CHILD PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT IN PALESTINIAN FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study was designed to identify predictors of child psychological maltreatment (CPM) in Palestinian families. It examined the relative contributions of child characteristics, parents’ sociodemographics, and economic hardship, in addition to family’s characteristics such as family values, family ambiance, gender inequities, parental support, harsh discipline, and other forms of maltreatment, to psychological maltreatment.

Method: The sample consisted of 1000 school age children who ranged in age from 12 to 16 years. Two school counselors carried the interviews with children at school, and with the available parent at home.

Results: Child school performance was specifically associated with CPM. The two-parent families and parents from refugee camps appeared to employ more psychological maltreatment of their children than single-parent families and parents from urban and rural areas. Parents who perceived that the family did not have enough money to meet the child’s needs were more likely to abuse their children psychologically. Gender inequities, harsh discipline, family ambiance, and lack of parental support were the most salient predictors of CPM. Child psychological maltreatment occurred concurrently with other forms of maltreatment such as physical abuse and child’s labor. Parental psychological maltreatment proved to be weakened with high traditional family values.

Conclusion: A significant proportion of the sample could be considered psychologically maltreated. Intervention and prevention efforts should be focused on child welfare, educational programs aimed at high-risk parents, and mobilization of the community and social services agencies. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd.

Key Words—Palestinian children, Family, Psychological maltreatment, Abuse, Methods of socialization.

INTRODUCTION

CHILD MALTREATMENT HAS become more visible as an area of professional concern to Palestinians (Khamis, 1996, 1998a; Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998). Investigators studying Palestinian children have traditionally focused on coping with political violence (Baker, 1990; Punamaki & Suleiman, 1990) and on major reports dealing with the use of gunfire or ill-treatment against Palestinian children living in the occupied territories (Al-Haq, 1988; Khamis, 1992a, 1992b; Nixon, 1990). Despite the growing clinical interest in the psychological conditions that affect the lives of Palestinian children in conflict-bound situations, no study presently exists through which one can develop an empirical understanding of the conditions that produce child maltreatment in families. In addition, little effort has been devoted to research and intervention focused on child psychological maltreatment primarily because available definitions and standards for determining its existence and impact are inadequate (Khamis, 1996, 1998a). The further study of the interplay of sociocultural factors and psychological maltreatment in non-Western societies will help untangle the web of causal and protective factors contributing to the various child
maltreatment types and forms. Cross-cultural research helps in this process by identifying factors that may contribute to the problem.

Experts generally believe that psychological maltreatment is more prevalent than other forms of maltreatment, and is often more destructive in its impact on the lives of young people (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983; Garbarino, Guttmann, & Seeley, 1986; Hart, Gelardo, & Brassard, 1986). Psychological maltreatment is conceptualized by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (1995) as a repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another’s needs. In addition, APSAC definition included acts of commission (e.g., verbal attacks by a caregiver) as well as acts of omission (e.g., emotional unavailability of a caregiver).

Families vary in their vulnerability to psychological maltreatment. Although theoretical perspectives on the causes and correlates of child maltreatment are many and varied (Zigler & Hall, 1989), investigators have seemed to rally around the human ecological model. Many researchers (Belsky, 1980, 1984; Garbarino, 1977, 1979; Valentine, Freeman, Acuff, & Andreas, 1985) have proposed Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) human ecology theory as a basis for a more comprehensive analysis of the complex conditions associated with child maltreatment. Bronfenbrenner’s model is a Lewin type “circles of influence” approach that emphasizes the interrelatedness and complexity of social-ecological influences on the family or the person being studied. Drawing heavily from this multifaceted, ecobehavioral approach to the study of psychologically abusive families, research has dealt with the nature and power of conditions or possible causes associated with maltreatment, which fall within and across different ecological levels such as psychological characteristics of perpetrators, social and economic stresses, characteristics of the child, cultural orientations and preparation for parenting, cultural sanctioning, and extremes in family privacy and of violence (Belsky, 1984; Garbarino, 1977; Hart, Germain, & Brassard, 1987).

