

**AN EVALUATION OF THE SELF CONCEPTS  
OF CHILD ABUSERS**

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OF CHILD ABUSERS

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An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Mary Jo Anderson

June 1978



## ABSTRACT

America deems itself a "child oriented" society and yet allows her children to be beaten and sometimes maimed by their parents or parent surrogates without serious repercussion. This deliberate battering of children has come to be known as "child abuse."

The need to identify characteristics of child abusers is imperative not only to prevent further abuse but to thwart battering by potential abusers.

The present study was designed to investigate the self concepts of abusive parents. Using the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS), a comparison was made between abusive parents and the normative population used by Fitts (1965).

The sample was composed of service members and their spouses who were reported for abuse of children in their care, and subsequently remanded to Social Work Services at Fort Campbell Army Hospital, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Ages of this group ranged from 17 to 65 years. The population included several races and ethnic backgrounds.

Analysis of variance resulted in significant differences at the .01 level between abusive (active and passive) parents and non-abusive parents on the

eight scales examined in this study. The results indicated that self concepts of abusive parents (active and passive) are significantly lower than those of non-abusers. The self concept could be a possible indicator of abusers or potential abusers.



To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Mary Jo Anderson entitled "An Evaluation of the Self Concepts of Child Abusers." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

William D. Danner-Mace  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

John D. Martin  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express sincere gratitude to Dr. William Dannenmaier for his invaluable guidance throughout this project. I also express my appreciation to Dr. Linda B. Rudolph and Dr. John D. Martin for their assistance and genuine caring.

I wish to render sincere thanks to all the people of the Social Work Service at Fort Campbell, Kentucky for their cooperation and support during this study.

I wish to give a very special thanks to my husband and best friend, Robert, who has given me the support, courage and loving chiding needed to aspire to greater personal growth.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Externally America appears to be a "child oriented" society, yet children are beaten and sometimes maimed by their parents or parent surrogates without serious repercussion. This deliberate battering of children has come to be known as "child abuse." In the past decade we have come to realize that child abuse in this country is at epidemic proportions (Kempe et al., 1962; Gil, 1970; Patti & Bereleman, 1976)

Maltreatment of children is not a new phenomenon. Since antiquity parents in many societies have had the right to do as they desire in regard to their children. This right was rooted in the belief that severe physical punishment was necessary either to maintain discipline, to transmit educational ideas or for the sake of religious beliefs e.g., to please the gods or to expel evil spirits.

This parental right was incorporated into ancient laws. The Code of Hammurabi, 2150 B.C., allowed a father to sell or exchange his child in payment for a debt. Infanticide of unwanted children or children with birth defects was also permitted. Ancient Hebrew law provided that persistently disobedient children be put to death. The Roman law of *Patria Protestas* gave fathers the right

to decide whether their newborns should live. Also the Christian Bible condoned the severe physical punishment of children: "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Christianity resulted in the reduction of infanticide. The Christian ethic allowed for vigorous punishment of children but forbade breaking of their bones. Christians were considered odd for their opposition to infanticide (DeMause, 1975).

In addition to the killing and severe punishment throughout history, various forms of mutilation have been endured by children as part of religious and ethnic traditions (DeMause, 1975). Ritual surgery has included castration to produce eunuchs or singers, foot-binding for female children in China, wrapping the neck with wire, splitting the lips and nose by certain cultures in Africa, tattooing and cranial binding done by North American Indians (Lindquist, 1976). In every age, there has been the deliberate defiguration of children's bones and faces to prepare them for a life of begging (DeMause, 1975).

The first reported case of child abuse in the United States occurred in 1874. Nurse Etta Wheeler was notified that a child was being maltreated. Investigating the report she found the child, Mary Ellen, chained to the bed in her parent's apartment. The child had been beaten and was pitifully undernourished. There was no law to protect the child and no agency to intervene, thus nurse Wheeler found her efforts to help frustrated. In desperation she implored the aid of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. She contended that the child was an animal and being treated worse than the lowest of animals. Such treatment qualified Mary Ellen for the Society's protection.

The following year the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established. Not many cases were reported until after 1946 when an article by John Caffey, a radiologist, questioned the frequency of subdural hemotoma in infants who also showed past fractures of other bones. Caffey offered a tentative explanation of possible child abuse and neglect to account for the phenomenon. In the early sixties Dr. Kempe became suspect of the great number of children admitted to his pediatric service at Colorado General Hospital, who were suffering from non-accidental injury.



