

# **Violence Against Children by Parents**

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## **Abstract**

The study aimed to identify the characteristics and frequency of physical and emotional violence against children by their biological parents and the relationship between children's characteristics, family factors and the extent of violent acts against children. The sample consisted of 212 grade six students in Muang District, Amnatcharoen Province. The data were collected from February 8 to 20, 1999. The results showed that 95.3 per cent of respondents perceived being treated violently by their biological parents, as 76.7 per cent were physical violence and 95.0 per cent were emotional violence. The most common physical and emotional acts of violence were beating by a cane or belt and scolding with rude language respectively. However, the violent acts occurred only occasionally. Only the factors of self-esteem and child's gender could predict the violent acts by fathers for 10.5 per cent; whereas family crises, family relations and self-esteem could predict the violent acts by mothers for 13.0 per cent. Therefore, building self-esteem, encouraging a healthy home environment, and creating proper coping skills against family crises are necessary for reducing violent acts.

**Key word :** Physical Violence, Emotional Violence, Biological Parents, Grade-Six Students

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The family is the smallest unit of the society. It plays an important role for child growth and development because the quality of life begins at home (1,2). At present, the social structure as well as family roles and functions have been changed. Thai families have changed from extended to nuclear families (3). Overwhelming economic and social crises, many families have been faced with stress induced by such factors as unemployment, low income and drug addiction(4). These may easily lead to violence within the family if the family relationship is poor and confronting skills to cope with the problem are weak. The victims of violent acts are likely to be children (5,6). The reflection of all kinds of violent acts affects the growth and development of children in many aspects including physical, emotional, cognitive and social well-being. The abused children of today will become abusive parents in the future, or so-called intergenerational transmission of violence(7).

The reported figures of the situation of violence against children are only the tip of the iceberg. The under reported cases are enormous and hard to reach. The study of Petsooksiri P. in 1989 showed that 26 per cent of 128 abused victims were children under 15 years old and most abusers were their parents (8). In addition, the study of Mahakhoon W and Patjekwinyusakul W revealed that 95.7 per cent of children in institutional care had experienced violence in the family, and 73.9 per cent had an anti-social attitude(9). The study of Wilasai B found that the main factors contributing to child prostitution were poor family relations and violent acts in the family(10). Since most caregivers always provide less information than usual in order to protect themselves, the information given by the children is another alternative. Although such information may be overestimated, the child's perception should not be overlooked. Therefore, it is worth identifying the characteristics and frequency of violent acts against children as well as family factors associated with such acts to be used as a surveillance measure and conduct a proactive approach to prevent child abuse.

## METHOD

The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey. The sample population was grade six students from schools under the Department of Primary Education in Muang District, Amnatcharoen Province who lived with their biological parents. The sampling method used was stratified random sampling where the districts were stratified as inner and outer munici-

pality areas. Then, the schools were randomly selected proportionately according to the calculated sample size of the study population. The total sample comprised of 212 students. Self-administered questionnaires and interviewing forms were used as data collection tools. The independent variables were respondent's characteristics such as gender, birth order, grade point average (GPA), self-esteem, and personality and family factors such as family crises, family relations, and type of family.

The dependent variables were physical and emotional violent acts toward children by their biological parents during the past 6 months. Types and frequency of violence were obtained from the perception of children. Physical violence was defined as any inappropriate and hurtful physical acts toward children, while emotional violence was verbal or non-verbal acts toward the children that caused negative effects to their feelings and emotional health. The frequency of each violent act was divided into 4 categories: never, occasionally (less than once a month), sometimes (at least once a month), and often (nearly every week). There were 26 violent acts assessed in the study. The score was given to the frequency of the violent act: 0 score for never, 1 for occasionally, 2 for sometimes, and 3 for often. The total score varied from 0 to 78.

The home self-esteem assessment was applied from Hare's concept(11). Child personality was assessed by Eysenck's Mausley Personality Inventory (MPI)(12). The extroversion-introversion scale was used in the study. With regard to family factors, type of family was divided into two categories: nuclear-only parents and children lived together and extended family-other relatives lived with them. The family relations assessment form was developed according to the concept of family function(13). The family crisis questions were adapted from Holmes and Rache's concept(14).

The instrument was tested for reliability by Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and yielded the alpha value of family relations, self-esteem, and personality parts equal to 0.708, 0.762, and 0.669 respectively. The data were collected in February 1999. The statistics used for data analysis were *t*-test, ANOVA, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis.

