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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 8
Issue 2 July

Article 12

July 1981

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Gingrich, Robert D. and Hudson, James R. (1981) "Child Abuse in a Small City: Social Psychological and Ecological Correlates," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol8/iss2/12>

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CHILD ABUSE IN A SMALL CITY:
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECOLOGICAL CORRELATES

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse has become a growing national concern. Its current status can be linked to the research by Kempe who identified the "battered child syndrome". Two models of explanation have been advanced; a medical and a social psychological. This study of 134 cases of child abuse in a small city employs the social psychological model and tests the hypothesis that social isolation is correlated with child abuse. Support for that hypothesis leads to an elaboration of the dynamics of social isolation with an emphasis on the absence of other persons with children from the milieu of the child abuse perpetrator and the consequence of having little knowledge about parenting. The incidents were also found not to be randomly distributed in the community. The characteristics of these areas are examined.

As with a number of social problems, the identification and recognition of child abuse as a social phenomenon has resulted in an increase in the reporting of such incidents. The current concern with the problem is closely linked to the early research of Kempe (1973) who is credited with the battered child syndrome concept which focused on the injuries done to the child. Since his initial effort, the research on the topic has increased enormously adding to our knowledge about the frequency of incidents as well as theoretical interpretations of its origins.

There is, as yet, no consensus on the causes of child abuse nor on any strategies for reducing its incidence. Two theoretical models have been put forward: the medical and the social psychological. These two will be reviewed followed by a study of child abuse in relation to neighborhood characteristics.

The problem investigated in this paper is an analysis of 134 cases of child abuse in a small city. As far as the authors can determine the data gathered are unique in that they are comprehensive for a given community over a three year period. The data were gathered from field interviews and provide a much more detailed analysis than has been the case in previous studies. The analysis will focus on certain characteristics of the abusers as well as characteristics of the community. Placing the incidents of child abuse within a community context will help identify an added social dimension to this phenomenon.

The Medical Model

The earliest contemporary research on child abuse was done by C. Henry Kempe, a physician, who coined the phrase "Battered Child

Syndrome". The battered child syndrome was believed to be a clinical condition in young children who were seriously abused physically. As a result of his medical training, Kempe's earliest research was influenced strongly by the medical or psychiatric model. The basic assumption is that child abusers have certain personality characteristics which differentiate them from non-abusers, and that these characteristics are pathological. The occurrence of abuse is indicative of an underlying sickness (Burgess, 1979)

Taking this one step further, some research attempts to identify specifically the deviant characteristics of abusers. Hebelller (1977) believes parents who physically abuse their children are immature and dependent individuals, having poor impulse control and a low tolerance of frustration. These traits, coupled with the belief that physical punishment is necessary to control children may result in serious injuries inflicted as part of "normal discipline". Hebelller also mentions that parents in this category may be significantly retarded and not capable of providing adequate care for their children; or poverty could be a cause for inadequate care, especially medical care.

Finally, Hebelller (1977) states that parents who emotionally abuse their children are usually suffering from psychological disturbance. He feels that a parent who fails to interact with the child on any level can have a greater negative impact than a parent who is occasionally physically abusive but who shows a strong emotional attachment to the child.

Steele and Pollack (1968) discovered that abusive parents often have distorted perceptions of childhood and expect to be nurtured by the child rather than be nurturing. Other characteristics supposedly found in abusive parents are immaturity, impulsive behavior, alcoholism, low self-esteem, and a history of having been abused or neglected as a child.

Silver (1977) found a high rate of deviance in areas of biopsychosocial functioning involving abuse incidents. He noted high rates of deviance in family structure, reflected in a high proportion of female-headed households and of households in which the biological fathers of abused children were absent. More boys than girls are physically abused; however, girls outnumber boys among abused adolescents.

