

ATTITUDES & AWARENESS TO CHILD ABUSE

of 40 Greek second year university students and their parents and 40 Greek early school leavers and their parents in Melbourne

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of child abuse was unexplored in Greece until the late 1970's when the legal, social and medical professions became aware of the growing problem which resulted in the passing of a new law. Studies on child abuse are almost non-existent at present.¹ Maroulis claimed that corporal punishment in the Greek culture can be perceived as an acceptable way of shaping a child's behaviour.² As yet there is very little, if any, research undertaken in Australia on Greek people and their awareness to child abuse.³ Masselos's 1981 account of the Greek Community in Brisbane cites only three cases of child abuse as having occurred.⁴ This account cannot be viewed as indicating a low prevalence. Education is regarded as one of the essential factors in making people aware of the problem of child abuse and teaching them what the needs and the requirements of children are.^{5,6,7} Two of the three authors of the present study are from the Greek community, and were most concerned to ascertain the sensitivity to child abuse in the largest ethnic community in Melbourne. This study was undertaken in the year of the campaign "When Love is Not Enough" was launched, 1982. In this study 240 subjects, 40 Greek second year university students and their parents and 40 Greek early school leavers and their parents were given a questionnaire to fill out. The question-

naire contained questions of awareness, attitudes and opinions to child abuse. The aim was to see whether these selected samples of Greek people in Victoria were aware of the problem of child abuse.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL COMMENTS ON CHILD ABUSE

In the past the rights of children have not been given much consideration, they have been subjected to cruelty, they have been maligned and mistreated, both physically and emotionally. The human species moved legislation to protect animals from abuse before they did for their own offspring, failing to realise or admit to the fact that children around them were being hurt by parents and other adults.

Multiple bone breaks in children attracted the attention of American radiologists in the forties and fifties, followed by reports of "unrecognised trauma".^{8, 9, 10, 11} All these reports and observations sparked off an interest in child abuse. However, it was not until 1961 that Kempe coined the phrase – "the battered child syndrome" – that professional interest and awareness developed, spilling over into the domain of the general public.^{12, 13, 14, 15} Different western countries became sensitized to child abuse at differing times.

Child abuse is now recognized as an international problem. Sadly, in certain cultures, child abuse is classed as a legitimate socializing agent.¹⁶ It has been claimed by many that violence has been part of the child rearing practices and attitudes held by different cultures and that different social and economic strata of society and different ethnic and nationality groups tend to differ for various reasons in their child rearing philosophies and practices. Consequently, in the extent to which they

approve of corporal punishment of children.^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.}

A review of literature on child abuse revealed that inadequate child-rearing practices on the part of the parent as being one of the leading causes of child abuse and neglect.^{23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.} Inadequate child rearing was seen as the inability of the parent to understand the basis of child development and to cope with the normal demands of parenting.^{29.}

There was general agreement from the literature cited above that abusive parents have unrealistic expectations of their children. In a study of three hundred families it was reported that abusive parents viewed their children as 'bad'.³⁰ The parents were thus not providing the love and nurturance the child needed. The prevailing attitude can best be summed up in a common parental expression, "Children should be seen and not heard". It has been thought that parents should have the right to raise their children without interference; this right also implied the right to impose discipline in whatever way they felt necessary.³¹

Gil claimed that the factor that influences all instances of physical abuse, and upon which all other contributory factors are superimposed appears to be a general culturally determined permissive attitude toward the use of physical force in caretaker-child interaction.³²

The approval of a certain measure of physical force as a legitimate and appropriate educational and socializing technique was endemic to American culture.³³ Gil further observed also that different ethnic groups, because of differences in their history, experiences and specific cultural traditions, seem to hold different views and seem to have evolved different practices concerning the use of physical force in child rearing.³⁴ Child rearing practices viewed as

acceptable by one group, may be viewed as unacceptable and even abusive and neglectful by another.^{35, 36.}

Specific Focus Pertaining to the Present Study

The phenomenon of child abuse in Greece has only recently become the target for research. The authors found no systematic studies in this field were carried out before 1978.

