

SUMMARY OF THE PHD THESIS

ABUSE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MARAMUREȘ COUNTY.

A SURVEY AND CASE STUDIES

Scientific supervisor:

Prof. MIRON IONESCU, PhD

PhD Candidate:

MANU (TRIFF) V. ZORICA

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The PhD thesis topic "Abuse on children and young people in Maramures county. A Research and case studies" is based on an exploratory study that aimed to examine the abuse of children and young people in the county of Maramures.

Child abuse occurs in different environments and can have many and varied causes and factors. The current research has **two purposes**: on the one hand it is **explanatory** and on the other hand **descriptive**, based on existing statistical data. Thus, this paper analyzes appearance and manifestation of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect in the child's school and family environment. The analysed area refers to the geographical area of Maramures county both in urban and in rural areas.

We considered the identification of children and young people at risk within the person-centered approach and detailed interventions through case studies in order to observe and modify the contextual factors that can ensure a safer environment for the child. Therefore, the research serves a **praxeological purpose** - to provide models and interventional procedures to those interested.

The thesis consists of an introduction, the first part, CHILD ABUSE – THEORETICAL BACKBROUND with three chapters, and a second part, SURVEY AND CASE STUDIES OF ABUSE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, with four chapters. In the first two chapters of the second part we present the organization, conduct and findings of the survey, and in the third chapter these are detailed with intervention and conclusions of 9 CASE STUDIES selected from the research survey. Finally, conclusions and implications of research in psycho-pedagogical practice are presented in the last chapter.

Part I

Chapter 1 sets terminology boundaries in the field of child abuse, exemplifying the main forms of abuse reported in the literature and their characteristics: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect.

Biological, psychological and psychosocial factors of the life environment, stress being laid especially on those in the family environment, along with the complex interconnection of abuse forms and their consequences, as well as the multicausal aspect, vulnerability and the secret nature of the abuse relationship, are further outlined.

The approach of abuse then resumes, explains and shows the application of terminology from the legislative point of view. Starting from the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989 of the General Assembly of the United Nations we present the Romanian

legislation, the consequences and factors responsible for intervention in cases of child abuse as well as the detailed procedures of team intervention and territorial structures involved in treating and preventing child abuse.

Chapter II - presents the consequences of child abuse leading to changes in the child's personality with subsequent serious effects, difficulties of adaptation and social integration, perpetuating the learned abusive behavior, violence, aggression, suicidal tendencies, social isolation, mood disorders, introversion, emotional imbalance, poor school performance, running away from home, truancy and dropping out of school, aggressive behavior (the imitation effect) or even juvenile delinquency.

By age peculiarities (sensitive and impressionable) the child undergoes a strong emotional and behavioral imbalance, building disharmonic personalities.

The symptoms that the victim develops are exemplified, largely belonging to the somatic type, low resistance to frustration, difficult adaptation and social integration.

The following aspects are furthermore emphasized: focusing on types of abuse, the need to recognize the importance of the type of interaction between parents and children and the need to focus attention more on this interaction and its rehabilitation.

Chapter III – synthesizes the complex relationships between defense mechanisms and preventive intervention in situations of abuse.

It is especially underlined the involvement and cooperation of teachers, students and parents in promoting and developing the students' desirable behaviors in order to assimilate and develop harmonious pro-social relationships.

The importance of prevention programs, exemplified on three levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) to have a precise target, a good knowledge of the environment peculiarities, but also of internal and external protective factors and strategies of intervention in case of abuse, are further detailed in this chapter.

Part II

SURVERY AND CASE STUDIES IN ABUSE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Chapter IV

SURVEY ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The basic premises of the research are:

1. In-depth study of the phenomenon of abuse on pupils (children and teenagers) is the sine qua non condition of policy, strategies and ways of intervention towards reducing / diminishing this phenomenon.
2. Intervention on factors leading to abuse on children and young people and prevention can lessen the abuse intensity under its various forms.

Starting from these work premises, the research had the following main goals:

- Detailed study of the phenomenon of abuse on pupils, understanding the particularities of abuse in two different natural environments - school and family;
- Analysis of the types / sizes of the abuse phenomenon: physical, emotional, sexual abuse and abuse through neglect, in two environments - the school and family;
- Analysis of the causes, contributing factors and forms of abuse that pupils are subjected to in schools and in their families;
- Identification of possible intervention modalities for abuse reduction / elimination.

To achieve these research goals, a questionnaire was developed for studying the phenomenon of abuse on children and young people, namely:

- to identify forms of abuse to which pupils have been subjected;
- to identify abused pupils.

