

OBJECTIVE

Tutors in educational institutions (schools, among others) play a significant role in the recognition of child maltreatment. Every-day, long-lasting contact and observation of the child give much opportunity to detect defects in the child's somatic and mental state that may suggest the case of maltreatment. Therefore the aim of the study carried out among teachers was the evaluation of the level of knowledge about maltreated child syndrome and methods of prevention.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was carried out in the form of a standardized survey questionnaire. It consisted of 20 questions, including 11 one-choice questions and 9 questions that require one or more answers. The questions concerned issues of occurrences of child maltreatment and preventing actions. The survey included 141 teachers from schools in Lublin and near Lublin chosen at random. It was carried out from April to June 1999. The collected data underwent statistic analysis.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In the group of 141 teachers taking part in the survey the large majority were women (87.2%). The percentage of men in the group was 12.8%. The teachers from primary schools in Lublin constituted 51.85% of the whole group. 48.2% of the surveyed group were teachers from primary schools in villages near Lublin. The age of the subjects was between 21 and 61. The largest group was constituted by people between 36 and 45 (46.1%). The percentage of the teachers aged 21 to 35 was 27.7% and 26.2% of the subjects were above 46. As a result of such a division of age groups, the teachers who have got a long teaching experience were the majority. Those who have worked for 10 years constituted 27.7% of the subjects, teachers working from 11 to 20 years – 47.5% and above 21 years – 24.8% of the whole. The first thing to do was to define the level of teachers' knowledge of maltreated child syndrome on the basis of their own, subjective views. 61.7% of the subjects claimed that they were able to recognize the syndromes. The remaining group did not give a positive answer. 7.1% of them gave a definite negative answer, and the remaining 31.2% of the subjects answered that they might be able to detect symptoms of violence towards the child but only after a more thorough examination of the problem.

61.7% of the surveyed group of the teachers admitted that they observed the cases of using different forms of violence towards the children during their professional career. 35.5% of the whole had nothing to do with such cases in their classes but they did not pay special attention to them. In the view of 54.6% of the teachers the occurrences of such cases are quite rare and according to 7.1% of the group they occur frequently. The remaining teachers were not able to give their opinions on the subject. Among their students all known forms of maltreatment were observed as presented in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. Incidence of different firms of child maltreatment

Almost half of the surveyed group, i.e. 48.2% observed during their professional career cases of children with various symptoms indicating the use of physical violence against them. Among the most visible signs of physical maltreatment used towards the child were: wales, bruises and other marks of hitting on their skin (recognized by 44% of teachers), swellings in different parts of the body (9.2% of the subjects), wounds in different phases of healing noticed by one teacher (0.8%). Using corporal punishment and physical violence triggers characteristic behaviours among the children who usually try to conceal this fact. These behaviours were also observed by the teachers. The changes in the child's behaviours connected with the use of physical violence recognized by the teachers are presented in Figure 2. 31.2% of the subjects noticed that the children who were victims of physical violence showed symptoms of growing apathy and isolation from the group. According to 30.5% of the teach-

