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A STUDY OF BATTERED CHILDREN
IN SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

by

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A report submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF
SOCIAL WORK

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1975



Jack Finley, ACSW., Chairman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES.....	iii
SECTION	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	2
III RESEARCH PROBLEM AND ITS METHODOLOGY.....	6
IV CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BATTERED CHILD.....	7 ①
V CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ABUSING PARENT.....	10 ②
VI CONCLUSIONS.....	15 ① ②
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	18
APPENDIX.....	19

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BATTERED CHILD	
I	AGE AND SEX OF THE ABUSED CHILD.....	7
II	AGE AND SEX OF THE CHILD IN CONTROL GROUP.....	7
III	SIBLINGS AND POSITION IN FAMILY.....	8
	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ABUSING PARENT	
IV	AGE AND SEX OF ABUSING PERSON.....	10
V	AGE AND SEX OF PARENT OR PARENT SUBSTITUTE IN CONTROL GROUP	11
VI	MARITAL STATUS OF PARENTS.....	11
VII	EDUCATION OF PRIMARY WAGEEARNER IN BOTH GROUPS.....	12
VIII	ANNUAL INCOME OF FAMILIES IN BOTH GROUPS.....	12
IX	ETHNIC ORIGIN OF FAMILIES IN EACH GROUP.....	13
X	FORMAL RELIGION KNOWN OF BOTH GROUPS.....	14
XI	FAMILIES NEW TO THE AREA OF SANTA BARBARA.....	14

I. INTRODUCTION

Current newspaper articles, professional journals and legislation reflect increased concern and attention in the area of child abuse. The frequency of reports of children physically and mentally abused, some fatally, makes abundantly clear the need to identify the children in jeopardy.

As an outgrowth of experience as a caseworker in Protective Services in Santa Barbara, California, the author developed a personal interest in learning more about characteristics of families with identified abused children. Associated with this personal interest is the possibility of identifying common elements of characteristics which might prove predictive and therefore potentially preventative in the area of child abuse. To consider family characteristics, the author examined materials gathered by CALM (Child Abuse Listening Media of Santa Barbara) and by others working in Protective Services in Santa Barbara.

For the purpose of this study, all cases of physical child abuse from the records of Santa Barbara County Protective Services over an eight month period were reviewed and compared with a control group which consisted of a random sample of all cases referred to protective services over the same period.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Within the last decade, the social work profession has demonstrated a renewed interest in the problem of the abused child. This becomes apparent in reviewing some of the most recent literature compiled on the subject by the U. S. Childrens Bureau.

What has popularly become known as the "battered child syndrome" is a relatively new phenomenon in the medical and social science literature. Although violence against children is a phenomenon which dates back as far as written history, the first case of child abuse in the United States was not recorded until 1874. The record shows that no social agencies existed to protect the battered child and strangely enough the youngster was assisted by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Despite the later formation of protective services, child abuse does not appear to have been recognized as a significant problem until the publication of a landmark article by Dr. Kempe in 1962 which identified child abuse as a severe social concern.¹

The Child Welfare League of America in it's statements of standards states, "However, when a conflict between the rights of parents and those of children affects the welfare of children, the rights of children have precedence." It is to protect these rights that social workers, lawyers, doctors, judges, and other professional bodies of the United States, spurred on by Kempe's expose, assembled to

¹Kempe, Henry C. "The Battered Child Syndrome" Journal of American Medical Association, U. of Chicago Press, Chicago, July 7, 1962. pp. 17-24

propose legislation directed toward childrens' rights. By 1966, child protection laws had been passed in 47 states with the majority including immunity from litigation of those reporting.

The battered child and his family has not been a particularly well-studied area, partially because of the concept that children were the property of the parents and also due to the inherent methodological difficulties. The most persitent characteristics of the battered child and his family found in the literature can be described as follows:

- (1) The battering parent exhibits a marked lack of associations with the outside world. His family tends to be isolated from friends and the community at large.
- (2) A high degree of psychiatric disorder is found among battering parents.
- (3) The victim has often been conceived and/or born out of wedlock. The parent may be punishing the child for having forced an unwanted marriage. The child may be beaten as a symbolic representation of the lover/spouse who deserted the other parent.
- (4) Battering parents have been typically described as rigid, compulsive, immature, depressed and anti-social in behavior.
- (5) Poverty and general financial stress tend to have high correlation with child abuse.
- (6) Alcoholism and drug addiction have been associated with child abuse.
- (7) The past involvement of the battering parent with various law enforcement agencies has been noted by researchers.
- (8) Marital stress and instability have been found to be a potent force in triggering acts of aggression against children.

