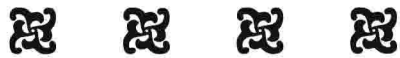


THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY BATTERED CHILD

James Garbarino
Edna Guttman
Janis Wilson Seeley





The Psychologically Battered Child



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THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY BATTERED CHILD

Strategies for Identification, Assessment, and Intervention

by James Garbarino, Edna Guttman, Janis Wilson Seeley

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The Jossey-Bass
Social and Behavioral Science Series

*To Irving B. Harris and Muriel F. Smith,
two tireless advocates for children*



Preface

When the U.S. Congress enacted the first federal child abuse and neglect treatment and prevention act in the mid 1970s, it was giving voice to a movement that had its roots in the nineteenth century. The impulse to protect children from abuse and exploitation took shape in the 1800s in the efforts of “child savers” who sought to remove children from dangerous environments and depraved caregivers. This movement addressed a host of issues—child labor, primary education, health care, foster care, and adoption. It led to the first White House Conference on Children, held under the auspices of President Theodore Roosevelt, in the first decade of this century. Although the early reformers were concerned with the mind, spirit, and heart of the child, child protective service agencies since then have tended to focus on the physical neglect and abuse and sexual exploitation that is easiest to document.

As American society has come to terms with child abuse and neglect, one after another related issue has come to the forefront. Since the “battered child syndrome” captured public and professional attention in the 1970s, child sexual abuse has emerged as a matter of grave concern. One outcome of the exposure of these problems has been a clear recognition that damage can result from abuse and neglect, even when no physical harm is done. Indeed, psychological harm is now the principal issue in almost all cases requiring intervention. As a result, psychological maltreatment is currently a topic of significant concern among professionals and the public.

Most professionals have long believed that psychological maltreatment is a significant social issue. But the lack of research and theory, which would give clear guidance on the basic threats to development, and the difficulties involved in defining psychological maltreatment have seemed insurmountable problems. Consequently, the consensus among professionals as well as the general public has been that psychological maltreatment must remain a peripheral issue for the day-to-day practice and jurisdiction of protective service intervention. This book is a response to that need for formal delineation of the problem.

The Psychologically Battered Child presents our efforts to define psychological maltreatment and to link that definition to intervention—both prevention and treatment. It is designed to help the professional who is caught in the bind of knowing that psychological maltreatment and harm are the core issues in most child protective work but who feels that the basis for proceeding with action is weak and obscure. The book begins with a look at the issues involved in distinguishing psychological from other forms of child maltreatment. It then offers a definition of psychological maltreatment that comprises five categories: terrorizing, isolating, ignoring, rejecting, and corrupting. The book illuminates these categories through case examples and explains their implications for identification, assessment, and intervention. Our emphasis throughout is on parent-child relations, although we also include material on psychological maltreatment in out-of-home situations and discuss a variety of public policy issues that bear on this topic.

Who Should Read This Book?

We have written this book for professionals and for professionals in training. It is designed to apply to a wide variety of theoretical and therapeutic orientations. Practitioners in child mental health, family therapy, parent counseling, child development, and parent-child relations will find this book useful in

defining their professional missions in cases of psychological maltreatment. It will also equip them with tools for carrying out effective intervention.

Because it couples wide-ranging conceptual discussion with practical application (that is, specific techniques for assessment and intervention), the book can serve as a resource in the education and training of professionals in a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, social work, counseling, and nursing. By introducing a set of specific cases early in the text and developing them throughout the volume, the book presents an integrated picture of how theory and practice work hand in hand.

This book will also serve the needs of sophisticated lay volunteers seeking guidance in how to approach the problem of psychological maltreatment of children from the point of view of community-based prevention and family support programs.

Overview of the Contents

Chapter One offers an exploration of the issues involved in defining psychological maltreatment. It dissects the historical impediments to definition and reveals how the field of child abuse and neglect has matured to a point where it can handle the challenges of psychological maltreatment as an “actionable category” in protective services. This first chapter explores the broad developmental and epistemological concerns surrounding the issue of definition. It also presents a five-category definition that includes terrorizing, isolating, ignoring, rejecting, and corrupting as facets of psychological maltreatment.

Chapter Two explicates the operational definition through analysis of twenty case studies. Most important, it places the definition in a developmental perspective, illustrating each type of psychological maltreatment across and within child developmental stages from infancy to adolescence.

Chapters Three and Four discuss the concepts and applications of exploratory identification and assessment. We offer a

broad selection of techniques and strategies for identification and assessment that apply to nested systems of interaction within the family as well as to the community and its host culture. The challenge of linking parental behavior to child outcomes is a major theme throughout this discussion.

In Chapters Five, Six, and Seven we focus the “ecological” perspective presented in earlier chapters on the issues of intervention in three areas: the broad social environment; the family, with individual members; and the institutional network of social services. Here we link exploratory assessment to the diversity of resources for family intervention that exist in contrasting communities. Recognizing that resources for assessment and intervention differ markedly from place to place and from case to case, we try to present a range of alternatives, with some guidance on selecting from what is available and on building resources.

Chapters Eight and Nine deal with psychological maltreatment in out-of-home care settings, such as day care centers and residential institutions. Chapter Eight presents our analysis of definition and identification while Chapter Nine addresses assessment and intervention. Throughout these chapters we emphasize “generic” issues—that is, issues common to psychological maltreatment in the family *and* in out-of-home care—while we focus on the special challenges imposed by the out-of-home setting, such as raising children to be fully functioning adults when there is an initial disadvantage to cope with.

