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Risk factors of violence against children

Each global aspect about harming children must take into consideration different standards and expectations regarding parents behaviour in different cultures in the world. The culture is a common base of judgement and behaviour of the societies and its conception as regards how people should behave. The culture helps to define commonly accepted rules of bringing up children and taking care of them (1).

Different cultures have different rules pertaining to accepted parents practices. Some of the researchers suggest that views on bringing up children in different cultures may differ to such a degree that reaching an agreement as to which practices are combined with violence or abandonment may be extremely difficult. Although, it seems to be common understanding in many cultures that harming children should not be allowed and there is practical consensus as regards very severe discipline practice and sexual harassment.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The analysis of materials about undertaken researches into factors causing violence against children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many researches, mainly from developed countries, suggest that some attributes of a child increase the risk of violence. The violence exposure – physical, sexual or by negligence – depends partly on the age of a child (2). Death cases with the use of physical violence happened mainly among neonates (3).

Small children are also exposed to physical violence not leading to death, however the peak age for such a form of violence differs depending on a country (e.g. 3–6 year olds in China, 6–11 year olds in India and 6–12 year olds in USA). On the other hand, ratios of sexual abuse show an increasing tendency after menarche, with the highest ratios occurring in adolescence (4). However, sexual violence may be directed also against small children.

In most of the countries girls are exposed to a higher risk of child murdering, sexual abuse, educational and food abandonment and forcing into prostitution. The results from some international researches give the ratios of sexual abuse 1.5–3 times higher among girls than boys. Generally, more than 130 million children in the age between 6 and 11 stay outside school, among which 60% are girls

(5). In some countries girls are not allowed to learn or they stay at home in order to take care of their siblings or to economically support family by working.

Male children may be exposed to a higher risk of severe physical punishment in many countries (6). Although girls are exposed to a higher risk of child murdering in many places, it is not clear why boys experience more severe physical punishment. It may be caused by the fact that this kind of punishment serves as a preparation for future adult roles and responsibilities or it is that boys need more physical discipline. Obviously wide cultural differences existing between different societies regarding the role of women and the value of male and female children may explain many of these issues.

It was demonstrated that premature babies and disabled children are exposed to a higher risk of physical violence and neglect. There exist contradictory data about the meaning of mental disability as a risk factor. It is thought that low birth weight, pre-delivery of a baby, illness, mental or physical disability of a neonate or a child collide with attachment, and the emotional link may create a child more apt to exposure to violence. However, these characteristics do not seem to be serious factors of violence when one considers other factors, e.g. parental and social.

The researches combine some features of the caregiver as well as the features of the family environment with neglect and violence against children. While some of those factors, including demographic ones, are linked with differences in risk, others are relevant with mental and behavioural features of the caregiver or family environment aspects, which may have interrupted children's bringing up and have led to their maltreatment.

Whether people using physical violence are more often men or women, depends partly on the type of violence. Men are more common perpetrators of head injuries, life endangering fractures and other lethal injuries (7), and women are more often perpetrators of emotional harassment. The perpetrators of sexual abuse, in case of male and female victims, are mostly men in many countries.

Parents using physical violence are mostly young, single, poor and unemployed, less educated than their equivalents not using violence. Both in the developing countries and in those already developed, poor, young, single mothers are among those who are burdened with the highest risk of using violence against their own children (8). The size of the family can also increase this risk. For example, examining of parents in Chile showed that parents with four and more children used violence against them three times more often than parents with fewer children. However, not always the size of the family matters. Data from many countries show that overloaded houses increase the risk of violence against children (9).

Unstable family environment, in which the structure of the family changes many times, when family members or others move out or in, is especially observed in cases of chronic negligence.

Many personality and behavioural characteristics are linked, in many researches, with neglect and violence against children. Parents more often using violence against children have a tendency to a low self-esteem, poor own impulses control, mental health problem and antisocial behaviour. Parents who neglect their children have the same problems and may have also difficulties in planning important life events such as marriage, having children and looking for a job. Many of those characteristics threaten bringing up children and this is combined with disturbance of social relationships, stress, disability and difficulties in reaching the social support systems.

