



### G22 Child Abuse and Interview of Pediatricians: Incidence in Southern Italy

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying child abuse, risk factors, and the social value of child maltreatment.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing useful data to prevent the maltreatment and psycho-physical consequence of the abuse.

**Introduction:** Child abuse and neglect are widespread problems found all over the world and have received considerable publicity over the past three decades. Child abuse represents an important cause of infant mortality and it is a sentinel event in a community, reflecting the effectiveness of prevention strategies, social security policy, and primary care for children.<sup>1</sup> UNICEF data (2003) found that in industrialized countries about 3,500 children <15 years die from abuse or neglect annually. Spain, Greece, Italy, and Ireland have the lowest rates of deaths with 0.1-0.2/100,000 children, while the United States and Mexico have the highest rates with 2.2/100,000 children. The child abuse is committed particularly on children younger than four years.<sup>2</sup> Seventy five percent of abuse is not diagnosed because the physicians fail to recognize signs of abuse. Due to this lack of diagnosis the opportunity to intervene early is lost, and many children suffer repetitions of abuse.<sup>3</sup> Currently in the territory of Southern Italy there are not estimates of the size of this problem.

**Objective:** The goal of this study is to estimate the incidence of the phenomenon of child abuse in Southern Italy, analyzing the population of pediatric medical centers in the geographical areas of Catanzaro and Cosenza (ITA).

**Materials and Methods:** A questionnaire was given to physicians of seven pediatric centers. The Chair of Legal Medicine collaborated with the Department of Pediatrics Faculty of University "Magna Graecia" of Catanzaro. The sample involved children aged zero to six years, admitted between January 2004 and December 2011. The questionnaire (closed answers) allowed, at each pediatric center, the investigation of case studies, characteristics of victims, social stratification of families, perpetrators of abuse, different types of child maltreatment in relation to age, type of injuries, and psycho-physical consequences on the victims.

**Results:** The preliminary results are available. Even in relation to data in the scientific literature, the underestimation of the phenomenon of child abuse determined by technical difficulties in diagnosis of psychological abuse and neglect, abuse committed by parents (81, 1%), denial by attackers, unpreparedness of many operators, delays and omission of reports, lack of collaboration between health centers and law enforcement was expected.<sup>4-5</sup>

**Conclusions:** Because of the increment of child maltreatment and its social consequences, identification and early intervention may help to minimize the probability of future violence and the consequences of child abuse. So, it is essential to extend the competences of the physicians in the identification and documentation of maltreatment in children for prevent child neglect.

#### References:

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#### Child Abuse, Pediatricians, Maltreatment