## RESULTS

Among respondents, 54.2 per cent were female and 45.8 per cent male, aged between 11-14

years old and the mean age was 12.45; 39.6 per cent were the first child, 39.2 per cent were the last child and 19.8 per cent were the middle child. Among them, 42.9 per cent had a GPA of 2.0-2.9, and 43.9 per cent had a GPA of 3 and more respectively. About 67 per cent of children had self-esteem at moderate levels, while 17.9 per cent and 15.1 per cent had self-esteem at high and low levels respectively. Most of them (76.4%) had fair family relationship whereas 13.7 per cent and 9.9 per cent had poor and good family relationship respectively. About 53.8 per cent had ambivert personality, 28.3 per cent were introvert and 17.9 per cent were extrovert. Seventy five per cent lived in a nuclear family. Only 2.8 per cent had three or more family crises, whereas, 57.6 per cent had none and 39.6 per cent had 1-2 crises. The most common family crises were unemployment of parents and severe accident of family members.

Only 10 students or 4.7 per cent did not face any violent act, both physical and emotional, at least once. Among 202 children who experienced violent acts, 71.7 per cent faced both physical and emotional violence, 23.3 per cent faced only emotional violence and 5 per cent faced only physical violence. About 24.5 per cent, 45.2 per cent and 30.3 per cent of children experienced physical violent acts from the father, the mother and both parents respectively, whereas 5.7 per cent, 22.9 per cent and 71.4 per cent of children experienced emotional violent acts from the father, the mother and both respectively. The most common physical violent acts were beating by a cane or belt, slapping the face, hitting by thrown objects; and the most common emotional violent acts were scolding with rude language, being left alone at home, and yelling at the child. Fortunately, these types of violence occurred occasionally (Table 1, 2).

Table 1. Distribution of type and frequency of physical violence.

Type of violence	% experienced from father			% experienced from mother		
	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often
Pushing or pulling severely	3.3	0.5	0.9	4.3	0.9	0
Pulling hair	1.9	0	0	1.9	0	0.5
Squeezing or hard pinching	0.9	0	0.5	6.6	0.9	0.5
Slapping the face, head, back	6.1	0.5	0.5	4.2	0.5	0
Kicking or hitting with fist	2.8	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0
Stamping with foot furiously	0.9	0	0	0.5	0	0
Beating with cane or belt	29.7	3.3	1.4	39.6	8.1	0.9
Hitting by thrown object	3.8	0.9	0.9	11.3	1.4	0.5
Knocking head body against the floor or wall	0.5	0	0	0.9	0	0
Treating with weapons	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0
Tying hands and keeping in the locked room	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0

Table 2. Distribution of type and frequency of emotional violence.

Type of violence	% experienced from father			% experienced from mother		
	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often
Scolding with rude language	25.5	5.7	3.3	35.4	9.9	5.2
Yelling at	21.7	5.2	0.5	25.5	6.1	2.8
Threatening verbally	10.9	4.2	2.8	9.4	2.4	0.5
Referred to as an animal	12.7	1.4	0.9	14.1	3.8	1.4
Verbally ridiculing	12.3	1.4	1.4	19.3	4.2	2.8
Verbally insulting	9.0	0.5	1.4	8.5	2.4	1.4
Condemning as the worst	14.6	3.3	1.4	21.2	5.7	1.4
Banning from going out	16.0	6.6	2.4	22.6	8.5	1.9
Being left alone at home	22.6	4.7	2.8	23.1	5.7	2.8
No giving care when sick	0.9	0	2.4	0.5	0	0.5
Not providing food	0.5	0.5	2.3	1.4	0.5	0
Not looking after/providing clothes	0.5	0.5	2.8	0.9	0.5	1.4
Not providing study materials	1.9	0	2.8	0.9	0	1.4

**Table 3. Correlation analysis between the extent of violent acts and some factors.**

Factors	Violent acts performed by			
	Father		Mother	
	r	p-value	r	p-value
GPA	-0.114	0.049	0.020	0.385
Self-esteem	-0.224	0.001	-0.399	<0.001
Family relation	-0.122	0.039	-0.359	<0.001
Family crisis	0.137	0.024	0.287	<0.001

The consequences of physical violence were minor injury with a non-open wound, bruising and an open wound with bleeding. The most common consequences of emotional violence were feeling upset, wanting to run away and revenge.

