



Original Article

Surveying of relationship between child abuse and aggression in primary school students in Sanandaj City-Iran



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Child abuse is a deliberate act of violence against children under the age of 18 years. One of its major complications is the aggression of children and, as a result, an increase in crime in society and a reduction in the success and quality of life in children. The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between child abuse and aggression in primary school students in Sanandaj City-Iran.

Methods: In this cross sectional study, the population included 381 primary school students (10-12 years old) living in Sanandaj. Samples were selected through multistage cluster sampling. Eysenck Aggression Questionnaire and the Majdzadeh Child Abuse Questionnaire were used. Data were analyzed using SPSS-18 software with Chi-square test for statistical analysis.

Results: Of the 381 students, 171 (44.9%) were male and 210 (55.1%) were female. Chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference between aggression with gender ($P=0.01$) and grade ($P=0.036$). There was also a significant relationship between child abuse and father's education ($P<0.05$). There was a significant relationship between aggression and different types of child abuse (psychological, emotional, physical and neglect) ($P<0.05$).

Conclusion: Considering the increasing prevalence of child abuse and its direct relationship with aggression in children, proper planning to reduce this social problem, it seems necessary to conduct educational classes for parents and teach them the proper way of communication with children.

Introduction

Intentional harm to children under the age of 18, including physical harm, neglect, psychological and emotional harm done by parents or people who are caretakers of children, are known as child abuse (1). The prevalence of child abuse in the world is increasing (2). In 2012, Child Protection Services (CPS) estimated that nearly 9 out of 1,000 children in the United States were victims of child abuse, most of them (78%) being victims of neglect (3). Therefore, neglect and emotional abuse seem to be the commonest and also the most hidden form of child abuse (3). Recent studies suggest that one out of eight children under the age of 18 is a

victim (4). Children are always more vulnerable than other people (5) because of their lack skills and experience as well as their inability to defend themselves. In severe cases and in the absence of control and prevention, child abuse can cause child mortality (6). The causes of child abuse include parental education, parental physical abuse, domestic violence in the parents' family, parental psychiatric disorder (8), family economic pressure (9), and community cultural beliefs (10). Problems of children start at the early stages of life and reach their peak in adolescence. Child abuse affects physical health (11), behavioral health and mental health of victims and disrupts their quality of life (12), and ultimately causes aggression, antisocial behavior

and increased crime in society. Any behavior aimed at harming others is known as aggressive behavior (14). Among the causes of aggression, we can mention the fundamental failures and aggressive models in children (13). Aggression, if not controlled, causes a variety of physical and mental problems and reduces the success and quality of life of a person (15). Children develop aggression from the family, parents, and friends' environments besides mass media; therefore, behavioral aggression has an imitative nature, and observing the aggressive behavior of others causes imitation (16). Aggression is more frequently seen in strict parents where physical punishment is considered essential in child-rearing, or in families that do not demonstrate decisive behavior against child aggression (17). In contrast, in families with a rational parenting style, the level of aggression in children is lower (18). In a study done on students at Islamic Azad University Ilam, it was concluded that life skills training can significantly reduce students' anxiety and aggression (19). The main roots of human aggression are in the childhood. If children are prevented from doing activities required for their age, the morale of aggression is gradually reinforced in them (17). Identifying child abuse outcomes is important and preventing them reduces its negative impact on children and, as a result, increases community health (19, 20). On the other hand, Servatyari et al. showed that the children in a family with rational authority parenting style have less aggression than the other children, so, this study confirms the role of parenting style in childhood aggression (21). Considering the importance of child abuse in children's health and its relation to aggression and its negative impact on the future of the child and society, as well as the increase of crime caused by it, we aimed to determine the relationship between child abuse and aggression in elementary school students of Sanandaj City-Iran.