In the early studies of child abuse, numerous psychiatric defects were attributed to abusing parents such as depression and dependency (Elmer, 1971; Steele and Pollack, 1968). In one British study, 48% of the mothers were described as being neurotic and a high percentage of fathers in his study were diagnosed as psychopaths (Smith, et al., 1973). Although it is suggested that psychiatric disorders produce child abuse, the evidence to the contrary also exists. Steele and Pollack (1968) stated that abusive parents did not exhibit excessive aggressive behavior in other areas of their lives, and were not much different from a cross section of the general population. Kempe and Helfer (1972) state that less than 10% of parents who abuse children can accurately be labeled mentally ill. Furthermore, electroencephalographic examinations of abusive parents found no evidence of a relationship between child abuse and organic dysfunction (Smith, et al., 1973).

The Social Psychological Model

Although the characteristics mentioned may exist to some degree in the abusive parents or within the structure of their home, the presence of these deviations alone does not totally cause or explain abuse.

Putting the emphasis on societal stress factors, the social psychological model offers another perspective on potential correlations of child abuse. The social psychological model assumes that a number of stress factors can encroach upon families, cause frustration, and consequently, aggressive behavior. The potential stress factors are many and include poor parental health, drug and alcohol abuse, financial difficulties, unemployment, legal problems, inadequate living conditions, marital problems, and isolation from effective social systems (Burgess, 1979). Lower socio-economic status and unemployment seem to be implicated in child abuse.

Gil (1970), in his survey, found that nearly 50% of the fathers involved in child abuse were unemployed during the year in which the abuse took place. This social isolation from the larger community was found to be associated with the incidence of child abuse. Because of the relative social isolation, abusive parents are not subjected to the norms and values that might keep their behavior within socially sanctioned boundaries. They are denied access to the potential saving grace of having standards and expectations to meet. The choice to succeed and gain approval or to receive the retribution of external disavowal is alien to the abusive parent or caretaker without access to friends, relatives, or neighbors. Isolation keeps them barren of support during stressful times.

In a recent study by Jensen (1977), who studied child abuse in a city population of court referred cases, social isolation was reflected in all aspects in the lives of the child abusers. Even though the abusive parents came in contact with other individuals, they spoke of their frustrations of having no close personal relationships that were satisfying.

The inability to take advantage of occasional opportunities to meet and form associations with other people suggests a social and psychological underdevelopment. Many abusive parents, having suffered a sense of emotional deprivation in their own childhood, transport this sense of isolation into their adult life and are trapped by their own unmet needs. This isolation results not only in parental frustration, but often leaves a gap in knowledge of child development and results in unrealistic expectations and demands on the child (Spinetta and Rigler, 1972).

In a study of parents de Lissovoy (1979) found a predisposition for physical punishment by parents who were socially isolated with little knowledge of child development. Unrealistic expectations were engendered. The parents in the study by de Lissovoy (1979) were found to have low self-esteem, low sense of competence, and lacked environmental supports. A behavioral analysis of the cycle of the abused parent abusing the child suggest that abusive behavior may be reinforced by parents or the child may acquire aggressive behavior through observational learning (Burgess, 1979).

In addition to these elements contributing to isolation, changes in society itself have affected the family structure and the roles of parents. The traditional family unit in which the new generation is strongly influenced and supported by elders,

provided a built-in support system for families. Many families are now relatively isolated from the social support of family and relatives. Logan (1979) points out that children working in an adult world within the family could help to re-establish the "child-as-contributor" reason for valuing children giving the child a sense of confidence in his/her skills. Logan (1979) also believes that neighborhoods could be instrumental in reconnecting the family and the child. Children working within and for a community could only raise its general standards and individual achievements.

The social milieu of most families is the local community or neighborhood. Albert Hunter (1974) has stated that local communities can be seen as possessing three elements if they are complete and nourishing environments for family and individual growth: sentiment, interaction, and organization. Deficiency in any of the elements would represent a weaker community on the interactional level and is seen as a possible substitute for goals once achieved by sentiment, such as social control and mutual aid in times of hardship. Interaction, however casual, is essential if the people in a neighborhood are to share a sense of identity, trust, and respect (Suttles, 1979). Although interaction within a community takes time to develop due to the consuming processes of establishing peer groups, becoming known and recognized as a regular client and frequenter of area gathering places. The community can then be seen as a natural source of aid in terms of delinquency, dependency, mental distress, and child abuse (Suttles, 1979). In an interacting community, the people share concerns, establish standards and guidelines and demonstrate a willingness to maintain these guidelines.