He proposed the term "battered child syndrome" to describe the clinical conditions of children who had received serious physical abuse. He undertook a nationwide survey of 71 hospitals and 77 District Attorneys and identified 749 children who had been victims of child abuse in a one year period. Of these children, 78 had died and 114 suffered permanent brain damage. The results of this survey brought to light the seriousness of this problem. The resultant findings spawned acceptance of parental mistreatment as a pervasive cause of the "battered child syndrome."

The actual incidence of child abuse has been and continues to be very difficult to determine. Accurate statistics are not available because a high percentage of abuse cases are not recognized or reported. At a 1973 Congressional hearing, the estimate of child abuse in the United States was 60,000 cases annually (Patti & Berelemen, 1976). It was widely accepted that this figure represented only the tip of the iceberg and many cases go unreported. The incidence of child abuse in the Philadelphia school population was surveyed by Lynch in 1975. She found that of every 10 cases of child abuse known to school authorities, only one had been reported to appropriate authorities. If this

disparity between known and reported cases of child abuse exists in the remainder of the nation, the actual incidence may be extremely high.

It should be noted that the direct murder of children and incest are normally excluded from child abuse reports. The United States Crime Report cited 615 murders of children by their parents in 1975. In this report, aggravated assault is defined as an unlawful attack upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily harm. Parental assaults on their children were not listed separately; however, 11% or 53,318 cases were directed against children under the age of 18.

The nature of the abused child has been determined by several extensive studies. Child abuse is not restricted to young children although the most severe cases occur in children under three years of age (Blumberg, 1974). In his comprehensive study of child abuse, Gil (1970) found that boys represented slightly more than half of the abused group. However, among the teenage population, girls outnumbered the boys.

The range of the effects of abuse on the victims is varied. Kempe et al. (1962) found 28% of the children who were battered suffered some degree of brain damage. A three year follow-up study by Martin (1972) at the

John F. Kennedy Child Development Center in Colorado reported 43% of the abuse cases resulted in permanent brain damage, 33% of the cases suffered a retarded rate of functioning, 33% experienced growth impairment and 38% sustained impaired speech patterns. Even dwarfism has been related to abuse. Money and Needleman (1976) found that a certain type of dwarfism could be reversed by changing the child from an abusive to a non-abusive domicile. They titled this type of disease hyposomatotropinism.

The child may have emotional and behavioral problems as a result of abuse. Bedwetting, withdrawal, truancy and firesetting were more common among abused children (Bakan, 1972). Young (1964) found battered children to be more aggressive, destructive and bitter than their peers. Truancy and school failure was more frequent among abused children. A layer of depression pervaded all their behavior.

Cruelty breeds cruelty and abuse fosters a rejection which penetrates to a much deeper level of personality. Abused children become the delinquents, grow up to be the adult offenders, become the social misfits, fill our institutions and form the hard core relief cases, and themselves become poor parents (Kempe & Helfer, 1972).



Martin (1972) reported 80% of the 100 juvenile offenders studied by him reported being abused as children. Welsh (1976) investigated 1800 delinquents and concluded that severe punishment is not only a precursor of delinquency, but was the only variable consistently found in the backgrounds of every recidivist male delinquent. In another study of 58 male delinquents, he found as severity of parental punishment received increased so did the severity of the delinquent behavior. A study done by Wolfgang (1967) at the Minnesota State Prison showed that isolated murders (murders committed by an individual) who had suffered remorseless brutality at the hands of one of their parents outnumbered those who had not (Wolfgang, 1967).

Child abuse cuts across all cultures, religions, educational levels, economic levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds (Gil, 1970). The reasons for child abuse are as diverse as the above categories through which it cuts.

To date there is no reliable set of predictive personality or sociological criteria which can accurately identify abusers. The impossibility of finding one answer does not relieve us of the responsibility of trying to find a solution (Fontana, 1973). Young (1964)

has said we need a collection of observations and research that will pursue many questions and above all we need patience and persistence.

In the keynote address to the Second Annual National Conference in Child Abuse and Neglect, Kempe (1977) emphasized the need for research in the early identification of potential child abusers. He encouraged investigation of the self esteem and self concept of abusers as possible indicators of high risk individuals.

The present study was undertaken to examine the self concept of parents who abused their children and to determine if their self concepts differed from the self concepts of non-abusive parents.

