El objetivo de esta investigación exploratoria y descriptiva, fue estudiar la problemática de padres maltratados por sus hijos y se llevó a cabo en un servicio organizado para tal fin, dado que Argentina no contaba con instituciones o servicios específicos para este tipo de consultas. Nuestra intención fue describir y comprender mejor este tema, que en la actualidad aumenta considerablemente.

De las 500 familias atendidas hasta 1998, residentes en la ciudad de Buenos Aires y en el conurbano bonaerense (Argentina), se seleccionó una muestra de 240 familias, con padres maltratados, en las cuales los hijos no hubieran sido golpeados físicamente por sus padres. El 75% de la muestra pertenecía a clase media.

A todos los padres se les aplicó una anamnesis (cuestionario para obtener datos de sus historias de vida, tomando tres generaciones, es decir, a partir de los abuelos). Esos datos fueron agrupados de acuerdo al esquema de las cinco matrices del comportamiento humano: biofisiológica, existencial, de los aprendizajes, psicodinámica y sociocultural (Gelvan de Veinstein, 1998), organizando antecedentes y modalidades de aparición de las violencias. Estas fueron clasificadas en una escala que se construyó para poder diferenciarlas dentro de las relaciones primarias en conflicto.
Como antecedentes se tomaron en cuenta los trabajos de violencia de hijos hacia sus padres que se presentan en la discusión, aunque la mayoría de ellos están referidos más a los hijos jóvenes, con desenlaces parricidas, que no corresponden a los casos en estudio.

Se conformaron tres tipologías básicas de formas de vinculación de los padres, entre sí y con los hijos, que favorecen su reacción violenta, encontrando antecedentes en sus respectivas familias de origen.

Palabras clave: Violencia - abuso - adulto mayor - relación padres-hijos.

Abstract

This descriptive research was carried out at an institution we had established to assist victims of elder abuse. This was the first institution ever created in Argentina to specifically provide help to this kind of victims. The aim of present work was describe, and understand this phenomenon, and to explain its increasing trend.

In 1998, over 500 families from Buenos Aires and its suburbs (Argentina) had already come to our institution for counseling. Out of these cases, we randomly selected a sample of 240 families, on condition that the youth who abuse their elder in these families had not been battered children before. Seventy-five percent of these are middle-class families.

All parents were interviewed in order to obtain biographical data for their family encompassing three generations, that is, grandparents, parents, and sons. These data were grouped according to the five matrices of human behavior: biophysical, existential, educational, psychodynamic, and sociocultural (Gelvan de Veinsten, 1998; Gelvan de Veinsten et al., 1998). Background and mode of occurrence of the violent behavior were recorded and organized according to this structure. Violent behavior was classified on a scale we devised in order to distinguish them, from the primary relationships in conflict.
Concerning background, we took into account the various papers on violence from children towards their parents that will be discussed, but most of them have focused on young children, and parricide, which differ significantly from the type of cases we have dealt with.

After analyzing the cases, we were able to identify three basic typical forms of relationship between parents themselves, and between parents and their sons, which favor violent behavior, and we have also identified a corresponding background in previous generations of these families.

Key words: Violence - abuse inflicted on parents - biographical background - parent-son relationship - elder abuse.

Introduction

This study was started in 1994, as we established an institution to provide assistance to parents who had been abused by their sons. We had identified this as a definite type of problem since 1990. In order to follow up our research project, we received support from a foundation until 1998, when this foundation went bankrupt.

Today, we are still working on a less ambitious project, thanks to the help of many therapists who volunteered to work for free. The families that seek help at our institution are mostly middle-class.

Abusive sons can frequently be grouped in two categories, adolescent and young adults, up to 27 years old, and those over 40 years of age. The forms of abuse range from insults and physical aggression, to neglect, in cases where elder parents have become too dependant on their sons.

Our interest in this developing social phenomenon led us to seek its causes, and to conduct a bibliographical search, which proved scarce. Most articles focus on parricide, or on violent behavior linked to criminal behavior and addiction to alcohol or drug abuse.

There was no legal background either: elder abuse was not specifically considered in our legislation.

Despite our lack of financial support, we decided to explore this phenomenon and try to give our colleagues the possibility to deal with this
problem, which has remained hidden, mostly due to the parents’ reluctance to accuse their own sons.

