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CHILD ABUSE PREVALENCE IN RUSSIAN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The article presents a child abuse spreading study (on physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect) fulfilled with International Child Abuse Screening Tool – Children's version (ICAST-C) in Nizhny Novgorod region of the Russian Federation. The sample numbers 227 children (131 girls, 96 boys) from 11 to 18. The authors found out that 78.4% of children face at least one form of abuse during their lifetime. ¾ of respondents suffered from abuse in family, and 2/3 faced abuse at school. The sample represents high levels of psychological abuse at home (present for more than 2/3 of respondents), while children are more frequently threatened at home than at school (54% and 30% respectively). Also in families, more children suffer from beating (49% in contrast with 33% at school). However, sexual abuse, contact form in particular, is more frequent at school (27%). Almost all forms of abuse are equally present for boys and girls. The exceptions are physical abuse at school, which is more relevant for boys (45%) than for girls (33%), and sexual abuse at home, where girls are more involved (13% in contrast with 4% for boys). Girls also suffer more from humiliation, than boys do. Other forms and types of abuse are not sensitive to gender. Older teenagers are less frequently abused than younger groups. They are less subjected to emotional abuse than other age groups (40% against 60-75% for others), and to sexual abuse forms. However, they suffer from penetrating sexual abuse more than others (8.5%).

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1. Introduction

Annual state reports "On children and families situation in Russian Federation" provide the data on critical status of children in modern Russia. It is characterized by deterioration of children's and teenagers' health, increased numbers of abandoned children, increased numbers of children with mental retardations, high incidence of crimes committed by children and teenagers, and increased drug and alcohol addiction rates among underage citizens (Report on children and family situation in Russian Federation for 2013). These urgent and severe problems take roots from deeper troubles: children's additions, asocial behavior and crimes are consequent to experienced child abuse or neglect.

In 1961 Henry Kempe, a pediatrician from Colorado, presented to American Academy of Pediatrics a paper on beaten child syndrome which described and determined so called unexplainable trauma of newborns (Kempe, 1962). It can be considered a starting point, when a professional society acknowledged child abuse phenomenon as a separate problem for the first time. This problem demanded united efforts from professionals, parents and society. Today, many articles, books and handbooks are published on particular medical, sociological, law, psychological topics, which feature the specifics of child abuse and maltreatment problem. Most of them are focused on studying the causes of child abuse, prevention and therapy programs, therapy for children with mental trauma, PTSD therapy, and early prevention programs (Bojos, 1992; Durrant, 2005; Finkelhor, 2005).

According to governmental statistics for 2013, 3.36% of total child population (29 969 000 children) became the victims of crimes, 19.62% addressed to centers for social care, and there were 333 950 violations of rights of underaged (Family and childhood, 2013). Thus, in Russia, children at least suffer nor lesser than in other countries, while scientific research of CAN is singular and don't yet have a tradition.

The goal of current article is to study child abuse spreading (physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect) in Nizhny Novgorod region of Russian Federation with International Child Abuse Screening Tool – Children's Version (ICAST-C).

By physical abuse, we meant any actions of parents or caregivers, which lead to physical trauma of the child or harm her health or development. Emotional abuse includes episodic or regular humiliations, threatening the child, ostentatious negative behavior and neglect, which lead to emotional or physical trauma. Sexual abuse comprised any actions, committed by an adult to the child and intended for sexual satisfaction of abuser. Neglect includes regular or temporary inability of parent or caregiver to meet child's need of care, food, health, clothes, shelter, medical care or safety, which lead to deterioration of child's health, development or child trauma (Volkova, 2011).

2. Methods and tools

The research was based on adapted version of ICAST-C (International Child Abuse Screening Tool – Children version) in Russian (Volkova, Isaeva et al., 2012) as a tool. International experts from eight universities developed this questionnaire, and tested in focus groups and delphi-groups. The final version was translated into 6 languages and piloted in 7 countries. Results of these studies were presented

on several Congresses (2006-2014), where this tool was considered valid for estimation of child abuse spreading in different countries.

The questionnaire comprises 88 questions, subdivided into following scales: demographical data on the respondent, family environment, child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. These scales, which describe various abuse types, were further fractioned to abuse forms. Sexual abuse type can occur in forms of contact, non-contact and penetrating abuse. Contact abuse includes all forms of unwanted touching of child or offender's private parts, unwanted kissing and fondling. Non-contact form is when child is made to watch sexually explicit pictures or videos, undressing or watching how adults undressing, making photos of naked children etc.

