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Emotional abuse in a sample of multiply maltreated, urban young adolescents: Issues of definition and identification

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Abstract

Objective—The main purpose of this paper is to use the Brassard and Donovan [Brassard, M. R. & Donovan, K. L. (2006). Defining psychological maltreatment. In M. M. Freerick, J. F. Knutson, P. K. Trickett, & S. M. Flanzer (Eds.), *Child abuse and neglect: Definitions, classifications, and a framework for research* (pp. 151–197). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookers Publishing Co., Inc.] framework to examine and describe the nature of emotional abuse experienced by a sample of urban, ethnically diverse male and female youth ($N = 303$) identified as maltreated by a very large public child welfare agency.

Methods—Case record abstraction was conducted on the DCFS records of these maltreated youth using the Maltreatment Case Record Abstraction Instrument (MCRAI) which was based on the work of Barnett et al. [Barnett, D., Manly, J. T., & Cicchetti, D. (1993). Defining child maltreatment: The interface between policy and research. In D. Cicchetti & S. L. Toth (Eds.), *Advances in applied developmental psychology: Child abuse, child development and social policy* (pp. 7–73). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.] as modified by English and LONGSCAN [English, D. J., & the LONGSCAN Investigators. (1997). Modified maltreatment classification system (MMCS). Retrieved from <http://www.iprc.unc.edu/longscan/>]. Fifteen items of parental behavior deemed emotionally abusive were coded and organized into four subtypes of emotional abuse (*spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting*) using the Brassard and Donovan (2006) framework.

Results—Using this coding system, almost 50% of the sample were found to have experienced emotional abuse in contrast to 9% identified at the time of referral by DCFS. Most of the emotionally abused youth also experienced physical abuse (63%) and/or neglect (76%) as well. The most frequent subtype of emotional abuse experienced was *terrorizing*. Most youth experienced more than one subtype.

Conclusions—Emotional abuse, while frequent, was seldom the focus of the child protection services investigation. The nature of this abuse was not minor, but rather likely to be dangerous to the mental health and well-being of these children. Further more emotional abuse, in this sample of young adolescents, at least, was likely to be accompanied by other forms of maltreatment, especially physical abuse and/or neglect. These findings have important implications for practice and the direction of future research.

Practice implications—All those who interact with child welfare clients must recognize the prevalence of emotional abuse in maltreated children so that appropriate interventions are instituted. Screening for emotional abuse should be part of all intake referrals and when confirmed should be noted in official records. When children are placed, foster parents (both kin and non-kin) need training on the prevalence and consequences of emotional abuse, and strategies to help their foster children recover from the aftermath. When children remain with maltreating parents, emotional abuse should be a focus of the interventions designed to help maltreating parents with more effective parenting strategies and also should be a focus of the interventions designed to help the child recover from the consequences of maltreatment.

Keywords

Emotional abuse; Definitions; Multiple maltreatment

Introduction

It has long been noted that research to advance knowledge about the causes and consequences of different forms of child abuse and neglect has been hampered by lack of attention to, and lack of clarity about, definitions and classification (Besharov, 1981; National Research Council, 1993; Zigler, 1980). While this has been true about all forms of maltreatment, it is especially true for emotional or psychological abuse for at least two reasons. For one, when the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was enacted in 1974 to ensure the development of programs and services for abused children and their families, specific definitions were given for certain types of maltreatment (e.g., sexual abuse), but no definition was provided for emotional abuse. Instead, that task was left explicitly to the states. The State of California, the site of the present study, developed the following definition of emotional abuse: "...nonphysical mistreatment, resulting in disturbed behavior by the child, such as severe withdrawal or hyperactivity. Emotional abuse includes willfully causing any child to suffer, inflicting mental suffering, or endangering a child's emotional well-being (Legislative Analysts Office, 1996)." Unlike definitions for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, not only is this definition vague, but no mention is made of specific parental behaviors that might constitute "nonphysical mistreatment" or "inflicting mental suffering".

