

IMPACT OF ADULT VERBAL ABUSE ON CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION AND FEELING

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Abstract

Verbal Abuse is the most common abuse towards children in their homes. The fact that signs of verbal abuse are hardly traceable in the body of the victim does not suggest that verbal abuse has no negative effect on the abused. Children who are verbally abused by adults (parents, teachers) or peers often become abusive themselves, depressed and self-destructive later in life. This paper is a survey research aimed at exploring why adults abuse children, the different types of abuses, the damaging effects on the abused child, how the victim sees the abuser and the reactions that follow. The research recommended that parents and teachers should restrain from abusing children.

Keywords: Student/Children, Perception, Feelings and verbal Abuses.

Introduction

Verbal abuse is a type of battering which does not leave evidence of injurious marks comparable to bruises of physical battering. It is often very difficult to see since there are rarely any visible scars unless physical abuse is added to the verbal abuse. Verbal abuse has to do with the use of speech organ. It involves man's use of language to codify, transmit, communicate and perpetuate his ideas in an abusive manner. Verbal communication is language -based. By language -based communication it means a system of spoken or written symbols (language) of a community, which convey information from one person to another. Generally, verbal abuse is a way of using spoken words to make the victim feel unimportant, become fearful, to see him/herself as not worthy, and to refrain from the abused.

Origin of Verbal Abuse

Just like any human action, it begins from the mind and heart. Proverbs 23:7 as he thinks in his heart so he is. I Sam 25:2\$. "Let not my Lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name and folly is with him..." What a person thinks in his mind and heart will be reflected in his words and actions. Verbal abuse and physical abuse result from a world view that is not clearly biblical.

Characteristics of Verbal Abuse

1. One of the characteristics of verbal abuse is that it is hurtful and usually it attacks

- the nature and the ability of the abused (child).
2. Verbal abuse may be overt (that is through angry burst and name-calling) or covert verbal abuse is usually sending blames and accusations in order to confuse the abused.
Covert verbal abuse which is hidden aggression, is even more confusing to the abused person because this tends to control the abused.
 3. Verbal abuse is manipulative and controlling. It may be in form of voiced out comments which comes in an extremely sincere and concerned way but the aim is to control and manipulate the victim.
 4. Verbal abuse is insidious. The abused's self-esteem gradually diminishes, usually without the abused realizing it. The victim may consciously or unconsciously try to change his or her behaviour in order not to upset the abuser.
 5. Unpredictability is one of the most insignificant characteristics of verbal abuse. The abused person may be stunned, shocked, and thrown off balance by the abuser's (adult) sarcasm, angry jab, put-down or hurtful comment.
 6. Verbal abuse is not just a side issue: In a verbally abused home, there is no specific conflict any issue is abused and is not easily resolved.
 7. Verbal abuse expresses a double message. There is incongruence between the way he the abuser speaks and his feelings. The abuser may sound very sincere and honest while telling the victim what is wrong.
 8. Verbal abuse escalates, increases intensity, frequency and variety. It may begin with put-down disguised as jokes and later other forms may surface.
Many a time verbal abuse leads to physical abuse, beginning with accidental, "shoves, pushes and bumps.

Effects of Verbal Abuse

The effect of verbal abuse is often silent. Verbal and psychological wounds leave a child forever changed.

Verbal abuse attacks the child's self-concept. The child sees himself/herself as unworthy of love and affection. The wound of maltreatment in children are ashamed. "I cannot believe you embarrassed me like this! Humiliated; "You Snot," terrorized, "you are really going to get it now!" "Go to your room!" are as equally significant, although very invisible and hard to recognize or quantify than the wounds of the worst physical and sexual abuse. Less severe forms of early emotional deprivation still can produce drastic effects on the abused. Like babies who grow into anxious and insecure children who are slow to develop and who may fail to develop a strong sense of self-esteem Emotional child abuse can result in various more serious ways. Such as physiological or behavioral problem. This may include lack of attachment or emotional bond to a parent or guardian, low cognitive and poor social skills. This type of abuse leaves hidden scars that manifest themselves in numerous ways. Insecurity, poor self-esteem, destructive behaviour, angry acts like setting of fire or cruelty to animals, withdrawal, poor development of basic skills, difficulty informing relatives or friendships can be possible result of emotional abuse.