Those people who live on the outskirts of socially cohesive neighborhoods are transient, or are simply unable to become involved and avail themselves of the catharsis of personal relationships, finding themselves outside the framework of informal assistance. They stand alone against stress and anger, and often vent their fury in anti-social behavior; child abuse may be one such pattern.

The need for new research in child abuse has lead to the formulation of this hypothesis. Although other models of child abuse have been mentioned, it is the social psychological model, which this study utilizes. Taking into consideration the inter-relatedness of the community and its networks, it was hypothesized that a high degree of social isolation will be evident among the abusive families. It was also hypothesized that child abuse will not be randomly distributed throughout the city with a greater frequency of child abuse cases occurring incertain areas of the city as opposed to others.

Characteristics of the Community

The population of the county is approximately 102,000; the city population barely exceeds 10,000 individuals. The county population represents 33,000 different households whose medium buying income was reported at \$9,650.00 in 1976. Of the total population, 32,500 (31.8%) were under the age of 18; 10,833 (10.6%) were over 65 years of age; 58,868 persons were between the ages of 18 and 65. Nearly 45,800 (46%) of the citizens were listed as employed. The people in the area earned their living in a variety of ways: farming, manufacturing, mining, construction, transportation, wholesale/retail trade, public services, and the various professions (Carmean, 1976).

The area has become highly industrialized. Manufacturing accounts for the employment of 20,756 persons, almost half the total work force. Five industries employ 88% of the people involved in manufacturing. They are (1) metal products, 30% (two major steel companies); (2) food, drink, and kindred products, 25%; (3) textiles, 19%; (4) leather, rubber and plastic goods, 9%; and (5) paper and printing industries, 5%. It should be noted that there are 1,120 farms in the area (Carmean, 1976).

The area has a strong fundamental religious philosophy and it is reported there are 162 church buildings with total membership reported as 52,563. Politically, the Republican party is dominant, listing 25,648 people to the Democrats' 11,213 (Carmean, 1976).

The study will focus on the city population or an area of approximately 4.65 square miles. This area is dominated by well-kept row homes which are evident throughout the city. Sidewalks, alleys, and front porches serve as a popular way of communicating with one's neighbors. It is a very common scene to view numerous people sitting on their front porches in the evening hours.

There appears to be a corner store for practically every block in the city. Churches, bars, and fire stations are also extremely prevalent throughout the city and all serve as a place for social gatherings. With respect to ethnicity in the city, there appear to be two distinct neighborhoods which could be classified as ethnic areas: a Spanish section and a Serbian neighborhood. Both of these areas have a neighborhood church, store, and maintain their ethnic language which differentiates them from the other sections of the city.

The city studied is family-oriented with culturally defined goals, purposes, and interests. The city is deeply rooted in German tradition, with the Pennsylvania Dutch language binding the culture and separating the natives from the outsiders.

A sociologist who has been a resident of the area for over ten years states that the people of the area studied are rurally-oriented and of low-middle income socioeconomic status. He further claims that they are religiously-oriented with a strong work ethic. He does not see them as being able to handle stress very well and considers them to be provincial; clinging to the past.

Methods

The study of this Pennsylvania town attempts to determine associated factors for the child abuse cases within the city during a three-year period. The operational definition for child abuse is taken from the Pennsylvania State Act 124. It pertains to any child under 18 years of age who exhibits evidence of serious physical or mental injury not explained by the available medical history. The study located the abuse cases with respect to geographical location within the city. Since no other small town child abuse studies could be obtained, a basis for comparison does not exist at this time.