Tsiandis, Kokkevi and Maroulis carried out a study of parents in lower socio-economic groups which was aimed at demonstrating some of the features of the child abuse syndrome as it is presented in Greece today.³⁷ They found that where child abuse was present, the parental abusive behaviour was characterized by severe physical maltreatment which seemed to be related with their (parental) impulsive personalities. However, they go on to say that methods of child rearing may also play a part in this behaviour.^{38,39}

Greek parents' expectations are quite high. They expect obedience, respect, love and financial help to the parents when needed and for the children to become educated and useful citizens.⁴⁰ The child's role is to honour and respect his parents, to play a responsible part in the family's daily life by assisting with appropriate chores and to preserve the family's sense of honour and pride through appropriate behaviour in public. A principle expectation of Greek parents is that the child obeys.⁴¹ Greek parents have a strong commitment to children in the form of caring, loving, nurturing and protection, at times even to the point of over protection.

No reported research in the area of awareness and attitudes to child abuse within the Greek population in Australia could be traced. There is, however, a similarity in the composition of the American society and the Australian society. Both societies are made up of different cultural groups, each of which contribute to the differing child rearing practices and attitudes to child abuse. The most prominent cultural sub-group in the Australian society is the southern European, which is made up of Italian, Greek, Yugoslavian and Turkish migrants.^{42.}

Education is regarded as one of the essential factors in making people aware of child abuse.^{43,44,45.} Mathews also argued that education is a big factor in helping people become aware of the problem of child abuse and teaching them what the needs and requirements of children are.⁴⁶ People with a college degree were more aware of child abuse than people without college degrees.⁴⁷ In the Tsiandis, Kokkevi and Maroulis study, most of the parents had low IQ

scores and came from lower socio-economic groups and were poorly educated.⁴⁸ It is not clear how these three different variables were interrelated, for example someone might have been poorly educated due to circumstances but now have a low IQ score and so on.

Although there has been a general increase in awareness to child abuse in Australia⁴⁷ (the increase in notifications of suspected cases is indicative of this rise in community awareness), there is, however, no information on whether Greeks and in particular Greeks in Australia have become aware of such a problem. What is known, however, is that the general population of Greeks who migrated to Australia particularly during the mid-late fifties have come from a rural background with very limited education, usually not having completed primary school. They have very high expectations of their children and expect them to obey and respect their wishes to do well at school. It might be hypothesized that, a high proportion of Greek parents in Australia would be unaware of the major problem of child abuse.

The aim of this study was firstly, to see whether the selected sample of Greek people in Melbourne, Victoria, were aware of the problem of child abuse and secondly, to see whether those families who have been exposed to tertiary education will be more aware and hold different attitudes to child abuse as compared to those families who have not been exposed to tertiary education.

METHOD

Subjects

All the Greek young adults had been born in Australia, while both parents had been born in Greece and had lived in Australia for 20 - 25 years.

A total of 240 Greek subjects participated in this study. The first group, forty Greek second year university students (20 males and 20 females) and their parents (40 mothers and 40 fathers). The second group consisted of 40 Greek early school leavers (20 males and 20 females) and their parents (40 mothers and 40 fathers).

The education level of the 80 parents who had children attending university was very diverse. Sixty-one had a primary school education, 13 had attended some part of secondary school, three had completed secondary school, two had a tertiary education, and one had a trade certificate. The 80 parents of the early school leavers, divided into the following categories: 74 had attended primary school, five had attended secondary school, only one had completed secondary school.

The mean age for Greek university

students was 19.7 years and for the early school leavers 20.35 years. Further the mean age for the parents of the university students was 48.45 and for the parents of the early school leavers 47.9 years.

The sample was predominantly Greek Orthodox in affiliation.

