authoritarian, authoritative and permissive by Baumrind (23). In the study by Servatyari et al. a significant relationship was observed between aggressiveness and parenting in a way that aggressiveness was significantly less frequent in children of parents who used authoritative parenting compared to other parenting styles (24). Regarding the importance of child abuse, identifying its risk factors can be helpful in the early detection and intervention in high risk cases by designing preventing strategies to reduce the negative effects of this sociocultural problem on children (25, 26). Therefore, we aimed to determine the prevalence of child abuse and its relationship with parenting styles among primary school children in Sanandaj, Iran.

## Methods

### Samples

This study was a cross-sectional analytical study. Study population included primary school children (8-11 years old) who resided in Sanandaj city during the academic year 2016-2017.

Sampling method in this study was cluster random sampling. Sample size was calculated using the Cochran equation with 95% confidence interval and 80% power. The calculated sample size was 384 children. School children were chosen randomly from each school and those who were willing to participate in the study were included in the study.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria were all primary school children between the age of 8 and 11 years old who were willing to participate in the study as well as their parents in Sanandaj city who signed an informed consent to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria were unwillingness of parents or children to participate in the study as well as incomplete or incorrect completion of study questionnaires.

### Ethical considerations

Considering the age of the primary school children, informed consent was obtained from their parents. Furthermore, willingness of the children was also considered for inclusion of samples in this study.

## Gathering data

This study was conducted after obtaining permission from the department of education of Sanandaj city and school managers and parents. Parents were ensured regarding the confidentiality of their responses. Child abuse questionnaire was filled by the children at school while parents filled the parenting style questionnaire. Educated enumerators participated in school visits and read the questionnaire items for children and requested them to mark the answer. In the next step, enumerators handed the parenting style questionnaires to the parents.

Demographic data was collected using a demographic questionnaire, which included two sections. The first section of the questionnaire comprised of data regarding the child, including birth order, gender and level of education. The second section of the questionnaire comprised of data regarding parents, including education level, history of drug abuse and number of children. We used the standard child abuse questionnaire, which was designed and validated by Majdzadeh et al. with the Cronbach's alpha=0.92 (27). This questionnaire included three domains, including neglect (6 items), physical (10 items) and psychological-emotional (10 items). The scoring system was based on Three-point Likert scale. Any positive response in each domain was considered as child abuse. The Baumrind parenting style questionnaire was used in the study. This questionnaire was developed in 1972 and in three domains authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting (10 questions for each domain) (23). The scoring system was based on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire has been evaluated in various studies, and the Persian translate of the questionnaire was found to be reliable and valid (28).

## Statistical analysis

Data were encoded into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 16. Frequency tables were created for nominal variables, while central tendency measures and dispersion indices were used for continuous variables. The confidence limit was set as 95%. As the dependent variable was categorical (child abuse and its domains), the relationship between child abuse and binary or multilevel categorical independent variables was assessed using the chi-square test. Similar procedure was performed for the assessment of the relationship between child abuse and other categorical variables.

## Results

The response rate was 98% in this study. The mean age of the children was  $11.25 \pm 0.92$  years old (maximum age was 13 and minimum age was 9 years old). A total of 176 (44.8%) children were boys and 217 (55.2%) were girls. The mean number of children in family was  $2 \pm 0.97$  (minimum number of children was one and maximum number of children was 8). Neglect abuse was observed in 388 (99%) children followed by psychological-emotional abuse in 291 (74.2%) children and physical abuse in 229 (58.4%) children. Overall, the prevalence of physical abuse was the least of all types of abuse. It is also noteworthy to indicate that the types of abuse overlapped and a child might have been exposed to one, two or all the three types of abuse. Only one child (0.3%) did not report abuse while 392 children reported that they experienced different types of abuse. Other demographic characteristics of study children are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Frequency of the demographic variables in students

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex	Girl	217	55.2%
	Boy	176	44.8%
Grade	4	168	42.7%
	5	149	37.9%
	6	76	19.3%
Father's Job	Employee	125	31.8%
	Self - employed	209	53.2%
	Declared	14	3.5%
	Other	45	11.5%
Mother's Job	Employee	72	18.3%
	Housewife	293	74.6%
	Declared	15	3.8%
	Other	13	3.3%
Father's Education	Illiterate	22	5.6%
	Diploma	204	52.2%
	High diploma and bachelor degree	127	32.5%
	Master degree and higher	38	9.7%
Mother's Education	Illiterate	29	7.4%
	Diploma	246	62.9%
	High diploma and bachelor degree	107	27.4%
	Master degree and higher	9	2.3%
Child Abuse	Mental & Emotional	291	74.2%
	Physical	229	54.8%
	Neglect	388	99%

The results obtained from chi-square test demonstrated a significant relationship between gender and all types of child abuses (psycho-emotional, physical and neglect). Both psycho-emotional cases of abuse were observed in boys more than girls while the number of girls that experienced neglect was more than

boys. Moreover, there is a correlation between father's job and physical abuse ( $P = 0.017$ ). All children being reared by either a stepmother or stepfather witnessed neglect and psycho-emotional abuses. However, they had no significant relationship with other variables (Table 2).