Methods

In this cross-sectional study, 381 elementary school students (aged 10-12 years) from Sanandaj city were evaluated. The sample size was calculated according to Cochran formula with 95% confidence level. Two-stage cluster random sampling was used for this study. Each geographic region was selected as a cluster. Then in each cluster and from both educational districts, of the list of elementary schools (received from education ministry), four schools were selected, including two girls' schools (public and private) and two boys' schools. In total, from educational districts 1 and 2, a total of 8 schools were selected; then, from the list of students and in proportion to the number of students in each school (according to the overall sample size),

a number of students were selected as the sample. The inclusion criteria for this study included students aged between 10 and 12 who were willing to complete the questionnaires and entered their demographic data accurately. Exclusion criteria included lack of willingness to complete questionnaires or incorrect completion of questionnaires. The tools used in this study were demographic information questionnaire, Eysenck and Gilin Wilson aggression questionnaire and Majdzadeh child abuse questionnaire. The demographic information questionnaire included 7 questions about the gender of the students, the level of education, the level of parental education, the occupation of the parents and their birth order. The Aggression Questionnaire designed by Eysenck and Gilin Wilson had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.69 (22). The questionnaire has 30 categories, of which 20 have positive and 10 have negative answers, and the respondents answered the questions with "yes", "no" and "no comment". The score range was from 0 to 30, and the maximum score was 30. A score above 20 indicates severe aggression, a score of 12 to 20 showed moderate aggression and a score of below 12, indicating poor aggression. The Child Abuse Questionnaire was designed by Dr. Majdzadeh et al., and its validity and reliability were measured (23); The questionnaire was prepared in three sections of neglect (6 questions), physical and emotional-psychological (10 questions for each). Each section was answered with "no, never", "yes but sometimes", and "yes, always". If the children responded at least to one question in one section, they were considered to have been victimized in that area of abuse, and those who reported at least one question for each section, were considered as general abuse victims. This study was approved by Ethics Committee of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences (with number IR.MUK.1395.46 and IR.MUK.1395.224). After obtaining respective consents from Sanandaj County Education Office and the approval of the selected school principals, a brief explanation of the research objectives was given to students who were then invited to participate in the study. Samples, and in cases their parents, consent was gained before participation. Throughout the study, the right to quit participation in the study and commitment to privacy were taken into account, and safeguarding all information about them was emphasized. Eysenck and Gilin Wilson Aggression Questionnaire and Child Abuse Questionnaire were completed by students in schools. The questioners were present in classrooms to read the questions out for students and ask them to mark the answer in the questionnaire. If there were any ambiguity in answering questions for students during the answering sessions, the questioners help the students to resolve any ambi-

guity. The data was analyzed using SPSS-18 software. Frequency, mean (standard deviation) of qualitative and quantitative variables were estimated. Chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between qualitative variables and to examine the relationship of the quantitative variables between two groups and more. ANOVA and Tukey's test were used to determine the exact relationship between the variables. The significance level in this study was considered to be $P < 0.05$.

Results

This study was conducted on 381 elementary school's students of Sanandaj City, of which, 171 (44.9%) were male and 210 (55.1%) were female. The mean (\pm standard deviation) age of the students was 11.23 (± 0.92) years. The highest number of students, 162 (42.5%), were in the fourth grade. The highest number, 204 (53.5%), stated that their fathers were self-employed, and 286 (75.1%) stated that their mothers were house-

wives. 22 students (5.25%) stated that their fathers had completed a diploma, and 242 (63.5%) stated that their fathers had a diploma. 82 students (21.6%) stated to be an only child (Table 1). Mean and standard deviation for scores of aggression, emotional, mental, physical, neglect child abuse among students in this study were 22.6 ± 7.9 , 4.4 ± 3.8 , 3.0 ± 3.5 and 5.4 ± 1.4 respectively. According to the findings, there was a significant relationship between aggression with different types of child abuse (mental and emotional, physical, and neglect) ($P < 0.05$). The results showed that there is a significant difference between aggression with gender ($P = 0.01$) and aggression with students' educational base ($P = 0.036$). Based on the results of Tukey's test, aggression in girls was significantly related to neglect ($P = 0.111$). However, aggression with other demographic variables did not show a significant difference ($P > 0.05$). There was a significant relationship between child abuse and students' educational base ($P = 0.04$). There was also an emotional and psychological child-

Table 1. Comparison of aggression based on demographic variables in primary school students in Sanandaj City