The questionnaire is original / designed by the PhD author and consists of 25 items, aimed at obtaining data on:

- presence of various forms of abuse on children and young people - in the family and non-family environments;
- the role of the family as a source of support for the child, the need for communication and ensuring harmonious relations in the family;
- educational practices in the field of child abuse;
- implications of abuse on abused children and young people;
- the impact of child abuse and on his/her medium and long term development.

Objectives and hypothesis of the research

Research objectives:

- to determine the incidence of abuse on pupils enrolled in education in Maramures county, in terms of the main types / sizes of the abuse phenomenon: physical, emotional, sexual and through neglect.
- to determine the distribution of index values of abuse from the pupils' perspective, according to the variables of biological gender, age, nationality / ethnicity, rural / urban residence (for the schools in the sample);
- to determine distribution of abuse forms in relation to the socio-economic characteristics of the family or substitute family environment .

Research hypothesis :

The types of child abuse in the family / other contexts and their frequency correlate with: biological gender, children's age at first abuse, ethnicity / nationality, residence, socio-economic status of the family, parental education.

The sample of participants

13 schools in the county of Maramures were involved in the current research, chosen at random, from both urban and rural environment, respectively 142 classes of these schools in the county of Maramures, in total a number of 3,397 students from grades II to XII, and a class of students in the vocational education

Chapter V

SURVERY RESULTS

We hereby summarize some results of the survey:

Participation to quarrelling occurs, in order of frequency, in the circle of friends and in school in about 40% of respondents, followed by quarrels in the family (approx. 25% of pupils) and then other instances of abuse (10% of the involved pupils).

In school, one fifth of the children in the sample under study report abuse by assisting or participating in beatings followed by beating which takes place in the circle of friends, with nearly the same frequency.

The next in order of frequency is the same type of abuse in the family (about 5%) and then in other situations.

Violent physical abuse and beatings with traces of blows on the body occur primarily within the family, by the brother or sister, and is presented by a tenth of the surveyed children.

Colleagues are involved in this type of abuse in almost the same percentage.

About 5% of the surveyed children are abused in this way by parents, followed by others.

Grandparents abuse children in proportion of 2.5% of the surveyed cases whereas with teachers, the proportion of abuse is of about 1%, a small percentage from the statistical point of view, which, however, represents an important message for children from the educational institution that should educate them in the spirit of nonviolence and, primarily, from mentors of the institutionalized educational process, i.e. the teachers.

Children's insults are due, firstly, to physical appearance and the parents' religious faith (10%), 5% of the students are offended by reference to their family financial situation, and 2.5% of them due to nationality or ethnicity, to health or their parents' education.

Other forms of abuse by those taking care of children in a proportion of about 5% are represented, firstly, by: the lack of affection ("unwanted or unloved enough") or affection perceived as unequal and / or diminished compared to that shown by others, and by assigning difficult tasks.

Among the most rare forms of abuse are child abandonment and being forced into begging, are reported by < 0.5% of respondents, but with a huge impact on the child.

The threat of abandoning the child has a similar percentage to the two above-mentioned forms of abuse.

No support from the parent or the person who takes care of a child in distress, or fear amplified by penalty which may cause the child to avoid home or run away, are signs of emotional abuse present in approximately 4% of the surveyed children, for each form individually.

The child's desire to run away from home has a 1% distribution and may be the result of other forms of abuse. Abuse by touching unwanted body parts occurs primarily in school and in the circle of friends or colleagues in a proportion of about 5% of the children. Neglect in case of illness by parents or those taking care of children is reported in 3% of the cases.

This is a small percentage statistically, but important in terms of emotional impact for the sick child who is frustrated without the necessary attention, help and treatment. The highest rate of child abuse appears, overall, in the Rroma ethnicity, without representing a rule, usually explained by the favoring conditions represented by the socio economic status, parents' studies and the children's play and activity environment outside the school and family.

Verbal abuse refers to the physical appearance and religion in case of pupils of Romanian nationality and Ukrainian ethnicity, and to physical appearance and financial situation in case of the Rroma pupils.

Regardless of nationality, the most common environments in which abuse takes place by assisting or participating in fights, assisting or participating in beatings and the touch of unwanted body parts are in the school and the circle of friends and the most frequent abusers are siblings, parents and colleagues.

Generally in rural areas these are reported in lower proportions compared with children and adolescents in the urban area.

On average, sexual abuse through unwanted touching is first mentioned at the age of 10-11 years in both sexes. Violent blows (with visible marks on the body) are most common in boys, from colleagues .