(9) A persistent and significant finding has been the observation of battering parents who have experienced considerable childhood conflicts with their own parents. These experiences include defects in the mothering process, physical abuse, psychological rejection, constant criticism, etc.

(10) A certain degree of child abuse seems to reflect a general harshness in discipline given by the parents.

(11) Behavioral atypicality on the part of the child himself may lead to abuse. The mentally retarded or hyperactive child may be perceived as disobedient, irritable and excessively demanding. The emotionally and/or physically unresponsive child may be perceived as unrewarding to the parents.

Kempe and Helfer have identified three criteria in the pattern of child abuse.² First, the parent must have the potential to abuse. The potential child abuser is characterized as the parent who experienced an emotionally deprived childhood, is socially isolated and unable to trust others, is unable to receive adequate emotional support from his/her spouse, and often has unrealistic expectations of his/her children. Second, there must be a child who is seen as atypical or dysmorphic. Third, there must be some kind of crisis that precipitates the actual act of abuse. Often the crisis involves a loss to the parent of someone who had been able to "rescue" in previous crisis situations.

²Kempe, Henry C. and Ray E. Helfer. Helping The Battered Child and His Family, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia and Toronto, 1972. pp. 57-65

This author feels that we need continuing understanding and sensitivity toward resolution of these most complex problems. We need more knowledge and new legislation that uses that knowledge not to punish parents but to protect children.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND ITS METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, child battering would be defined as any physical injury to a child caused by blows or physical violence where there is cause to suspect that the injury was an intentionally or wantonly inflicted action.

The author reviewed the 1974 statistics from case records of the Santa Barbara County Protective Services files. Twenty families were studied which represented the total number of battered child cases known to the agency between January 1, 1974 and August 31, 1974. The main objective of the instant study was to develop criteria descriptive of families with battered children and through this process hopefully define a predictive potential for identification of children at risk.

A group of families referred for protective services was used as a control group for comparative analysis. A total of 137 cases had been referred for protective services in Santa Barbara and a sample of 20 cases was reviewed. A random table from J. Freund's book Statistics³ was used to select the random sample.

³Freund, John E. Statistics, Prentice and Hall, N. J., 1960. p. 191.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BATTERED CHILD

This chapter is focused on the characteristics of the target population compared with the control group. The following are selected areas in which the findings will be addressed:

- (1) age and sex of the abused child;
- (2) siblings and position in family;
- (3) severity and method of abuse.

TABLE I

AGE AND SEX OF THE ABUSED CHILD

Sex	0-3	4-6	7-12	13-16	Total
M	4	4	2	1	11
F	2	1	3	3	9
Total	6	5	5	4	20

TABLE II

AGE AND SEX OF THE CHILD IN CONTROL GROUP

Sex	0-3	4-6	7-12	13-16	Total
M	2	0	2	3	7
F	7	1	1	4	13
Total	9	1	3	7	20

Results regarding age and sex show that 11 of the sample of 20 (55%) of the battered child group were males while only seven of the sample of 20 (35%) were males in the control group. There were four (25%) males and two (10%) females age 0-3 years identified as battered children compared to two (10%) males and seven (35%) females age 0-3

years in the control group. In the battered children group five (25%) of the children fell in the 7-12 year age range. Three (15%) of the children in the control group fell within the 7-12 age range. There were only four (25%) of the battered children group age 13-16 years while seven (35%) of the children in the control group were in the 13-16 years category.

TABLE III

SIBLINGS AND POSITION IN FAMILY

	Only Child	Oldest	Middle	Youngest	Total
Battered	8	4	4	4	20
Control	3	7	4	6	20

In looking at data regarding siblings and position in family, it is interesting to note that eight of the sample of 20 or 40% of the battered children were the only children in their families. This is double the number reported for the oldest, middle, and youngest children in the battered child group. There were four who were the oldest in their families, four who were the middle children, and four who were the youngest in their families. There were only three of the sample of 20 (15%) of the children in the control group who were the only children in their families. Seven (35%) of the children in the control group were the oldest in their families. Six (30%) of the control group were the youngest in their families. Four (20%) of the children in the control group were the middle children in their families.

Findings regarding the severity and method of abuse were not set up in tables due to the small sample and the wide variety of identified battering methods. The battered children, without exception, had sustained multiple injuries. Many required hospitalization for fractures

of arms, legs, and burns on the body. There were two children who received fatal injuries; one was drowned and the other beaten with numerous "instruments". A belt was used in a majority of the cases of child battering. A large percentage of the severely abusing families failed to secure medical care for their children. Since medical treatment may have been essential to life itself, the lack of parental care in this area was particularly destructive to the children.