Assessment Questionnaire

The questionnaire constructed by the National Opinion Research Council of Chicago, 1965, was translated into Greek. The questionnaire was designed to tap attitudes, public awareness and opinions on child abuse.

Procedure

The Standardized instruction format was given to the parents and children in their homes in both Greek and English and the questionnaire simultaneously administered to everyone at once, thus controlling for cross discussion, and ensuring individual responses, rather than group opinions.

The Greek young adults all preferred to complete the questionnaire in English while their parents all preferred to complete the questionnaire in Greek. The results were collated and analyzed.

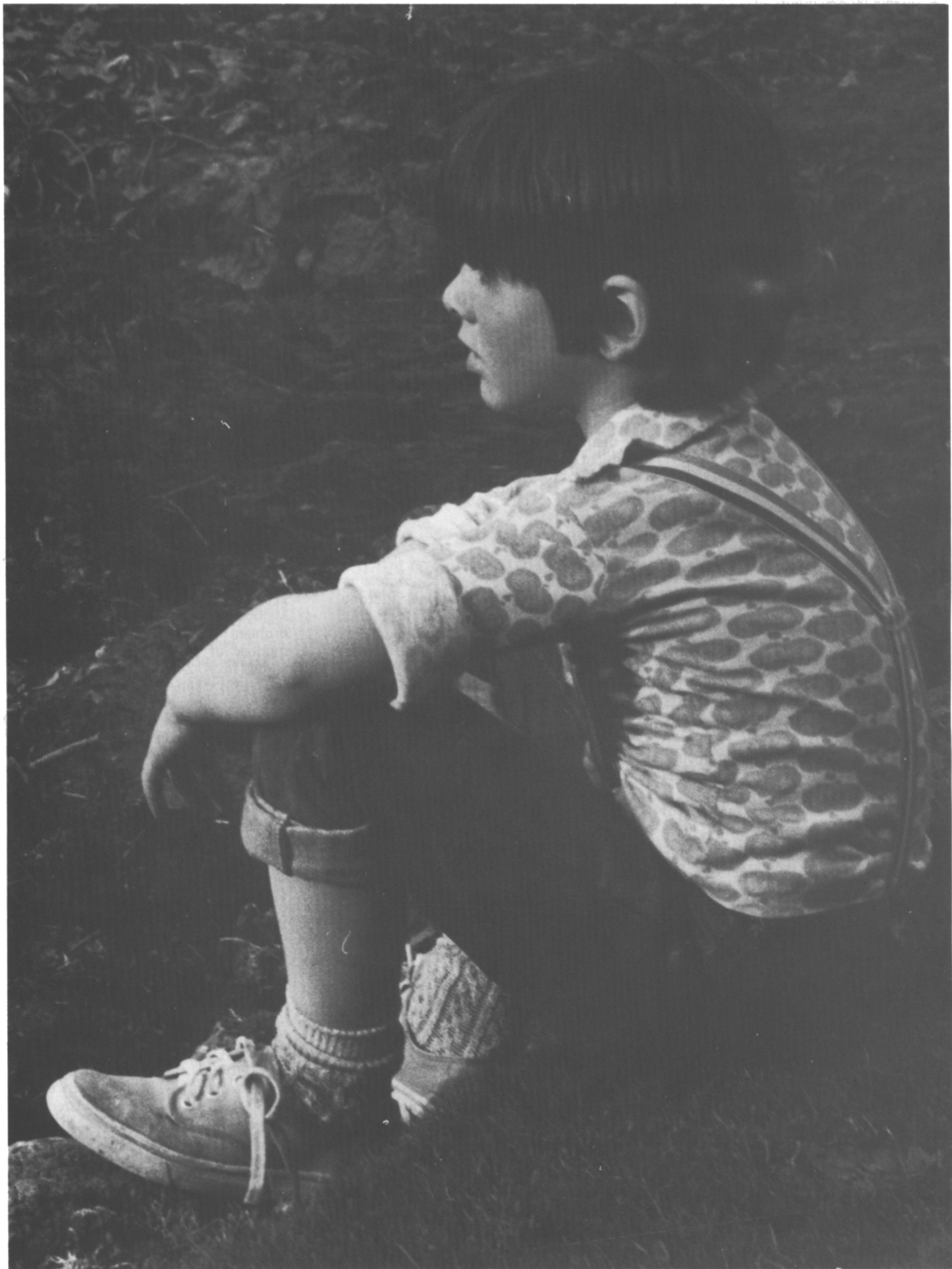
DISCUSSION

In general Greek people sampled in Melbourne, Australia, were aware of the problem of child abuse. Of the total number of subjects employed in this study ($n = 240$), approximately 70% ($n = 168$) claimed that they were aware of child abuse. However a significantly higher proportion of the university students and their parents were found to be more aware of child abuse and of educational programmes and local agencies dealing with the problem as compared with the early school leavers. Of the university students ($n = 40$) all except two of the students were aware of child abuse. Just over half of the early school leavers were aware ($n = 120$).

Seventy percent ($n = 168$) of the participants claimed that they were aware of child abuse. See Table 1.

However, a significantly higher proportion of university students and their parents 91.67% ($n = 110$) were found to be aware of child abuse than early school leavers and their parents 51.67% ($n = 62$). Early school leavers 62.5% ($n = 25$) said they were aware of child abuse while 97.5% ($n = 39$) of university students were. The parents of University students 88.75% ($n = 71$) said they were aware while only 46.25% ($n = 37$) of the parents of early school leavers said they were.

Early school leavers 62.5% ($n = 25$) compared with their parents 46.25% ($n = 37$) said they were aware of child abuse. University students 97.5% ($n = 39$) stated that they were aware of child



abuse, while 88.75% (n = 71) of their parents were aware.