Physical abuse forms include direct harm to child's health and severe discipline (corporal punishment). Harming is any action to hurt a child by means of guns, hands, water, fire, or strangle. Severe discipline can happen by limiting child's freedom, twisting the ear or dragging for hair. Such actions may be less painful, but aimed at the child to acknowledge offender's power over her and right for punishment.

Emotional abuse consists of threats and humiliations. Any forms of threatening, including threats of harm and leaving without care, were considered threats. Mocking, nicknaming, shaming child because of her health, family or nationality were forms of humiliation.

There are two forms of neglect (which only applies to home abuse forms): physical neglect and psychological neglect. Neglect of physical needs is parent's failure to provide sufficient clothing, shelter, food, water and medicine for a child, which can harm her health. Psychological neglect is lack of care, attention, emotional warmth and support from parents or caregivers.

Research sample included 227 children (131 girls, 96 boys) of 11-18 age. The data were collected in summer camps, secondary schools and orphanages of Nizhny Novgorod region. Respondents were chosen randomly, and answer sheets were anonymized by the cipher. The procedure included signing written consent by parent/caregiver and verbal agreement to participate by the child. When conducted in the institution, data collection was also approved by director/administrator. Statistics were calculated with SPSS for Windows version 22. Basic method was a Pearson chi-square.

The research procedure, methods and tools were approved by Ethical committee of Saint Petersburg State University, certified by international system of Health and Human Services (HHS).

3. Results

The sample consists of 131 girls and 96 boys. It was split into three groups by age: younger teenagers (11-13 years), middle teenagers (14-16) and older teenagers (17-18). There were no significant differences in age groups by gender. 67 of respondents (29.5%) live with only one parent, in most cases with a mother; 130 children (57.2%) live in full families with both parents; 30 children (13.2%) do not have parents.129 of respondents (56.8%) reported to be religious, of them 118 (91.8%) are Orthodox, 2 (1.4%) Catholics, 1 - (0.7%) Protestant, 4 (2.8%) Muslim, 4 (2.8%) are of other beliefs. The majority of respondents are Russians - 197 children (87%); 8 children (3.4%) – Tatars; representatives of other nationalities (Jews, Mordva, Chuvashi) are no more than 2% of total number of respondents.

3.1. Family environment analysis

110 respondents (48.4%) reported their family environment to be threatening. Children witnessed or were part of conflicts and fights or saw their family members when they were drinking or on drugs. The accidence of such violations is presented on Table 01.

Table 01. Accidence of environment violations in families

Family anvisamment should taking the	Accidence, (%)			
Family environment characteristics	Present	Absent		
Someone is using drugs or alcohol	55 (24.2%)	172 (75.8%)		
Someone is shouting	95 (41.8%)	132 (58.2%)		
Someone is beating	41 (18.0%)	186 (82.0%)		
Someone is fighting with knifes or guns	16 (7.0%)	221 (93.0%)		
Someone is stealing things	20 (8.8%)	207 (91.2%)		

Conjugation analysis revealed that joint presence of these traits was not accidental (conjugation coefficient from 0.42 to 0.62, $p \le 0.01$). Considering this, we can conclude that if someone is fighting with knifes or guns it is 100% associated with abusing drugs or alcohol and connected to shouting, beating. Abusing drugs or alcohol is in 97% associated with fights and shouting. 75% of fights are accompanied by shouting.

3.2. Estimates of child abuse spreading at home and at school

78.4% of children in this sample suffered from a particular form of child abuse during their lifetime. ³/₄ of respondents faced abuse in families and 2/3 – at school. Emotional abuse at home is extremely prevalent (happens to more than 2/3 of the children), and children are largely threatened at home (54%). Also children more often suffer from direct harming at home than at school (49% vs 33%). At school, however, sexual contact abuse happens a lot (27%). The detailed results are showed on Table 02.

Table 02. Child abuse spreading by types and forms

Tours and farms of above	Place			
Types and forms of abuse	Family	School		
Any	171 (75.3%)	145 (63.9%)		
Physical	117 (51.5%)	86 (37.9%)		
Direct harming	112 (49.3%)	75 (33.0%)		
Discipline	51 (22.4%)	46 (20.2%)		
Emotional	156 (68.7%)	133 (58.6%)		
Threats	122 (53.7%)	68 (29.9%)		
Humiliations	127 (55.9%)	122 (53.7%)		
Sexual	21 (9.2%)	61 (26.9%)		
Contact	9 (3.9%)	51 (22.5%)		

Non-contact	15 (6.6%)	13 (5.7%)
Penetrating	7 (3.0%)	10 (4.4%)
Neglect	85 (37.04%)	
Physical	20 (8.8%)	
Psychological	81 (35.7%)	

Almost all types of abuse are equally present for boys and girls. We can point exceptions of physical abuse at school, which happens mostly to the boys (45%) than to girls (33%) and sexual abuse at home (13% of girls and 4% of boys). Girls significantly more often suffer from humiliations than boys. Other forms and types do not differ across genders.