### ABUSING PARENTS

Many characteristics have been proposed to describe the abusers but much controversy remains. Gil (1971) reported that the greatest incidence occurs in lower socio-economic classes and that middle class cases of child abuse are very low. Steele and Pollock (1968) contend that social and economic factors have been overstressed as etiological agents in cases of child abuse. Paulson and Blake (1969) advert to the deceptiveness of the upper and middle class child abusers. They cautioned against viewing abuse and neglect as completely

a function of the educationally, economically, or socially disadvantaged parents. In summarizing her findings, Young (1964) stated that there were middle class cases found in her sample. She further cautioned against the assumption that neglect and abuse are confined solely to lower economic or social class. Giovanni (1971) found abusive families were higher on all measures of socio-economic status and had male heads who had gone beyond the highschool education level. Many others (Kempe et al., 1962; Young, 1964; Giovanni, 1971; and Adams, 1976) warn that, although economic and social stress play a role in bringing out underlying personality weakness, neither is a sufficient nor a necessary cause of child abuse. Steele and Pollock (1968) state that social, economic and demographic factors are irrelevant to the actual act of child beating.

There is no common psychiatric category into which even a majority of abusing parents can be placed. True sociopathy among abusers is rare (Steele, 1970). Kempe and Helfer (1976) report that only 10 to 15% of abusers are psychotic or psychopathic. Blumberg (1974) stated that psychosis was rarely a factor in child abuse. Adams (1976) said that most abusing parents are not psychotic. Neither do they manifest severe neurotic



tendencies. Kempe et al. (1962) contended that in most abusers some defect in character structure was present. Kempe and Helfer (1976) maintained that 85% of abusive parents have personality diagnoses which cover the spectrum seen in the general population. Steele and Pollock (1968) hold that parents who abuse their children have severe emotional problems. Wright (1976) found that battering parents were psychopathically disturbed but whenever possible presented a distorted picture of themselves as unlikely to abuse their children. This tendency was labeled the "sick but slick syndrome."

Gelles (1973) criticized the psychopathological theories of child abuse. He argued that child abuse is multidimensional in causation and to claim a single variable, mental aberration, is to minimize the complexity of the problem. The narrowness of such a theory does not examine possible social causes of the psychological stress it posits as leading to child abuse. He stresses the social-psychological model of child abuse. He propounds that socio-economic status, sex, employment status, are important factors in child abuse. Adams (1976) feels abusive families have sociologic/psychologic stresses such as economic problems, social isolation and parental unemployment. Steele (1970) asserted that

while social factors may disturb psychic equilibrium and activate latent potential for child abuse these factors are not critical because abuse occurs in families where none of these stresses is present.

Personality traits of abusers have not been well researched. In their review of the literature on child abuse, Spinetta and Rigler (1972) pointed out the need for well designed studies of the personality characteristics of abusing parents. The findings which to date have been presented have been diverse. Melnick and Hurley (1969) found that mothers who abused their children had severely frustrated dependancy needs and an inability to empathesize with their children. Cardillo and Sahd (1977) found female abusers were more suspicious, insecure, and resentful than male abusers. They also showed more anxiety, depression and resentment than males.

Various personality typologies to help clarify the traits of abusing parents have been proposed (Zalba, 1967; Delsordo, 1962; Merrill, 1962). The problem with such typologies is that few abusive parents share all the characteristics. Further work needs to be done in refinement and validation of such categories through research. The use of such categories seems simple, unifying and time saving. If they can be empirically

validated they may be used as an aid in the determination of high risk individuals.

The most commonly repeated finding among abusing parents is that they were mistreated as children (Adams, 1976). Steele and Pollock (1968) found a history of parents having been raised in the same style which they have regenerated in the pattern of rearing their own children. Bakan (1972) agreed that if a person who was abused in childhood becomes a parent the likelihood of a repetition of abusive practice is great. Persons who engage in violence tend to have been victims of violence. Fontana (1968) considered abusive parents as emotionally crippled because of unfortunate circumstances in their own childhood. Blumberg (1974) stated, "almost without exception abusive parents were themselves abused; and deprived of love and mothering when they were children" (p. 24). Kempe et al. (1962) contended that attacking parents were subjected to similar abuse in their childhood. Long ago, Wordsworth said, "Child is the father of man." The capacity to love is not an inherent trait but must be taught to the child. This view is supported by Erikson, "There are, to be sure, many forms of love...but love is, I believe, the transformation of love received" (1964, p.27). The



reception of love and tolerance are critical factors in character development. Many abusive parents have been raised without these crucial elements.