Belsky (1980) built upon the ecological system foundation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tinbergen, 1951) by describing a system of nested, interactive levels contributing to child abuse. These levels are the ontogenic development, or the effects of the parent’s history on present parenting practices, the microsystem, or characteristics of the family and the child, the exosystem, or characteristics of the neighborhood and the family’s social support; and the macrosystem or the social characteristics of the culture in which child abuse occurs. While most of the factors studied were associated with the risk that maltreatment will occur in a family context at the individual and microsystem levels (Egeland & Erickson, 1987; Wolfe, 1985), the cumulative impact of the exosystem and macrosystem levels has been also addressed (Gil, 1987). For example, research indicated that certain child characteristics have been implicated in abuse such as prematurity, handicaps, aversive cry related to neurological problems and hyperactivity (Belsky, 1980; Frodi, 1981; Gil, 1970; McCabe, 1984; Parke, 1977). Also, researchers have found that parent’s own rearing history, and the style of parenting to which they were exposed, contribute to the way they practice child rearing (Altemeier, O’Connor, Vietze, Sandler, & Sherrod, 1982; Main & Goldwyn, 1984). Other research findings identified certain parent’s personality characteristics as associated specifically with psychological maltreatment (Brassard & Gelardo, 1987; Miller, 1983). Viewed from an ethnological perspective Rohner and Rohner (1980) have investigated the construct of rejection, as one form of psychological maltreatment, by comparing parenting behaviors that characterizes several geographically and culturally disparate societies. The study indicated that rejecting parents were overwhelmed by a convergence of social and economic hardships, large number of children, inadequate material resources, stress, and lack of emotional support. Garbarino and Vondra (1987) considered parenting practices that are characterized by an authoritarian style as a negative, ego-oriented form of psychological maltreatment. Such a style of childrearing emphasizes dichotomies of behavior and perception, which rely on extremes of punishment and reward, and demands an orientation to power and status.

Although psychological maltreatment of children may be the most widespread type of abuse committed by parents in Palestinian families (Ayyoush, 1993; Khamis, 1998a), this form of...
maltreatment has been overlooked by researchers, policy makers, and clinicians. However, literature about methods of socialization in the Arab world either explicitly discussed or else implied the notion of disciplinary policy in child-rearing practices including ways of cultural or regulatory training that is manifested in acts of terrorizing, producing anxiety and fear, punishment in the form of fulminations (e.g., exploding, bursting) or curses, or it may be corporal and denying filial sentiments. The general pattern of behavior between children and parents are largely ones of dominance, submission, couched in the term of “filial piety” (Ammar, 1973; Barakat, 1980; Sharabi, 1975). This style of parenting appears to cover major forms of psychological maltreatment when judged on the basis of a combination of Western community standards and professional expertise (Garbarino & Gilliam, 1980; Hart, Germain, & Brassard, 1983) which further warrant the inclusion of this pattern of parental functioning within the broad scheme of indirect maltreatment.

Despite the broad overlap between the methods of socialization in the Arab world and parental psychological maltreatment, however, the parameters of psychological maltreatment may vary according to who is determining it and in what culture it occurs (Schakel, 1987). Although cultural values may not explain the etiology of child maltreatment, they do contribute to it, and they are important in determining community standards of acceptable child rearing practices (Dubowitz & Egan, 1988). This study was designed to identify predictors of child psychological maltreatment in Palestinian families. It examined the relative contributions of child characteristics, parents’ sociodemographics, economic hardship, in addition to family’s characteristics such as family values, family ambiance, gender inequities, parental support, harsh discipline, and other forms of maltreatment, to psychological maltreatment.

METHOD

Sample Selection

The design for sample selection was based on four primary stratified variables: gender, age, grade level, and supervising authority (i.e., governmental, private, United Nations Relief Work Agency [UNRWA]). Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for the 1998 census were used to allocate schools from various districts in the West Bank: South, North, Central and East Jerusalem. Children then were selected randomly from each school by the help of school personnel. Of the 1000 children who were selected for entry into the study only eight children and two parents declined to participate and as a result 10 other children were selected for replacement.