As teenagers, they find it difficult to trust, participate in and achieve in relationship and resolve the complex feelings left over from their childhood. As adults, they may have difficulty in recognizing and appreciating the needs and feelings of their own children and verbally abuse them as well.

According to Ben, Vardigan. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never

hurt me." Yet calling of names do hurt, especially when the person doing it is a parent, a teacher or a near adult. Verbal abuse can undermine your child's self-esteem and damage his/her ability to trust.

How to Identify Parents or Teachers Who Verbally Abuse Their Children

As a parent, teacher or adult, whenever you find yourself doing any of the following you should realize that you are verbally abusing your child or pupil.

- ' Name-calling, belittling, swearing, insulting. "You are stupid," "You are a rotten kid," all these words hurt very much. Because you are not be rating your child directly doesn't mean he/she does not hear it and feel the sting.
- Rejecting or threatening with abandonment. "I wish you had not been born" "I should put you up for adoption". This type of verbal abuse creates a sense that your child is not wanted in the family.
- Scape one word goating or blaming. "You are the reason why this family is in a mess". "If I didn't have to take care of you, I could have a better life". "If you were not so clumsy, your baby sister wouldn't have gotten hurt", your child will think he/she is a bad person who deserves to be punished or unhappy.

How to identify a Child suffering from Verbal Abuse

Some of the following are signs that a child is suffering from Verbal Abuse.

- Negative self-image. This is the most common and pervasive effect of verbal abuse. When your child says things like this "I'm stupid" or "Nobody likes me" or he/she may simply seem to withdraw, depressed, all of these are signs of a low self-esteem
- **Self-destructive acts:** "cutting" (using razor blade or knife to cut his own skin) and all forms of self-injury signal a problem. And such reckless activities put your child in danger.
- **Antisocial behaviour:** A New Hampshire study discovered that verbally abused children demonstrate higher rates of physical aggressive delinquency and inter personal problem. Your child may frequently fight and quarrel with his/her classmates or behave cruelly to others.
- **Delayed development:** The slowdown may appear in the child's social, physical, emotional or academic development. The child may become aggressive, have

difficulty in making friends or engage in regressive act, like rocking, thumb-sucking etc.

Methodology

The study was a survey research. The area of the study was Delta State. Four secondary schools in Agbor town were used for the study and students were the population for the study. A sample of 100 students, fifty (50)JS1 and fifty (50) JS II were used. A questionnaire designed by the researcher was the instrument used for the collection of data. The questionnaire had two sections. Section "A" sought information on the student's personal data while section B Contained 15 items on children's perception/feelings of adult's verbal abuses. The questionnaire was directly administered by the researcher and other research assistants that were trained. The respondents were

requested to tick yes/no out of the one hundred questionnaires. Out of the one hundred questionnaires administered all the one hundred were retrieved. And the data collected was analyzed using simple percentage. Table 1

Name Calling Abuse

S/N	ITEMS	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL
1	Have you been verbally abused?	100	90%	10%	100%
2	Has any of your parents called you names outside your given name?	100	85%	15%	100%
3	Has anybody told you that you are a rotten/stupid child?	100	70%	30%	100%
4	Has any of your class teachers called you "coconut head"?	100	65%	35%	100%

Table 1 provides answers to the student' responses on whether any of them had been verbally abused. 90% accepted the fact that they had been verbally abused while only 10% of the respondents said "no", indicating that they had not been verbally abused. Again 85% of the student' accepted the fact that their parents had verbally abused them by calling them names while 15% disagreed to the fact. This is an indication that verbal abuse is very common in homes and that most parents can verbally abuse their children when they are angry. Besides, 70% against 30% accepted the fact that their parents or near adults had called them "stupid" and 65% agreed that their teachers had called them "coconut head" which indicate that both parents' and teachers are engaged in verbal abuse of children.

Table 2 Shouts/Beating abuses

S/N	ITEMS	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL
5	Have you ever been shouted at by your teacher when you failed simple Mathematics?	100	75%	25%	100%
6	Has your class teacher called you out and shouted at you in the presence of your classmates?	100	60%	40%	100%
7	Has any of your parents shouted at you and given you	100	60%	40%	100%

Table 2 explains the level at which parents and teachers verbally abuse the kids under them through shouting at them and sometimes adding beating to the verbal abuse. 75% of the students agreed that in the class, that their teachers had ever shouted them down because they failed simple math while 25% ticked "No" indicating that they had not experienced such. On the other hand, 60% agreed having been shouted at in the presence of their classmates and been beaten when their baby sister kept them fell down.