### SELF ESTEEM AND SELF CONCEPT

The term self concept has existed since the time of the Greek philosophers. William James was the first to make extensive use of the term. Based on research and studies Rogers (1951) defines self concept in the following manner:

The self concept may be thought of as an organized configuration of the perceptions of self which are admissable to awareness. It is composed of such elements as perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities; the percepts and concepts of self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects and goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive or negative valence. (p. 36-37)

Thus the self concept is the way a person assesses himself. Harry Stack Sullivan stated that the self concept develops in early infancy and is based on the reflected appraisals of others. If the appraisals are good, the infant characterizes himself as the "good me" and has a positive opinion of himself. Negative appraisals result in the nullification of the infant's self respect.



Coopersmith (1967) defined self esteem as:

The evaluation which a person makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself. It expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval. It is, in short, a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself. (p. 5-6)

It easily can be understood that self esteem is a function of one's self concept. The converse of this is also true. A person with high self-esteem will have a favorable self-concept.

Harry Stack Sullivan proposed that hostile acts were influenced by self esteem. Sullivan (1940) postulated a negative relationship between self esteem and hostility:

The self may be said to be made of reflected appraisals. If these were chiefly derogatory... then the self dynamism will itself be chiefly derogatory. It will facilitate hostile disparaging appraisals of other people and will entertain disparaging hostile appraisals of itself. (p. 22)

Carl Rogers (1961) also maintained that attitudes and beliefs about other people are directly related to the self concept. Furthermore, one's behavior is directly influenced by his self concept. In his studies, Rogers has found a positive correlation between self acceptance and the acceptance of others. He explains the findings, "One can love others only to the extent that one loves himself" (Rogers, 1954, p. 167).

Using the Sullivan hypothesis of a negative relationship between self esteem and hostility, one could propound that child abusers have a low self concept as a result of low self esteem. Blumberg (1974) stated that abusers have a poor self concept and low self esteem. Steele and Pollock (1972) have supported his statement. Hearn (1974) found a significantly lower self esteem in the abusive father than in the controls. Melnick and Hurley (1969) found abusive mothers have a low self esteem. Timm (1974) found high self esteem mothers gave more rewards and fewer negative remarks to their children than did mothers with low self esteem. In a series of studies done on self esteem, Coopersmith (1967) found mothers with low self esteem express only limited affection for their children while high self esteem mothers express considerably greater affection. Lindquist (1977), using the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965), found that active child abusers had a lower self esteem than controls. He found a significant difference on three of the four scales he examined. These were the total positive scale, the moral ethical self and the family self scales. Lindquist found no significant difference on the social self scale although abusers did tend to score lower on this scale than

controls. Examination of the Lindquist study (1977) showed, in general, the control group used in his study and the group on which Fitts based his normative data were comparable (1965). From these studies, it can be concluded that as Kempe suggested in his keynote speech, the self esteem and the self concept of abusers should be studied as possible predictors of high risk individuals.

#### RESEARCH TO BE DONE

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the self concepts of abusing parents. This study compares the self concepts of abusing parents with the normative population used by Fitts (1965). Using the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS), examination of the following scores is undertaken.

Identity. These items reflect the individual's view of himself as he sees himself (Fitts, 1965).

Self Satisfaction. This score describes how the individual feels about the self he perceives (Fitts, 1965).

Behavior. Here, the individual is presenting his perception of the way he functions or his own behavior (Fitts, 1965).



Physical Self. This score represents the individual's view of his body, state of health, physical appearance, skills and sexuality (Fitts, 1965).

Moral-Ethical Self. This score describes the person's feelings of being a "good" or "bad" person, his moral worth, relationship to God, and satisfaction with one's religion or lack of it (Fitts, 1965).

Personal Self. The individual's sense of personal worth, his feeling of adequacy as a person and his evaluation of his personality apart from his body or relationships to others is reflected by this score (Fitts, 1965).

Family Self. This score describes one's feelings of adequacy, worth and value as a family member. It refers to the individual's perception of himself in reference to his most immediate and closest circle of associates (Fitts, 1965).

Social Self. This reflects the person's perception of self in relation to others who are not among his close associates. The person's sense of adequacy and worth in his social interactions with other people, in general, is reflected by this score (Fitts, 1965).

