

## **The Influence of Ethnicity, Gender, Personality, Life Satisfaction, and Number of Children in the Family on Child Abuse Potential**

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### **Introduction**

Child abuse is one of the serious social problems and has become a universal problem. Child abuse is not a new issue, since it has emerged a long time ago. Although child abuse is an old issue, it only gets attention in the 19th century when the number of cases has been increasing each year.

Children are accorded their rights by the international community through "Declaration 10 Issues About Children's Rights", which was announced at a general assembly of United Nations in 1959, with its slogan "People should give children their best rights".

Hence, people keep agitating for children's rights and recently, UNICEF chose "Children's Right International Protection" as the theme for The International Children's Day in 1989. The young generation really has their rights to obtain their primary needs. Although the society has given the declaration for their rights, each year about 60 to 100 thousand children all over the world become victims of child abuse (Hasan Baseri Budiman, 1991).

Since there is increasing concern of this problem, numerous studies were conducted. In Malaysia, studies of this nature is still lacking. Hence, the researchers feel that this study is necessary since this issue is becoming more serious and brings negative effects physically and psychologically.

The purpose of this study is to find out the influence of personality factor, demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, number of children and life satisfaction in child abuse potential.

### **Related Literature**

Numerous studies of child abuse have been done in the west. Milner, Robertson and Rogers (1990) found that there were no significant correlations between the child abuse potential and gender, age and level of education. Rusell (1983) and Wyatt (1984) found that there is no difference in child abuse potential among different ethnic groups. Smith, Hanson and Noble (1974) also studied the influence of demographic characteristics towards child abuse. Their findings show that families with more children tend to abuse more than the average family. Anna and Helen (1987) conducted a study to identify the personality and intelligence of the parents prone towards child abuse. They found that mothers who tend to abuse were shy, fearful, lacks discipline, self-conflicting and low in self-

control. Bowen (1981) showed that single parents who were satisfied with their life had good relations with their children.

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This study seeks to examine the influence of personality characteristics, demographic characteristics and life satisfaction on child abuse potential. In this study, personality factors, demographic characteristics such as gender, number of children, ethnic background and life satisfaction are the independent variables and child abuse potential is the dependent variable.

#### **Location**

This research was conducted in two Malaysian universities where there were suitable subjects for this research.

#### **Subjects**

In this study 107 married students and staff were selected as research subjects. Subjects were randomly selected according to the ethnic groups in Malaysia.

#### **Instrument**

One set of questionnaire comprise four parts: Part A, consists of respondent's personal particulars; Part B, is The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAP) (Milner, 1990); Part C consists of items in Eysenck Personality Questionnaires (EPS) (Eysenck, 1986) and Part D, consists of items from satisfaction with life scale. The instruments were translated into Malay, according to the procedure suggested by Brislin (1980).

#### **Data Analyses**

The data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science-Extra (SPSS-x) and CAPSCORE computer programs. The two-way ANOVA method was used to compare child abuse potential by personality and gender factors, and by ethnic and gender factors. The Pearson correlation method was used to identify the relationship between number of children in a family and life satisfaction towards child abuse potential. The t-test was used to identify whether there were gender differences in child abuse potential.

### **Results**

Results from two way ANOVA (Tables 1, 2 and 3) show significant differences in child abuse potential

**Table 1** Analysis of Variance Summary

Source of Variation	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-ratio
Personality	28822.55	1	28822.55	8.45*
Gender	12378.73	1	12378.73	2.75
Interaction (Personality x Gender)	23683.19	1	23683.19	6.94*
Error	3514400.00	103	3411.65	
Total	420339.14	106	3965.46	

\*P<0.05

**Table 2** Mean Score of Child Abuse Potential for Personality Factor

Source of Variation	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Introvert	139.60	74.64	43
Extrovert	102.27	48.88	64