Table 04 reports that older teenagers less often suffer from abuse than younger and middle teenagers. They face emotional abuse less than others (40% vs 60-75% in other groups). In general, they face sexual abuse less often, and at the same time, they are more vulnerable to penetrating abuse at home (8.5% of cases). The most vulnerable to any abuse are middle teenagers: they suffer from threatening at home, sexual abuse at home and penetrating abuse at school more than others.

Table 03. Child abuse spreading at home and at school split by gender

		Family		School			
	Boys	Girls	χ2	Boys	Girls	χ2	
Any	70 (73%)	101 (77%)	0.32	61(62.5%)	84 (64.1%)	0	
Physical	54 (56.2%)	63 (48%)	1.16	43(44.7%)	43 (32.8%)	2.88 .a	
Direct harming	51 (53%)	61 (46.5%)	0.70	32 (33%)	49 (37.4%)	0.24	
Discipline	17 (17.7%)	34 (25.9%)	1.71	22 (23%)	24 (18.3%)	0.47	
Emotional	59 (85.5%)	97 (74%)	3.51 .	57 (59%)	76 (58%)	0.005	
Threats	51 (53%)	71 (54%)	< 0.001	32 (31%)	36 (27.4%)	0.65	
Humiliations	42 (43.7%)	85 (64.8%)	9.20 **	49 (51%)	73 (55.7%)	0.31	
Sexual	4 (4%)	17 (13%)	4.12*	24 (25%)	36 (27.4%)	0.07	
Contact	3 (3.1%)	6 (4.5%)	0.04	23(23.9%)	28 (21.3%)	0.09	
Non-contact	3 (3.1%)	12 (9.1%)	2.36	4 (4.1%)	9 (6.8%)	0.33	
Penetrating	1 (1%)	6 (4.5%)	1.28	1 (1%)	9 (6.8%)	3.19	
Neglect	34 (35.4%)	51 (38,9%)	0.16				
Physical	8 (8%)	12 (9.1%)	0				
Psychological	32 (33%)	49 (37.4%)	0.24				

^a p: . <0.1;* - <0.05; ** - <0.01; *** - <0.001

Table 04. Child abuse spreading at home and at school split by age groups

	Family				School			
	Younger	Middle	Older	χ2	Younger	Middle	Older	χ2
Any	60 (78%)	95 (82%)	16 (45%)	20.07 *** a	51 (66%)	78 (68%)	16 (45%)	5.96*
Physical	37 (48%)	67 (58%)	13 (37%)	5.35	29 (37.6%)	43 (37.3%)	14 (40%)	0.08

Direct harming	34 (44%)	65 (56.5%)	13 (37%)	5.28	26 (33.7%)	37 (32%)	12 (34%)	0.08
Discipline	17 (22%)	31 (27%)	3 (8.5%)	5.21 .	15 (19.4%)	22 (19%)	9 (25.7%)	0.76
Emotional	56 (73%)	86 (75%)	14 (40%)	15.97 ***	50 (65%)	69 (60%)	14 (40%)	6.35*
Threats	37 (48%)	74 (64,3%)	11 (31.4%)	13.2**	26 (34%)	34 (29.5%)	8 (22.8%)	1.38
Humiliations	48 (62%)	67 (58.3%)	12 (34.2%)	8.19*	46 (60%)	63 (55%)	13 (37%)	5.04 .
Sexual	2 (2.5%)	16 (14%)	3 (8.5%)	7.05*	18 (23.3%)	37 (32.1%)	5 (14.2%)	4.97 .
Contact	0 (0%)	7 (6%)	(5.7%)	4.82 .	17 (22%)	29 (25.2%)	5 (14.2%)	1.85
Non-contact	2 (2.5%)	11 (9,5%)	2 (5.7%)	3.68	3 (3.8%)	9 (7.8%)	1 (2.8%)	1.95
Penetrating	0 (0%)	4 (3,4%)	3 (8.5%)	6.04*	1 (1.2%)	9 (7.8%)	0 (0%)	6.57*
Neglect	24 (31.1%)	49 (42.6%)	12 (34.2%)	2.75				
Physical	4 (5.1%)	15 (13%)	1 (2.8%)	5.36 .				
Psychological	23 (29.8%)	46 (40%)	12 (34.2%)	2.09				