Participants

The participants in this study were 1000 Palestinian school age children from the West Bank who ranged in age from 12 to 16 years ($M = 14.18, SD = 1.60$). Of these children, 60 (6%) had physical or sensory disability; whereas 118 (11.8 %) tended to be working. Only nine children who were all females reported that they had been sexually abused by a relative or a non-relative, and 141 (14.1%) of the children reported that they had been physically abused in their families. Around 244 (24.4%) were affected in one way or another by political violence such as having a family member killed, injured, imprisoned, or had their homes demolished. The combined monthly income of the participant’s families ranged from 100 to 2000 US dollars ($M = 750, SD = 535$). Selected demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from the Ministry of Education, school directors and the participants. They were given a full explanation of the study, were assured of the anonymity of their responses, and
were ensured confidentiality of all information collected. Two female school counselors carried the interviews with children at school, and with the available parent at home. The interviewers had previous experience in working with abused children and their families. They were sensitive to two important components of the interview relationship: respect and empathy. The interviewers communicated a good understanding of the participants, and obtained the most useful information while attempting to keep their comments in regard to sensitive issues as nondirective as possible.

**Instrumentation**

The measures in this study were administered as a battery of questionnaires focusing on parental psychological maltreatment in the Palestinian family context. The scales that are reported below have been constructed for the purpose of this study in order to capture the peculiarities of the Palestinian culture. The statements of these scales were generated from previous observations and interviews of abused children and their families, and from a review of related theoretical and empirical research. Also, four specialists in the areas of psychology, psychiatry and the Palestinian society were asked to judge the overall format of the scales and to assess each scale item for its presumed relevance to the property being measured. Only statements that were unanimously agreed upon were used; this reinforced the content validity of the scales (Kerlinger, 1986). Also, factor analysis with a principal components matrix and a varimax rotation was used to test for the construct validity of all the scales (Anastasi, 1988).

**Family data sheet.** This brief questionnaire secured demographic and background information about family members including the child. The child variables considered for this study were age, school performance (average), gender, presence of disability and child’s work if any. Also, children were asked if they were subjected to any form of child abuse (e.g., physical) in their families, or if their families were affected in one way or another by political violence such as having a family member killed, injured, imprisoned, or had their houses demolished.

The parents’ sociodemographics were level of education completed by mothers and fathers, religion, marital status, residential patterns (urban, rural, and refugee camps), number of children and total household income.

| Table 1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Participants |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Variable        | n | %    |
| Gender          |    |      |
| Males           | 523 | 52.3 |
| Females         | 477 | 47.7 |
| Religion        |    |      |
| Muslims         | 864 | 86.4 |
| Christians      | 136 | 13.6 |
| Type of School  |    |      |
| Governmental    | 609 | 60.9 |
| Private         | 188 | 18.8 |
| UNRWA           | 203 | 20.3 |
| Residence       |    |      |
| Urban area      | 569 | 56.9 |
| Rural area      | 319 | 31.9 |
| Refugee camp    | 112 | 11.2 |
| Marital status  |    |      |
| Two-parent      | 918 | 91.8 |
| Single-parent   | 82  | 8.2  |
Child psychological maltreatment (CPM). The child psychological maltreatment scale is a 20-item scale that was designed to measure the repeated patterns of parental behavior that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value in meeting another’s needs in the context of the Palestinian culture. The initial selection of the items was guided by the forms of psychological maltreatment described by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (1995) including spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness and neglect. The statements were generated from previous observations and interviews with parents and children. Using a principal-component analysis with a varimax rotation of eigenvalues greater than or equal to 1.0, the scale generated three factors. These factors with their loadings are listed in Appendix A. Factor 1, emotional abuse included verbal or emotional assault, close confinement and threatened harm, explained 40.5% of the variance. Factor 2, emotional neglect included inadequate nurturance and affection, child isolation and neglect, explained 6.4% of the variance. Factor 3, corrupting included encouraging child maladaptive behavior such as lying and cheating, explained 5.2% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale is .92.

Gender Inequities Scale (GIS). The gender inequities scale (Khamis, 1998b) is an 8-item scale that was designed to measure children perceived fairness regarding parents’ gender preferences. Functions of parental gender bias reflected practices regarding rewards, support, help, empathy, and responsive care-giving. Factor analysis results generated two factors. Factor 1, gender bias included disparities in providing support (e.g., instrumental, emotional) for males and females within the family explained 35.9% of the variance. Factor 2, gender inequality reflected parents gender preferences in providing rewards and responsive care-giving, explained 17.9% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale is .76.