There was no significant difference between the early school leavers and their parents; and the university student and their parents.

Attitudes

The results obtained from questions dealing with attitudes to child abuse are presented in percentage form as the data does not permit a chi square analysis.

The general trends that are observed are:

- * The university students and their parents follow similar trends while the early school leavers and their parents match each other also.
- * The early school leavers and their parents recorded a larger number of responses in the category 'don't know' than the university students and their parents.
- * Parents of early school leavers record a larger number of responses in the category 'don't know' than the early school leavers.

University students and their parents replying to, "What should be done with children who had suffered injuries inflicted by their parents or others caring for them?" felt that children should be removed from their homes as a last resort and that parents should be supervised and helped in the care of their children; while the early school leavers and their parents felt if it seemed unlikely that the person who injured the child would do it again it would be alright to leave the child in the person's care.

University students and their parents felt parents or others who had injured a child should be closely supervised and treated rather than be supervised (Question 14). The early school leavers and their parents varied in their response.

Sixty percent of the university students and their parents felt that the primary responsibility for dealing with the whole problem of child abuse should be that of social welfare agencies whereas the early school leavers and their families varied their responses, ranging from law enforcement, social welfare, and medical agencies.

Fifty-seven percent (n = 68) of university students and their parents and 36.67% (n = 44) of early school leavers and their parents thought they would notify a welfare agency if a child in their neighbourhood had been physically injured. In contrast 41% (n = 49) of the early school leavers and their families, and 10% (n = 12) of university students and their parents felt they had no business in interfering.