N=107

**Table 3** Mean Score of Child Abuse Potential by Personality and Gender

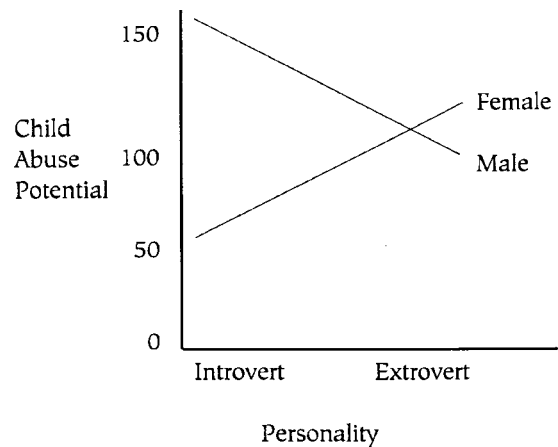
		Gender	
		1 (Male)	2 (Female)
Personality (Introvert)	1	158.79 (29)	99.85 (14)
(Extrovert)	2	100.16 (32)	104.38 (32)

( $F_{(1,103)} = 8.45, p < 0.05$ ) according to personality. The F-ratio test was used to show that introverts (Mean = 139.60) have higher potential in child abuse as compared to extroverts (Mean = 102.27). The results also show that there is a difference in mean score between male and female subjects but was not significant ( $F_{(1,103)} = 2.75, P > 0.05$ ).

Further analyses show an interaction effect of personality factors and gender towards child abuse potential. Figure 1 shows these interactions were significant ( $F_{(1,103)} = 6.94, P < 0.05$ ). These two factors have different effects on child abuse potential.

Results also show that male introverts have higher mean scores on child abuse potential than male extroverts. In contrast, female extroverts scored higher on child abuse potential than the female introverts.

Table 4, 5 and 6 show the results for Two-way ANOVA indicating no significant difference in mean score for child abuse potential between Malay and non-Malay subjects ( $F_{(1,103)} = 0.005, p > 0.05$ ). However, if the ethnic factor is considered the findings show significant differences in mean scores between males and females. F ratio test indicates male (mean = 128.03) has higher potential in child abuse than female (mean = 103.00) (Table 7).



**Figure 1** Interaction Effect between Personality and Gender on Child Abuse Potential

**Table 4** Analysis of Variance Summary

Source of Variation	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-ratio
Ethnic	19.77	1	19.77	0.005
Gender	16349.49	1	16349.49	4.17*
Interaction (Ethnic x Gender)	486.69	1	484.69	0.12
Error	403399.48	103	3916.50	
Total	420339.14	106	3965.46	

\*P<0.05

**Table 5** Mean Score for Child Abuse Potential by Ethnic Groups

Source of Variation	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Malay	118.06	61.58	65
Non-Malay	116.05	65.79	42

N=107

**Table 6** Mean Score for Child Abuse Potential by Ethnic and Gender

		Gender	
		1 (Male)	2 (Female)
Ethnic	1 (Malay)	126.35 (40)	104.80 (25)
	2 (Non-Malay)	131.24 (21)	100.86 (21)

**Table 7** Mean Score of Child Abuse Potential for Male and Female Subjects

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	t
Male	128.03	71.30	61	2.19*
Female	103.00	46.88	46	

N=107

As for the interaction effect, Figure 2 shows ethnic and gender factors show no interaction effect upon child abuse potential ( $F_{(1,103)} = 0.12, p > 0.05$ ). This result shows the ethnic factor is independent of the gender factor in explaining the child abuse potential.

The t-test analysis was used to identify the difference in mean scores between male and female subjects on child abuse potential. Results show that there is significant difference between male and female in child abuse potential ( $t = 2.19, p < 0.05$ ). Males show higher (mean = 128.02) mean scores in child abuse potential than females (mean = 103.00).

To identify the relationship of child abuse potential between life satisfaction and number of children in a family, Pearson correlation analysis was used. The results show significant inverse relation between child abuse potential and life satisfaction. Results also show that the relationship was significant for male subjects, not in female subjects ( $r = -0.21, p > 0.05$ ).

With respect to number of children and child abuse potential factor, the overall results show a weak correlation and is not significant ( $r = 0.03, p > 0.05$ ). Both in male ( $r = 0.04, p < 0.05$ ) and female subjects ( $r = -0.01, p < 0.05$ ), the relationship between number of children and child abuse potential shows weak correlations and are not significant.

## Discussion

The results of this study show that there were differences in child abuse potential between extroverts and introverts. The findings suggest that introverts tend to have suppressed feelings, antisocial, isolated, fearful and worry, easily upset and hurt, apathy, and low self-esteem.