In the Afterword, we briefly consider the likely future of attempts to deal with psychological maltreatment. We believe that progress is necessary to society’s efforts to improve the quality of life for children and that progress is a realistic expectation, based on what we have accomplished thus far. We recognize that the same process is involved in defining and acting on a concept of psychological maltreatment as has been employed in dealing with physical and sexual maltreatment. Definition is fundamentally a matter of blending active community beliefs about what children deserve out of life (and indeed what it means to be a child) with

professional knowledge about how parent-child relationships work (and why they sometimes do not).

This book contains four resources that will be useful to readers who wish to carry their ideas forward into action. The first, following this Preface, is the list of experts who served as our review panel during the writing of this volume. They may be consulted as resource persons by readers who need advice beyond what we offer in this book. At the end of the book, Resource A presents information about the instruments we discuss in Chapter Four and describes some additional ones. Resource B offers names and addresses of a variety of organizations active in the child welfare and child protection field. Resource C lists contact points for the chapters of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, the leading citizen group concerned with child abuse prevention.

This book reflects a decade of study and discussion on the topic of psychological maltreatment. It also reflects our efforts (funded by grant number of OH DS 90-CJ-0072 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families) to synthesize ideas about the meaning and origins of child development and the threats to development that are posed by harsh, cold, negativistic, or morally inappropriate treatment of children by parents, family members, and others. Having formulated a concept of psychological maltreatment as "assault on the psyche," we have striven to determine the implications of this formulation for intervention. The result is this volume.

In preparing this book we had access to a group of professionals and lay volunteers who are active in the field of child abuse and neglect. Their expertise in clinical, prevention, assessment, and research methodologies is extensive, and we have drawn upon their wide-ranging knowledge. The review panel took on the task of critiquing the outline for this manuscript and the preliminary draft of it. Their comments and suggestions were very useful to us

as we attempted to shed some light on this complex and difficult topic. We assume final responsibility for the outcome of our efforts, of course, but we thank the review panel for their help.

We also thank Alice Saxion and Joy Barger, the support staff at Pennsylvania State University's Department of Individual and Family Studies, for helping us complete this manuscript.

July 1986

James Garbarino
Chicago, Illinois

Edna Guttman
Haifa, Israel

Janis Wilson Seeley
University Park, Pennsylvania



The Authors

James Garbarino is president of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development, in Chicago, Illinois. He received his B.A. degree (1968) from St. Lawrence University in liberal arts, his M.A.T. degree (1970) from Cornell University in social studies education, and his Ph.D. degree (1973) from Cornell University in human development and families studies.

Garbarino's main research activities have been in issues of applied human development and child welfare, particularly child abuse and neglect. He is the author of more than sixty articles and chapters dealing with child welfare, social development, and education. His books include *Understanding Abusive Families* (1980), *Protecting Children from Abuse and Neglect* (1980), *Children and Families in the Social Environment* (1982), *Successful Schools and Competent Students* (1981), *Social Support Networks* (1983), and *Troubled Youth, Troubled Families* (1986).

In 1985, he was the first recipient of the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect's C. Henry Kempe Award for outstanding professional contribution to the field of preventing and treating child maltreatment. In 1980 and again in 1982 he received the Mitchell Prize for essays dealing with the future of the family in a changing economic and ecological context. In 1981 he received a Silver Award from the International Film and Television Festival of New York for coauthoring the film "Don't Get Stuck There; A Film on Adolescent Abuse." From 1975 to 1978 he was a National Academy of Education Spencer Fellow, and from 1981 to 1984 he was a Kellogg Foundation National Fellow. His

1981 book *Successful Schools and Competent Students* received an Outstanding Book Award from the American Library Association.

Garbarino was director of the Maltreatment of Youth Project at the Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development from 1976 to 1979. As a member of the Board of Directors of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse he chaired the Research and Program Evaluation Committee. From 1979 to 1985 he was a member of the faculty in the Department of Individual and Family Studies in the College of Human Development at Pennsylvania State University.

Edna Guttman is a doctoral candidate in human development and family studies at Pennsylvania State University. She received her B.A. degree (1982) from the University of Haifa in Israel, in social work, and her M.A. degree (1985) from the University of Minnesota in family social science.

Guttman's main professional activities have been in social work in general and in child and youth care work in particular, as they both relate to child and adolescent development and to the professional development of practitioners in this area. The research she has been and is involved with is ecological in nature and deals with the professional characteristics of social work practice and residential child and youth care, and with the development of children and youth as it differs across contexts of living. She has field experience in social work and residential youth work in Israel. Her publications, many coauthored with Zvi Eisikovits, from Haifa, Israel, include articles and chapters on the topics she is researching.

Janis Wilson Seeley is a doctoral candidate in human development and family studies at Pennsylvania State University. She received her B.A. degree (1978) from Kutztown State College in social sciences, with a concentration in social welfare, and her M.S. degree (1982) from the University of Maryland in family and community development.

Seeley's professional experience and research has focused on adolescent development and services to adolescents. She has worked as a counselor with runaway youth, educationally disad-

vantaged youth, and substance abusers. Seeley has also taught parenting skills and life skills to diverse populations including pregnant adolescents and teenage parents. Her research has focused on the issues of runaway youth and adolescent sexuality and pregnancy. She has written a chapter on runaways with James Garbarino and Anne Garbarino in the book *Troubled Youth, Troubled Families* (1986).



Advisory Panel

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