

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN THE FAMILY

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ABSTRACT: *The abuse and neglect of children continue to be two sensitive subjects of the public agenda, on which the attention and efforts of the authorities, but also those of the relevant actors from the non-governmental environment, will continue to be directed with the same concern. The need to harmonize this common effect must remain a priority, given the serious long-term effects that acts of violence perpetrated on a child can have on his future development and his behavior as an adult, in the overall rules of social coexistence.*

The relevant and substantial analysis of the various forms that violence against children takes, at the level of Romanian society, brings to the fore the way in which children and adults perceive the phenomenon of violence, its consequences or the causalities underlying such behavior.

The phenomenon of abuse still has a weak recognition and awareness at the level of society. The specific cultural paternal gives the family a closed status, the process of collective awareness of situations of abuse being just at the beginning.

Key words: *abuse; neglect; protective measures;*

1. Introduction

The problem of child abuse is that of Romanian society as a whole because it bears the consequences of the victims' inability to adapt and integrate through developed antisocial behaviors, the lack of a profession, a job, through the perpetuation of abusive behavior. The effects of the phenomenon have a long-lasting social impact, requiring efforts at the organizational, administrative and economic level. The care, recovery and rehabilitation of the child who has been subjected to abuse or exploitation of any kind involves complex long-term efforts.

Child abuse and neglect continue to be two sensitive topics on the public agenda, on which the attention and efforts of the authorities, but also those of the relevant actors from the non-governmental environment-government will continue to move forward with the same concern.

The need to harmonize this joint effort must remain a priority, given the serious long-term effects that acts of violence perpetrated on a child can have on their future development and his behavior as an adult, in the set of rules of social coexistence.

The pertinent and substantive analysis of the various forms that violence against children takes, at the level of Romanian society, brings to the fore the way in which children and adults perceive the phenomenon of violence, its consequences or the causalities underlying such behavior.

2. Understanding the phenomenon of violence

Seen as a global public health problem by the World Health Organization (WHO), it also estimates that annually 40 million children under the age of 14 are victims of abuse and neglect (WHO, 2007), i.e. approximately 1.8% of the 2,213,456,000 children under 18 worldwide (UNICEF, 2009).

Studies from the US and other highly industrialized countries estimate that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 12 boys will experience some form of maltreatment (Finkelhor, 2008), while studies in developing countries estimate a much higher rate (Mulinge, 2002). A conservative estimate would be that 1 in 15 children worldwide, i.e. approximately 150 million children are maltreated in one form or another every year, so more than 4 times more than the WHO

estimate. Under these conditions, in 20 years since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the idea of protecting the child is more than ever on the political and research agenda around the world.

In addition, in the current socio-economic context, the question arises regarding the effects of maltreatment on the well-being of the child, knowing 1 PR-99-20/WHO 2 On November 20, 1989 by resolution 44/25 of the UN General Assembly. The only states that have not ratified are Somalia (due to the non-recognition of the government internationally and the USA, although it has ratified the associated Optional Protocols) that periods of economic crisis are associated with an increase in the level of violence against children (Harper, Jones, McKay, Espey, 2009)

A macro approach, at the community level, will allow interventions to be carried out at the level of families in those areas that are prone to a greater risk.

Interventions that succeed in modifying contextual factors are more likely to create a safer environment for the child. In other words, prevention activities at the community level are more effective than those centered on the person and from a material point of view (Freisthler, Merritt, LaScala, 2006).

