



Pathology & Biology Section – 2008

G61 Victimization of Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults by Physical and/or Sexual Abuse in Northwestern Greece: A Three Year Study

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become familiar with the epidemiologic, demographic, social and medical features of child, adolescent and young adult victims of physical and/or sexual abuse in Northwestern Greece.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating the value of data collection and interdisciplinary research work as an important initial step in facing child abuse (either physical or sexual) effectively.

Child abuse is a worldwide problem, although its manifestations and extent in specific regions may vary. It is far more prevalent and detrimental than is generally recognized, having both short and long-term physical, psychological, and social consequences. In Greece mild physical punishment of children is considered to be a normal aspect of child rearing. Compared to other countries (e.g., USA, United Kingdom or Japan) the reported incidence of child abuse in Greece is minimal. It is probable, however, that the rate is underestimated because of the lack of mandatory reporting of child abuse, and also because of inadequate awareness among health care providers. A priori, these circumstances make any effort of estimating the true extent of child abuse in Greece even harder.

The incidence, gravity and the social and medical characteristics of the reported cases of child, adolescent and young adult abuse in Northwestern Greece were the parameters chosen to be investigated. A comparison was also done to the characteristics found in other areas of Greece and foreign countries. Data survey was performed through the retrospective analysis of child, adolescent and young adult abuse cases, for the period November 2004 to December 2006, based on the archive files (forensic reports) of the Patras Medical Examiner Office, which serves the entire region of North-western Greece.

Twenty-six (26) cases of child, adolescent and young adult abuse were reported. The age of the victims ranged between 1 and 20 years old for both sexes. From these 26 cases, 18 were identified as physical and/or sexual abuse. At the rest 8 cases neither physical nor sexual abuse findings were established. Six (6) cases concerned rape or sexual abuse, and the victims' age ranged between 5 and 15 years old. Four (4) victims were males and 4 were females respectively. The 18 established cases of physical and/or sexual abuse included 4 victims of rape (3 were females), and 14 children and adolescents physically abused. The significance of the injuries (see table 2) of 3 out of the 14 physically abused victims was characterized as dangerous (2 females, 1 male) and 11 as simple or light (9 females, 2 males). The families of 15 victims resided in urban centres and the rest 3 in the country, respectively. As far as the nationality of the victims is concerned, one family was Eastern European while the rest (17 families) were Greek. The above categorization of physical and sexual abuse was performed according to the Greek legal system (Greek Criminal Law).

Demographic and social characteristics of the victims included:

- Delay in Seeking Help: 38 (70%)
- "Difficult Child": 24 (44.4%)
- Unwanted Pregnancy: 21 (39%)
- Illegitimate Child: 7 (13%)
- Difficult Pregnancy and Delivery: 19 (35%)
- Premature Child: 8 (14%)
- Problem during the Neonatal Period: 15 (28%)
- Illness during the first months of life: 12 (22%)

Summarized medical findings in 18 cases of abused children, adolescents and young adults included:

- Blunt Force Injuries: 23 (42.5%)
- Craniocerebral Injuries (including fractures): 19 (35.2%)
- Fractures of Long Bones: 8 (15%)
- Burns and Scalds: 7 (13%)
- Sharp Force Injuries: 5 (9.2%)
- Developmental Disorders: 15 (28%)
- Psychomotor Retardation: 7 (13%)
- Congenital Malformations: 1 (1.8%)
- Other: 4 (7.4%)

* Several victims were diagnosed with more than one finding.

There is no doubt that child abuse and neglect is manifested in Northwestern Greece with characteristics similar to those described in other areas of Greece and in foreign countries. Nevertheless, in our study there was a high



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prevalence of females among the victims, an argument that comes in controversy with the standing esteems medical examiners have in Greece. The relatively low number of reported cases (26 cases, less than 9 per year) is primarily a result of lack of the Greek National Health System's organization, but may be also attributed to the nature of the Greek family which precludes the maltreatment of children. Indisputably, there is wide denial of a child abuse problem among professionals in Greece, especially in the medical profession. Notwithstanding, Greece is just making its initial steps in identifying and facing the phenomenon of child abuse and neglect, and we are very optimistic that the situation will be ameliorated in the near future.

Forensic Medicine, Child Abuse, Northwestern Greece