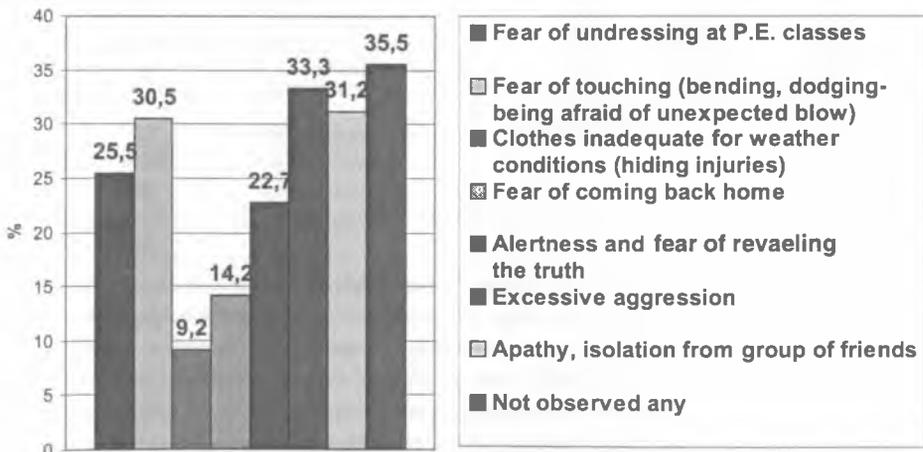


Fig. 2. Changes in child's behaviour connected with use of physical violence

ers equally frequently occurring symptoms were: excessive fear and avoidance of the touch, according to 25.5% of the subjects – unwillingness to undress at physical education lessons. 22.7% of the injured children showed much alertness and fear of revealing the truth. 9.2% of the subjects noticed that the clothes their pupils wore were not adequate for the weather conditions, which was connected with the wish to hide injuries on their body under the clothes. 33.3% of the teachers linked pupils' aggressive behaviour with the use of corporal punishment or different forms of violence against them.

A different form of maltreatment is mental injuring that includes kinds of behaviour and actions directed towards the children that trigger serious defects and harms in this emotional growth, violate the child's self-respect and destroy faith in this own abilities. 61% of the teachers observed the cases of children facing mental violence. The most frequently recognized form of behaviour indicating mental violence were, according to 34% of the subjects, emotional rejection and lack of support. The use of verbal degradation or humiliation by adults (observed by 25.5% of the surveyed teachers) or their intimidation (23.4%) were equally frequent. The cases of putting children under pressure and requiring too much from them were recognized by 22% of the subjects while the cases of mortification and disparagement were observed only by 7.1% of the whole. 39% of the teachers never faced or recognized any cases of mentally maltreated children. The consequences of mental violence observed by teachers are presented in Figure 3.

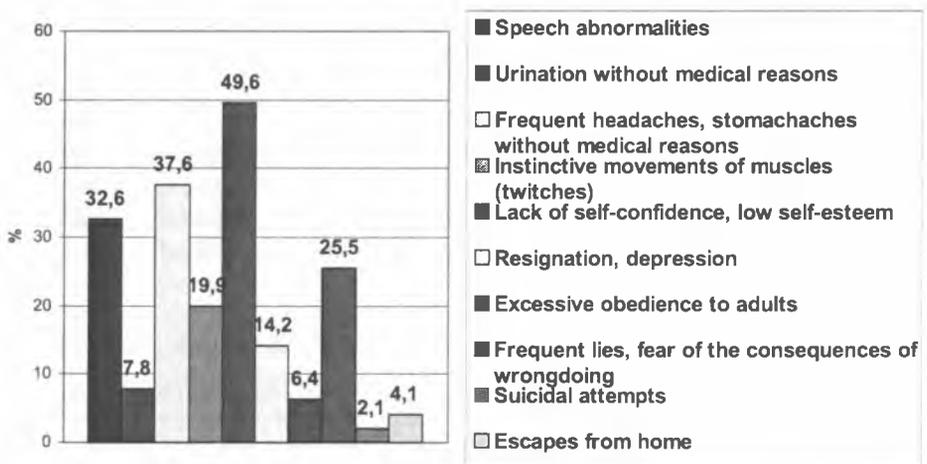


Fig. 3. Consequences of mental violence

Among the symptoms that followed this form of maltreatment the surveyed teachers most frequently recognized: low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence (49.6%), followed by psychosomatic defects i.e. headaches, stomachaches without any medical reasons (37.6%) and speech abnormalities resulting from excessive nervousity (32.6%). Inadequate fear of the consequences of one's own wrongdoing was observed by 25.5% of the teachers, resignation and states of depression – by 14.2% of the subjects. Among less frequent consequences of child maltreatment there are such behaviours as: excessive obedience to adults (6.4%) or destructive behaviours in forms of: attempts of suicide (2.1%) and escapes from home (4.1%).