Using the above scores, we test the following hypo-



1. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Identity scale of the TSCS.

2. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Self Satisfaction scale of the TSCS.

3. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Behavior scale of the TSCS.

4. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Physical Self scale of the TSCS.

5. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Moral-Ethical Self scale of the TSCS.

6. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Personal Self scale of the TSCS.

7. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Family Self scale of the TSCS.

8. Abusive parents (active and passive) do not differ significantly from the normative population on the Social Self scale of the TSCS.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Subjects

The population from which the sample was derived was an intact group, the active military personnel and their families stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The total population had approximately 26,000 military personnel. The dependents (families) of the servicemen amounted to approximately 30,000 more persons. Ages of this group ranged from 17 to 65 years. The population included several races and ethnic backgrounds.

The sample was composed of service members and their spouses who were reported and subsequently remanded to Social Work Services for the abuse of children in their care. The total sample was 18 persons.

The sample was selected from the active treatment files of the Social Work Services. Not all of the subjects had voluntarily entered active treatment, but all were continuing treatment on a voluntary basis. All the subjects participating in the study volunteered to do so. The majority of these had just entered treatment and none had been in treatment for longer than 12 months.

## Apparatus

The instrument administered to the subjects was the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS). The TSCS was developed by William H. Fitts in 1965. It is different from most scales that measure the self concept in that it is a multidimensional description of the self. The scale is composed of one hundred self-descriptive statements. It has a two-dimensional scheme.

Each item contributes to two different scores. The first dimension, the horizontal categories or row scores, gives three measures of the self from an internal reference. These three scores, Identity, Self Satisfaction and Behavior, while positively correlated, are primarily independent. They are interpreted in comparison with each other. For example, an individual may have very high Identity and Behavior scores and yet have low Self Satisfaction scores. This contrast could be due to setting very high standards or expectations for himself, a hypothesis to be explored in counseling.

The vertical columns which represent an external frame of reference are: Column A - Physical Self, Column B - Moral-Ethical Self, Column C - Personal Self, Column D - Family Self, Column E - Social Self.



The vertical columns, when added constitute the total Positive score. This score reflects the overall level of self esteem.

The reliability data of the TSCS was computed on test-retest over a week period with 60 college students. Validity was based on four validation procedures:

- (1) content validity, (2) discrimination between groups,
- (3) correlation with other personality measures, and
- (4) personality changes under particular conditions.

The standardization group from which the norms were developed was a broad sample of 625 people. The sample included people from various parts of the country, age ranges from 12 to 68 years. There were approximately equal numbers of men and women. Both Black and white subjects, representatives of all social, economic, intellectual and educational levels from 6th grade through the Ph.D. degree comprised the normative group. Subjects were obtained from high school and college classes, employees at state institutions and various other sources (Fitts 1965).

### Procedure

Before the testing program began, the graduate students who were to conduct the interviews and testing were

trained. This training consisted of familiarization with the testing materials, standardization of interviewing techniques and presentation of material.

Initially interviewers (Ii) worked in pairs, one male and one female. To insure uniformity of technique, the pairs were interchanged.

The Ii were not knowledgeable of the identity of the subjects. The subjects reported to the secretary at the Social Work Services office. Their name tags were concealed by the secretary. They were then introduced to the Ii who seated them in a conference room and presented a letter of introduction (see Appendix I) to the study and were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. Subjects were subsequently tested using the TSCS. Any questions concerning the study were answered following the testing.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

Analysis of variance was performed for the eight scales of the TSCS under study. Subsequent comparisons of significant differences were performed using the Newman-Keuls procedure.

Analysis of the Identity scores (Row 1) of the TSCS yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 19.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated that all three means (Active, Passive and Norm) were significantly different,  $p < .01$ . Active abusers scored lowest on this scale which reflects the individual's description of his basic identity. Passive abusers scored the next lowest scores. These significantly lower scales indicate that abusers (active and passive) do view themselves as different from the non-abusers. They are more demeaning about the self they perceive. Analysis of variance for the Identity scale data is summarized in Table 1.