The subjects for this study were 134 families who were residents of this city and were referred to the Children and Youth Department for child abuse allegations. All 134 family cases were validated cases of child abuse occurring between 1977 and 1980, and met the definition studied in Act 124, the

Pennsylvania Child Protective Service Law.

The data for this study came from interviews with the families conducted from 1977 through 1980. During the interview process, data were gathered with respect to the immediate family unit of the abuse victim. The parent or parents were interviewed, as well as the abuse perpetrator and the child abuse victim, if the child was old enough to say what happened. The interviews were conducted by members of the child protective service unit of the county Children and Youth Department. A consent for release of information was signed by all the families involved in the study. Specifically, the families were asked the following: (a) marital status of the family unit in which the abuse victim currently resides, (b) religious affiliation with a church or synagogue, (c) presence of extended family relationships which could provide emotional and financial support, (d) perpetrator's relationship to the abused child/children, (e) the educational level of the perpetrator, (f) the employment status of the abuser, (g) family history of the perpetrator (for example, any evidence of divorce or child abuse in his/her childhood history), (h) the employment status of the perpetrator, (i) psychiatric history of the abuser (operationalized as any institutionalized hospital treatment), (j) the present marital status of the perpetrator, and (k) sex of the perpetrator. There were eighty-three males and fifty-one female child abuse perpetrators in this study. Data were also obtained regarding the physical condition of the house (substandard/standard), and the address of the house within the city. Data on the victim is not included in this analysis but will be reported elsewhere.

Using the address of the abuse families, the 134 cases were plotted on a city map, according to their specific location within

the city (Figure 1). The map of the city was obtained from the city engineer and was divided into ten voting wards. This system of ten districts was also used within the city to determine minority characteristics, substandard housing, etc. The ten voting districts also served as the coding zones for the data tabulation. The purpose of plotting the abuse cases on the map was to determine if there was a high distribution of child abuse in a specific area of the city. A code book was developed containing the categories for first, second, and third cases of abuse within the family unit.

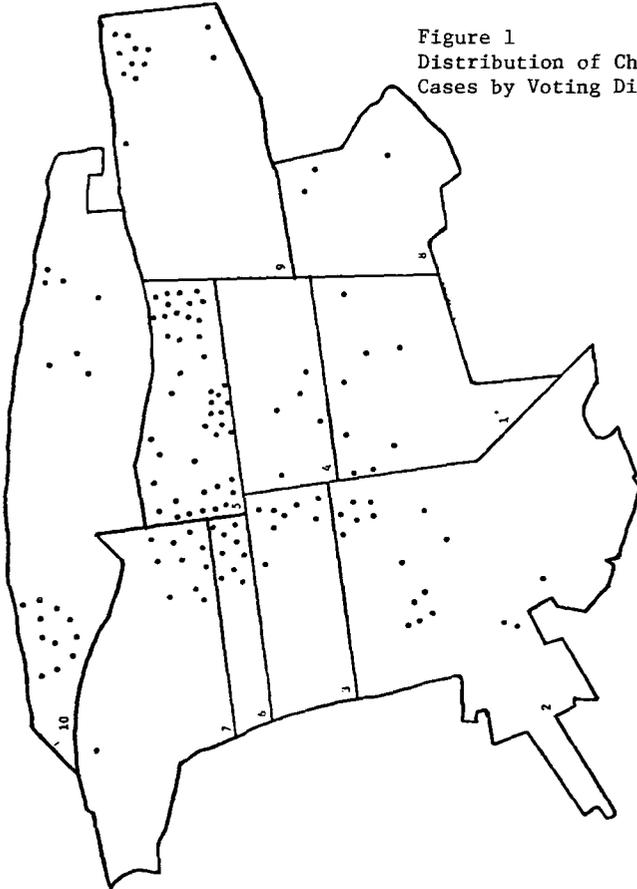
Results

One of the primary objectives of this research was to obtain basic descriptive data on the perpetrator of child abuse, and some characteristics of the neighborhood milieu in which these incidents occurred. The results will be reported in that sequence and in the final section some theoretical considerations will be made that also have policy implications.