Much of the research on child abuse and neglect that has proliferated in the last several decades, especially that focusing on physical or sexual abuse, has used samples recruited from protective service agencies and thus been based at least implicitly on the state or Federal definitions. While fundamental problems can arise when psychological or social science researchers take definitions developed for legal or administrative purposes and use them to define constructs in scientific research, at least these definitions can serve as a starting point, tied as they often are not only to sample recruitment decisions but to other important elements of research design as well.

A second reason for this lack of attention to definitions may be that there is a weaker societal consensus about how to distinguish emotional abuse from suboptimal parenting than there is for other forms of abuse, especially physical and sexual abuse which are also

perceived as more dangerous and more prevalent and thus requiring more attention from the child protection agencies responsible for the safety and well-being of the children under their supervision (Feerick & Snow, 2006). In fact, the incidence of emotional abuse as counted by both Federal and local agencies does appear less prevalent than other forms of maltreatment. For example, in the latest Federal report of statistics of reported cases of maltreatment, 59,746 children were victims of psychological abuse or 6.9% of the total number of maltreated children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2007). And Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) reports that, in 2007, for new reports of child abuse and neglect, the incidence of emotional abuse ranged from 6.6% to 8.5% of the total cases each month with a median for the year of 7.8%. But the question remains: How can we know how prevalent something is when we have not defined it?

In contrast to this lack of definitions coming from Federal and state legislation surrounding child maltreatment, there have been important strides in defining emotional abuse deriving from several decades of social science and mental health research. These efforts have recently been comprehensively organized and summarized by Brassard and Donovan (2006). These authors have developed a classification system based first on a definition framework published by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC, 1995). They further reviewed all the extant research definition schemes (nine total developed from 1979 to 2002: see Fig. 7.1; Brassard & Donovan, 2006) and indicated the degree to which each of these indicated different subcategories of parental/caregiver behavior to the child. Thus in these cases, in contrast to the vague definition cited above, all of the definitional systems were based on parental/caregiver behaviors rather than on maladaptive development of the child. The APSAC system had six main categories of parental behavior deemed emotionally abusive: *spurning*, *terrorizing*, *isolating*, *exploiting/corrupting*, *denying emotional responsiveness*, and *mental health/medical/legal neglect*. The Brassard and Donovan (2006) system involved developing from 2 to 5 subcategories of behaviors for each of these 6 larger categories (total = 22). For example, subcategories for *isolating* are “confining within environment” and “restricting social interactions in community”. They then summarized the nine definitional systems in terms of these subcategories to determine how comparable the systems were to one another and how comprehensive vis-à-vis the six APSAC categories. One of the outcomes of this effort is the realization that there is a fair amount of consensus among researchers of the varied types of parental/caregiver behaviors that constitute emotional abuse. The Brassard and Donovan (2006) chapter provides an excellent framework for research on emotional research grappling with the problems of definition and classification.

The main purpose of this paper is to use the Brassard and Donovan (2006) framework to examine and describe the nature of emotional abuse experienced by a sample of urban, ethnically diverse male and female youth identified as maltreated by a very large public child welfare agency. Questions addressed include:

1. What percentage of this sample is identified (labeled) as emotionally abused at the time of referral to the agency? What is the nature of this abuse? Are males

and females and members of different ethnic groups equally likely to be emotionally abused?

2. When the full case records of these youth are examined, what percentage of this sample is identified as emotionally abused and what is the nature of this abuse? Are males and females and members of different ethnic groups equally likely to be emotionally abused?
3. In this sample, what is the nature of these emotionally abusive experiences? What is the frequency of occurrence of the different APSAC subtypes? What is the co-incidence of different subtypes of emotional abuse with other subtypes and with other types of maltreatment?