The researches show that parents who were maltreated as children are burdened with a higher risk of using violence against their own children. This relationship is complicated, though, and some examinations suggest that most of those parents were not the victims of violence. Empirical data present here the existing of a real relationship and the meaning of this risk factor may be grandiose. Other factors, which are combined with violence against children – such as young age of parents,

stress, isolation, too many people in the house, abuse of psychoactive substances or poverty, may be more prognostic.

Stress and social isolation of a parent can be linked with violence against and neglect of a child (8). It is believed that stress, which can be the consequence of job changes, income loss, health problems and other aspects of the family environment may extend conflicts at home and induce the family members to seek help. It is less probable that those who are more inclined to seek social support will be using violence against their own children, even if other factors are present.

A number of researchers in many countries show a strong relationship between being poor and children maltreatment (10). The indexes of violence are higher in societies with a high unemployment level and condensed poverty. These societies are also characterized by a high level of population fluctuation and overloaded houses. The research shows that chronic poverty unfavourably influences children through its influence on parents behaviour and access to social resources.

The great number of factors on a social level has an important influence on children and families soundness. These factors, not examined at this time in most of the countries as the risk factors of violence against children, include: the role of cultural values and economic powers in construction of choices facing families and creation of their responses to those powers, sex and income inequality – factors present in different types of violence and related also with child maltreating, the force of social support system, the main source of support which ensures the safety of children and their families.

Many of those wide cultural and social factors may have influence on parents' ability to care about a child – increasing or decreasing stress bound up with family life and influencing resources shared by the families.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In different cultures there exist different explanations of parents' behaviour distinguishing what is proper and what is harmful for their child. However, it seems to be common understanding in many cultures that doing children harm shouldn't be allowed.

2. Risk factors of appearing violence against a child depends on many things – beginning with parents' family history, their features, through a child's characteristics, ending with social dependences.

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SUMMARY

Each global aspect about harming children must take into consideration different standards and expectations with regard to parents behaviour in different cultures in the world. However, it seems to be a common understanding in many cultures that harming children should not be allowed. Male children may be exposed to a higher risk of severe physical punishment in many countries. Girls are exposed to a higher risk of child murdering, sexual abuse, educational and food abandonment and forcing into prostitution. As perpetrators, men are more common perpetrators of life endangering head injuries, fractures and other lethal injuries, and women are more often guilty of emotional harassment. Parents using physical violence are mostly young, single, poor and unemployed, less educated than their equivalents not using violence. The researches show that parents who were maltreated as children are burdened with a higher risk of using violence against their own children.

Czynniki ryzyka przemocy wobec dzieci

Podejście do krzywdzenia dzieci musi brać pod uwagę odmienne standardy i oczekiwania co do zachowania rodzicielskiego w różnych kulturach na świecie. Niemniej, istnieje ogólna zgoda co do tego, że krzywdzenie dzieci nie powinno być dozwolone. Dzieci płci męskiej wydają się narażone na większe ryzyko surowej kary fizycznej w wielu krajach. Dziewczęta zaś są narażone na wyższe niż chłopcy ryzyko dzieciobójstwa, wykorzystania seksualnego, zaniedbania dotyczącego wykształcenia i wyżywienia i zmuszania do prostytucji. Mężczyźni są najbardziej powszechnymi sprawcami urazów głowy zagrażających życiu, złamań i innych urazów śmiertelnych, zaś kobiety dominują w przemocy emocjonalnej i zaniedbywaniu. Rodzice stosujący przemoc fizyczną częściej są młodzi, samotni, biedni i bezrobotni i mniej wyedukowani niż ci, którzy nie stosują przemocy. Badania wykazują, że rodzice maltretowani jako dzieci są obciążeni wyższym ryzykiem stosowania przemocy wobec swoich własnych dzieci.