Sixty percent (n = 72) of university students and their parents said they would try to stop the person somehow and protect the child from being in-

TABLE 1
AWARENESS QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 10:		
	<i>During the past year, that is, since last June, have you heard or read anything about the general problem of child abuse by parents or others caring for them?</i>		
	% YES	% NO	χ^2
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their parents	52	48	**
Early School Leavers versus University Students	63	37	**
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	46	54	**
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	46	54	
University Students' Parents versus University Students	89	11	
	63	37	
	89	11	
	97	3	
<div style="text-align: right;"> d.f. = 1 ** χ^2 .01 = 6.6 * χ^2 .05 = 3.8 </div>			

TABLE 2
AWARENESS QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 29:		
	<i>During the past year have you heard or read any specific incidents anywhere, in which children were physically injured or even killed by their parents or other persons caring for them?</i>		
	% YES	% NO	χ^2
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their parents	33	67	**
Early School Leavers versus University Students	25	75	**
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	85	15	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	36	64	**
University Students' Parents versus University Students	74	26	
	36	64	
	25	75	
	74	26	
	85	15	
<div style="text-align: right;"> d.f. = 1 ** χ^2 .01 = 6.6 * χ^2 .05 = 3.8 </div>			

jured, while only 38.33% (n = 46) of the early school leavers responded to this category. Early school leavers and their parents (35%) (n = 42) responded to the category 'don't know' while only 5.83% (n = 7) of the university students and their parents responded to this category.

Eighty percent (n = 96) of the university students and their parents claimed that they had read or heard about specific incidents of child abuse (Table 2) while only 30% (n = 36) of the early school leavers and their parents had. See Table 2.

Further the majority of subjects 90% (n = 216) had heard of more than two incidents of child abuse in the past year. See Table 3.

The parents of the university students and the students were shown to have a similar level of awareness and attitudes to child abuse. The parents of the university students and the parents of the early school leavers were very similar in terms of age, occupational status and attained level of education. The present investigation cannot pinpoint the reasons for the differences in the parental results. One might speculate that the parents of the university students had a different attitude to and motivation to education than that of the parents of the early school leavers. Could this difference account for these results?

To Question 28, Table 4, 60% (n = 144) of responses of all subjects (n = 240) indicated that they were not acquainted with an agency in their community that could be called upon to protect children in incidents where someone caring for the child had injured or harmed the child.

This highlights the need for dissemination of information in agencies available to this particular community. One would think of using Greek newspapers and multicultural television broadcast as the most effective means. See Table 4.

For Question 24, Table 5 concerning the awareness of educational programmes or activities dealing with child abuse, once again a higher proportion of university students and their parents were found to be more aware than the early school leavers and their parents. This finding has implications for treatment and prevention. There is knowledge of child abuse at a level higher than knowledge of programmes and activities dealing with child abuse; and ways of preventing child abuse. This data was collected in 1982, the year that saw the launching of "When Love is Not Enough" in the press, radio and television. This is rather a distressing state of affairs. One might choose to remedy the situation by using the media available to this community. Further, it is interesting to note that Channel 0/28, "the multicultural channel", was

TABLE 3
AWARENESS QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 30:		
	1	2 - 5	5+
	%	%	%
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their parents	8	72	20
Early School Leavers versus University Students	0	80	20
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	10	69	21
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	10	69	21
University Students' Parents versus University Students	2	80	18
	6	68	26

d.f = 2
** χ^2 .01 = 9.2
* χ^2 .05 = 5.9

TABLE 4
AWARENESS QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 28:		
	% YES	% NO	χ^2
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their parents	15	85	*
Early School Leavers versus University Students	23	77	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	11	89	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	11	89	
Early School Leavers versus University Student's Parents	23	77	
University Student's Parents versus University Students	23	77	**
	40	60	

d.f = 1
** χ^2 .01 = 6.6
* χ^2 .05 = 3.8

not involved with the "When Love is Not Enough" campaign. See Table 5.

Opinions

To the question "Do you think that almost anyone could at sometime injure a child in his care?" 23% (n = 27) of the early school leavers and their parents replied "Yes" whereas 43% (n = 51) of the university students and their parents gave the same reply. The university students gave a significantly higher affirmative response to this question than their parents. See Table 6.

For the Question "Do you feel that you yourself might possible injure a child at sometime?" 40% (n = 16) of the university students and 73% (n = 58) of their parents answered "no".