Method

Participants

The subjects of this study participated in a longitudinal study of the effects of maltreatment on adolescent development. Recruitment procedures were approved by the Los Angeles County DCFS, The Juvenile Court of Los Angeles County, and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Southern California. Each month, the agency developed lists of new cases in the system that met the recruitment criteria: (1) a new substantiated referral (i.e., report of maltreatment) to DCFS in the preceding month for any type of maltreatment; (2) child age 9 to 12 years; (3) child identified as Latino, African-American or Caucasian (non-Latino); (4) child residing at the time of the referral to DCFS in one of 10 zip codes in urban Los Angeles County areas. The sampling was restricted by zip codes to ensure that children had similar neighborhood experiences. The zip codes were chosen using DCFS statistics on rates of maltreatment (for children of different ethnicities) and census tract information on ethnic diversity and urban character. A letter went to the caretaker of each child on the list describing the study and enclosing a postcard indicating their willingness or unwillingness to participate. Unless a returned postcard indicated unwillingness to participate, the potential volunteer received a phone call approximately 10 days after the letter was sent out. In this call the person was either thanked for volunteering – if they had returned the postcard indicating that – or again invited to participate. In all, 77% of the families sent the letter agreed to participate. A final sample of 303 maltreated children was the sample for this study (Table 1) (A comparison sample of children from the same zip codes was contacted through direct mail lists, but those children are not part of the current study.)

The caretakers and their children came to the project office where they took part in an interview process that included measures of functioning on multiple levels (A more complete description of the protocol can be found in Gordis, Granger, Susman, and Trickett (2006) and Mennen and Trickett (2007).) Caretakers and children gave consent (assent) for the study which included their permission to access DCFS case records on the maltreatment.

Methods for abstracting child maltreatment case records

The study used two retired DCFS supervisors to access the agency's records. They reviewed records, obtained copies of the investigation documents on each report of maltreatment (e.g., emergency referral information, screener narrative, investigation narrative, contact sheets, etc.), court reports, placement history, and provided a summary of the child's case.

The authors developed a data base using SPSS Data Entry Builder 3.0 in which to enter the large amount of information available in each record, the Maltreatment Case Record Abstraction Instrument (MCRAI). The decisions about the kinds of information to enter into the system were done in consultation with a number of experts in child maltreatment, consultants from DCFS, and built on the work of Barnett, Manly, and Cichetti (1993). The goal was to create a system that could include a large amount of very specific data about a child's experiences in order to be able to categorize the maltreatment experience in a way that would begin to quantify their experience (A copy of the instrument is available from the authors.)

The MCRAI included the original DCFS categorization of each report of maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, substantial risk and caretaker incapacity), the type of reporting party, and the disposition. In addition, the MCRAI was constructed so that following entry of the official data, a data field with each type of maltreatment was listed that incorporated specific information about each. This information included the perpetrator's relationship to the child, age of child at onset of abuse, frequency, duration, and other specifics of the abuse (e.g., whether hospitalization occurred, whether marks were left). Also entered in the data base were all the Child Protection Services (CPS) allegations of maltreatment and the investigation status (i.e., whether or not the allegations were confirmed). Information about the parents' functioning in relation to substance abuse, domestic violence, mental and physical health was also part of the system. The detailed information could be entered for each category that was relevant for each specific report of maltreatment. A new record was created for each new report of maltreatment that included all the relevant data for that particular report.

The case example of Jessica Morgan, age 9, illustrates the process. Jessica had a report of neglect by a teacher who was concerned that she was coming to school dirty, without her hair combed and seeming to be hungry. The child protection worker made a home visit and found the home was filthy, with dirty clothes throughout the house, and little food in the refrigerator. Jessica's mother told the worker that Jessica was a big part of the problem because dealing with Jessica's asthma was so much trouble that the mother missed a lot of work which meant she did not have the money to meet the children's needs. Jessica told the worker during an interview that she had caused the problems in the family because of her asthma. Her parents had terrible fights because her medicine was so expensive. Her mother let her know that the fights over her and the cost of her medicine were the reasons that her father left them. Neighbors reported that the parents could often be heard screaming and fighting and that on several occasions Mrs. Morgan had gone to the hospital because of injuries sustained. Both parents screamed profanities at Jessica and would not let her play with the other children in the neighborhood. The neighbors were afraid to get involved because of the parents' bad tempers. Previous reports of neglect had been made, but were