The cases of sexual abuse are recorded when the child is implicated into the sphere of sexual activities inadequate for his or her growing stage. They were definitely less numerous and better recognized by the teachers. 87.9% of them did not recognize such cases among their pupils, whereas the cases that were observed by the remaining part concerned mainly incestuous sexual relationships (6.4%) or sexual relations with people outside the family (1.4%). 21% of the teachers claimed that they knew the cases of children who were forced to prostitution.

The consequences of sexual harassment of children presented in Figure 4 are, according to the teachers, first of all, sexual overexcitability inadequate for the age of the child, observed by 10.6% of the teachers. 5% of them observed strong fear and suspicions of adults as well as isolation from the environment because of the feeling of being "sealed" with shame (4.3%). The choice of leading a destructive lifestyle (i.e. escapes from home, drinking alcohol, thefts) was, according to 6.4% of the subjects, the consequence of sexual abuse, one case of suicidal attempt (0.7%) and 3 cases of unwanted pregnancy (2.1%) belongs to the most drastic cases of the consequences of sexual harassment observed by the teachers.

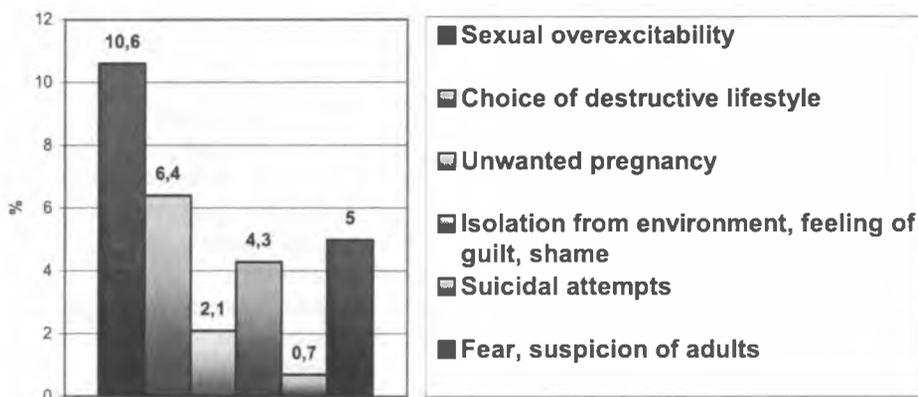


Fig. 4. Symptoms indicating consequences of sexual abuse

The most clearly observable category of maltreating children was negligence of children's biological and emotional needs presented in Figure 5. Only 5.7% of the teachers claimed that they did not know such cases. 79.4% of the subjects mentioned educational failures, 69.5% – upbringing failures, 49.6% – neglecting emotional needs. These types of adults' negligence were not frequently recognized by the teachers as they caused difficulties in the realisation of education programme. The lack of personal hygiene in a broader sense (including body hygiene) was observed by 62.4% of the teachers, wearing clothes inadequate for weather conditions – by 32.6% of them. The cases of pupils with symptoms of undernutrition and defective physical development were known to 17.7% of the teachers. The teachers also recognized the cases of negligence in respect of medical care i.e. the lack of proper medical treatment (12.8%) and of dental care (20.6%). The cases of injuries or accidents that happened to children were linked with the lack of proper care on the side of the adults by 7.8% of the subjects.