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSING PARENT OR PARENT SUBSTITUTE

The focus of this chapter is on abusing parent or parent substitute. The selected areas in which the findings will be discussed are as follows:

- (1) age and sex of abusing parent or parent substitute;
- (2) marital status;
- (3) education and income;
- (4) ethnic group;
- (5) religion;
- (6) isolation (Recently moved to Santa Barbara area);
- (7) record of drug abuse.

For the purpose of this paper, the term parent substitute refers to a person living in the home and assuming the role of parent. The data on age and sex of abusing parent or parent substitute includes a total of 24 individuals. The data on age and sex of parents and parent substitutes in the control group includes a total of 30 individuals.

The data in each other section of this chapter includes a total of 20 families.

TABLE IV

AGE AND SEX OF ABUSING PERSON

Sex	Under 25 yrs	25-30 yrs	Over 30 yrs	Total
M	6	3	4	13
F	2	6	3	11
Total	8	9	7	24

Table IV shows the age and sex distribution of the abusing person.

From a total of 24 abusing individuals, 13 (54%) were male and 11 (46%) were female. There were only two (8%) who were females under the age of 25 years. Six (25%) of the group were male abusers under the age of 25 years. Three (12.5%) of the group were males between the ages 25-30 years. Six (25%) of the group were females between the ages 25-30 years. Seven (29%) of the abusers were over 30 years of age, 12.5% were female and 16.5% were male.

TABLE V

AGE AND SEX OF PARENT OR PARENT SUBSTITUTE IN CONTROL GROUP

Sex	Under 25 yrs.	25-34 yrs.	Over 34 yrs.	Total
M	2	4	5	11
F	6	8	5	19
Total	8	12	10	30

Table V shows the age and sex distribution of parents and parent substitutes in the control group. From a total of 30 parents in the control group, 11 (37%) were male and 19 (63%) were female. There were only two (7%) who were males under the age of 25 years. Six (20%) of the group were females under the age of 25 years. Four (10%) of the group were males between the ages 25-34 years and eight (27%) of the group were females between the ages 25-34 years. There were five (17%) females and five (17%) males of the group who were over 34 years of age.

TABLE VI

MARITAL STATUS OF PARENTS

	Legally married	Parent alone	Living together	Total
Battered	10	5	5	20
Control	10	10	0	20

Findings regarding marital status show that of a total of 20 children and families, 10 (50%) of the parents with a battered child were legally married or living together. The same number was found in the control group. There were five (25%) of the parents with a battered child who were living alone and 10 (50%) of parents in the control group were living alone. Five (25%) of the parents with a battered child were living with a boyfriend/girlfriend. None of the parents in the control group were reportedly living with a boyfriend/girlfriend.

TABLE VII

EDUCATION OF PRIMARY WAGEEARNER IN BOTH GROUPS

	Less than 12th	H.S. completed	Beyond H.S.	Total
Battered	5	10	5	20
Control	13	5	2	20

In the study, data on education shows that there is a higher educational level for the families of a battered child than the control group. Five (20%) of the wageearners of the battered child families have beyond a high school education. Only two (10%) of the control group wageearners have beyond a high school education. Five (20%) of the wageearners of the battered child families have less than a high school education and 13 (65%) of the control group wageearners have less than a high school education.

TABLE VIII

ANNUAL INCOME OF FAMILIES IN BOTH GROUPS

	Welfare	Under \$7000	\$7000-10,000	Over \$10,000	Total
Battered	12	3	2	3	20
Control	13	3	4	0	20

The data on income shows 12 (60%) of the families with a battered child receive welfare assistance. Thirteen (65%) of the families in the control group receive welfare assistance. There were no families in the control group earning over \$10,000 per year, but three (15%) of the families with a battered child were earning over \$10,000 per year. There were three (15%) of the families earning under \$7000 per year in both groups. Two (10%) of the families with a battered child were earning between \$7000 and \$10,000 per year and four (20%) of the families in the control group were earning between \$7000 and \$10,000 per year.

TABLE IX

ETHNIC ORIGIN OF FAMILIES IN EACH GROUP

	Caucasian	Black	Mex-American	Oriental	Total
Battered	11	2	5	2	20
Control	12	0	8	0	20

Findings regarding ethnic origin show that from a total of 20 families with a battered child, 11 (55%) were Caucasian and 12 (60%) of the families in the control group were Caucasian. There were two (10%) of the families with a battered child who were Black and there were no Black families in the control group. Five (25%) of the families with a battered child were Mexican-American and eight (40%) of the families in the control group were Mexican-American. There were two (10%) of the families with a battered child who were Oriental and no Oriental families in the control group.