not confirmed. The case was listed as a substantiated case of neglect. This information would be entered in MCRAI as a confirmed case of neglect reported by a teacher which occurred over an unknown period of time. The home conditions of lack of food, unkempt surroundings, and lack of attention to child's hygiene would be noted. The additional information on emotional abuse with specifics of blaming the child for the parents' problems, isolating her from other children, and witnessing domestic violence would be entered. The additional data and specifics related to the previous reports of neglect would be noted in MCRAI even though the case was not substantiated (Drake, 1996; Hussey et al., 2005). Thus we were able to more fully explain the child's actual experience than was possible by using the official classification.

Two of the authors supervised, trained, and checked the record abstraction process performed by social work masters students and psychology undergraduate students. Training consisted of initial 2-hour extensive orientation and close supervision of the first 4–5 case abstractions until the abstractor achieved at least 90% inter-rater agreement with the authors. Abstracted data were checked by individual case reviews as well as data matching with the case summary that the hired DCFS consultants provided to this study. In cases of inconsistencies, original DCFS case records were re-checked and, if necessary, group decisions were made among the authors and the entries modified. During the data collection process, twenty cases were chosen at random to test inter-rater agreement on the four major types of maltreatment for each referral for each child. This indicated good reliability: .82, .82, .79, and .75 for physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect, respectively. The agreement of each question item was slightly lower. For 14 original emotional abuse items, the mean *Kappa*'s was .67, ranged from .50 to .73.

Methods for categorizing emotional abuse items

The MCRAI included 14 questions related to emotional abuse derived from the Maltreatment Classification System (Barnett et al., 1993) as modified by English and LONGSCAN (1997). Modifications were made for some of the question items based on qualitative information summarizing each incident. First, based on qualitative information in "child was subjected to emotional damage" and "child was subjected to extreme negativity or hostility", a new variable titled "verbal abuse" was created, which indicates screaming, yelling, name calling, etc. Next, two items were dropped (i.e., "child was subjected to emotional damage", "child was exposed to mental illness") in the final analysis because of redundancy. Wherever appropriate, these items were rearranged into "verbal abuse", "exposed to extreme negativity", "exposed to domestic violence", or "exposed to illegal activities", etc. Finally, following Brassard and Donovan (2006)'s classification, two items were added (i.e., "Child exposed to illegal activity", "Child involved in illegal activity"). These items were initially classified as neglect in the MCRAI system. Thus 15 items were investigated as related to emotional abuse for the final analysis (for each item, see Table 3). We first compared our MCRAI findings with the maltreatment classification that the DCFS provided for this study at the time of subject recruitment. Next, following Brassard and Donovan's framework, the emotional abuse cases as indicated by the MCRAI system were reviewed, classified, and examined with regard to demographics, detailed abuse characteristics, as well as inter-relations among subcategories.

Results

There were marked differences in the incidence of emotional abuse between those classified as emotionally abused at entry into our study and those identified as emotionally abused by our case record review process (see Table 2). The original maltreatment classification (labeled “DCFS classification”) identified only 27 children (8.9% of the sample) as being emotionally abused while our MCRAI abstraction process found 147 children (48.4% of the sample) having an instance of maltreatment that met the criteria for emotional abuse. The children classified as emotionally abused by MCRAI had a mean number of separate reports for suspicion of maltreatment of 5.6 ($SD = 3.4$) and an average of 3.8 different types of maltreatment allegations, significantly higher than the 1.4 types in the DCFS classification. Over three quarters of those who could be classified as suffering from emotional abuse in MCRAI also could be classified as neglected and nearly two thirds also experienced physical abuse significantly higher than the DCFS findings of co-occurrences. There was a trend toward finding a higher co-occurrence of sexual abuse in the MCRAI classified group than in the DCFS classification group.