The location of this study in a small Pennsylvania community characterized by high normative integration and strong social cohesion suggested that those not incorporated into it might be more susceptible to engaging in child abuse than the more integrated household. The obvious difficulty with these data is that there are no possible comparisons with those with similar attributes who do not abuse children. Nonetheless, these data are useful in developing a more systematic approach to child abuse incidents.

Since the community investigated had such a marked degree of social integration, our investigation began with assessing some dimensions of social isolation. Social isolation was operationalized

Figure 1
Distribution of Child Abuse
Cases by Voting District



as a lack of supportive kinship ties, marital status and marital history, educational level and religious affiliation.

The marital status of the perpetrator, Table 1, reveals that 36.6% were married, 23.1% were divorced, 11.9% were separated, 5.2% had a commonlaw marriage, 14.2% were previously married at least one time, 6.7% were unmarried, and 2.2% were unknown. These data supports claims by Silver (1977) that a high rate of deviance in family structure was evident in abuse families. And for this community such a pattern is deviant. This was reflected in a high proportion of female-headed households and of households in which the biological fathers of abused children were absent in the study.

Table 1
Percent Distribution of Marital
Status of Child Abuse Perpetrators

| <u>Marital Status</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Married | 36.6 |
| Divorced | 23.1 |
| Separated | 11.9 |
| Commonlaw | 5.2 |
| Two or more marriages | 14.2 |
| Unmarried | 6.7 |
| Unknown | 2.2 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

Burgess (1979), deLissovoy (1979), Gil (1970), Jensen (1977) all support a social psychological model of child abuse, and stress social isolation from the community and from family as a contributing factor to child abuse. The data in Table 2 shows that only 22.4% of the abusers indicated good or supportive kinship ties as opposed to 26.9% indicating negative kinship ties. Those indicating no kinship ties represented 50.7%.

Table 2
Percent Distribution of the Evaluation of
Kinship Ties Among Parents of Abused Children

| <u>Evaluation of Kinship Ties</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Good | 22.4 |
| Bad | 26.9 |
| None | 50.7 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

To provide further support that social isolation will be evident in the lives of the child abusers, Table 3 shows that 78.4% indicated no current religious affiliation. In this community, absence of church affiliation must be considered a measure of social isolation because of the strong religious values of the community, having over half of its population being affiliated with a church (Carmean, 1976).

These data also supports Gil (1970) in that abusive parents are not subjected to the community norms and values that might keep their behavior within socially sanctioned boundaries.

Table 3
Percent Distribution of Presence or Absence of
Religious Affiliation of Parents of Abused Children

| <u>Status of Religious Affiliation</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--|----------------|
| Present | 21.6 |
| Absent | 78.4 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

Child abuse has also been correlated with socio-economic status (Gil, 1970). To obtain some measures of this dimension, education and current employment status were used. Income, unfortunately, was not available for this analysis. In Table 4 we can see that the educational level of the child abuse perpetrators is low. Just over 58% had failed to complete high school and less than 1% were college graduates. Some, about 10%, had received special education. Overall, in the reported cases of child abuse, the perpetrator was not well educated. Since education and income are commonly positively correlated, this population would tend to have low socio-economic status.

Table 4
Percent Distribution of Level of
Education of Child Abuse Perpetrator

| <u>Level of Education</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Some high school | 58.2 |
| High school graduate | 30.6 |
| College graduate | 0.7 |
| Other | 10.4 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

The current employment status of the child abuse perpetrator is indicated in Table 5. While 60% were employed at the time of the study, their work histories in the interviews suggested that employment was frequently problematic. Although no systematic data were available, we assume that most of those reporting did not have a secure labor force career. Obviously, future research should try to document the work histories of the child abuse perpetrator.