TABLE 1  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF IDENTITY SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	4001.84	2	2005.92	19.59*
Within Groups	65,453.8	641	102.112	
Total	69,455.64	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of the Self Satisfaction scores (Row 2) of the TSCS yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 8.18, p < .01$ . The comparison indicated that there was no significant difference between active and passive abusers. There were significant differences between the abusers (active and passive) and the normative group,  $p < .01$ . The abusers (active and passive) had significantly lower scores on this scale which reflects how the person feels about the self he perceives. These active and passive abusers do not feel good about themselves as evidenced by their lower scores for self acceptance. Analysis of Variance for Self Satisfaction data is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF SELF SATISFACTION SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	3118.01	2	1559.005	8.18*
Within Groups	122,173.72	641	190.59	
Total	122,291.73	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of Behavior scores (Row 3) of the TSCS yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 20.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated significant differences between all groups,  $p < .01$ . Active abusers scored lowest on this scale which reflects the individuals perception of his behavior. Passive abusers scored next lowest. The normative group scored significantly higher than both groups indicating that the two abuse groups feel less positive about the way they function and their actions. Analysis of Variance for Behavior data is summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF BEHAVIOR SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	5180.74	2	2590.37	20.59*
Within Groups	80,638.01	641	125.8	
Total	85,818.75	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of the Physical Self scores (Column A) of the TSCS yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 15.50$ ,  $p = .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated no significant difference between the abusive groups (active and passive). Both groups differed significantly ( $p = .01$ ) from the normative group on this scale in which the individual presents his view of his physical appearance, state of health, skills, and sexuality. Their significantly lower scores indicate they do not feel as good about their overall physical self as the normative group. Analysis of Variance for Physical Self data is summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF PHYSICAL SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	1870.55	2	935.245	15.50*
Within Groups	38,679.89	641	60.343	
Total	40,550.43	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of Moral-Ethical scores (Column B) of the TSCS yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 19.70$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated a significant difference between all groups,  $p = .01$ .



Passive abusers scored lowest on this scale which reflects the individual's relationship to God and feelings of being a good or bad person. Active abusers scored the next lowest while the normative group scored significantly higher than the abusers. The norm group exhibits better feelings about their moral worth and their judgement regarding the goodness of their personhood. Analysis of variance for the Moral-Ethical data is summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF MORAL-ETHICAL SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	2969.85	2	1484.925	19.70*
Within Groups	48,312.84	641	75.37	
Total	51,282.69			

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of the Personal Self scores (Column C) yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 7.09$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated no significant difference between abusers (active and passive). Both groups did differ significantly ( $p < .01$ ) from the normative group on this scale which reflects the individual's sense of personal worth, his evaluation of

his personality apart from his body or his relationship to others. The norm group feels significantly better about their adequacy as persons than do the abuse groups. Analysis of Variance for Personal Self data is summarized in Table 6.

TABLE 6

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF PERSONAL SELF SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	789.75	2	394.875	7.09*
Within Groups	35,704.57	641	55.701	
Total	36,494.32	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of Family Self scores (Column D) yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 16.52$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparison indicated a significant difference between all groups,  $p < .01$ . Active abusers scored lowest on this scale which reflects their lowered feeling of adequacy and value as a family member. Passive abusers did not score as low as the active abusers, but were significantly lower than the normative group. Analysis of Variance for the Family Self data is summarized in Table 7.

TABLE 7

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF FAMILY SELF SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	2,346.84	2	1,173.42	16.52*
Within Groups	45,542.41	641	71.049	
Total	47,989.25	643		

\* $p < .01$

Analysis of Social Self scores (Column E) yielded a significant difference,  $F(2,641) = 9.86$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent comparisons showed a significant difference between all groups,  $p < .01$ . Active abusers manifested the lowest scores on this scale which reflects the individual's perception of his social interaction with people in general. Passive abusers scored next lowest, while the normative group scored highest, thus reflecting a higher sense of adequacy and worth in their perception of their social interactions. Analysis of Variance of Social Self data is summarized in Table 8.



TABLE 8

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF SOCIAL SELF SCORES

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	1208	2	604	9.86*
Within Groups	39,262.80	641	61.25	
Total	40,470.80			

\* $p < .01$

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The goal of the present study was to examine the self concepts of abusive (active and passive) parents. Specifically, this study was undertaken to determine whether abusive parents (active and passive) have lower self esteem and thus a lower self concept than parents who are not abusive.