Could it be that the university students are more insightful than their parents, and more in touch with the possibility that they might possibly injure a child at some time? Perhaps the parents knew their own reactions more, through experience. See Table 7.

No significant group differences were found to the responses of the question "Was there ever a time when you could hardly keep yourself from injuring a child in your care?" +78% (n = 187) of the total subject population replied negatively to this question. See Table 8.

To the question "Do you think that such incidents should be given a lot of publicity, some publicity, or should they be kept quiet?" the majority of subjects felt that a lot to "some" publicity should be given to incidents of child abuse. This then should be the lead for the relevant media for this group to feel comfortable to publicizing such information. See Table 9.

Direct Question

To the following direct question, Table 10 "Did you ever lose control of yourself or injure a child?" the majority of all respondents gave a negative answer. There were no significant differences between university students and their parents and the early school leavers and their parents. We speculate that respondents were sensitive to research and the implication of answering this question in the affirmative. See Table 10.

The same lack of significant differences between these groups was evident (Table 11) in their reply to "Did you personally know any families involved in these incidents?" The university group reported 32 incidents and the early school leavers reported 29 incidents that they had personally known. See Table 11.

Table 12 "Did you personally know any families involved in a specific incident at some time in the past?" (30% (n = 36) of the university students and their parents responded in the affirmative while only 13% (n = 16) of the early school leavers and their families

TABLE 5
AWARENESS QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 24:		
	% YES	% NO	χ^2
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their parents	13	87	**
Early School leavers versus University Students	18	82	*
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	18	82	**
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	18	82	
University Students' Parents versus University Students	43	57	

d.f = 1
** $\chi^2 .01 = 6.6$
* $\chi^2 .05 = 3.5$



gave a similar reply. The university students as compared with the early school leavers, and the early school leavers as compared with their parents reported significantly a higher incidence of personally knowing families in specific incidents of child abuse. See Table 12.

Sources of General Information and Specific Incidents of Child Abuse.

The majority of subjects claimed that their awareness to child abuse was made possible either through the media or through conversation with friends and neighbours. University students also claimed that school was another source, while the non-university students claimed that awareness was made possible through their work. Of the parents, most claimed that their awareness to child abuse was made through Greek newspapers and periodicals. Overall approximately 95% of the subjects claimed that they were made aware of incidents of child abuse claimed that they were made aware of incidents of child abuse through the television and through newspapers. There was only a handful of subjects who said that awareness was made possible through social service agencies and hospital and medical organizations. It is thus apparent which is the most-powerful media to be used for education and prevention.

Participation in any Educational Programme or Activity Dealing with Child Abuse.

Of the total 240 subjects only one subject claimed that she had participated in an education programme dealing with child abuse. This clearly is an area that would require immediate attention and remediation.

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**TABLE 6
OPINION QUESTION**

GROUPS	Question 18:			
	<i>We'll just repeat once more what we mean by <u>child abuse</u> — that is when an adult physically injures a child in his care, either deliberately or because he lost his temper. Do you think that almost anyone could at some time injure a child in his care?</i>			
	YES 1 NO 2 DON'T KNOW 3			
	% YES	% NO	% Don't Know	X ²
Early School Leavers and their Parents versus University Students and their Parents	23	56	23	**
Early School Leavers versus University Students	22	56	22	**
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	24	52	24	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	24	52	24	
Early School Leavers versus University Students' Parents	22	56	22	
University Students' Parents versus University Students	35	51	14	*
	60	23	17	
d.f. = 2 ** X ² .01 = 0.2 * X ² .05 = 5.9				