In the cases we have studied, love-hate conflicts come to the foreground, as well as struggles on power to take decisions, where money, and possessions are usually at the center of the fight. Our questions were simple, but hard to answer:

a.- How does violent behavior occur?
b.- What kind of abuse is inflicted?
c.- What is the background for this behavior?
d.- What are the common traits among abused parents in families in which children were not abused?
e.- Can we somehow prevent the development of aggressive behavior from sons toward parents?

We reviewed all the available bibliography on this subject. The only specific article we could find in Argentinean literature was Battered Parents (Gelvan de Veinsten, 1995). We also found in general psychoanalytical literature some interesting insights on this problem, like Fenichel’s (1964) observation that the dethroning of parents was a normal separation process, and also a neurotic process, as a failure of detachment; among existentialists, Rollo May (1974) viewed family violence as a result of a struggle for power, and significance; in the field of dynamic psychiatry, Rojas Marcos (1996) wrote that violence is learned, and claimed that environmental factors, as well as parents as role models, especially the father, are crucial to prevent the development of violent behavior.

Three years after the creation of our institution, Barylko (1992) set up his theory that children might become aggressive due to the parents fear to impose limits on their impulses and desires. Among the articles we read, two particularly drew our attention: Harbin, and Madde (1979), studied 15 cases of adolescents presenting what they called the new battered parents syndrome, and Hide (1993), who pointed out the main common traits of parriidal youths, which in some way reflected some features of the cases we were dealing with. We put forth three research hypotheses:

1.- If violence is learned, we must find out from whom, and how.
2.- If violence is related to self-assertion, and the struggle for auton-omy, we should find among abused parents some features indicating oppression or some other kind of limitation to the normal growth of their children and their becoming independent.
3.- If parents fear to impose limits on their children, and offer them a culture devoid of feelings, they should be rational and neglecting.

Patients who had a previous history of neurological or any other kind of organic psychiatric pathology were excluded from the sample.

For five years we tried to gather sufficient field experience in order to come to the results we present in this article. During the initial phase of this research project, Dr. Brie, who was at the moment research director at the Universidad del Salvador, helped us as an external advisor.

Theoretical grounds

Violence, and aggression have posed a constant challenge to human behavioral sciences. Family violence is a recently developed field of research in our culture, which claims it to be the base for the formation of personality, the development of learning capabilities, and the ability to establish social bindings.

From violence directed towards children and women, studied and defended for the last fifty years, we have come to be aware of the existence of violence and aggression towards parents, which is spreading and growing in our occidental countries at an alarming rate.

This kind of relationship as a reaction to parental domination was more insinuated than studied by psychoanalysis as long as psychiatry has usually considered it a derivation of an underlying neurological or mental disease. It is nowadays considered a new syndrome which calls for specific research (Harbin, & Madde, 1979).

We have tried to study the biographical data collected from our patients without sticking to any explicative theory from the beginning, to prevent our observations to be conditioned.

In order to achieve this goal, we needed a conceptual framework wide enough to accommodate the many bio-psycho-social variables that are involved in violent an aggressive behavior. We therefore assumed an integrationist position, trying to interlace contributions from different theories, placing them according their axes of behavioral cause and effect. We tried to perceive from different points of view the experiences in the field of conflict, in order to enhance the observational and explicative resources.

We have devised a scheme that groups the various data into five delimited areas (matrices) which are both recognized and recognizable, in their
double possibility of being both cause and manifestation of facts and events. Therefore, this scheme must be understood as a representation of a network of paths and circuits of dynamic and interdependent behaviors.

The five Human Behavioral Matrices (HBM) (Gelvan de Veinsten, 1998) are:

1. biophysiological matrix,
2. existential matrix,
3. learning matrix,
4. psychodynamic matrix, and
5. socio-cultural matrix.

These are all interlaced in the significant construction that every one makes from the circumstances of their lives (personal novel). Each matrix performs a specific function as a part of a whole system, thus producing integrations and disintegrations in personal identity (see Appendix).

1. The biophysiological matrix: Its scope reaches from genetics to physiology, detecting the possibilities and limitations each individual has. Data from the structures and processes implicated in biological adaptation to life are organized here.

