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### Child Abuse

“The old saying about sticks and stones was wrong. Words will forever hurt you,” said Natalie Sachs-Ericsson, a professor of psychology at Florida State University (Elish). Words will forever hurt you; how is insulting, verbally attacking, threatening to hurt, swearing, and yelling at a child not considered child abuse? That is the point, it very well is. Child abuse is doing, or not doing, something that results in harm of the child or puts the child at risk for future harm; it can come in physical, sexual, or emotional states; and it does not provide for a child’s needs in order to become a healthy, well-equipped adolescent and adult. Some people wonder if verbally attacking a child is the new spanking. In 2003, *The Journal of Marriage and Family* reported that “88 percent of the 991 families interviewed admitted shouting, yelling or screaming at their children in the previous year. That percentage jumped to 98 percent in families with 7-year-old children” (“Constant Yelling”). Screaming at and insulting a child is considered child abuse because it has immediate psychological and emotion consequences, puts the child at a future risk for many different disorders and emotional problems, and can even lead to physical risks for self-harm and suicide.

Most parents do get aggravated with their children sometimes, but yelling often makes the child shut down or more inclined to continue doing wrong. On top of this, the over use and increasing severity of just “raising one’s voice” can have extremely serious consequences on a child, no matter what age (“Constant Yelling”). One of these consequences is immediate and detrimental psychological and emotional effects. When a parent insults a child, they are

emotionally scarring their kid. They are putting thoughts in a child's head that they are not enough for their parents. They are not worthy, not smart, not important, or they are all around bad children. When someone, like a parent, as close and as dear to that child yells at them and verbally assaults them, the child will assume that everyone thinks that same of them: they are not worthy or smart enough for anyone. Thus, the child doubts their true capabilities and can lack the necessary social skills to form bonds with their peers, teachers, other family members, etc. Subsequently, they will hold back more in relationships and will also be more subject to being bullied. These situations that the child faces now, as a direct result of being insulted and yelled at over and over will ultimately lead to future risks of psychological and emotional disorders.

Byron Egeland, a University of Minnesota psychologist, has studied parenting and early-childhood development for years, says that effects of emotional child abuse – including cursing, calling a child a name, threatening to hit a child, and yelling at a child – may be just as detrimental to that child as physical abuse would be. Egeland and colleagues have suggested “that emotionally abused children suffer an even greater decline in mental and psychological development as they grow older than do physically abused children” (Jacoby). The abuse that these children tolerated throughout their younger years follows them the rest of their lives. They are at a higher risk to be a troubled teen and adult. They constantly doubt their capabilities because of how they were talked to by their parents. They have flashbacks of terrifying memories, they worry that, although they are motivated to not become the same kind of parent that their own parents were, they will fall into the same path they were put into: one of perpetual yelling and screaming of all kinds. It seems as though the adults that suffered verbal and emotional abuse from their parents were more inclined to suffer from these disorders over adults who had suffered physical or sexual abuse in their childhood. This is probably due to the fact that

these, now, adults are so self-critical of everything they do or pursue that they are more likely to have emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, manic, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc and be involved in alcoholism or drug abuse. Studies, according to Florida State's Natalie Sachs-Ericsson, find that adults that were verbally abused were 1.6 times more likely to experience depression like symptoms and twice as likely to develop anxiety or mood disorders (Elish).

Because of these psychological risks both in their childhood and adulthood, physical self-harm has come into the realm of the effects of verbal abuse. Victims of verbal abuse are prone to thinking that they are so unworthy of everyone and everything that they begin to wonder why they are even living. Why their life is so important that they should stay living. Both children and adults criticize everything they do. They have ingrained into their minds that they are not important, that they are disliked by everyone, and they can do no right; consequently, some victims begin to have suicidal thoughts. This can lead to physical self-harm or, even worse, attempts (with some succeeding) of suicides. Sure, some people do not deal with this of extreme of side effects, but many do, and it is a scary thought. However, as Martin H. Teicher states,

We do not understand why exposure to abuse appears to profoundly affect some individuals but not others, or why it may be associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in some; depression, substance abuse, or antisocial behaviors in others still (n. pag.).

Though this serious of events does not occur in everyone who undergoes such adversity as growing up verbally abused, it is still a huge matter of concern. Furthermore, educating parents on the risks they put their children at could make more parents aware of the dangers they are putting upon their children, consequently, reducing the number of mental illnesses in today's society.

Sure, there are skeptics who do not believe verbally insulting or yelling at children is abuse. In this view, critics could argue that verbal or psychological abuse is not actually child abuse due to the fact that if it were to be declared this, the interfering of the criminal justice system and child welfare programs would be needed (Straus and Field 805). However, there are many less severe ways to implement change or establish awareness in a parent. One way is to have family counseling in which the parent learns different methods of disciplining their child that does not include hitting or yelling. Another step is to inform the general public through TV commercials or brochures located in popular places like doctors' offices about the risks of psychological consequences placed on a child when verbally attacked (Straus and Field 805-6).

We have seen many examples on why verbally attacking, insulting, threatening, and yelling at children fall under the category of child abuse. A few of these reasons is because in performing such actions as these, the parent is putting the child at risk for current and future concerns. Some of these consequences include a lack of proper social skills, emotional stability, and self-confidence, especially during developmental phases in life: childhood and young adulthood. Looking at the future, the rise of mental illnesses and suicidal tendencies are also a threat. Maybe there is not a legal issue here, but a medical and ethical issue – what child abuse is does not have to be defined legally, for there are other alternatives, but it does have to be defined both clinically and morally.

## Works Cited

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