Table 5
Current Employment Status of
Child Abuse Perpetrator

| <u>Employment</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Employed | 60.5 |
| Unemployed | 16.4 |
| Receiving Public Assistance | 23.1 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

The final dimensions analyzed in this study considers some aspects of the social history of the child abuse perpetrator. In Table 6 the marital status of the perpetrator's family is reported. Half of those interviewed were from divorced families.

Table 6
Percent Distribution of Marital Status
of Child Abuse Perpetrator's Family

| <u>Marital Status</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Married | 49.7 |
| Separated | 6.3 |
| Divorced | 44.0 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

Table 7 indicates that 22.4% of the abuse perpetrators were abused as children. DeLissovoy (1979) and Spinetta and Rigler (1972) suggested that abusive behavior may be reinforced by parents.

Table 7
Percent Distribution of Child Abuse
History of Child Abuse Perpetrator

| <u>Abuse</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--------------|----------------|
| Abused | 22.4 |
| Not Abused | 44.0 |
| Unknown | 33.6 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

The psychiatric history of the abuse perpetrator, indicating institutionalized hospital treatment for emotional problems, reports in Table 8, that 20.9% of the abusers had psychiatric histories. Smith, Honigsburg, and Smith (1973), Elmer (1971), suggest that psychiatric disorders can produce child abuse. Kempe and Helfer (1972), however, state that less than 10% of parents who abuse children can accurately be labeled mentally ill. Although 20.9% of the abusers revealed a psychiatric history, there was no evidence to indicate they were mentally ill at the time of the abuse incident.

Table 8
Percent Distribution of Psychiatric
Institutionalization of Child Abuse Perpetrator

| <u>Psychiatric Institutionalization</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---|----------------|
| yes | 20.9 |
| no | 78.4 |
| unknown | 0.7 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

It was assumed that the incidence of child abuse would not be randomly distributed in the city. Indeed, as in many cities, certain characteristics of social disorganization cluster in specific areas. Table 9 presents the location of the residence of the abused child's home within the city. The results reveal that 6% of the abuse homes were located in section one of the city map, (Figure 1); 12.7% of the homes were located in section two; 6% in section three; 3.7% in section four; 32.8% of the abuse homes were located in section five; 6.7% were found to be in section six; 7.5% in section seven; 2.2% in section eight; 9.0% in section nine; and 13.4% of the homes were located in section ten of the city.

While there were 9% of the abused cases in section 9, these clustered (about three quarters of the cases) in a low income housing project located on the northeast city line. There were no reported cases in an ethnic neighborhood in the same section. This ethnic neighborhood was composed of

Serbs who supported their own church and neighborhood grocery store. In addition, most residents still spoke Serbian and maintained a range of ethnic customs, e.g., the celebration of certain Serbian holidays on which native costumes were worn. There was then, a high degree of social cohesion and normative consensus in the neighborhood. We do not know, however, if child abuse was absent or if it was simply not reported. We do know that none came to the attention of the responsible authorities.

Table 9
Percent Distribution of Location of Homes of
Child Abuse Households by City Voting Districts

| <u>City Voting District</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 6.0 |
| 2 | 12.7 |
| 3 | 6.0 |
| 4 | 3.7 |
| 5 | 32.8 |
| 6 | 6.7 |
| 7 | 7.5 |
| 8 | 2.2 |
| 9 | 9.0 |
| 10 | 13.4 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

Table 10 indicates that 40.3% of the homes in the abuse study were substandard, meaning that they were visibly in poorer condition from surrounding residences in the neighborhood. The remaining 59.7% of the homes did not differ by appearance from surrounding residences. Steinmetz (1978) reported that the appearance of the homes of abusive families are lower. With respect to the data in Table 9, there were no other studies to be found which dealt with demographic data such as the location of the abuse family's home.

Table 10
Percent Distribution of Condition of
Residence of Household of Abused Children

| <u>Condition of Residence</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| substandard | 40.3 |
| standard | 59.7 |
| % | 100.0 |
| N | 134 |

Analysis

The major objective of this study was to test the hypothesis that social isolation was correlated with child abuse. Using such measures as kin ties, church affiliation, employment status and education, the hypotheses was supported. The question of why those who were not socially isolated abused children can not be assessed by these data. Nonetheless, the measures of social isolation account for a large proportion of the child abuse incidents.