As the urbanization process has increased in recent years, urban communities are "being built" as social spaces of risk for child maltreatment. Recent studies show that in cities, young people are exposed to increased levels of violence (Aisenberg, Ell, 2005; Salzinger et al., 2006; Shields, Nadasen, Pierce, 2008), this having a series of effects on them such as increasing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco (Fick, Thomas, 1995), the decrease in the level of individual safety (Salzinger et al., 2006), the increase in domestic violence (Shields, Nadasen, Pierce, 2008), high rates of child abuse and neglect (Lynch, Cicchetti, 1998 cited Phelps, McCarthy, Davis, 2002; Coulton et al., 2007; Guterman et al., 2009). The explanation of the relationship between the characteristics of the urban community and child maltreatment was made in several directions (Barnes, Katz, Korbin, O'Brien, 2006), two of which attract attention in particular (Coulton et al., 2007): one that

emphasizes social disorganization, and the other on ecological-transactional development

The term child abuse was defined in the 60s under the name of "battered child syndrome", the concept being expanded, constantly, until it came to be used for all forms of maltreatment, not only physical abuse but also emotional and sexual abuse or various forms of neglect. Roth-Szamoskozi, M. (2005)

Child violence is a complex and integrative concept for the various forms of physical, verbal, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, economic/labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, abduction and/or disappearance, migration at risk, trafficking, violence through internet etc., referring to all environments with which the child is in a relationship: family, educational, medical, protection institutions, crime investigation and rehabilitation/detention environments, internet, mass media, workplaces, sports environments, community, etc. Marc G. (2015)

The main forms of child violence are: abuse, neglect, exploitation and child trafficking.

Abuse is defined in Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights (art. 89, paragraph 1) and can take different forms, being classified as physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and economic abuse (HG no. 49/ 2011, annex 1, chapter II.2.1. Operational definitions).

Physical abuse consists of non-accidental painful touching or physical contact, including physical intimidation directed at the child, and is represented by those physical traumas resulting from being poked, slapped, hit, bitten, shaken, grabbed, thrown, suffocated, burned, handcuffed or restrained, caused by the abuser, regardless of whether he intended to hurt the child or not.

Emotional abuse is a form of psychological abuse through which a person is exposed to behaviors that cause emotional trauma, post-traumatic stress syndrome and anxiety. This type of abuse is considered a form of domestic violence. In many cases, people do not realize that they are becoming victims of emotional abuse, a fact that ends up making them feel controlled and humiliated. Even without being duplicated by physical abuse, the results are similar and generate fear in the abused person;

as a consequence of the abuse, she comes to doubt what she feels and what she thinks. Emotional abuse is the essential and most destructive factor in all forms of abuse and neglect but also the least understood. It overlaps in definition with psychological abuse and defines a stable pattern of the relationship between the child and the person who cares for him.

Abuse happens when someone hurts a child, makes them feel bad on purpose, bullies them, manipulates them or gets them to do different things with their private parts. The abuse may happen only once or it may be repeated.

"Children have the right to live in an environment without violence. So do you, that's

why we want you to know how you can do it so that you don't suffer. At the same time, it is very important that you don't hurt others either". (Ancu . 2006, p.103) Child abandonment/ family abandonment is the worst form of neglect.

3. Child abuse and neglect in Romania - statistical data

In table no. 1 presents the cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation, reported by the County Departments of Social Assistance and Child Protection, data collected for the first half of the current year, respectively, the period January 1, 2023 - June 30, 2023

Table no. 1. The cases of abuse

Cases of:	Total Cases	Urban	Rural	Number of children left in the family (with services provided)	Number of children for whom the DGASPC director ordered emergency placement (and services cf. PIP)	Number of children for whom the court ordered emergency placement, with a presidential order, and DGASPC offers services cf. PIP	Number of cases for which criminal prosecution of the aggressor was initiated	Number of cases in progress	Number of closed cases
a) Physical abuse	983	497	486	788	165	9	344	426	573
b) Emotional abuse	1122	612	510	1024	81	3	104	628	518
c) Sexual abuse	804	310	494	676	122	2	622	404	423
d) Neglect	5925	2530	3395	4591	1182	127	111	2579	3749
e) Exploitation through work	101	55	46	92	8	0	6	75	26
f) Sexual exploitation	24	12	12	22	2	0	16	5	20
g) Exploitation for committing crimes	76	46	30	69	7	0	35	26	50
Total	9035	4062	4973	7262	1567	141	1238	4143	5359
<i>which occurred in:</i>									
Cases of:	Family	At the AMP	Residential services	Educational units	Other institutions	Other locations			
a) Physical abuse	645	18	46	94	3	177			
b) Emotional abuse	952	6	15	74	4	71			
c) Sexual abuse	357	4	6	16	4	417			
d) Neglect	5687	17	24	66	8	123			
e) Exploitation through work	92	0	0	0	1	8			
f) Sexual exploitation	6	0	0	0	0	18			
g) Exploitation for committing crimes	45	0	0	5	0	26			
Total	7784	45	91	255	20	840			