^a p: . <0.1;*-<0.05; **- <0.01; ***-<0.001

4. Discussion

According to our data, every second child suffer from physical abuse (Tab.2). National US research also reported that approximately 50% of all children face physical abuse at school, and every tenth child has a severe physical trauma (Finkelhor, 2005). In general, however, physical abuse level in our research was higher than in the USA, which can be explained by larger spreading of physical violence in families.

Current research showed that physical abuse is prevalent for children of younger and middle teen ages (48% and 58% correspondently, see Table 04), while direct harming is more widespread than severe discipline. This trend persists for both boys and girls in all age groups, although boys suffer more from physical abuse at school. As a rule, physical abuse is easy to notice. Teachers or parents see bruisers, wounds, burns etc. in more than one body part (for example, back and chest), which origin is unclear and have a shape of object (for example, belt buckle, hand or rod). Child's senses are damaged, and she is usually not mobile. Behavioral indicators may include insularity or extreme aggression, negative orientation on other children in group (alert and aggressive to any changes), self-distractive behavior, and fear of coming home or to school, running away from home etc.

Physical abuse level is sometimes connected to particular cultural norms, especially with absence of legislative ban of physical punishment (Durrant, 2005). Russian national character includes sacrificing as a highly appreciated social standard. Physical suffering has an aura of sanctity. On the other hand, physical abuse is introduced to the context of modern life by unending criminal reports, social disasters, wars and fights. Mass media and the Internet unintentionally make physical abuse popular. Altogether, it can form tolerant attitudes to violence and physical abuse.

Current research did not find any significant differences between levels of physical abuse for genders (Table 03) or age groups (Tab.4), which allows suggesting that physical violence may be considered "normal" by children. A child who suffered from physical abuse thinks that beloved ones can show their affections by beating and she herself has a right to beat others. Physical abuse is considered a method to achieve goals. Adults express the same motivation when they justify physical punishment.

In current sample up to 23% children (Tab. 2) suffer from severe physical punishment, and it could happen both at home and at school. There were no significant effects of gender and age, except for lower levels among older teenagers. We may hypothesize that victims change their role to offenders, but this suggestion requires additional research.

Emotional abuse was high among the respondents, and can be compared, for example, with numbers from Brazil (Franzin, 2014). Emotional abuse is the most frequent type of abuse and happens to 60% of children of different age (Table 04). Child is very sensitive to it in family, when she faces threats of harming or humiliations. Girls suffer from this abuse more often than boys (Tab. 3). In addition, the younger child is the more destructive is the mechanism of emotional abuse (Table 04).

At school, humiliation is the most frequent form of emotional abuse, while the younger child is, the more often she suffers from mockery and humiliation. School emotional abuse can present in two main ways (Volkova, 2011): tough, severe teaching and abusive relationships between children of the same or different ages. The last way is sometimes called bullying (Olweus, 2001).

Nature of abusive actions is not yet definitely established, but we can claim that abusive actions toward other children originate from psychological insecurity of the offender: as a rule, aggressive behavior is connected to their own traumatic experience. The reasons for teacher's aggression to pupils are more divergent. It could be psychological trauma, emotional burnout, lacking skills of constructive interaction, insufficient competence. Teachers are looking for new ways of teaching and try to inspire informal atmosphere in class, but when they face a reality of educational process, which includes provocative behavior from particular pupils, they turn away from dialog and go back to authority and suppression. In these cases, children are constantly criticized, insulted, rarely praised, and reminded of their failures and stupidity. It happens in front of others (peers and classmates), when the traumatization is most deep.

Not every trauma is caused by intensive but singular action from other children or teachers. Traumatic context is no less dangerous. Repeated physical, social and verbal aggression may come from those who are considered superior in some aspect. It means, that bullyers include pupils of higher social status and fixed prerogative position in class or at school. These children may look prosperous, and even be school leaders and have excellent marks. In Russia, this problem was addressed by the study conducted by Petrosyantz (2011). The author questioned 272 children of 16 to 18 age and found out that up to 40% of them suffer from bullying. Current research reports even higher rates.