2. The existential matrix: It involves the family structures, where every one is identified with a name and destiny expectations according to the family novels one is ascribed to. This matrix is the base for self-perception and provides the rudiments of identity and vision of the world.

3. The learning matrix: It consists of the structures and processes involved in formal and informal learning to know and to do in everyday life. It comprises both the content and form of acquisition of this knowledge (genetic and cognitive psychology).

4. The psychodynamic matrix: It consists of the structures, and processes involved in the construction of a personal identity, and what is usually called in psychoanalytic literature the functioning of the psychic system. In this group we include the possibility of controlling impulses, and the differentiation of autonomy degrees in order to choose the way of being, both with oneself and with others (deep and existential psychology).
5.- The *socio-cultural matrix*: It consists of the structures and processes involved in occupying a place in the status and roles offered by society and the cultural system of values corresponding to a person’s lifetime, his affiliation to groups, his points of reference and vision of the world, that give a socially agreed sense to human existence (social psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology).

**Objectives**

The objectives of the present work were:

1.- To define the concept of elder abuse as a nosological entity inside the category of family violence.
2.- To identify the different types of violence we have observed, and to propose an operative classification.
3.- To prove the utility for observation, treatment and its evaluation of the five-matrices scheme of human behavior.
4.- To statistically analyze, the data collected from a sample of patients who came for counseling to an institution specialized in elder abuse to draw inferences, and to identify significant variables for the study of this phenomenon.

**Method**

We made a review of biographical data, based on a structured questionnaire used on initial interviews. Follow-up during course of treatment.

**Description sample**

The sample was formed by 250 families attending our service. Exclusion criteria were: abusive sons that were not psychotic, abuse victims or had any neurological or mental disease involved in impulsive behavior.

The people consulting were mostly mothers (78%), while fathers scarcely approached us (22%).

The 50% of consultants were of middle class, 30% were upper-middle class, and only 20% belonged to lower classes.
Physical abuse was the main motive, with 54% of the consultations. The second one was highly offensive words or gestures, with 18%. Third came bad behavior with around 8% and fourth, neglect, claimed specially by older parents. There were no significant differences among social classes.

As for violence, and aggression in abused parents’ homes of origin, we found: Parents lived together but in bad terms were the 30%, mother or father abandoned home were the 18%, physical abuse 20%, psychological abuse (insults, threats, etc.) 25%, and no abuse 7%. Most patients refer their parents had a conflictive relationship, involving psychological or physical abuse.

Abused parents believe their children abused them due to the following reasons: Alcohol abuse was 7%, Drug abuse 5%, Immaturity and negative influence from friends 10%, Abuse in the parental couple (father to mother) 12%, Parents divorce or abandonment 27%, Inheritance of bad temper 8%, Adverse social circumstances (usually unemployment, and poverty) 13%, and Lack of limits, 17%.

About abusive sons:

a.- The majority was male (56%).

b.- The distribution by age of abusive children bellow was: Under 12 years, 3%, 13 to 19 years 32%, 20 to 26 years 35%, 27 to 33 years 12%, 34 to 40 years 8%, 41 to 47 years 7%, and over 47,3%.

c.- About the traumatic experiences during the first year of life the percentages were: Obstetric complications and diseases during the first month of life 25%, Accidents 15%, Infections or serious diseases during first year of life 20%, Operations 10%, No negative experiences 25%, and Other 5%. As we can see, 75% of them had had negative experiences. Obstetric complications are more frequent in middle-class families and accidents are more frequent in lower-class families.

d.- Problems at school: In school histories, problems were reported in 72% of cases. Only 27% of them did not have school problems. Of those who had, 20.8% had learning problems while in 52% of cases, problems involved misbehavior.

e.- Highest educational level reached by abusive sons over 20 years old. Educational level in abusive kids was: Incomplete elementary 2%,
Complete elementary 20%, Incomplete high school 35%, Complete high school 20%, Incomplete college/university 18%, and Complete college/university, 5%.

Procedures

Instruments used were interviews, structured questionnaire, and classification of data into matrices, and the statistical procedure was frequency analysis of variables, in percentages, grouped into matrices.