Source: <https://copii.gov.ro/1/date-statistice-copii-si-adoptii/>

As it also appears in the specialized literature, the number of girls, victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation, is higher than that of male children (table no. 2)

4. Violence in the family

Domestic violence is defined by Law no. 217/2003 (art. 2). We emphasize the difference

Table 2. Distribution of types of abuse by gender

Cases of:	Male	Female	Total
a) Physical abuse	511	472	983
b) Emotional abuse	509	613	1122
c) Sexual abuse	78	726	804
d) Neglect	2877	3048	5925
e) Exploitation through work	57	44	101
f) Sexual exploitation	3	21	24
g) Exploitation for committing crimes	56	20	76
Total	4091	4944	9035

Source: <https://copii.gov.ro/1/date-statistic-copii-si-adoptii/>

From the same source, we can also present the age distribution of abused, neglected, exploited children, as they are in the official statistics, based on reports from the county departments and those from the sectors of the city of Bucharest (table no. 3)

between the term domestic violence, which refers to violence between partners, and family violence, which refers to violence directed against any member of the family. In other words, the concept of domestic violence is included in the concept of family violence,

Table no. 3. Age distribution

Cases of:	<1 year	1-2 years	3-6 years	7-9 years	10-13 years	14-17 years	≥18 years
a) Physical abuse	12	27	95	139	314	376	20
b) Emotional abuse	35	80	230	202	337	233	5
c) Sexual abuse	1	1	30	41	257	467	7
d) Neglect	578	643	1096	843	1210	1554	1
e) Exploitation through work	4	8	24	12	32	21	0
f) Sexual exploitation	0	0	0	1	5	18	0
g) Exploitation for committing crimes	0	0	5	9	32	30	0
Total	630	759	1480	1247	2187	2699	33

Source: <https://copii.gov.ro/1/date-statistic-copii-si-adoptii/>

Next, we present the categories of social services benefited by children identified as victims of some form of neglect, abuse or exploitation, at the national level (table no. 4).

which includes both violence between partners, whether they are spouses or cohabitants, as well as violence against children, the elderly or other relatives in the family.

Table no. 4. Categories of social services

Cases of:	Rehabilitation services			Medical services (other than rehabilitation)	Educational services		Legal advice/ assistance
	Psychological counseling	Psychotherapy	Other therapies		School reintegration	Orientation and professional training	
a) Physical abuse	639	26	27	64	3	0	443
b) Emotional abuse	685	26	45	47	7	0	445
c) Sexual abuse	615	27	29	61	0	0	312
d) Neglect	3465	41	225	271	71	95	1999
e) Exploitation through work	22	3	54	3	4	0	13
f) Sexual exploitation	22	0	0	1	0	0	13
g) Exploitation for committing crimes	52	0	0	0	0	0	46
Total	5500	123	380	447	85	95	3271

Source: <https://copii.gov.ro/1/date-statistic-copii-si-adoptii/>

For operationalization with a view to monitoring, GD no. 49/2011 classifies domestic violence in:

a) Physical violence - consists of touching or painful physical contact, including physical intimidation directed at the victim. Forms of manifestation: pushing, slapping, pulling hair, twisting arms, disfiguring, causing bruises, contusions, burns, beatings, punching, slapping or kicking, throwing various objects at the victim, hitting walls and furniture, using weapons .