Family Ambiance Scale (FAS). The family ambiance scale (Khamis, 1998b) is a 7-item scale that was designed to assess child’s experience of anxiety in proximal home environment. Items reflected subjective anxiety (tension, nervousness) or it’s opposite (relaxation, calm) in situations involving various family patterns of interaction such as speaking, discussing and communicating. Factor analysis results generated in two factors. Factor 1, family environment included apprehension and fearfulness of communicating with the father, expressing thoughts and opinions, and participating in family events explained 26.1% of the variance. Factor 2, family relationships included apprehension of communicating with the mother and siblings explained 12.0% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale is .73.

Parental Support Scale (PSS). The parental support scale (Khamis, 1998b) is a 10-item scale that was designed to assess child’s degree of satisfaction with parental support. The evaluation of items were rated on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 10 (very dissatisfied) to 70 (highest possible satisfaction). Items dealt with tangible support (e.g., presents, rewards, money, food, and clothing), emotional support (e.g., affection, love, warmth), and social support (e.g., help, caring). Factor analysis results generated one factor, namely parental support that explained 51.6% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is .89.

Harsh Discipline Scale (HDS). The harsh discipline scale (Khamis, 1998b) was designed to measure children’s perception of parent’s rearing practices. The six items on the HDS refer explicitly to harsh discipline such as coercive punishment, immediate obedience to parental orders, monitoring and directing activities. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 6 (very lenient) to 30 (very harsh discipline). Factor analysis results generated two factors. Factor 1, parental suppression included immediate obedience to parental orders, monitoring, directing activities, and coercive punishment explained 37.4% of the variance. Factor 2, exertion of parental power reflected parents pressures in affecting child’s choices and wants explained 19.7% of the variance, Chronbach’s alpha for the total scale is .74.
Family Values Scale (FVS). The family values scale (Khamis, 1998b) was designed to measure parents’ perception of the desirable values in a family along a traditional–non-traditional continuum. The selection of items were guided by the exiting norms in the Arab society. The items were divided into seven a priori content areas that revolved around women, men, children, family, elderly, society and authority. The scale is composed of 20 items scored along the usual 5-point Likert type scale. Scores vary from 20 (low traditional values) to 100 (high traditional values). A factor analysis of the items led to the identification of five factors. Factor 1, commitment to family and women’s honor explained 21.4% of the variance. Factor 2, submission to authority and men explained 10.4% of the variance. Factor 3; children conformity explained 7.1% of the variance. Factor 4; traditional mores explained 6.1% of the variance. Factor 5, social influence and collectivity explained 5.0% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale is .73.

Economic pressure. Economic pressure was measured by parents’ responses on three indicators. Two items assessed the extent to which parents were having difficulty paying their bills (1 = no difficulty at all, 5 = a great deal of difficulty) and one item dealt with the extent to which parents were having difficulty in having money to meet the daily family needs.

Fulfillment of Child’s Material Needs Scale (FCMNS). The fulfillment of child’s material needs scale (Khamis, 1998b) was designed to provide a measure of the extent to which parents agreed or disagreed that the family had enough money to meet child’s needs for a suitable home, school items, clothing, food, medical care, and recreational activities. A factor analysis of the seven items resulted in one factor, namely fulfillment of child’s material needs that explained 62.8% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is .89.

RESULTS

Selection of Variables for Inclusion in Analyses

To simplify data analyses, the number of predictor variables were reduced. This was accomplished by identifying variables significantly associated with child psychological maltreatment (CPM). With respect to family characteristics, there was a significant effect for child’s work $t_{(977)} = 2.41, p < .01$, with children who were working having higher scores on CPM than did children who were not working. Also significant main effects were found for the presence of physical abuse $t_{(997)} = 6.69, p < .0001$, with children who reported experiencing physical abuse having higher scores on CPM than did children who did not report experiencing physical abuse. Results of the correlations indicated that the strongest associations involving CPM occurred with family ambiance $r = .60, p < .001$, gender inequities $r = .62, p < .001$, harsh discipline $r = .52, p < .001$, parental support $r = .58 p < .001$, and family values $r = -.14, p < .001$.

