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**VII CONFERENCE OF
WIVES OF HEADS OF
STATE AND GOVERNMENT
OF THE AMERICAS**



**THE AMERICAS PROJECT ON EDUCATION
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND CULTURE OF PEACE**

PANAMA, REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

OCTOBER 8 - 9, 1997



**VII CONFERENCE OF WIVES OF
HEADS OF STATE AND
GOVERNMENT OF THE
AMERICAS**

**CEJEG/PANAMA
OPER2
English
October 8th and 9th**

**EXECUTION 2 OF THE XXI CENTURY
SCHOOLS: EDUCATING FOR LIFE
INITIATIVE**

**DIAGNOSE STUDY: INCIDENCE OF CHILD
ABUSE IN THE SCHOOL POPULATION OF
PRIMARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SAN FELIPE**

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PANAMA, OCTOBER 8TH AND 9TH

ABSTRACT

There is no statistical data to detect child abuse in Panama. Scarcely two years ago the legal system has made it mandatory to try to prevent, to denounce, to diagnose, to treat and to follow up these cases.

We wanted to precise what was happening within the public elementary school population of our country in Panama City, Panama. A survey of six of our schools was undertaken and this covered 15% of the students (346) comprising boys and girls from kindergarden thru the 6th grade. The degree of abuse found was high and alarming. 74.3% of the children indicated blows from parents or guardians. 45% of these cases were considered severe and showed important physical findings. Mothers were the most violent. 18% of the children received no adult care after school and had to wait for their parents to return from work. 64% of the families drank alcohol, 46.2% of the parents screamed as the only means of communication and 17.3% of the parents ended their dispute with physical violence. The finding gives us an indication of the chaotic situation of our families and makes this one of the main health problems encountered.

INTRODUCCION

Child mistreatment is not an easy topic since we have to begin by investigating the family in depth.

The family is a very complex biological and social system, influenced by standards inherited from both ancestors. When a new family system develops, many situations formerly considered as rights of the parents are seen today as an abuse of respect and human dignity.

Family violence should be a health priority for Panama due to its serious implications and the influence it has on the great social problems such as drug addiction, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and the like.

The healthy individual growth of the abused child or the one who has witnessed violence is affected and these way cause psychological repercussions.

The literature reports that the main oppressors of children are his parents, essentially the mother. This might have a historic past since fathers played the role of the strong sex and aggressive behavior toward the mothers and they released their frustrations on the child. Witnessing violence may produce families with equal standards and characteristics.

There are no statistics on child abuse in Panama. Since 1995, the legal system in Panama compels us to try to prevent, to denounce, to diagnose and to follow all cases of domestic violence.

METHOD

2,250 students from six public elementary schools within San Felipe county of Panama City were included in the study a representative sample of 346 students of both sexes (15%) were selected for further study.

This sample was chosen at random an in stratified form. Researchers developed a survey and this was applied individually.

The investigation was of the transverse descriptive type, analyzing variables and manifestations that had occurred at a specific moment.

The statistical design was simple, it was not predictive.

RESULTS

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:

46.2% of the boys and girls in the sample expressed that within their homes the main means of communicating between parents was through yells and fights, and in 17.7% of these, the parents culminated their dispute with physical violence.

DRUG USE:

65% of the children reported that alcohol was consumed in their homes. This reveals a high potential for use by the offspring.

The previous finding verifies other studies that indicated the drug more widely used in Panama is alcohol.

DISCIPLINARY METHODS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

The study confirms that levels of child abuse in our county are high and harmful.

257 children (74.3%) of the total sample of 346 reported having received blows from parents or guardians (Figure 1).

160 of these cases (257 cases) were considered severe abuse victims who showed important physical evidence (Table 1). 51.7% (133 cases) of the 257 victims were beaten by their mothers (Figure1). This data corroborates the universal finding that mothers mistreat children more than their fathers do.

It should be highlighted that 18% of the children remained for long hours without supervision by an adult, a fact considered a risk factor for abnormal behavior.