There were also differences between emotionally abused children and non-emotionally abused children, that is, the other maltreated children not identified as emotionally abused. Biracial children were less likely to be emotionally abused than the African-American, Latino, or white children. Emotionally abused children were less likely to be in relative placement than those who were not emotionally abused. The emotionally abused children had more reports of maltreatment (5.6 vs. 4.1) and more different types of maltreatment (3.8 vs. 2.1) than those who were not classified as having suffered from emotional abuse. There were fewer instances of physical abuse in the non-emotionally abused group.

Table 3 arranges the MCRAI categories according to both the APSAC categories and Brassard and Donovan’s subcategories of emotional abuse and gives examples of our subjects’ experiences in each category. There are only 4 (rather than 6) APSAC categories because, (1) in our system *mental health/medical/educational* neglect is considered neglect rather than emotional abuse and (2) the frequency of behaviors that would be categorized as *denying emotional responsiveness* was essentially zero and thus this category was excluded. *Terrorizing* was the most common type of emotional abuse experienced by our subjects with 81.1% of the emotionally abused children having been terrorized. Examples of terrorizing range from parents threatening suicide, threatening the child with harm, or engaging in physical acts that are particularly frightening. *Spurning* was the next most common type of emotional abuse with 38.1% of the children experiencing acts that meet the definition of spurning. Some acts meeting the definition of spurning were calling the child names, racial slurs, or blaming for parents problems. Nearly one third (31.3%) of the children’s experiences met the definition for *Exploiting/Corrupting*. Some examples of this were using or buying drugs in the presence of the child, forcing the child into illegal activities, or having the child observe sex of others. The least common category was *Isolating* with 13.6% of the children having this experience. Some examples of this were prohibiting phone calls or visits to family, or inappropriately confining a child.

The frequency of different types of emotional abuse differed when we compared the original DCFS classification with our MCRAI classification (see Table 4). While terrorizing was the most frequent type of emotional abuse in both systems, the other types showed up at higher rates in the MCRAI system. For example, only 7.4% of children could be classified as having experienced exploiting/corrupting upon entry into our study; when the records were reviewed by the MCRAI system, 31.3% were found to have been victims of exploiting/corrupting.

Children most often experienced more than one type of emotional abuse (see Table 5). The most common co-occurring type of maltreatment was the combination of *Spurning* and *Terrorizing* with 78.9% of the children who had one of these types of abuse also having the other. Also frequently co-occurring was *Exploiting/Corrupting* with *Isolating*: 65.0% of the time these types of abuse occurred together.

Table 6 presents descriptive data on demographic information and abuse characteristics for the four subtypes of emotional abuse. Biological parents are the most frequent perpetrators of all types of emotional abuse. Another person involved the emotional abuse in a substantial number of cases. This is particularly true of isolating when two or more people perpetrate the abuse in three quarter of the cases. Neglect is experienced along with emotional abuse at very high rates ranging from a high of 95% for *Isolating* to a low of 75% for *Terrorizing*. Physical Abuse is also commonly experienced with emotional abuse, ranging from a high of 80.4 % of children experiencing *Exploiting/Corrupting* to 61.7% of those experiencing *Terrorizing*. Sexual abuse is the type of abuse least likely to occur with each type of emotional abuse ranging from a high of 30% co-occurrence with terrorizing to a low of 19.6% with spurning.

Discussion

Though a laborious task, abstracting the DCFS case records of the maltreated youth in our sample resulted in rich data that illuminate the phenomenology, if you will, of the experience of emotional abuse at least for this group of urban young adolescents. Especially as illustrated by Table 3, one can see that these experiences can be categorized well using the Brassard and Donovan (2006) framework and that for many of these youths these are egregious experiences likely to be dangerous to the mental health and well-being of these children.

Furthermore, in this sample, emotional abuse while frequent was seldom the focus of the child protection services investigation. Only 8.9% of the maltreated youth were labeled emotionally abused by DCFS at the time of the referral to the agency, a percentage similar to the Federal and DCFS' annual statistics for 2007 reported earlier in this paper. On the other hand, almost half of these youth were determined to be emotionally abused when the entire case record was abstracted using the Brassard and Donovan (2006) framework. And, as noted, the nature of this emotional abuse was not minor. What is more, most of the emotionally abused children also experienced other forms of maltreatment as well, especially physical abuse and/or neglect. Sexual abuse is the type of abuse least noted to co-occur with emotional abuse. This seems surprising in view of many victims' descriptions of

their experiences that sound very much like emotional abuse as defined by Brassard and Donovan (2006). Perhaps when sexual abuse is present, authorities find this so important that they fail to note the other experiences that may accompany the abuse.