In analyzing economic hardship variables, economic pressure $r = .23, p < .001$, and satisfying children’s material needs $r = .27, p < .001$ were significantly related to CPM.

In regard to child characteristics, only the presence of disability ($t = 5.36; p < .0001$), and child’s school performance ($r = -.24; p < .001$) were significantly related to CPM. Children who suffered from physical or sensory disability and children who had poor school performance reported to experience higher levels of psychological maltreatment by their parents than did children without a disability, and than did children with higher school performance.

Of parents sociologitics, marital status $F_{(2, 996)} = 4.51, p < .01$, and residential patterns $F_{(2, 996)} = 8.60, p < .001$, had main significant effects on CPM. Post-hoc analysis using Scheffe’ test indicated that the two-parent families were more psychologically abusive to their children than single-parent families (widowed, divorced), and parents from the refugee camps were more psychologically abusive to their children than parents from urban and rural areas. Also modest
negative correlations were found between fathers education $r = -.20$, $p < .001$ and CPM, and mothers education $r = -.21$, $p < .001$ and CPM.

The Prediction of Child Psychological Maltreatment

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to predict psychological maltreatment of children from four blocks of predictor variables. The four-predictor blocks were: (a) child characteristics (b) parents’ sociodemographics, (c) economic hardship, and d) family’s characteristics.

The predictor blocks were entered in the order listed. This order was based upon chronology of occurrence. The early entry of a variable block into the regression equation provided a statistics control for the impact of those variables upon psychological maltreatment. Table 2 indicates that the model containing all four predictor blocks accounts for 62.3% of psychological maltreatment variance. Each predictor block separately accounted for the following percentage of child psychological maltreatment variance: 8.1% by child characteristics, 3.1% by parent’s sociodemographics, 4.4% by economic hardship, and 46.7% by family’s characteristics.

The absolute increase in $R^2$ is small for child characteristics, .081; parents’ sociodemographics, .033; economic hardship, .049; and large for family’s characteristics, .553 obtained by dividing the percentage of additional variance by the percentage of unexplained variance prior to entry. Cohen’s (1988) guidelines for small, medium (those typical in behavioral research), and large effect sizes are .02, .15, and .35, respectively.

In Table 2, the column denoted beta contains the standardized or beta coefficients of the 15 individual variables contained in the model. The absolute magnitude of the beta coefficients indicated the relative strength of 15 variables as predictors of child psychological maltreatment.
Beta coefficients are particularly good indexes of the relative importance of variables as they express the unique variance attributable to a predictor while controlling for all other predictors within the final regression model.

Of the child characteristics only child’s poor school performance was significantly associated with psychological maltreatment. Among parent’s sociodemographic variables, only two stood out as predictors of more psychological maltreatment of children. Parents who lived in refugee camps and two-parent families appeared to employ more psychological maltreatment of their children. Of the economic hardship, parents who perceived that the family did not have enough money to meet child’s material needs were more likely to abuse their children psychologically.

All of the measured factors of the family’s characteristics appeared to be significant predictors of psychological maltreatment of children. Children who experienced physical abuse and who have been working tended to report higher levels of psychological maltreatment. Parents who perceived that the family had high traditional values, psychological maltreatment was less likely to be reported by their children. The quality of the methods of socialization and rearing practices were highly predictable. Gender inequities, harsh discipline, child’s experience of anxiety in proximal home environment (i.e., family ambiance), and lack of parental support were the most salient predictors of psychological maltreatment of children.

**DISCUSSION**

The pattern of results from this study provides evidence that the number of Palestinian children who experienced parental psychological maltreatment is alarmingly high. A significant proportion of the sample, 16.4%, could be considered psychologically abused based on their scoring of at least 1 SD above appropriate norms ($M = 35.34, SD = 12.50$) on the child psychological maltreatment measure (CPM).