**TABLE 7
OPINION QUESTION**

GROUPS	Question 19:			
	<i>Do you think that you yourself might possibly injure a child at some time?</i>			
	YES 1 NO 2 DON'T KNOW 3			
	% YES	% NO	% Don't Know	X ²
Early School Leavers and their Parents versus University Students and their Parents	17	62	21	
Early School Leavers versus University Students	22	56	22	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	15	65	20	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	15	65	20	
Early School Leavers versus University Students' Parents	22	56	22	
University Students' Parents versus University Students	11	73	16	**
	33	40	27	
d.f. = 2 ** X ² .01 = 9.2 * X ² .05 = 5.9				

There are a few problems that may have affected the results thus affecting the conclusions made. The subjects, particularly the parents, may have been reluctant to answer the questions. This was made obvious when the parents would often ask the experimenter whether they had to answer certain questions. The extent and degree of child abuse proved to be a further problem. According to Giovannini any definition of child abuse is inadequate if it does not include the general population's perception of child abuse. Despite the numerous definitions of child abuse, none seem to cover the complexity of a multicultural society.⁶⁵

Melbourne, Victoria, has one of the largest Greek communities in the world. This population is derived from both urban and rural backgrounds, forming a non homogeneous group with respect to attitudes to child abuse and child rearing practices. The findings of this study are only pertinent to the sampled respondents under consideration, further large scale research along similar lines would provide accurate generalisations.

In conclusion, there is scope for research into the changing patterns of child rearing, as influenced by exposure to the host culture and the implications these findings would have for the helping profession.

TABLE 8
OPINION QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 20:		
	<i>Was there ever a time when you could hardly keep yourself from injuring a child in your care?</i>		
	YES 1 NO 2		
	% YES	% NO	X ²
Early School Leavers and their Parents versus University Students and their Parents	7	93	**
Early School Leavers versus University Students	2	98	*
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	9	91	*
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers	2	28	
University Students' Parents versus University Students	22	78	
	20	80	

** X² d.f = 1
* X² .01 = 6.6
* X² .05 = 3.8



TABLE 9
OPINION QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 23:			
	<i>Do you think that such incidents should be given a lot of publicity, some publicity, or should they be kept quiet?</i>			
	A LOT OF PUBLICITY 1 SOME PUBLICITY 2 KEPT QUIET 3 DON'T KNOW 4			
	%Lot	%Some	%Quiet	%Don't Know
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their Parents	19	57	22	2
Early School Leavers versus University Students	23	75	2	0
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	18	47	31	4
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	36	43	11	10
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	18	47	31	4
Early School Leavers versus University Students' Parents	23	75	2	0
University Students' Parents versus University Students	36	43	11	10
University Students	50	50	0	0

TABLE 10
DIRECT QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 21:	
	<i>Did you ever actually lose control of yourself and injure a child?</i>	
	YES 1	NO 2
	% YES	% NO
Early School leavers and their parents versus University Students and their Parents	5	95
Early School Leavers versus University Students	0	100
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	7	93
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	12	87
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	7	93
Early School Leavers versus University Students' Parents	0	100
University Students' Parents versus University Students	12	87
University Students	0	100

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TABLE 11
DIRECT QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 32:	
	<i>Did you personally know any of the families involved in these incidents?</i>	
	YES 1	NO 2
	% YES	% NO
Early School leavers and their Parents versus University Students and their Parents	21	79
Early School Leavers versus University Students	10	90
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	24	76
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School leavers	24	76
University Students' Parents versus University Students	20	80
University Students' Parents versus University Students	20	80
University Students	26	74

TABLE 12
DIRECT QUESTION

GROUPS	Question 33:		
	<i>Did you personally know any family involved in a specific incident at some time in the past?</i>		
	YES 1	NO 2	
	% YES	% NO	X ²
Early School Leavers and their Parents versus University Students and their Parents	13	87	**
Early School Leavers versus University Students	2	98	* *
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Students' Parents	19	81	
Early School Leavers' Parents versus Early School Leavers' Parents	19	81	*
Early School Leavers' Parents versus University Student's Parents	2	98	
University Student's Parents versus University Students	26	74	
University Students	37	63	

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