The analysis of the difference of the extent of violent acts performed by parents regarding child's gender, type of family, birth order, and child's personality showed no significant difference. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied to test the correlation between the extent of violent acts and GPA, self-esteem, family relations and family crises. The findings are shown in Table 3. However, when the stepwise multiple regression was applied only self-esteem and child's gender could predict the extent of violent acts by the father by 10.5 per cent with the equation:  $y = 11.911 - 0.286$  (self-esteem) + 0.935 (child's gender). In contrast, self-esteem, family crises, and family relations could predict the extent of violent acts by the mother for 13.0 per cent with the equation:  $y = 15.419 - 0.299$  (self-esteem) + 0.923 (family crisis) - 0.268 (family relation).

## DISCUSSION

The study showed 95.3 per cent of children perceived threatening by violent acts from their parents. The prevalence was quite high as seen in the study conducted by Isaranurug, S(15). Although such violent acts did not occur frequently, it reflects parenting styles commonly performed in the study families which may contribute negatively to the physical and mental health of the children(15,16). Together with the rapid social changes, many families have to cope with a lot of stress, crises and violence that may happen accordingly. The most common victims of family violence are children and women. Mothers seemed to express more violent acts than father as

found in Petsuksiri's study(17). This was because the mother was usually the primary caregiver and responsible for the whole household chores and these may cause her pressure leading to negative emotional outbursts and acting violently to a child. This situation is alarming and causes more concern to the child-rearing pattern. Appropriate child rearing like authoritative style should be strengthened in order to promote suitable child growth and development(18).

The factors that had mild to moderate correlation with the extent of violent acts against children by parents were the child's self-esteem, family relationships, and family crises. Children with high self-esteem can assert their needs and ideas strongly, protect themselves from unwanted conditions and face up to the undesirable situations properly(19-21). Family relations and family crises are other factors contributing to violent acts performed by the mother. Since the mother is usually the one responsible for family activities, she has to efficiently manage them and maintain family harmony. If problems or stress occur, they may create poor family relationships and produce a family crisis that may affect the mother more than the father(13). In addition, a child's gender is cor-related with violent acts performed by the father as, generally, a boy is more aggressive than a girl and may have more chance to be punished(22,23).

To ensure proper growth and development of children who are the future of the nation, it is necessary to eliminate the violence against children in the family, promote child self-esteem, strengthen family relations, and reduce family crises. Every couple should be well-prepared before having children, such as having child rearing skills, good physical and emotional health of the parent-to-be, and adequate economic conditions through family life education by various means.

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## การกระทำรุนแรงต่อเด็กโดยบิดามารดา

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ได้ศึกษาลักษณะและความถี่ของการกระทำรุนแรงต่อเด็กด้านร่างกายและจิตใจ โดยบิดามารดา และความสัมพันธ์ กับลักษณะเด็กและปัจจัยด้านครอบครัว โดยศึกษาในเด็กชั้นประถมปีที่ 6 โรงเรียนสังกัดสำนักงานประถมศึกษา อ่าเภอเมือง จังหวัดอุบลราชธานี จำนวน 212 คน เก็บข้อมูลในช่วงเดือนกุมภาพันธ์ 2542 พบว่า เด็ก อายุ 95.3 เดือนร้อยละ 95.3 เคยถูกกระทำรุนแรง จากบิดามารดาอย่างน้อย 1 ครั้ง ในระยะ 6 เดือนที่ผ่านมา โดยร้อยละ 76.7 เคยถูกกระทำรุนแรงด้านร่างกาย และร้อยละ 95 เคยถูกทำรุนแรงด้านจิตใจ ลักษณะความรุนแรงที่พบบ่อย คือ ตีด้วยไม้หรือขี้มีด และดูดด้วยคั่งทรายบดาย การกระทำรุนแรงดังกล่าวเกิดขึ้นนาน ๆ ครั้ง และพบว่า การเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองของเด็ก เพศของเด็ก สามารถทำนายการถูกกระทำรุนแรง จากบิดาได้ร้อยละ 10.5 ในขณะที่ภาวะวิกฤตในครอบครัว สัมพันธภาพในครอบครัวและการเห็นคุณค่าตนเองของเด็ก สามารถทำนายการถูกกระทำรุนแรงจากการได้ร้อยละ 13.0 ดังนั้นเพื่อลดปัญหาดังกล่าวควรส่งเสริมการเห็นคุณค่าตนเองของเด็ก สัมพันธภาพที่ดีในครอบครัว และสร้างทักษะการจัดการปัญหาอย่างสร้างสรรค์แก่สมาชิกครอบครัว

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