**Table 3
Emotional feelings during abuses**

S/N	ITEMS	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL
8	Have you ever cried when you were verbally abused by an adult?	100	80%	20%	100%
9	When your parents or teacher verbally abused you, did it cause any injury on your body?	100	20%	80%	100%

10	When adults abuse you verbally, do you feel unloved?	100	70%	30%	100%
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Table 3 contains three (3) items, which describe the emotional feelings of children when they are verbally abused by adults or teachers. Item 8 (8) of Table (3) 80% of the students agreed that they cried when they were verbally abused by adults while 20% did not really cry when verbally abused by adults. On the other hand, 20% accepted that they always felt injured when they were verbally abused by adults. This could imply: emotional injury or the abuser must have added some physical abuse to the verbal abuse which would have caused the respondents some injury. Although, 80% negates the responses which means that no injury was left on them when they were verbally abused by adults. This could also imply that no physical abuse was included in the verbal abuse and as such no wound or injury was sustained. The third item on the table also gave a description of how children felt towards their abusers. 70% feel unloved while 30% percent disagreed. Thus such students saw verbal abuse as normal, or something not new especially when it had become something that happened regularly.

Table 4

Reactions to abuses

S/N	ITEMS	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL
11	When a particular adult keeps verbally abusing you, do you put up some reactions to make that adult angry?	100	79%	21%	100%
12	Have you ever felt that your parent hated you because of the way they talk to you?	100	75%	25%	100%
13	Do you always run away when you see any adult that verbally abuses you?	100	60%	40%	100%
14	Do you feel happy with parents who usually abuse their maids/children?	100	90%	10%	100%
15	Do you feel embarrassed and humiliated when you are verbally abused?	100	80%	20%	100%

Table 4 has five items. Item (11) specifically points out the victim's reaction to the abuser. 79% shows a throw of tantrum to the abuser as an indicator that they are not really happy with the abuser. While 21% on the other hand do not go shew though any negative action. Besides, 75% of the children have the feeling that they are not being loved by the parents while 25% accepted the situation as something usual.

Moreover, 60% of the children tried to escape from the presence of the abuser while 40% took it as a normal way of life. While in the last two items 90% felt very unhappy with parents who verbally abused their children and maids. Not only that, they felt embarrassed and humiliated when they were verbally abused. The tables above strongly indicate that a very large number of students had been verbally abused by adults and their responses also showed that a large number of them felt unloved, humiliated and embarrassed when they were verbally abused.

Recommendations

Suggestions on what parents, teachers and adults can do to stop verbal abuse of children.

- > Experience has shown that in a moment of stress, or anger that one tends to speak swollen words or make negative statements or say anything to your child/children. As such it is advisable that:
- > Parents, teachers and adults take a "time-out," leave the child alone, walk to another room. Take a deep breath; wait for few minutes before talking to the child.
- > Try to deal with the present situation and do not allow piled up stress to overcome your emotion.

Besides the above suggestions, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using what is called RETHINK to bring your feelings under control. RETHINK stands for:

- Recognize your feelings
- Empathize with your child/children
- Think of the situation differently
- Hear what your child/child has to say
- Integrate your love with your angry thoughts.
- Notice your body's reactions to feeling anger and to calming down.
- Keep your attention on the present situations

Conclusion

There is a need to reach out to verbally abused children with a little bit of kindness. Experience has shown that when children of abusive parents have just one adult with whom they can experience a normal positive relationship, that one attachment can offer a profound counter-weight to all the abuses. So an aunt, uncle, a neighbour, a teacher who reaches out consistently can provide a saving grace.

In addition, explain to the child that the verbal abuse that the mother, the father or the teacher rains down when they are angry is¹ an inaccurate description of whom he or she is. Explain to them that when people get angry, sometimes they say things that they don't really mean and are untrue. Also explain to the child that for the fact that he/she is verbally abused is not the child's fault, but that it comes as a result of problems in the brain of the parents which produces the anger.

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