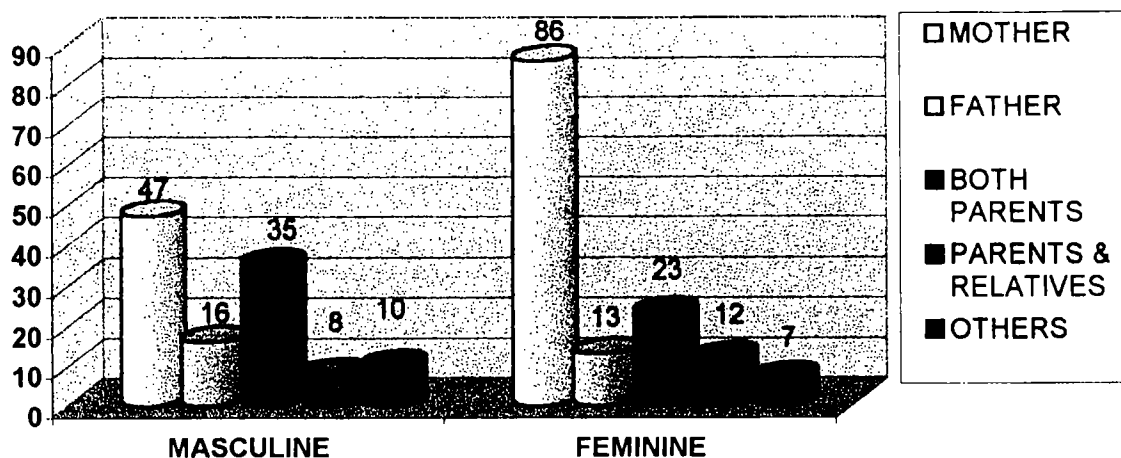
Figure 2 shows that parents normally use various objects to beat their children, being the preferred one the strap (118 cases, 45.9%), that usually leaves visible impressions, often serious ones.

Table 2 shows 42.4% of the children receive blows in the legs and 27.2% receive blows in several parts of the body (face, head, hands, arms, legs, buttocks).

The psychological and physical implications of this behavior are extremely traumatic and emotional scars remain for life. We ask ourselves if parents are really prepared and mature enough to procreate children and have them grow in a healthy and risky environment.

We face the fact that children are victims of hatred, frustrations, immaturity, indifference and a lack of preparations for parenting.

**FIGURE 1. PHYSICALLY ABUSE CHILDREN ACCORDING TO KINSHIP,
IN THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN SAN FELIPE COUNTY,
PANAMA, 1996.**



**TABLE 1. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE, ACCORDING TO
SEX IN THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN
SAN FELIPE, PANAMA, 1996.**

	TOTAL		MASCULINE		FEMININE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
TOTAL	346	100.00	156	45.09	190	54.91
NOT EVIDENT	186	53.76	72	20.81	114	32.95
EVIDENT	160	46.24	84	24.28	76	21.97
ALL	11	3.18	4	1.16	7	2.02
LEAVING SIGNS						
HEMATOMAS, EDEMA						
BURNS, CUT						
MORE THAN ONE	61	17.63	32	9.25	29	8.38
LEAVING SIGNS	87	25.14	48	13.87	39	11.27
EDEMA	1	0.29	0	0.00	1	0.29

FIGURE 2. WAYS USED TO BEAT THE CHILDREN ACCORDING TO SEX, IN THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, IN SAN FELIPE, PANAMA, 1996

