

REFUGEE CHILDREN EXPERIENCING RAPE AND VIOLENCE DIRECTED TO PARENTS

H. Ascher

Department of Paediatrics, The Queen Silvia Childrens Hospital, Gothenburg, Sweden
henry.ascher@pediat.gu.se

During the last decades an increasing number of families have fled from war and political violence. We have documented a number of families, mainly from former Yugoslavia, that have experienced violence including rape and will report the effect on their children.

In almost all families the rape was a well-hidden secret even to the father, since divorce, social shame and isolation was an expected outcome if the knowledge would be spread. Thus the rape was generally not known to the immigration authorities. Most mothers were in an extremely bad psychological state, especially after refusal of the asylum applications and the threat of re-deportation. Many mothers were treated for long periods in psychiatric clinics, often with psychosis, severe depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome after suicide attempts or risk of expanded suicide. Exceptionally poor mother-child relations were noticed. Young children often reacted with shielding in the relation to the mother. In some cases no contact whatsoever between mother and child was visible when observing mother and child in the same room. Older children demonstrated an adult-type of taking responsibility, severe depression, sleeping difficulties including nightmares, enuresis, flashbacks, suicide attempts and in some cases anorectic-bulimic symptoms. In some children an aggressive behaviour developed into a passive, depressive state.

We would like to call attention to the possibility of rape and violence against parents as a possible, often hidden, cause of poor mother-child relations and impaired psychological status in parents and children seeking refuge.