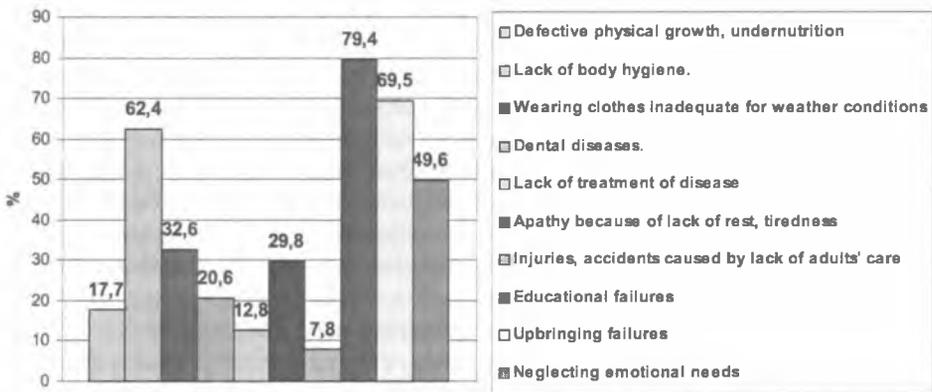


Fig. 5. Knowledge of negligences of life and emotional needs

There are numerous co-existing conditions that release negative behaviours towards children. The most frequent reason for using violence against children as observed by the teacher was their parents' alcoholism (72.3%). According to 44% of the subjects the reason for maltreatment was ill-relationship between the parents, according to 29.1% – incomplete or broken family and according to 23.4% – criminogenic environment. Considerably fewer cases of maltreatment were caused by mental deficiencies or diseases of the parents (10.6%). 29.1% of the teachers found excessive ambitions and requirements of the parents one of the most significant reasons for maltreatment. In such cases maltreatment occurs when the child is not able to fulfil the parents' ambitions.

Children who are victims of different forms of violence are usually very unwilling to reveal this fact, they try to conceal it. The situations in which a child asked his or her teacher for help concerned only 22% of the cases. In the remaining cases teachers had to make their own decisions about the intervention. 42.6% of the whole found themselves in a situation requiring their commitment and help during their professional career. However, the results were different. 20.6% of the subjects claimed their actions brought about positive solutions, i.e. ended with a success, whereas 7.8% of the teachers admitted that their intervention had no effect on the situation. 14.2% of them did not know how the case finished.

According to the teachers different forms of help should be used in cases of child maltreatment. At the same time they claim that they do not have much opportunity to act in this respect. 79.4% of the survey participants claim that their help should have the form of a conversation with the parents. 65.2% maintain that the case should be handed over to a school psychologist or special institutions that cope with this sort of issues.

The opinions about the necessity to organize classes for the teaching staff on the subject of maltreated child syndrome were mostly positive. 75.9% of the teachers admitted that the knowledge in this field is indispensable in their work and 22% claimed that it is necessary only in a limited extent. Only 2.1% of the teachers gave a negative answer finding this sort of knowledge unnecessary for their work at school. The demand for such a training and information concerning the possibilities to recognize, intervene and prevent in cases of child maltreatment is huge especially when we consider the fact that only 17.7% of the surveyed teachers took part in this kind of training.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A considerable number of teachers recognize different forms of child maltreatment and its health consequences. The most frequently observed category of maltreatment is negligence of biological and mental needs. We can also trace symptoms and consequences of physical and sexual violence but they are less frequent.

2. At the base of the occurrences of adults' violence towards the children there are mainly social pathologies such as alcoholism in family, family conflicts, incomplete family or less frequently – mental disease and unreasonable ambitions and requirements of the parents.

3. On account of the scale of this issue there is a necessity to prepare teachers for solving this sort of problems.

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STRESZCZENIE

Celem pracy była ocena skali występowania zjawiska krzywdzenia dzieci według obserwacji nauczycieli. Z racji długotrwałych kontaktów z dziećmi mają oni szansę wykrycia różnych przejawów przemocy dorosłych w stosunku do dzieci. W badaniach ankietowych uczestniczyło 141 nauczycieli szkół podstawowych Lublina i okolic. Znaczna część ankietowanych obserwuje wśród swoich uczniów przypadki różnych form krzywdzenia dzieci, w tym najczęściej obserwowane są przejawy zaniedbań w zakresie potrzeb bytowych i wychowawczych. Około 50% pedagogów dostrzega przypadki maltretowania psychicznego oraz fizycznego dzieci, a 12% badanych zna przypadki dzieci, będące ofiarami wykorzystywania seksualnego. Ze względu na poważne następstwa stosowania przemocy dla rozwoju psychofizycznego młodych ludzi należy uznać to zjawisko za istotne zagrożenie zdrowotne młodej populacji.