Consistent with previous findings (Eckenrode, Larid, & Doris, 1993) the results of this study indicated a significant negative relationship between parental psychological maltreatment and school performance (lower grades), however this result does not determine if poor school performance preceded or resulted from maltreatment. While most studies comment on the innumerable physical, behavioral, and personal child’s characteristics which may evoke negative responses in parents (Berdie, Berdie, Wexler, & Fisher, 1983; Garbarino, 1989; Garbarino, Schellenbach, Sebes, & Associates, 1986; Garbarino & Vondra, 1987; Kadushin & Martin, 1981; Libby & Bybee, 1979), these studies may be problematic with respect to the cause/effect relationship (Wiehe, 1996).

Results indicated that children living in two-parent homes were at higher risk of subsequent psychological maltreatment than were children living in single-parent families (divorced or widowed). This finding reached a similar conclusion by Kempe and Kempe (1978), and Jackson and colleagues (1999) whereas it was inconsistent with other studies (Gelles, 1997; Wahler, Leske, & Rogers, 1980) that noted the prevalence of single mothers in maltreating families. In fact, Palestinian single parents are less abusive than couples. For example, single mothers tend to provide more warmth and affection to their children than other caregivers, with the goal of having these children as a source of future support “al-sand.” Studies (Bourqia, 1994; Jacobson, 1994) show that the threat of both divorce and widowhood heighten women’s insecurities about the future. On the other hand children enhance women’s status in the family and community; they provide a sense of great psychological and economic security. In effect, children are part of a woman’s insurance policy against abandonment and divorce or in the event of widowhood. Also, when interpreting this result, it is important to bear in mind that the observed marital status of this sample might not reflect the quality of the marital relationship, which in turn may have contributed to child psychological maltreatment. An additional finding is related to socio-cultural issues in relation to child psychological maltreatment. Children from refugee camps reported experiencing more psychological maltreatment than did children from urban and rural areas. Although it
would be misleading to view parents from refugee camps as generally neglectful of their children or emotionally abusive, however, studies (Garbarino & Vondra, 1987; Wiehe, 1996) reported that parents could behave in such ways when severely stressed in adverse circumstances that left them feeling despairing and unable to manage. There is ample evidence that Palestinian refugees live under severe socio-political and economical stresses (Zureik, 1996).

Economic hardship in regard to parents’ inability to fulfill child’s needs was a significant risk factor for psychological maltreatment of children. This is consistent with previous research that associated child maltreatment with poverty (Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1970; Kotch et al., 1995), and inadequate financial resources (National Center on Child Abuse & Neglect, 1988a, 1988b; Wolock & Horowitz, 1979). Conversely, parents’ inability to meet children needs attributed to psychological maltreatment (Hart & Brassard, 1987) may be due to economic hardship.

The analyses of the results emphasized the crucial role of parenting and methods of socialization in predicting child psychological maltreatment in Palestinian families. Gender inequities, harsh discipline, child’s experience of anxiety in proximal home environment (i.e., family ambiance), and lack of parental support were the most salient predictors of child psychological maltreatment. Also, other forms of abuse and exploitation appeared to be significant predictors such as physical abuse and permitting child’s work. These results are in agreement with the findings of several investigations addressing the role of the family in maltreatment. Treating children differently on the basis of gender may result in psychological maltreatment (Wiehe, 1996). Parental beliefs and expectations about gender-appropriate behavior may influence the way parents treat children, with the result that children are not allowed to develop to their full potential (Telzrow, 1987). Other researchers considered harsh discipline to be primarily responsible for child maltreatment (Gelles, 1973; Gil, 1970; Reid, Taplin, & Lorber, 1981). Family ambiance which reflects subjective experience of anxiety involving parent-child communication (Patterson, 1982; Wiehe, 1996) and lack of parental support (Brassard & Gelardo, 1987; Miller, 1983) seemed to be associated with psychological maltreatment. In addition studies (Brassard & Gelardo, 1987; Wiehe, 1996) provided evidence that psychological maltreatment occur concurrently with other forms of maltreatment such as physical abuse, and permitting child’s work.