**Table 2.** The comparison between various types of child abuse and with demographic variables

Variable	Group	Child Abuse					
		Mental & Emotional		Physical		Neglect	
		Safe	Unsafe	Safe	Unsafe	Safe	Unsafe
Sex	Boy	(27.7%) 28	(50.9%) 148	(33.7%) 55	(52.8%) 121	(100%) 4	(44.3%) 172
	Girl	(72.3%) 73	(49.1%) 143	(66.3%) 108	(47.2%) 108	(0%) 0	(55.7%) 216
	p-value	<0.001		<0.001		0.026	
Grade	4	39 (38.6%)	128 (44%)	60 (36.8%)	107 (46.7%)	2 (50%)	165 (42.5%)
	5	47 (46.5%)	102 (35.1%)	71 (43.6%)	78 (34.1%)	2 (50%)	147 (37.9%)
	6	15 (14.9%)	61 (21%)	32 (19.6%)	44 (19.2%)	0 (0%)	76 (19.6%)
	P value	0.103		0.107		0.610	
Father's Job	Employee	29 (28.7%)	96 (33%)	50 (30.7%)	75 (32.8%)	2 (50%)	123 (31.7%)
	Self - employed	55 (54.5%)	154 (52.9%)	85 (53.1%)	124 (54.1%)	2 (50%)	207 (53.4%)
	Declared	1 (1%)	13 (4.5%)	2 (1.2%)	12 (5.2%)	0 (0%)	14 (3.6%)
	Other	16 (15.8%)	28 (9.6%)	26 (16%)	18 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	44 (11.3%)
	P value	0.134		0.017		0.796	
Mother's Job	Employee	17 (16.8%)	55 (18.9%)	28 (17.2%)	44 (19.2%)	0 (0%)	72 (18.6%)
	Housewife	72 (71.3%)	221 (75.9%)	120 (73.6%)	173 (75.5%)	4 (100%)	289 (74.5%)
	Self - employed	6 (5.9%)	9 (3.1%)	7 (4.3%)	8 (3.5%)	0 (0%)	15 (3.9%)
	Other	6 (5.9%)	6 (2.1%)	8 (4.9%)	4 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	12 (3.1%)
	P value	0.129		0.317		0.714	
Father's Education	Illiterate	2 (2%)	20 (6.9%)	9 (5.6%)	13 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	22 (5.7%)
	Diploma	51 (51%)	153 (52.8%)	83 (51.2%)	121 (53.1%)	3 (75%)	201 (53.1%)
	High diploma and bachelor degree	32 (32%)	95 (32.8%)	53 (32.7%)	74 (32.5%)	1 (25%)	126 (32.6%)

	Master degree and higher	15 (15%)	22 (7.6%)	17 (10.5%)	20 (8.8%)	0 0%	37 (9.6%)
	P value	0.055		0.948		0.825	
Mother's Education	Illiterate	8 (8%)	21 (7.2%)	11 (6.8%)	18 (7.9%)	1 (25%)	28 (7.3%)
	Diploma	62 (62%)	184 (63.4%)	102 (63%)	144 (63.2%)	3 (75%)	243 (635)
	High diploma and bachelor degree	29 (29%)	78 (26.9%)	46 (28.4%)	61 (26.8%)	0	107 (27.7%)
	Master degree and higher	1 (1%)	7 (2.4%)	3 (1.9%)	5 (2.2%)	0	8 (2.1%)
	P value	0.838		0.959		0.288	

Chi-square test,\* statistically different  $p < 0.05$

Chi-square results showed that parenting styles lack any significant relationship with all types of child abuses. Yet, the results demonstrated that authoritative style is significantly

related to physical child abuse ( $P = 0.009$ ) and no relationship was observed for other variables (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The relationship between various types of child abuse with parenting styles