Boys more frequently than girls report in their circle of friends of assisting or participating in beatings. The proportion of recently abused pupils (during last year) verbally, physically and sexually is relatively equal in both genders.

Girls more frequently than boys report abuse by assisting or participating in family quarrels. The first abuse by violent blows with traces on the body is reported by girls as having begun around the age of 9 years and in boys at 10 years. The socioeconomic status,

place of residence, gender, school unit or ethnicity are not unique determinants of the child abuse phenomenon .

Chapter VI

CASE STUDIES - OVERVIEW, DESIGN OF INTERVENTION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the survey of the abuse phenomenon in Maramures county we identified numerous instances of abuse on pupils who required personal evaluation and counseling, being referred to the school psychologist and where the complexity and effects of abuse required, to the clinical psychologist

Of the 23 evaluated pupils, 12 were counseled and are included in the 9 case studies of this research.

Chapter VII

Conclusions and implications of research in psycho-pedagogical practice

The last three decades have seen a significant increase in the overall interest of theoreticians and practitioners for the **phenomenon of child and teenager's abuse** and for its specific issues; types of abuse and their prevalence, causes, impact, consequences and, of course, strategies to reduce or even eliminate abuse.

In this paper we intend to consider Maramures as a **case** and to analyze the phenomenon of abuse as follows:

- a) By performing a **fundamental pedagogical research** in order to:
 - a.1.) study the phenomenon of abuse and identify prevalent types of abuse to which pupils are subject both at school and in the family through the study of 13 schools in the county, selected at random;
 - a.2.) analyze the causes and factors leading to pupils' abuse in schools and in their family;
- b) By making a **practical and applied pedagogical research** in order to:

- b.1.) perform correlation studies, in order to study possible correlations between child abuse and a series of variables identified through the study of literature;
- b.2.) to conduct case studies in which the effectiveness of psycho-pedagogical interventions was tested in cases of abuse as well as their valences towards diminishing the negative effects of abuse on children and young people.

The following conclusions can be drawn after performing the survey of Maramures county:

Frequency of abuse forms on pupils varies according to school, being conditioned by numerous factors that can significantly differentiate educational institutions in terms of various forms of abuse, without this representing the norm.

Although the main research tool - the **questionnaire** targeted pupils and was distributed to educational institutions, the forms of abuse which it envisages includes and addresses the entire environment in which children live.

The simple structuring of the questionnaire was aimed at being simple and easy for pupils to fill in, starting from 2nd graders (7-8 years) being also useful in identifying forms of abuse and older students of 18-19 years of age. The questionnaire was structured starting from validated and widely used questionnaires in research on situations of abuse, mainly in Western countries, being, however, original.

The use of 3 choices per question on the average facilitates a fast filling in, even by pupils in primary education, representing **a useful tool in assessing child abuse**, for children's group testing, allowing first and foremost identification of abuse forms.

The proportions of different forms of abuse found through this study show their extensive presence in the community

Mandatory interventions are primarily aimed at groups revealed by the research: pupils aged 8-12 years in urban areas, predisposed communities or environments through low socio-economic status or circle of friends, play or activity environment in which the child takes part.

The questionnaire-based screening in communities or classrooms can help enforce preventive measures, targeting both the community and the respective pupil through individual features, highlighted by the case studies presented.

Our supposition, that child abuse occurs both in the family and at school is confirmed by the data of this survey, indicating, for each form of abuse, the occurrence in both areas.

In particular, **a conclusion** resulting from the present research is that forms of sexual abuse are frequently associated with one another, appear in multiple children's environments (school, extracurricular and family environments) and are associated with emotional and physical abuse, most often in the family but also in school.

Thus, identifying a pattern of abuse in an environment of work and life requires evaluation of all areas in which the child operates, as well as search and identification of other forms of abuse to prevent this phenomenon.

Therefore the hypothesis according to which the frequency of child abuse is determined by biological gender, socio-economic status, urban / rural residence, school unit or nationality of the child is partially confirmed.

Socio-economic status, place of residence, gender, school unit, or ethnicity, are not unique determinants of the child abuse phenomenon.

Other cases of abuse, e.g. by quarrels are less frequent (about 10%). The most frequent child abuse by assisting or participating in beatings occurs even in schools.

The school environment is the environment in which a fifth of the surveyed children report abuse by assisting or participating in beatings followed, more or less crossed or overlapping with the circle of friends, with approximately the same frequency.

The percentage of those who have been abused by beating or witnessing to family beatings is relatively small in statistical terms, i.e. approx. 5%. Other situations that lead to this type of abuse are less frequent.