Variables	Grouping	Aggression		
		Frequency (Percent)	Mean \pm SD	P-value
Gender	Girl	210 (55.1)	24.6 \pm 7.8	0.001
	Boy	171 (44.9)	21.0 \pm 7.7	
Grade	4	162 (42.5)	21.5 \pm 7.9	0.036
	5	147 (38.6)	22.8 \pm 8.3	
	6	72 (18.9)	24.5 \pm 6.9	
	Employee	120 (31.5)	22.1 \pm 8.9	
Father's job	Free	204 (53.5)	28.0 \pm 8.5	0.084
	Unemployed	13 (3.4)	22.0 \pm 6.4	
	Other	44 (11.6)	24.6 \pm 7.8	
	Employee	68 (17.8)	23.4 \pm 8.9	
Mother's job	Housewife	286 (75.1)	26.6 \pm 7.7	0.356
	Unemployed	15 (3.9)	22.6 \pm 9.5	
	Other	12 (3.1)	18.9 \pm 5.8	
	Illiterate	21 (5.5)	25.6 \pm 7.2	
Father's education	Diploma	200 (52.5)	22.5 \pm 8.2	0.311
	Associate degree or Bachelor	124 (32.5)	22.6 \pm 7.8	
	Master of science or more	36 (9.5)	21.5 \pm 7.1	
	Illiterate	28 (7.4)	24.3 \pm 5.8	
Mother's education	Diploma	242 (63.5)	22.3 \pm 7.9	0.276
	Bachelor	103 (27)	22.7 \pm 8.3	
	Master of science or more	8 (2.1)	26.9 \pm 8.7	
	1	82 (21.6)	22.2 \pm 8.2	
Number of children	1-3	274 (71.9)	22.5 \pm 7.9	0.357
	4 or more	25 (6.5)	24.8 \pm 7.5	

birth among students who have illiterate fathers more than those with a higher education level than their fathers ($P=0.049$). Moreover, emotional and psychological child abuse in students who had illiterate fathers is higher than those with higher education. Based on Tukey's test results, the most significant difference of child abuse was found in sixth grade. Finally, there was

no significant difference between child abuse and other demographic variables ($P>0.05$).

Discussion

The results of this study showed that aggression had a significant relationship with a variety of child abuse

Table 2. Comparison of different types of child abuse based on demographic variables in primary school students in Sanandaj City

Variables	Grouping	Child abuse		
		Psychological and emotional Mean (SD)	Physical Mean (SD)	Neglect Mean (SD)
Gender	Boy	5.2 (3.7)	3.7 (3.5)	5.3 (1.5)
	Girl	2.7 (3.8)	2.4 (3.4)	5.5 (1.4)
	P-value	0.805	0.173	0.011
Graduation	4	4.4 (3.7)	3.0 (3.2)	5.5 (1.6)
	5	4.1 (4.0)	2.9 (3.9)	1.3 (5.2)
	6	4.8 (3.7)	3.0 (3.7)	5.7 (1.3)
	P-value	0.473	0.962	0.040
Father's job	Employee	4.6 (3.9)	3.0 (3.5)	5.4 (1.6)
	Free	4.4 (3.8)	3.2 (3.7)	5.4 (1.6)
	Unemployed	5.6 (3.3)	3.6 (2.7)	5.4 (0.96)
	Other	3.1 (3.6)	2.0 (3.3)	5.5 (1.4)
Mother's job	P-value	0.980	0.273	0.989
	Employee	4.3 (3.6)	2.6 (2.7)	5.4 (1.1)
	Housewife	4.5 (3.9)	3.2 (3.8)	5.4 (1.1)
	Free	3.8 (3.8)	2.2 (2.9)	5.7 (1.4)
	Other	2.4 (2.8)	1.5 (2.4)	5.0 (0.51)
Father's education	P-value	0.279	0.241	0.728
	Illiterate	5.7 (3.6)	4.2 (3.7)	5.3 (0.91)
	Diploma	4.5 (3.8)	3.0 (3.6)	5.5 (1.4)
	Associate degree or Bachelor	4.3 (3.7)	3.0 (3.6)	5.5 (1.4)
	Master of science or more	3.0 (3.8)	2.4 (2.9)	5.6 (1.2)
Mother's education	P-value	0.049	0.303	0.705
	Illiterate	4.6 (3.9)	2.7 (2.8)	5.3 (1.5)
	Diploma	4.4 (3.8)	3.2 (3.7)	5.4 (1.5)
	Associate degree or Bachelor	4.1 (3.8)	2.6 (3.4)	5.6 (1.2)
	Master of science or more	4.7 (4.6)	2.7 (2.8)	6.0 (1.5)
	P-value	0.895	0.567	0.434