Physical violence also includes the destruction of property that belongs to the victim or that the two partners own and use together. Triff, Z. (2016).

b) Psychological violence - precedes and accompanies the other forms of violence/abuse, but can also be manifested in isolation through insults, threats, intimidation, killing of favorite domestic animals, deprivation of essential personal needs (food, sleep, etc.)

c) Sexual violence - consists of degrading comments to the victim, unpleasant touches and various insults during or in connection with the sexual act, including marital rape.

d) Violence through deprivation/neglect - represents the non-physical form of violence. It is manifested by the aggressor's inability or refusal to provide the person with what is necessary for all aspects of his life: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, life safety in the context where the

family or the legal guardian has access to the necessary resources. Includes lack of supervision and lack of protection/help for the person in the face of danger, deprivation of liberty, abandonment of the family, non-compliance with measures regarding the custody of the minor. Rent from his home

e) Economic violence - manifests itself by controlling the victim's access to money or personal belongings, food, means of transport, telephone, and other sources of protection or care from which they could benefit. It leads to a decrease in the victim's resources and autonomy.

5. The causes of the violet/abuse, on the child

The vast majority of children participating in focus groups relate to violent behavior (regardless of whether it is physical, verbal or psychological violence) taking into account the following dimensions/factors:

1. Factors that affect the socialization of the aggressor, with an important emphasis on primary socialization, "the seven years at home". Important in this case are elements such as models and family values - "what the child learns from the parents" (Ancu . 2010, p.98).

2. In the case of teachers, they resort to violence to "discipline", in the context where they "don't know other methods" (Ancu . 2010, p.100).

3. Factors related to the environment / group of friends and its pressure on the child, especially among teenagers and young people: "The environment is to blame most of the time, the child can be mean to the parents and when he leaves the house he swears and do everything. The parents have no way of knowing, because they don't see them". (Ancu . 2010, p. 100)

4. Aggravating factors / that exacerbate already existing problems: alcohol consumption, material difficulties, the departure of one parent, or worse, both parents, abroad (by losing "control over the child") etc. (Ancu . 2010, p. 101)

6. Consequences for the child

Violence can have immediate and/or long-term consequences on the child's health, development and well-being.

In the long term, the consequences also affect adult life, being reflected by the difficulty to develop or maintain intimate relationships with the opposite sex or even social relationships in general, to find a stable job, to have the attitudes and the skills needed to be a good enough parent.

Not only the act of violence itself has consequences, but also the context in which it occurs. Usually, there is an interaction between several risk factors that lead to the emergence of consequences and increased impact. Repeated interviewing/hearing of the child after the discovery of the act of violence can also revictimize the child.

The consequences are reflected on the child's development both emotionally and on other aspects of development and school adaptation.

- Affectively: atypical (disorganized) attachment, affective deficiencies, negative emotionality, aggressiveness, low self-esteem etc.
- In terms of other aspects of development: growth retardation, delays in motor, cognitive and language development, reduced social skills etc.
- In terms of school adaptation: low school performance, learning difficulties, school dropout.

a) The consequences of physical abuse

Physical abuse can have physical, neurological consequences and can lead to illness, fractures, disabilities and even death. It also frequently leads to aggressive behavior, emotional and behavioral problems and learning difficulties and reduced school performance. The context in which physical abuse occurs can be in the family, various institutions (e.g. school, re-education center, placement center), in the community (e.g. on the street) and even society.

b) The consequences of emotional abuse

Sustained emotional abuse especially has long-term consequences on the child's development, mental health, behavior and self-esteem. The contexts of producing this type of abuse are usually those related to domestic violence in the family, adults with mental health problems and parents with low parental skills.

c) The consequences of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is often recognized through self-aggressive behaviors, depression, loss of self-esteem and sexual behavior inappropriate for the child's age. The severity of the impact is all the greater the longer and more intense the abuse, the older the child, if there is a component of premeditation, threat, coercion, sadism, etc. In the case of sexual abuse, once the child recognizes and reveals it, the presence of an adult, especially a protective parent or a caregiver, in whom the child trusts and helps him face this dramatic experience and understand what happened to him, offering him support and protection.

d) The consequences of negligence

Severe neglect, especially of young children, greatly affects the growth and physical and intellectual development of the child, and in extreme cases it can lead to hospitalization, the installation of a disability and/or the death of the child.