This co-incidence of emotional abuse with other forms of maltreatment has implications both for practice and for research. In terms of practice, since child protective service agencies seldom identify children as emotionally abused, interventions may not be aimed at the emotional abuse these children have experienced or their maltreating parents have done. This is especially important given the number of children who remain with maltreating parents, which, in our sample of maltreated children, is the majority (54.3%).

Most research, to date, has focused on physical abuse, sexual abuse, and, recently, neglect. One implication of the findings of the present study is that many if not most of the children in such samples may have also experienced unidentified emotional abuse severe enough to have implications for children's development. Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner (2007) and others (e.g., Rossman & Rosenberg, 1998) have demonstrated convincingly that experiencing multiple forms of maltreatment, or polyvictimization, as Finkelhor calls it, often leads to more serious and long-lasting mental health consequences than does a single form of maltreatment. To better understand how emotional abuse affects children's development, future research needs to take a multivariate approach that considers both the subtypes of the emotional abuse experienced and also both the type(s) of other abuse and neglect experienced and factors such as chronicity, identity of perpetrator, severity, and developmental stage of the child. Techniques such as cluster analysis and discriminant function analysis might be useful in identifying different patterns of maltreatment experiences with different implications for children's functioning and subsequent adaptation.

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Table 1Demographic information on the study participants ($n = 303$)

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Age at study entry	$m = 10.8$ ($SD = 1.2$)	
Parent's education ^a	$m = 12.1$ ($SD = 3.9$)	
Gender		
Male	152	50.2
Female	151	49.8
Ethnicity		
Black	123	40.6
White	35	11.6
Latino	106	35.0
Bi-racial	39	12.9
Placement		
Remain w/bio parent	164	54.1
Relative placement	74	24.4
Foster care (non-kin)	64	21.1
Adoptive home	1	.3

^aParent's education has a possible range from "0" (none) to "17" (professional degree). "12" indicates 12th grade without high school diploma.

Table 2

Demographic characteristics and co-occurrence status of emotional abuse cases by DCFS classification and by MCRAI classification.

Characteristics	DCFS		MCRAI		Sig. test	
	A: Emotional abuse (<i>n</i> = 27)		B: Emotional abuse (=147)		A vs. B	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	B vs. C	
Age at study entry	<i>m</i> = 10.7 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2)		<i>m</i> = 10.9 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2)		<i>m</i> = 10.8 (<i>SD</i> = 1.1)	
Parent's education	<i>m</i> = 10.2 (<i>SD</i> = 5.1)		<i>m</i> = 12.0 (<i>SD</i> = 3.9)		<i>m</i> = 12.0 (<i>SD</i> = 3.9)	
Gender						
Male	16	59.3	71	48.3	82	52.2
Female	11	40.7	76	51.7	75	47.8
Ethnicity						
Black	8	29.6	53	36.1	70	44.6
White	4	14.8	19	12.9	16	10.2
Latino	15	55.6	61	41.5	46	29.3
Bi-racial	0	0	14	9.5	25	15.0
Placement						*
Remain w/bio parent	18	66.7	84	57.1	81	51.6
Relative placement	2	7.4	31	21.1	42	26.8
Foster care (non-kin)	7	25.9	32	21.8	33	21.0
Adoptive home	0	0	0	0	1	.6
Co-occurrence with						*
Physical abuse	3	11.0	92	62.6	54	34.4
Sexual abuse	2	7.4	30	20.4	32	20.4
Neglect	4	14.8	112	76.2	106	67.5
Total number of reports	N/A		<i>m</i> = 5.6 (<i>SD</i> = 3.4)	<i>m</i> = 4.1 (<i>SD</i> = 3.1)	N/A	***
Total number of different types of maltreatment allegation ^a	<i>m</i> = 1.4 (<i>SD</i> = .64)		<i>m</i> = 3.8 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2)	<i>m</i> = 2.1 (<i>SD</i> = 1.0)	***	***

^a *p* < .08.* *p* < .05.*** *p* < .001.