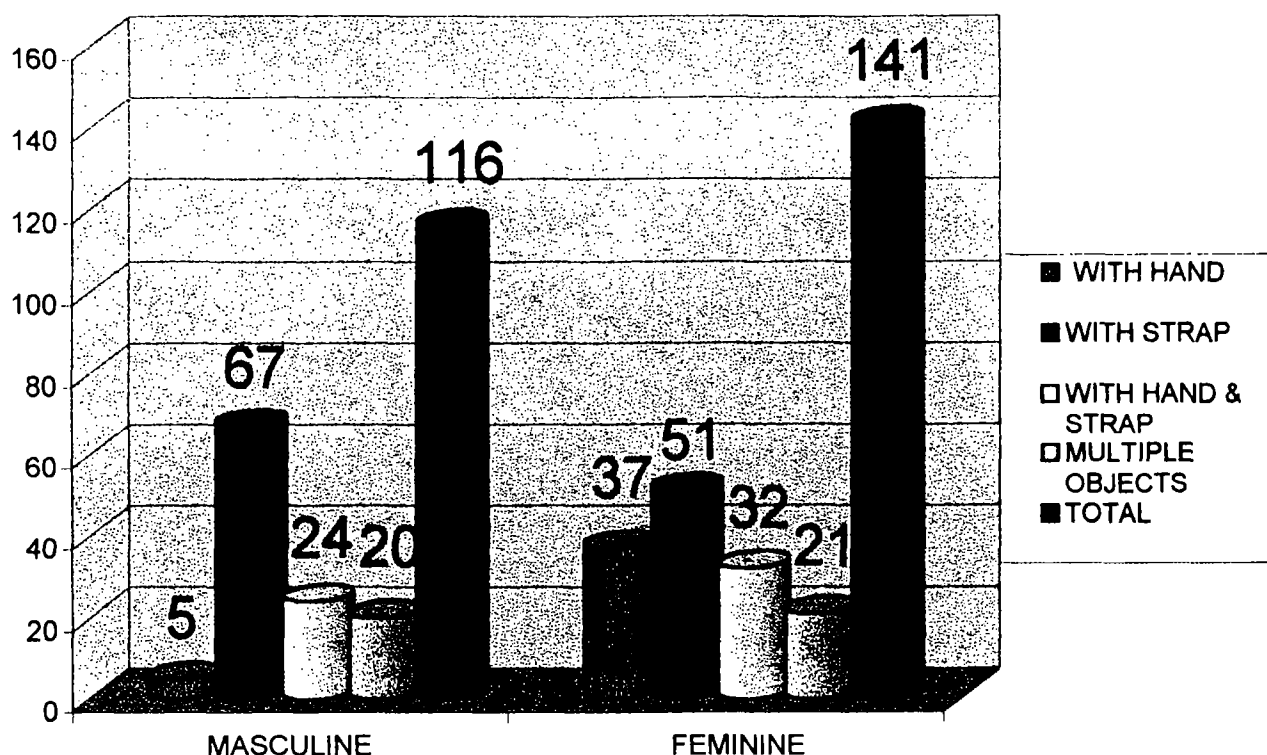


TABLE 2. PARTS OF THE BODY WHERE THE CHILDREN ARE BEATEN, ACCORDING TO SEX, IN THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, IN SAN FELIPE, PANAMA, 1996

PART OF THE BODY	TOTAL		MASCULINO		FEMENINO	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
TOTAL	346	100	156	45.09	190	54.91
NOT BEATING	89	25.72	40	11.56	50	14.45
BEATEN	257	74.28	116	33.53	141	40.75
LEG	109	42.41	53	45.69	56	39.72
HANDS & ARMS	26	10.12	6	5.17	20	14.18
LEGS & ARMS	45	17.51	19	16.38	26	18.44
HEAD	2	0.78	1	0.86	1	0.71
BUTTOCKS	5	1.95	0	0.00	5	3.55
SEVERAL PART OF THE BODY	70	27.24	37	31.90	33	23.40

CONCLUSIONS

The level of abuse observed indicates a regular standard for raising children and living together that only perpetuates violence that dates from very remote eras.

Institutions for the family should develop and change since a number one public health problem is family violence.

We should understand that the worse risk factors and sociopathies are found within the children's own homes. Parents should recognize the damage they cause their children with this type of behavior since their offspring develop in a violent environment thus creating future aggressors and furthering chain reactions for violence in future generations.

The health sector is the key to understanding and promoting more reasonable behavior by parents, and it is the only institution with the power to involve others, in actions to diminish in some measure the impact on mental and physical health created by violent behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutions in charge of monitoring violence should insist on the participation of all society in the endeavor of saving family life. They should participate in the regulation of television programs, be supported by a capable staff in all health areas, but this should not be interpreted as an intervention by the state against private initiative. The promotion of the peace culture instead of the violence viewed daily on Television.

European countries have already implemented the modality of School for Parents, at the public and private level. This consideration should be taken into account in our part of the world, since it gives a different dimension to the fact of being a mother or a father.

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