TABLE X

FORMAL RELIGION KNOWN OF BOTH GROUPS

	Formal religion	No formal religion	Total
Battered	14	6	20
Control	8	12	20

Findings regarding formal religion show that there were 14 (70%) of the families with a battered child who were involved in a formal religion. Eight (40%) of the families in the control group were involved in a formal religion.

TABLE XI

FAMILIES NEW TO THE AREA OF SANTA BARBARA

	New to area-isolated	Living here	Total
Battered	12	8	20
Control	10	10	20

Results of data on families new to the area show that 12 (60%) of the families with a battered child were new in the area of Santa Barbara. Ten (50%) of the families in the control group were new in the area of Santa Barbara.

The records of drug abuse were not set up in tables due to the lack of constant information. Records of heroin use and conviction were high in both groups and a few parents were identified as alcoholic. It was interesting to note that the target group had fewer noted records of drug abuse than the control group.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of families with battered children which might contain predictive elements and therefore a potential for early detection or anticipation of those children at risk with regard to child abuse or battering.

The conclusions from the study would suggest several areas that may be evaluated on children referred for protective services. In this study, the author found the modal age of the battered child to be two years. Of the study group, more male children of ages 0-6 years were battered. The sex of children in other age ranges was not significant. The results showed that battered children were more often the only child in their families. Characteristics of both the target and control groups included low education and low income, suggesting that these factors are usual in reference to cases referred to Santa Barbara Protective Services. However, the target group had slightly higher education backgrounds and incomes than the control group.

It was found in the study that parents who batter their children were often isolated and new to the area where they lived. There were few friends and relatives available to provide emotional supports.

A significant number of parents who batter their children were members of a formal religion. In a number of these cases, the religions were very controlling in the abusers' lives.

The ethnic origins of families involved in abuse and neglect were appropriate to the general community.

Drug abuse was found to be high among parents in both target and control groups.

The limitations of the study include limited populations and limited information recorded in case records. Social workers are not geared to record for research purposes. In some instances, statistical data was missing, however, it was possible to supplement some of the information from eligibility files of Santa Barbara County Welfare.

It would aid in predictability had a control group from the general community been available to determine whether or not the study group was similar or different from the larger society.

It appears that there may be predictive factors for children at risk. However, further study is indicated and should include a more thorough, regularized recording process by all agencies to identify predictive criteria. Prevention could then become the process instead of the current reparative effort. Early intervention and counseling would appear to be of great importance. Programs other than welfare, such as schools and health departments, might be examined for predictive or preventive criteria to provide early identification rather than await referrals to welfare.

Counseling programs and family life education for adolescents and adults in preparation for and after marriage should be offered within the public school systems of our communities.

Community programs offering opportunities for parents to discuss feelings and needs must be broadened to include resources, such as homemaker services, child care, and opportunities for all parents to communicate with other people on a regular basis. A life line should be available in every community seven days a week, 24 hours a day, to

provide emotional support when it is needed.

We must strive for a therapeutic philosophy rather than a punitive one in order to raise the level of human well being in our society and to protect our children.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A	CONTROL GROUP									
	Mo-24	S/Mo-35 Fa-40	Mo-37	Mo-41 Fa-45	Fa-52	Mo-29 S/Fa-31	Mo-38 Fa-41	Mo-31	Mo-31	Mo-51
Age Parents										
Age Child	1	14	15	14	14	7	6	1	7	16
Sex Child	F	F	F	M	M	M	F	F	F	F
Siblings	0	3 older	0	5 older	1 young	1 older	5 mid	2 young	1 young	1 young
Marital Status	Sep	Mar	Sing	Mar	Div	Mar	Mar	Sep	Div	Div
Education	HS	Mo-HS Fa-HS	Mo-13	Mo-HS Fa-HS	Fa-HS	Mo-HS S/Fa-HS	Mo-6 Fa-6	Mo-9	Mo-9	Mo-13
Income	AFDC	\$6500	AFDC	\$6000	\$8000	\$9500	\$5000	AFDC	AFDC	\$10,000
Ethnic Group	Cauc	Cauc	Cauc	Cauc	Cauc	M/Amer	Cauc	M/Amer	Cauc	M/Amer
Religion (formal)	None	Fund	None	None	Prot	Cath	Cath	None	None	Prot
Isolation	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Record of drug abuse	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Unk	Yes	Unk	Yes	No

APPENDIX B

CONTROL GROUP (CON'T)