Maximum possible number of maltreatment allegations is six, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, as well as caretaker incapacity and substantial risk.

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Table 3
Categorizing emotional abuse experiences using the framework of Brassard and Donovan (2006) ($n = 147$)

APSAC categories	Subcategories of parental/caregiver behavior (Brassard & Donovan, 2006)	MCRAI categories	MCRAI case examples	<i>n</i>	%
Spurning	Belittling, denigrating, or other rejecting	"Child is blamed for adult problems"	Child is blamed for parent's job loss	7	4.9
	Ridiculing for showing normal emotions		Child is blamed and scolded for making parent late to work after he masturbated on the child		
	Singling out	"Verbal abuse"	Parent calls child racial slurs Parent calls child derogatory names (e.g., "whore", "idiot", "jackass", etc.) Child is told she is unwanted Parent yells and screams at child	52	35.9
Terrorizing	Placing in unpredictable/chaotic circumstances placing in recognizably dangerous situations	"Parent threatens suicide"	Father threatens that, if mother turns him in, he will kill himself Parent threatens suicide if DCFS takes child away Mother tries to jump out of a moving car when father is driving and children are in the car	9	6.3
	Having rigid/unrealistic expectations accompanied by threats if not met Threatening/perpetrating violence against child	"Child subjected to extreme negativity for hostility"	Father tied child's hands behind his back and drove him around in a car to simulate being arrested Father attempted to burn house down with family inside Parent throws child against wall and puts child's face under water	63	44.4
	Threatening/perpetrating violence against child's loved ones/objects—includes exposure to domestic violence	"Child is threatened with injuries"	Parent threatens to choke child or abuse more if she disclosed abuse	34	23.8
		"Parent threatens to abandon child"	Parent threatens to hit child with a belt Parent threatens to abandon child and leave the country Parent says she will take child's siblings and leave the child alone	10	7.1
Isolating		"Child is exposed to domestic violence"	Father slaps and chokes mother in the presence of child Father pushes mother and displays a gun in his back pocket Child witnesses father attempt to run mother over with a car	90	62.9
		"Child is exposed to other violence"	Child sees mother attack foster mother Mother jumps out of bathroom window naked	18	12.6
	Confining within environment	"Child's relationship with others are undermined by parent"	Child is not allowed to receive phone calls from friends Parent does not want child to speak to aunt	9	6.3
	Restricting social interactions in community	"Parent interferes with other relationships"			
		"Child is confined or isolated"	Father tells children to curse at mother's new boyfriend. Child is locked in a room, a closet, or a bathroom Parent ties child with a rope and ties his ankles with a belt Child is strapped to a car seat.	5 11	3.5 7.7
	Modeling, permitting, or encouraging antisocial behavior	"Child is forced to assume inappropriate responsibility"	Child is forced to earn money for family through pan-handling Child is left to care for a younger sibling who is terminally ill	25	23.8

APSAC categories	Subcategories of parental/caregiver behavior (Brassard & Donovan, 2006)	MCRAI categories	MCRAI case examples	n	%
Exploiting/corrupting	Modeling, permitting, or encouraging developmentally inappropriate behavior	“Parent has inappropriate expectations for child”	Mother allows child to watch her and boyfriend have sex Mother does not let child bathe more than 2–3 times a week because it's not necessary	18	12.7
	Restricting/undermining psychological autonomy	“Child exposed to illegal activity”	Parents abuses, sells, or buys drugs in the presence of child	22	15.0
	Restricting/interfering with cognitive development	“Child involved in illegal activity”	Father tells child to hit girls because that is what girls are meant for Parent makes child get the gun	6	4.1
			Child sexually molests a sibling repeatedly while mother is aware of it and does not take action		