The results of the present study yielded significant differences between abusive (active and passive) and non-abusive parents on all eight scales of the TSCS (see Appendix II). These findings substantiate the hypothesis that the self concepts of abusers deviate from the normal population significantly. These findings are important for counselors working with abusive parents. When observing parents who are low in self esteem the counselor should be alert to the possibility of child abuse. It must be noted, however, that the present study does not conclude that a lowered self concept is the causal factor in child abuse. It could be that abusive parents manifest lower self concepts as a consequence of their abusive actions.

Rogers (1961) maintained that in successful therapy negative self attitudes decrease. Changes in a positive direction of parents' self concept scores might possibly serve as an indicant of reduced danger of child abuse and success in the treatment program. Rice (1974) found a negative correlation between TSCS and high aggressive tendencies. Perhaps one of the main goals in the treatment of abusers should be to build up the parents' self concept.

One phenomenon should be noted. The passive abusers scored significantly lower than the norm group and the active abusers on the Moral-Ethical scale (see Appendix II). A study done by Young (1964) of 180 abusive families found none of the passive parents sought protection for their children. Only a small minority of the passive partners fled the family and none of these took the children with them. When considered in the light of the Young study, it might be hypothesized that the passive abusers do not consider themselves "good" persons for allowing such abuse to be perpetrated. Such significantly lower scores on this scale might indicate guilt feelings the passive abusers have for their failure to intervene during the abuse or to seek protection for their children.



Kempe (1972) maintained that, through comprehension of the mechanisms involved in the release of aggressive acts, we can attain a better understanding of child abuse. Kempe (1977) proposed that the self esteem and self concept of child abusers should be studied. He felt that they might somehow serve as possible indicators of high risk individuals. Perhaps the self concept is a critical mechanism involved in the release of aggressive acts. The findings of the present study substantiate Kempe's proposal.

The major limitations of the present study must be noted. First, abusive parents in this study had been officially identified prior to testing. As a consequence, they may have responded differently to the TSCS than they would have if their conduct were not known to the authorities. The second limitation involves the small sample size which imposes restrictions on the findings, thus limiting generalization. Another limitation to be considered is the voluntary nature of the study. All participants were volunteers. It is not possible to determine how abusive parents who volunteer to take part in such a study differ from those abusive parents who do not. A final limitation has to do with the population used. All were active

duty military personnel and their spouses. It can not be overlooked that the lower self concept scores could somehow be affected by military life, separation from kin and lack of roots. A study done by Lindquist (1977) suggests little difference in self concepts of non-abusing military personnel and the norm group used by Fitts (1965).

On the basis of the results of the present study, the following recommendations are warranted:

1. The study should be replicated on a broader basis using a larger sample.
2. The study should be replicated using a civilian population. The purpose of such a study would be to determine if the lower self concepts manifested in the present study are characteristic of non-military abusers.
3. Further research is needed to determine whether lower self concept is a result of abuse inflicted or is a precursor of imminent abuse.

It is clear that part of the approach to understanding violence between parent and child must be based on an understanding of the child and the parent. The impossibility of such a task does not excuse us from trying to sort out the puzzle and put the pieces

painstakingly together.



## APPENDIX I

## To The Person Being Interviewed

We are part of a team of people working with Dr. Dannenmaier at Austin Peay State University studying the problems of raising children. Several of us on the team have children, including Dr. Dannenmaier who has five, and we are concerned with all of the talk at the present time about child abuse. Sometimes, people talking about child abuse make you think that any type of spanking is child abuse; we don't think all discipline is abuse. Children need some discipline. Also, those of us who have children know that sometimes it would take an angel not to get angry at them and we aren't angels. Sometimes, we punish them more than we really want, and we feel badly about it. We don't know any parents who really want to hurt their children, but at times children do get hurt. The reason for this interview is to try to understand parents and their problems better. If we can do this, maybe we can understand the things that make parents go too far in discipline and help them before they hurt their children.

We are asking you to help us in this. We have several questionnaires we would like you to fill out as honestly as you can and then we would like to interview

you. Anything you say will be kept anonymous. We plan to interview at least 60 couples. We will summarize what you say but your name will not be part of it. For example we may say something like "30 of the parents say they believe in spanking and 15 of these said that once or twice they felt they spanked their child too hard." You can see that you as a person will not be named in such a report. What you say will not be part of any official record under your name.

When we have completed our study, we will make a complete report of it to the Social Work Service. You will have permission to come and read it if you wish and to ask questions about it.