Results

We have grouped the results according to the five-matrices scheme:

1. **Biophysiological matrix**: Some abusive sons suffered diseases during the first year of life, some of which required admission at a hospital, surgery or painful treatments (early traumatic experiences). Even the healthy children were consider weak by their parents, due to sleep or alimentary disorders or psychosomatic diseases (specially breathing disorders). A total of 60% of these children had some kind of biophysiological condition.

2. **Existential matrix**: In this matrix we observed, (a) ambivalent or negative role in the family novel, (b) abandon, marital separation or conflict, (c) hostile and/or openly violent relationships between parents or guardians, (d) opposed or confusing criteria or attitudes towards children between parents, and (e) contradictory or changing educational rules.

3. **Learning matrix**
   - **Informal learning**: In this aspect we found, (a) violent style of relationship learned from parental models, (b) praise of power acquired through fear imposed on the victims (the value of being feared), (c) ignorance of the concept of gratitude and responsibility, (d) fragmentation of the concept of obedience the law, and feeling of impunity after breaking the rules.
   - **Formal learning**: In this aspect we found, (a) adaptation disorders at school, (b) lack of motivation and interest in school syllabuses, and (c) undiscovered talents.
4.- *Psycodynamic matrix*: In this matrix, we observed: (a) weak ego facing needs and frustration. Anxiety discharge in face of what is perceived as impossibility of an immediate satisfaction, (b) infantile, and paranoid personalities, (c) difficulties to circumscribe his internal space, (d) fear of the future, (e) massive identifications, and pseudo-identities, (f) borderline personalities or states, (g) sadomasochistic relationships, and (h) jealousy, and envy.

5.- *Socio-cultural matrix*: (a) violent role models perceived as successful, (b) values related to having and power, (c) distrust in community leaders, and applicability of the law, (d) lack of job opportunities, and impossibility of growing out of poverty, (e) excess of information in mass media about violence, making it appear *normal*, and (f) easy availability of alcohol, drugs, etc.

Most frequent types of relationships between abused parents and their children

a.- *Confusing parents*: They can not perceive their children as independent people. They usually refer to them using the possessive *my*: my baby, my princess, my sweetheart, etc. They usually say that they *live for them* or that they give them a *reason to live*. They try to keep a permanent symbiotic link, and their ideal is love.

b.- *Guilt-feeling parents*: They assess themselves against an idealized model they feel they should be up to. They try to be continuous suppliers of goods and services. They are afraid of not providing their children with what *a good mother or father should provide*. They are attentive to their desires and whims, and they are continually talking of the many *sacrifices* they make for them. They see their sons as the heir of their own ambitions.

c.- *Vindictive parents*: They put the stress on defending their children from the problems they have suffered during their own childhood. They do this in a rational and explicit way. Their relationships usually lack affection, but they stimulate themselves fantasizing with the epical success they prepare for their children.

To sum up, we might say that Group a: draws strength out of an exaggerated romanticism, Group b: from mysticism, and Group c: from a realism that implies a criticism of the world.
Discussion

This article is a first approach to the problem of violence from sons towards their parents.

After the preceding analysis, we have concluded that no single circumstance is determinant of violent behavior, as stated on previous reports. Therefore, the ideas and concepts of various authors, specially of Rollo May, Rojas Marcos, and Barylko can be adopted and correlated. Rollo May (1978) claims that anxiety can be overcome if the acquired values are stronger than the menace, as long as we understand that a ‘human dilemma is the one that arises from man’s ability to live as a subject and an object at the same time’. Through this life experience, identifications (Erikson, 1974) and other significant events that reflect the growing being as accepted and capable of being accepted are of utmost importance. Acceptance can be granted to the being and approval to the doing. One can only resist disapproval if the being is strong (Gelvan de Veinsten, 1998). These two answers appear to be confused in the upbringing of these children who have become parent abusers.

We adopt Rojas-Marcos’ distinction (1996) between violence as unbalance, one that is needed in order to grow up, learn, adapt, face conflicts, and malignant violence as the kind of response which denotes a weakness of the ego in front of insurmountable pressures.

Thus, we believe that it is not violence itself that is learned, but a way of expressing it (we must not forget that these children were not battered but exposed to some other kind of violence during childhood).

Even though familiar and social role model draw pathways of reaction to conflicts and teach ways of facing needs, it must also be taken into account that many of these abusive sons have suffered some kind of stress during the first year of life, and/or trouble at school.