There are, of course, a large number of explanations for child abuse. At the outset we reviewed part of the range of explanations by considering the medical and social psychological models. When more data become available, it will be possible to identify a number of theories that can adequately explain different patterns of child abuse. We are postulating that child abuse, like a number of behavioral patterns may have their origin in an array of causes and no theory will be inclusive. The explanation we are presenting, then, offers an approach that focuses on the individual in a community setting. It is a general extension of the social psychological explanatory model. The obvious limitation is that it is based upon data from a single community, but that is also its strength. The community context of the child abuse perpetrator is well known. The senior author's involvement in the community as an administrator of Children and Youth Department provides extensive knowledge about the social dynamics of the area. The following interpretations, then, are presented as one possible explanatory theory as well as a suggestion for future research.

Social isolation in a number of dimensions seems to be associated with child abuse. It is a particular aspect of social isolation that will be addressed in this analysis. Namely, the consequences of not being integrated with others involved in parenting or who have had parenting experience.

If we begin with the absence of kin ties or kin ties evaluated by the respondents as poor, we can postulate that the isolated parent does not have the opportunity to see the behavior of other children. The opportunity to observe other children behaving in ways that prompted the aggressive act is denied. Further, the

chances of concerned kin to intervene in halting physical abuse is reduced. Indeed, the possibility to give sanctuary to the child or adult during a tense period is absent.

Another indicator of social isolation is the high incidence of low educational achievement. If we disallow, for the moment the possibility that high school drop outs have lower intellectual capacity, a more interesting consideration is available. If your cohort of classmates moves through the life cycle at the same pace, marriage and child bearing occur at approximately similar times and the possibility of comparing experiences increases. But the drop out may begin marriage and child bearing earlier and, leaving out the question of social maturity, one simply has no reference group for comparative purposes. Similarly, in these small Pennsylvania towns the high school as a focal point for formal and informal reunions is part of the social life of community residents. The drop out is functionally isolated from such events.

The ecological concentration of child abuse incidents suggests two competing interpretations. On the one hand, the areas in which child abuse occur are those in which there are low levels of social integration. The measures of social isolation such as kin ties, church affiliation, and low educational achievement are exacerbated by the social disorganization of the residential areas. Those who reside there suffer from chaotic work histories, high rates of family disintegration and substandard housing. The social milieu is not conducive to high normative integration.

On the other hand, there may be a degree of community cohesion. Suttles (1972) has shown that communities that have such characteristics do not lack a normative order. There is the possibility that aggressive behavior toward children, physical punishment, and other forms of abuse are considered normative. Violent resolution of domestic problems is within the accepted boundaries of the value system. The abuse of children is simply one aspect of the general violent pattern that are part of the normative order.

We can contrast this low level of neighborhood social cohesion with its correlate of high levels of child abuse and certain neighborhoods with low levels of child abuse. In particular, the Serbian neighborhood mentioned earlier with its high level of social cohesion is maintained by institutional configurations such as a church, a distinct language and cultural loyalties. Under these conditions there are both vertical and horizontal levels of neighborhood solidarity that support normative integration. Because there are no reported cases of child abuse, we assume that abusive behavior is not part of the normative structure. This does not imply that strict child discipline is not valued, but the form it takes does not generate behavior that results in abuse as defined in this study.

The data from this study support a number of the findings in the child abuse literature. In particular, the general correlation between social isolation and child abuse. Our extension of these explanations is the introduction of some of the possible social dynamics produced. The critical variable we specified was the lack of association with other persons with

parenting experience, and more directly, those who are in the parallel stage of child rearing. The possibilities of sharing information, experiences and frustrations, we contend, may be unavailable to the child abuse perpetrator. The research this suggests is that future studies attempt to establish the degree to which the perpetrator has access of those who are also engaged in parenting.

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