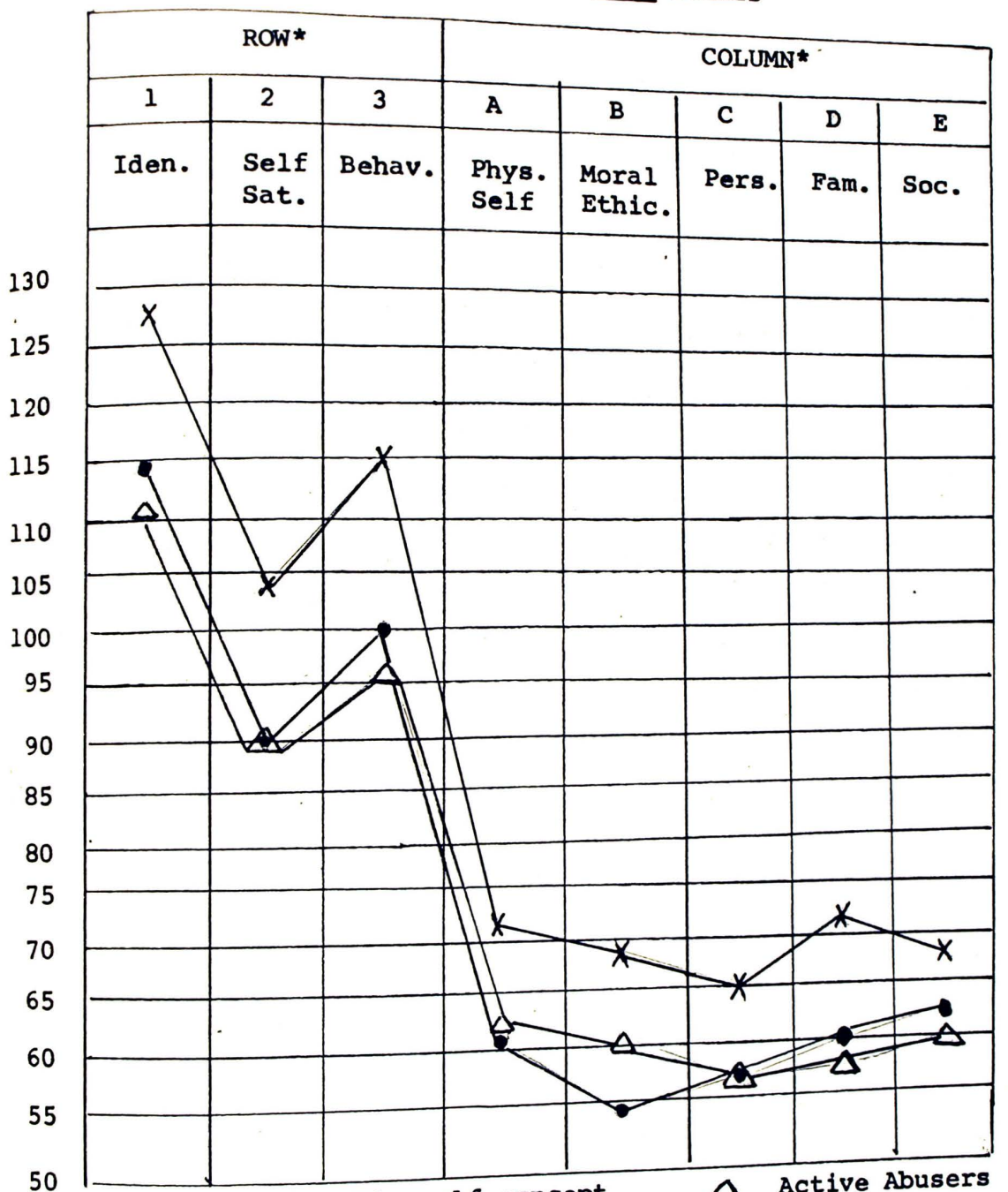
We will interview you and your (wife - husband) seperately. If you wish to tell one another about the interviews, that is your business, but we won't!

We are requesting that you permit yourself to be interviewed and take three questionnaires for us. Our goal is to understand parents and their children better in order that, in the future, we will be able to do a better job of helping children who are having problems. You do not have to participate in this if you do not want to. If you have no objection, we

shall begin with a short interview.



## APPENDIX II

GROUP MEANS ON THE TSCS SCALES

\* The individual's self concept based on an internal frame of reference.

\*\* The individual's self concept based on an external frame of reference.

△ Active Abusers  
● Passive Abusers  
X Norm Group

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