Parental psychological maltreatment proved to be weakened with family values. Children whose parents tended to foster high traditional family values reported low levels of psychological maltreatment. Traditional family values focused on the existing norms in the Arab society, such as women’s honor and high expectations involving men-women interaction patterns (dominance, submission) parent and elderly-child communication patterns (obedience) and submission to the authority. High traditional family values may be protective factors that buffer the parenting system from threats to its integrity. In fact, parent’s failure to meet Palestinian societal expectations may create stress on parents that may in turn affect the parenting abilities and put them at risk to be psychologically abusive to a child. Such stressors may include marital discord, poor parental communication, and non-cohesive supportive social network. Studies have demonstrated that supportive environments can diminish the risk associated with parental psychological maltreatment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crochenberg, 1985; Kinard & Klerman, 1980). Also, marital discord has also been cited as a common problem with families of abused children (Ory & Earp, 1980). Given the strong significant associations between family-related variables (e.g., gender inequities, harsh discipline, family ambiance, lack of parental support), and increased child psychological maltreatment, it is necessary to look beyond individual families and examine influences within the Palestinian society. Cultural variables are important in determining community standards of acceptable child-rearing practices, and they also influence interpersonal relationships within families (Dubowitz & Egan, 1988).

Overall the data from this study reveals that child psychological maltreatment in the Palestinian society seem to vary and become more or less apparent in different socio-economic backgrounds and with different parenting practices. Future research can build upon this foundation by elaborating and specifying those features of the ecologies of maltreated children that have a causal
influence on their development. Future work in the area of cultural and religious values will contribute more to our understanding of the factors that may protect families against child psychological maltreatment. These cultural and religious values should be integrated in a more comprehensive model that will investigate the interactive levels of various components contributing to the development of child psychological maltreatment in the Palestinian families. Various treatment modalities and prevention programs are available for dealing with child psychological maltreatment (Wiehe, 1996). However the results of this study reflect the need for specific prevention programs that will be based on an understanding of factors related to child psychological maltreatment in the Palestinian families.

Child maltreatment prevention can be implemented at three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Wiehe, 1996). Primary prevention efforts against child maltreatment must begin by the enactment of various public policies relevant to children’s welfare. Although the Palestinian Authority has adopted the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1997, the drafting and enforcement of child’s rights related laws remain a challenge. Public policies are encouraged to adopt residual and institutional perspectives in the delivery of services (Segal & Gustavsson, 1990). The residual views of social services focuses on adopting policies and implementing services after maltreatment occurs, whereas the institutional perspective emphasizes policies and services ensuring the optimum psychological development of each child from birth through adolescence. However, in the Palestinian context, an emphasis on child protection might be an ineffective starting point, rather, the promotion of child welfare may be a better framework for policy (Melton & Thompson, 1987). Programs aimed at high-risk parents serve as secondary preventive efforts against child maltreatment. Educational programs should focus on early interventions for enhancing parenting skills and appropriate child rearing practices. Tertiary prevention efforts may be aimed at mobilizing and strengthening the existing community mental health and social services agencies to help in the guidance process, thereby limiting the impact of parental psychological maltreatment on children.

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REFERENCES

### Appendix A. Factor Structure with Loadings for the Child Psychological Maltreatment Scale (N=1000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>My parents despise me in front of people.</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Very often my parents call me names that are not favorable.</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Very often my parents frighten me and terrorize me.</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My parents make me feel as if I am not a member of the family.</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>My parents make fun of the way I talk, dress and act.</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My parents depreciate me even when I do something good.</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>My parents threaten me harm for no reason.</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>My parents always make actions that lower my self-esteem and deprive me of my dignity.</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>My parents always make me feel guilty whether I am right or wrong.</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>My parents do not recognize my success or any achievement that I make.</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Very often my parents lock me in a separate room.</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>My parents deal with me in a mechanistic way, with emotional detachment and involvement (void of hugs and kisses).</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Very often my parents forbid me to interact with friends.</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>My parents ignore my attempts to interact with them.</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Very often my parents actively refuse to help me when I need, and/or ask for help.</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Very often my parents make me do a lot of work.</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>My parents do not give me love and deny me from any emotions.</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I feel very much neglected by my parents.</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>My parents tell me that sometimes one should lie in order to get out of difficult situations.</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>My parents tell me that it is important that one should cheat sometime in order to get what s/he wants.</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>