Age	Mo-43	Mo-21	S/M-27	Mo-27	Mo-24	Mo-24	Mo-35	Mo-24	Mo-34	Mo-23
Parents	Fa-45	Fa-19	Fa-29	Fa-28	Fa-24			Fa-27		
Age	16	2	3	2	1	1	13	2	2	10
Child										
Sex	F	F	F	F	M	F	M	M	F	M
Child										
Siblings	4	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	0	1
	older	older	young	older	young	mid	young	mid		older
Marital	Mar	Mar	Mar	Mar	Mar	Sep	Sep	Mar	Div	Sep
status										
Education	Mo-6	Mo-9	S/Mo-9	Mo-9	Mo-8	Mo-8	Mo-9	Mo-10	Mo-9	Mo-9
	Fa-6	Fa-8	Fa-10	Fa-10	Fa-9			Fa-10		
Income	AFDC	AFDC	\$7000	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC
Ethnic	M/Amer	M/Amer	Cauc	Cauc	M/Amer	M/Amer	Cauc	M/Amer	M/Amer	Cauc
Group										
Religion	Cath	None	Cath	None	None	None	None	Cath	None	None
(formal)										
Isolation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Record of	Yes	Unk	Unk	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Unk	Yes	No
drug abuse										

APPENDIX C

TARGET GROUP

Age Parents	Mo-33 S/Fa-34	Mo-27 Fa-30	Mo-24	Mo-30	Mo-30 Fa-40	Mo-22 B/F-22	Mo-30 Fa-30	Mo-27 Fa-28	Mo-36 Fa-34	Mo-29 Fa-29
Age Child	10	5	8	11	12	4	6	5	14	10
Sex Child	F	M	F	F	M	M	F	M	F	M
Siblings	2 older	1 young	0	3 older	4 young	0	0	1 young	8 mid	6 mid
Marital Status	Mar	Mar	Sing	Sep	Mar	Div	Mar	Mar	Mar	C/Law
Abuser	S/Fa	Mo	Mo	Mo & Bro	Fa & S/Mo	B/F	Adopt Mo	Mo & Fa	Mo	Fa
Education	Mo-14 Fa-13	Mo-12 Fa-16	Mo-12	Mo-6	S/Mo-12 Fa-16	Mo-HS	Mo-HS Fa-HS	Mo-6 Fa-6	Mo-9 Fa-10	Mo-8 Fa-8
Income	\$8000	\$12,000	AFDC	AFDC	\$15,000	\$3000	\$8000	\$5000	AFDC	AFDC
Ethnic	Cauc	Cauc	Black	M/Amer	Orient	Cauc	Cauc	M/Amer	M/Amer	M/Amer
Religion (formal)	None	Mormon	Prot	Cath	Fund	Fund	None	Cath	Cath	Cath
Isolation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Record of drug abuse	Unk	No	Yes	Unk	No	No	No	Yes	Unk	Yes
How Abused	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt Cord (death)	Belt	Sharp Inst	Belt	Brush &	Switch	Belt

APPENDIX D

TARGET GROUP (CON'T)

Age Parents	Fa-62 S/Mo-41	Fa-33 S/Mo-31	B/F-20 Mo-21	Mo-33	Mo-30	B/F-19 Mo-22	Fa-22 Mo-19	Fa-20 Mo-19	Fa-30 Mo-29	Fa-40
Age Child	16	7	2	13	2	2	1	2	2	14
Sex Child	F	F	F	F	F	M	F	M	M	F
Siblings	0	3 mid	0	1 older	3 mid	0	0	2 mid	0	2 young
Marital Status	C/Law	Mar	Div	Sep	Div	C/Law	Mar	Mar	Mar	Sep
Abuser	Fa	S/Mo	B/F & Mo	Mo	Mo	B/Fr	Fa	Fa	Fa	Fa
Education	S/M-9 Fa-13	S/M-12 Fa-12	Mo-12 B/F-12	Mo-12	Mo-6	Mo-10 Bf-Milit- ary	Mo-10 Fa-13	Mo-12 Fa-Milit- ary	Mo-12 Fa-Milit- itary	Mo-12 Fa-Milit- ary
Income	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	AFDC	\$8000	\$7000	\$14,000
Ethnic	Black	Cauc	Cauc	Cauc	M/Amer	Cauc	Cauc	Cauc	Orient	Cauc
Religion (formal)	Fund	None	None	None	Cath	None	Fund	Cath	Fund	Fund
Isolation	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Record of drug abuse	Unk	Yes	Unk	Unk	Unk	Yes	Unk	Yes	Unk	Unk
How abused	Chain & Belt	Plastic Cord	Burns	Belt	Drown (death)	Beating	Beating	Belt	Beating	Slapping