Parenting style	Child abuse	Situation	Mean	Standard Deviation	P
Permissive style	Mental & Emotional	Safe	26.6	4.98	0.453
		Annoyed	26.64	4.63	
	Physical	Safe	25.87	5.001	0.780
		Annoyed	25.69	4.52	
Authoritarian style	Neglect	Safe	26.5	4.12	0.751
		Annoyed	25.74	4.73	
	Mental & Emotional	Safe	25.99	6.29	0.798
		Annoyed	25.79	6.58	
Authoritative style	Physical	Safe	25.41	6.44	0.262
		Annoyed	26.16	6.54	
	Neglect	Safe	30.25	6.75	0.174
		Annoyed	25.81	6.49	
Authoritative style	Mental & Emotional	Safe	41.63	4.70	0.525
		Annoyed	41.01	5.36	
	Physical	Safe	41.84	5.53	0.009
		Annoyed	40.69	5.06	
Neglect	Safe	35.5	11.24	0.418	
	Annoyed	41.23	5.10		

Chi-square test,\* statistically different  $P < 0.05$

## Discussion

Child abuse is one of the important global health complications (29) and usually arises from parenting styles and domestic problems. The results of this study showed that 74.2% of the students involved with psychologic child abuse, 58.4% of them underwent physical abuse, and 99% were neglected. These values are consistent with those reported by Douki et al (30) in which emotional and physical abuses had a prevalence of 67-90% and 32-78% in Mazandaran province, Iran. In another consonant study carried out by Nilchian et al (31) in Isfahan, Iran, the frequencies of emotional, physical and sexual abuses were 77.1%, 66.1%, and 64.1%, respectively. However, Eslami-Shahrbabaki et al (32) found emotional and physical abuses only in 17.9% and 9.7% of the students living in Kerman, Iran. This consistency may be due to the different population considering that they studied high school students but not those in primary schools whom this study focuses on. The second potential explanation might be the different questionnaires used in their study. Our results showed that the incidence of neglect was 99% which was compatible with the study by Barnett et al. therefore, it can be concluded that emotional maltreatment is the most frequent and unrevealed form of child abuse (33).

The present study found that the rank of birth is significantly related to child abuse so that the first child usually involved in abuse complications. This might happen because there is not

enough parenting experience or an appropriate attitude towards the first child. Therefore, the provision of training plans for parents who are expecting their first child can remarkably decline the incidence of child abuse. This fact is supported by several studies (34).

Furthermore, our results revealed that the most frequent abuses were neglect and physical abuse among girls and boys, respectively, being in agreement with the study by Lee et al. (35). Hence, Parental Education seem to be essential to decrease various types of child abuses.

Father's job was another variable proved to be significantly related to physical type of child abuse, these results are matching with the results of previous studies (36). Whence, the importance of father's job should not be ignored so that if appropriate jobs are provided for fathers by community officials, they can also decrease the extra amounts of the budget that will have to be spent on the treatment and dealing with aggression.

A reverse significant relationship was observed between authoritative parenting style and child abuse, this is confirm by Cui and Liu study (37) in which they also concluded that children can better talk to their parents over their emotions and problems when parents follow authoritative style. It means that authoritative parents have more intimacy yet with clear and logical policies. Therefore, children who benefit from having authoritative parents are less prone to be abused by their parents compared to whom reared by permissive or

authoritarian style. This matter consequently helps teenagers' emotional and social growth as well as their normal behaviors.

Furthermore, the authoritative style has a negative sign with internalization and externalization problems (38). Servatyari et al also found that authoritative parenting style decreases the future incidence of aggression in children (24).

Evaluating our hypothesis, it was demonstrated that there was no significant relationship between the authoritarian parenting style and child abuse, whereas in the previous studies (39) a significant relationship was found between them. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between (childbearing style) and child abuse. However, in other studies this relationship has been established (40). The absence of a relationship can be due to differences in the timing and location of studies together, the cultural, psychological, and social condition.

### Conclusion

According to the results of this study, authoritative parenting style is the best type of parenting style to reduce the incidence of child abuse. On the other hand, father's job and gender affected on the child abuse. Therefore, education for parents in the pregnancy period can significantly reduce the prevalence of child abuse.

Considering that family survival is of great importance by modern's societies, it seems necessary to evaluate the underlying factors of family decline and children's aggression. Therefore, the relationship between parenting styles and aggression in children is recommended to investigate in future studies. Moreover, the population is recommended to be enlarged and the prevalence of child abuse be studied in various styles.

### Ethical disclosure

The Ethics Committee of University of Kurdistan approved the study (with number: 1395.46).

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### Author contributions

All the authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this submitted manuscript and approved submission.

### Conflict of interest

The is no conflict of interest.

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