On performing a biographical revision, we found that many of this abused parents, had been also abused by their own parents. This might reflect a repetition of their victim role, now putting their own children in the role of the abuser, and therefore turning them into victims, too.

As well as in Ornell, and Gelles study (1982), mothers tend to be more abused than fathers and violence depends on the relationship with and between them, facing also other family problems. However, we did not find any differences related to the presence of more or more violent aggressors among sons than among daughters, but we understand that this could probably be due to the conditions our sample presented.

We found also relevant the fact that the kids had witnessed abuse within the parental couple. As to parents’ strictness, our sample proved ambigua-
ity and confusion in rules and acceptance parameters to be a major risk factor.

The struggles for money, and power at home were the triggers of conflicts. The kids demand supplies and spaces which, not being provided, end up in threats, insults and hitting, first objects, then people. Paraphrasing Fromm (1979): the need of having for being. A being that demands self-assertion (Rollo May, 1978) when caught into parents’ desires (confusing parents) which don’t even call their kids by their names, but pumpkin or sweetie instead. Possession, and annulment of their identities, and so having, owning, possession for the parents.

Social class was no significant for the form of violence, although offensive sarcastic remarks, disqualification and complains about not being up to some standard, specially academic ones, were, of course, higher in medium class.

Unlike most of the studies we consulted, having non-violent siblings in 90% of the interviews, it is remarkable the amount of first year of life-stress and school problems among those kids who abuse. Only this relation with difficulties in school insertion was as well observed by Ornell, and Gelles.

We must point out that many of the mothers that consulted our service (70%) have attended or are at present attending other counseling group/s, due to anxiety or depression, or what people call self-help groups. Some of them (18%) were addicted to those treatments so that they could reinforce their identity as victims. In such cases, it becomes very difficult to introduce changes that threaten to alter that condition.

Chauvinist culture is also a referent for continuity in couples where the male is aggressive towards his wife (specially among Bolivian patients), and in some women that prefer it to indifference.

As shown by Berger, and Luckmann (1984), social reality in day-to-day life is caught in a continuum of characterizations which become more and more anonymous as they walk away from here and now, the face-to-face situation. In one end of the continuum are those with whom I interact daily and intensely in face-to-face situations, my inner circle, as we can say. In the other, there are really anonymous abstractions, which by its own nature could never be accessible in face-to-face interaction.

On a further reading, we find that, in that continuum, they place both characterizations in society and ancestors and descendents, with mythical reference power. That power is the one we have proved to be present in our personal histories of battered parents and battering kids (abused and abusive).
Conclusions

Our work is to be a point to start new research. Different hypotheses come out from it.

Treatments have shown us that kids don’t normally come for consultation because, in some way, their position assures them power within the family. That is the reason why we work mostly with parents, supporting their decision of stopping to be a victim.

We achieved a 60% of positive changes, by combining different treatments which include Occupational Counseling, study groups and volunteering. Those help to move parents away from their role as victims, which has become a part of their personalities. We expect to count with economical support to continue with our work.
Appendix
Dynamic scheme of matrices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biophysical Matrix</th>
<th>Existential Matrix Family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological type and inheritance</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Constitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Biophysical conditions for better or worse survival chances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dispositions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Perceptual and reactional style.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- First care-takers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identifications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Primary models and basic experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The family novel: expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Initial group affiliation. Acceptance vs. Rejection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic trust vs. basic distrust.</td>
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<th>LEARNING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Psychodynamic processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERSONAL ORGANIZATION OF BEING AND DOING VISION OF ONESELF AND VISION OF THE WORLD</td>
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<td>Psychodynamic processes</td>
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<th>LEARNING</th>
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<td>Learning Matrix</td>
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<td>School and Groups</td>
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<td>- The second care-takers.</td>
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<td>- Formal learning. Approval or disapproval.</td>
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<td>- Learning and teaching models.</td>
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<td>- Scientific and technological knowledge models.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural Matrix</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society and Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Positive and negative value models: Secondary group affiliation.</td>
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<td>- Inclusion vs. exclusion.</td>
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<td>- Status access models and historically defined role models.</td>
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<td>- Vision of the world and values.</td>
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