Table 3. Relationship between parenting styles and child abuse in primary school students in Sanandaj City

Types of child abuse		Mean (SD)	P-value
	Psychological and emotional	4.4 (3.8)	<0.001
Aggression	Physical	3.0 (3.5)	<0.001
	Neglect	5.4 (1.4)	0.03

types such as mental, emotional, physical, and neglect, i.e. in children with any type of child abuse, aggression occurs more often, which are in line with the result of Kerr et al. (24) and Ghasemi et al. studies (25). In the present study, no relationship between aggression and the level of father's education, mother's education, father's occupation and mother's occupation was found. These results were consistent with the results of Ralt et al. (26), Tahmasbiyan et al. (27) and Torshay et al. (28). However, in the study of Sharifirad et al., the relationship between father's occupation and child aggression was proven (29), and in the study of Malik Shahi et al. (30), a significant relationship was found between child abuse among middle school students in Khorramabad and father's occupation and parents' education. It should be noted that the statistical population of the study was elementary school students, while in the Sharifi study, the statistical population were high school students and in the study of Menashtkhahi the statistical population was middle school students. In addition to the above, the questionnaire, location and date of the studies were different, which could be the reason of different results. One of the results of this study was that aggression in girls was more than that of boys, which was consistent with the results of the study by Nichols et al. (31). They concluded that female students in grades 6 and 7 showed the highest rates of aggression compared to boys, which may be due to the delicacy associated with the 10-12-year age for girls, when they enter puberty, and are flooded with feelings of ownership and power. The study concluded that there is a relationship between neglect child abuse and the female gender, such that child neglect was more likely to be observed in female students, which may be due to the high sensitivity of girls and the emotional need of girls in community, which is consistent with the results of the study conducted by the center of Control and Prevention of Diseases, announced in 2013 (3). According to the main findings of the present study, aggression was significantly associated with child abuse, such that in a study by Ford et al. (32), aggression was 50% higher in boys victimized of physical child abuse compared to boys who had not been exposed to such abuse. In another study, boys shown to be more likely to suffer

from oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) than girls (33). In the present study, there was a significant relationship between child abuse and father's education, such that child abuse was lower in children of parents with higher education levels, which was consistent with the results of Zohrabi Moghadam et al. (34) and also Miri et al. studies (5). The reason for such finding, could be that parents with a higher level of education, better understand their children and their needs, and thus, incidence of various types of child abuse were lower in their children. In the present study, there was a significant relationship between abuse and the grade of elementary school students, such that at the sixth grade of elementary school, children were more likely to experience abuse, the reason for which, is perhaps entering or nearing the puberty age, which causes their disobedience to their parents, agitation and aggression in the community, which consequently forces parents to commit abuse in order to control their children.

Conclusion

According to the results of this study, there is a significant relationship between child neglect abuse and aggression in elementary students of Sanandaj city, such that, children who had been victims of abuse, expressed a higher degree of aggression compared to their peers. Considering the increasing prevalence of child abuse in the world and its direct relationship with aggression in children, proper planning to reduce this social problem, it seems necessary to conduct educational classes for parents and teach them the proper way of communication with children. Of the main limits of this study are the age, experience and understanding of students in answering questions about violence and child abuse, as well as students' fear of being scared or blamed by parents, or feeling of embarrassment by correct answers to the questions. It seems that conducting this study in other age groups can provide useful and comparable results.

Ethical Disclosure

This study was approved by Ethics Committee of

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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 authors declare any conflict of interest.

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