7. Child neglect

The forms of ill-treatment that fail to ensure the biological, emotional and educational needs of children, endangering their physical, emotional, cognitive and social development, fall into the category of neglect.

Child neglect is a category that often raises

the issue of opportunity in supporting the child. Roth-Szamoskozi, M. (2005, p.81) considers neglect as posing special problems to professionals, because cases rarely reach the level of discussions in the child protection commission, and the interventions in favor of minors are often discontinued soon after cases are reported. Although families who neglect their children can face serious financial and other problems, social services also tend to neglect providing help.

A broad category of ill treatment, child neglect includes various forms of disinterest, shown by the people meant to take care of him: physical neglect and physical safety of the child, in the scope of which fall: neglect of the child's nutrition, neglect of adequate clothing, failure to ensure a adequate housing, failure to provide supervision and protection, medical negligence; neglecting the child's education and its cultural depravity: not trusting the child in an appropriate form of education, orienting the child towards other activities, not protecting the child from negative influences, neglecting the child's special educational needs; emotional neglect of the child: in the own family, of the child in a form of protection outside the biological family; temporary or permanent abandonment of the child: *exploitation from the home during the day or night or disinterest in the absence of the child from home, leaving the child unattended for a long time, abandoning the child to a person, in a hospital or in a protective institution and lack of interest in such a child abandoned* (Iovu, MB2008)

Although the consequences of neglect are often serious due to their chronic nature, the true prevalence of the phenomenon in the population, outside of reported cases, is little known. Neglect of the type of serious disinterest of the parents towards the child, going as far as giving up concern for him, is an extreme form, which is obviously included in the spectrum of child abuse. In the specialized literature, severe forms of neglect are actually considered abuses, being forms of omission of actions that can have very serious consequences on the development of the child's personality. Roth-Szamoskozi, M. (2005)

Ofusually, however, the neglect is less obvious: the child is given food, but

insufficient, inadequate in quality, or only after he is tired of crying because of hunger; the child is dressed, but with inappropriate clothes, in which he does not feel good, or is ridiculed in the collectivitate; receives, however, some care from the parents, but this is insufficient. Roth-Szamoskozi, M. (2005)

8. Conclusions

All investigations and explorations have as their common goal a deeper understanding of the human being and at the same time the understanding of the problem itself, in order to follow an effective intervention (recovery, but also preventive).

There are differences between child protection specialists in intervening in child abuse situations. These differences are evident starting from the number of specialists who are involved, the way the case is developed, the importance given to the assessment of the child's needs, the number of people interviewed during the assessment, the way in which the child-victim is or is not involved in making decisions that concern him. In most of the case studies, the opinion of the child and the application of the principles of social assistance are not mentioned.

The way in which the specialist approaches the problem of abuse, the importance he gives to the assessment of the child's needs, the assessment of the risk factors of abuse create distinct models from one service to another.

To the extent that the rate of family abuse and neglect is higher where there is also community violence, one of the ways to prevent abuse is to respond to the needs of families experiencing such community problems. Likewise, family interventions should be oriented towards improving problem-solving skills and better management of family roles.

In conclusion, the abuse and neglect of children is a serious problem in Romania, as evidenced by the statistical data presented, with long-term consequences on the development and well-being of these children. It is essential that the authorities, health professionals and social services, but also society as a whole, work together to prevent these forms of violence against children and to provide

adequate support and protection to victims. Only through awareness, education and action can we hope to create a safer and healthier future for Romania's future generations.

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