These findings corroborate Even's study (1980), which also found that abusive mothers have low self-concept, tend to feel nervous and apathetic if compared to normal mothers. These findings also support previous studies which show that abusers tend to isolate themselves (Spinetta, 1987; Milner and Wimberley, 1980).

As for the ethnic factor, results show that there is no significant difference in child abuse potential between the Malay and non-Malay. Thus, the results also imply that the ethnic factor is not important to identify the child abuse potential. Every ethnic group has the potential for abuse.

This findings do not support most of the local studies which show that there is a difference among Malay, Chinese and Indian in child abuse potential (Abdul Ramlan Sanusi, 1987; Mohd. Sham Kasim, Haliza Mohd. Shafie; Irene Cheah, 1994 and Gunasegeram, 1993). Milner's study (1976) also shows that there is difference between different ethnic (White and Black) groups in United States in child abuse potential.

This study also indicates the significant difference

between males and females on child abuse potential, and the results found that males have a higher potential than females.

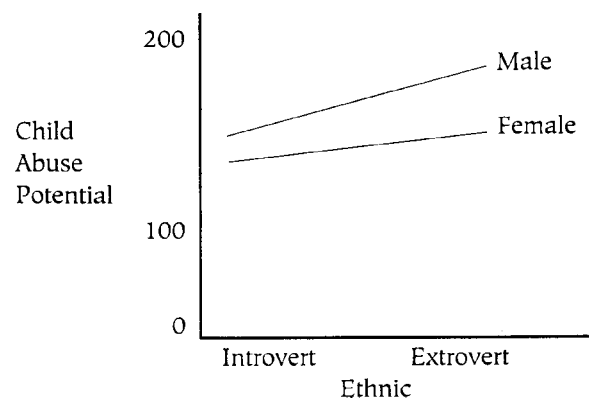
The findings is parallel with Creiston's (1979) study based on those who have case records of abuse and normal people. The potential for males is higher than females. This can be explained by the typical male attitude of being more aggressive, likes to fight or competitive and dominant. Although, the findings of this study do not corroborate Milner et al. (1990) and Nealex (1992) studies on the abuse potential in the two sexes, it is perhaps due to the difference in role, responsibility and stress of life in the western and eastern societies.

The findings also indicate that there is no significant relation between number of children and child abuse potential. This result also implies that number of children could play a minor role in child abuse potential.

The results of this study supports Hunlock's study (1973), suggesting that family size or number of children in a family is not a factor in child abuse. However, Newberger, Reed, Demel, Hyde and Roteschudk (1977) and Staur (1982), show that families involved in abuse have more children.

Indeed, there are many studies which show that families involved in abuse have quite a number of children if compared to average families (Altermeier, Viets, Shemed, Sander, Falser and O'Commor, 1979; Smith, Hanson and Noble, 1974; Gil, 1970; Straus, Gelles and Steinmets, 1980). No firm conclusions can be drawn yet based on these studies.

The findings on the relation between child abuse potential and life satisfaction imply that those who are satisfied with their lives are lower in abuse potential than those who are not satisfied with their lives. The significant relation between life satisfaction and abuse potential, for males and not for females suggest that life satisfaction is not important in identifying the child abuse potential for females.



**Figure 2** Interaction Effect Between Personality and Gender Factor on Child Abuse Potential

The results appear to support a study by Kirkham et al. (1986), which shows that those not satisfied with life, tends towards abuse. Bowen (1981), also indicates that single parent who are satisfied with life have good relations with their kids.

The present study also shows that there is significant relation between personality and gender factors towards child abuse potential. The effect also shows that both factors interact in child abuse potential. The relationship between gender and personality, show that introverts has higher potential for child abuse than extroverts. Female extroverts have higher potential for child abuse than female introverts.

On the relationship between ethnic and gender, the results indicate no interaction for ethnic and gender factors towards child abuse potential. The ethnic factor is independent of the child abuse potential.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, personality, gender and life satisfaction factors do have some influence on child abuse potential. However number of children and ethnicity do not have a major influence. The factors that influence the child abuse potential are not isolated, but interact with other factors. In other words, no single factor can explain an individual's potential for child abuse.

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