

HD 497 Lecture 2 – Historical Overview

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HD 300 Child Abuse & Neglect

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Unit 2

Historical Overview of Child Abuse and Neglect

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In this unit, we are going to discuss child abuse from historical standpoint.

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Historical View of Children

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- Historically, children were viewed as property of their fathers.
 - *Patria Postestas* – ownership of children
 - Patriarchy – Fathers were the boss
- Until the early 20th century, children were viewed and treated as little adults.

[Audio]

Historically children were viewed as property of their fathers and the term for this, the ancient Roman term is *patria postestas*, which equates to ownership of children and fathers were thought to own their children and their wives and therefore they could do anything they wanted with them. The *patria postestas* idea is still present in some families and societies. That is, fathers have all the rights, women and children are considered lower class citizens and have few or any privileges.

Another that refers to this same idea is patriarchy and this is a more familiar term in the United States. That is, fathers are not only the head of the family, but when we start considering abusive issues, fathers are the boss, the ultimate boss and children are expected to obey without question.

Patriarchy is the norm in many U.S. families and families in other societies too and it is also associated with more punity of parenting and corporal punishment is more common in these families.

Historically and until the near past, children were viewed as little adults and were expected to take on adult responsibilities. Children worked in coal mines, clothing factories, various industrial mills and were hired out as farmworkers and household help. Later in the semester, we will explore present-day child labor and exploitation.

Early paintings of children show them with adult-like body proportions and faces and they were dressed exactly like their parents, even down to the bustels worn by little girls. Now we have

Weeboks, designer jeans and leather jackets for babies. Perhaps, we haven't come so far after all.

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Justification for Abuse

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- Maintain discipline
- Transmit educational ideas
- Please certain gods
- Expel evil spirits
- Religious beliefs and practices
- Political agendas.

[Audio]

Justification for abuse in the past, that is, why is it okay to abuse children.

The first is to maintain discipline. We can think of that both historically and in present-day time. To transmit educational ideas. Picture the very strict headmaster with a ruler in his hand who went along the aisles hitting children around their knuckles and on their heads.

Child abuse was justified to please certain gods. In fact, children were often sacrificed to gods.

To excel evil spirits – we have heard that even in present-day newscasts of parents who thought their child was possessed and they did all kinds of things to try and get rid of the evil spirit and it was very abusive and even sometimes caused the death of their child.

Religious beliefs and practices were often abusive to children and there are some religious believes even in this day and age that are abusive to children.

And political agendas. Probably, the most notorious of those was the reign of Hitler where children were captured and used for scientific experiments – Jewish children.

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Mutilation – Male Circumcision

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- Most common operation performed
- Pros
 - Cleanliness
 - Prevents phimosis
 - Prevents need for circumcision later on
- Cons
 - Hemorrhage or infection
 - Scarring
 - May reduce sexual satisfaction

[Audio]

Mutilation is also a form of child abuse. We are going to be discussing male circumcision to begin with, but mutilation was and still is commonly practiced. Mutilation refers to any alteration of the body and it may range from piercing a child's ear to amputating a limb. Though certain practices are socially acceptable, medically they can still be classified as mutilation.

Male circumcision is the most common operation performed in United States. Early in the 20th century, 90 percent of baby boys were circumcised. That rate began dropping in the early 70s to a rate of about 58 to 65 percent by the late 70s. The reason – it was argued that there was no medical purpose in circumcising boys and therefore it could be viewed as abusive. However, during the Vietnam war where young men were often in swampy areas and unable to bathe, increasing numbers of these young men needed to be circumcised because of infections and other complications.

Some of the pros for circumcising. It promotes cleanliness, prevents phimosis. Phimosis is the tightening of the foreskin and it is another reason that men are circumcised in adulthood. This is a more complication and uncomfortable procedure than if it were performed in infancy.

Circumcision in infancy then prevents the need for circumcision later on. Some of the cons or side effects of circumcision while rare, can happen and they include hemorrhage or infection, scarring, and in some cases, because of scarring or other complications, may reduce sexual satisfaction.

Circumcision is uncommon in Northern Europe, Central and South America and Asia. Canada only has a 25 percent rate of circumcision. However some immigrants circumcise their boys who are born in the United States. When I was working in Labor and Delivery Room in my previous career, we had a patient come in and she was from China and she delivered her baby in our hospital and she did not know what the procedure was. So, she was shown a circumcised infant alongside a noncircumcised baby boy and she was very excited to have her little son circumcised. Even though her husband wasn't there, she didn't care what he thought, she wanted her baby circumcised. So, one of the things though as far as having their infant circumcised is that if parents want to do this and the pendulum now has swung back to doing more circumcisions again because of later complications is parents should request that the doctor's use a local anesthetic on their baby.

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Female Genital Mutilation

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- Estimated 2 million each year
- In 1993, WHO called for its elimination
- Some immigrants to the U.S. request a "ceremonial" version of circumcision for their female infants.

[Audio]

Now, we have talked about male circumcision. Now, let's talk about female genital mutilation or also called female circumcision. There is an estimated 2 million girls every year, younger than