Table 4

Frequency of emotional abuse subcategories in DCFS and MCRAI classification

Subcategories	DCFS classification (<i>n</i> = 27)		MCRAI classification (<i>n</i> = 147)		Sig. test
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Spurning	5	18.5	56	38.1	*
Terrorizing	21	77.8	120	81.6	
Isolating	1	3.7	20	13.6	†
Exploiting/corrupting	2	7.4	46	31.3	**

† *p* < .08.
* *p* < .05.
** *p* < .01.

Table 5

Frequency and relations among four emotional abuse subcategories ($n = 147$)

	Spurning		Terrorizing		Isolating		Exploiting/corrupting	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Spurning	56	100.0						
Terrorizing	45	78.9	120	100.0				
Isolating	8	14.0	17	14.2	20	100.0		
Exploiting/Corrupting	23	41.1	41	34.2	13	65.0	46	100.0

Note: Italicized statistics in the main diagonal indicate size and % of each subcategory.

Demographic information and detailed abuse characteristics by four subcategories of emotional abuse

Table 6

	Spurning (<i>n</i> = 56)		Terrorizing (<i>n</i> = 120)		Isolating (<i>n</i> = 20)		Exploiting/corrupting (<i>n</i> = 46)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
[6.1] Demographics								
Age at study entry		<i>m</i> = 11.2 (<i>SD</i> = 1.3)		<i>m</i> = 10.9 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2)		<i>m</i> = 11.0 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2)		<i>m</i> = 10.9 (<i>SD</i> = 1.3)
Gender								
Male	25	44.6	57	47.5	9	45.0	21	45.7
Female	31	55.4	63	52.5	11	55.0	25	54.3
Ethnicity								
Black	22	39.3	38	31.7	6	30.0	9	19.6
White	6	10.7	17	14.2	5	25.0	10	21.7
Latino	23	41.1	53	44.2	7	35.0	22	47.8
Bi-racial	5	8.9	12	10.0	2	10.0	5	10.9
Placement								
Remain w/bio parent	24	42.9	68	56.7	8	40.0	18	39.1
Relative placement	18	32.1	29	24.2	6	30.0	18	39.1
Foster care (non-kin)	14	25.0	23	19.2	6	30.0	10	21.7
[6.2] Abuse details								
Age of onset		<i>m</i> = 9.2 (<i>SD</i> = 1.9)		<i>m</i> = 8.7 (<i>SD</i> = 2.1)		<i>m</i> = 8.5 (<i>SD</i> = 1.9)		<i>m</i> = 8.6 (<i>SD</i> = 2.1)
Total # of perpetrator								
One	31	55.4	62	51.7	5	25.0	25	54.4
Two or more	25	44.6	58	48.3	15	75.0	21	45.7
Identity of perpetrator ^a								
Bio parent	40	71.4	100	83.3	18	90.0	42	91.3
Other parental figure	24	42.9	39	32.5	10	50.0	15	32.6
Others	12	21.4	20	16.7	2	10.0	3	6.5
Co-occurrence with								
Physical abuse	36	64.3	74	61.7	16	80.0	37	80.4
Sexual abuse	11	19.6	24	20.0	6	30.0	12	26.1
Neglect	45	80.4	90	75.0	20	95.0	42	91.3

	<u>Spurning (<i>n</i> = 56)</u>		<u>Terrorizing (<i>n</i> = 120)</u>		<u>Isolating (<i>n</i> = 20)</u>		<u>Exploiting/corrupting (<i>n</i> = 46)</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Total # of emotional abuse report	<i>m</i> = 1.9 (<i>SD</i> = 1.3)		<i>m</i> = 1.6 (<i>SD</i> = 1.1)		<i>m</i> = 2.0 (<i>SD</i> = 1.3)		<i>m</i> = 1.2 (<i>SD</i> = 1.1)	

^a Because of the cases having multiple perpetrators, the total percentages did not add up 100%.