Humiliations, threatening and emotional stress slow down emotional development of the child. Emotions evolve in a fixed way, when the child fails to understand her own responses and reactions, and thus feelings and emotions of others. Compassion and positive feelings become difficult to abuse victims because they cannot find joy in simple things like other children. Their empathy is blocked, and as adults, they fail to express their feelings and usually refuse to deal with them.

Humiliation has consequences connected to self-cautiousness. It is extremely important in teen ages. As a rule, self-image of child victim of abuse is simplified, role of victim is underlined, and picture of damaged body parts is exaggerated or absent at all. Self-image loses its complexity, and becomes blurred, contradictory and disjunctive in time. Universal reaction is low self-esteem, which anchors all psychological disturbances connected to the abuse. Child can experience guilt, shame, and is constantly sure that she is worse than others. Abuse victims also lose a feeling of themselves as unique, precious, become rigid and closed to new experiences. Their world perception narrows down, and as a result, such children hardly achieve success and are respected by others.

Sexual abuse rates vary from 3% to 22.5% depending on the form, place and gender (Table 03). Sexual abuse levels at home reach 9%, and most victims are girls. Sexual abuse rate at school is 27%, where no differences were established between genders. Its level is so high that it is close to spreading of sexual abuse in Africa (Pereda, 2009).

The most severe form of sexual abuse – penetrating – happens to 3-4.4% of children at school and at home (Table 02). Although the results of current research reveled lower rates (compared to some countries, see Priebia, 2008), it is known that information about sexual abuse can remain hidden. According to the studies, up to 25% of girls and 38% of boys will not tell anyone about the case, and almost 65% of the remaining children will discuss the problem only with peers. Several will contact adults or professionals, and even they do not always meet understanding and support.

Most often middle and older teenage children suffer from penetrating abuse (see Table 04). Despite the stereotype that most of the abusers are strangers, 75-90% of children report to be acquainted with offenders. For 45% of cases abuser is a relative (mostly, father, stepfather, caregiver, brother or uncle), and for 30% - a family's acquaintance (brother's friend, mother's partner) (Cherepanova, 1996). Penetrating form is largely presented in investigations, and is a part of official statistics of sexual crimes against children. However, usually a history of other forms of sexual violations precedes the case.

In families, the most prevalent form of sexual abuse is non-contact (Table 02), when a child made to watch movies or pictures with sexual content, to undress in front of other people or to look at the naked person. At school, the most prevalent form is contact (Table 02), which includes unwanted touching or kisses. In everyday mind both noncontact abuse at home and contact abuse at school are considered "not criminal", and child's complaints about unsafety and violation pass for fantasies or exaggerations. The law does not consider this a crime, when it committed to a peer. The consequences of these actions are as damaging as those of penetrating abuse, in some cases – even more destructive: deformation of child's self-esteem, lower resistance, and idea that child sexual abuse can be acceptable, fear of the world.

In cases of sexual abuse neither gender, no age were the factors (Table 03 and Table 04). It contradicts a theory of the girls becoming victims three times more often than boys do. For abuse at home, though, this trend remains, which makes us to suspect that school environment contains hidden, unstudied factors, equalizing gender differences and targeting both boys and girls. Such factors may be pedagogical traditions (for example, teacher's refusal to interfere in any relationships between children when educational process remain undisturbed), inattention to child's problems at school and at home, or teacher's elimination from education beyond schooling.

Child neglect of both physical needs (food, clothing, medical care and shelter) and psychological needs (care, attention, and acceptance) was studied only for families. Physical neglect can occur because of objective reasons (poverty, mental disability, lack of experience), but may be intentional. A typical example is leaving children unattended, when accidents, poisoning or other threats happen. According to our data, every third child is deprived of psychological needs. Physical neglect happened to 9% of children (Table 02), which is the same as in other countries (Finkelhor, 2005), and equally presents for genders and ages.

5. Conclusion

Current research do not cover frequency analysis of child abuse cases, analysis of abusers and a number of other important questions. Intentionally we did not consider polyvictimization as a unified impact on a child, although almost 10% of our sample suffered from several forms of abuse simultaneously. The sample was not large and we hope, that future research will allow performing additional analysis and clarifying found trends. We hope that local research of child abuse spreading will help to outline the range of urgent tasks for providing help to abused children and preventive work. Preventive measures could include working with parents on prevention of physical discipline in families, optimization of parent-child relationships, correction of emotional stress and behavior for teenage girls, and further emotional development of children starting from primary school age.

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