

Identification with the Aggressor in the Abused Child: A Clinical Psychological Study of Three Cases

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to identify the mechanisms of identification with the aggressor and interpret it analytically in abused children. It focuses on two variables: "identification with the aggressor" and "the abused child," using a clinical approach with a case study technique. It includes a theoretical aspect to elaborate on theoretical concepts by adopting an analytical theory, and an applied aspect to present the topic in the field and make the study tangible in real-life settings. We used tools such as interviews, observations, and the Children's Apperception Test (C.A.T) to reinforce information obtained during interviews with three selected cases, that all of them are males, deliberately chosen from educational institution – Middle School – with ages between 10 to and 12 years old, from the first year of the middle school. The findings of the study revealed that children who have been abused often exhibit aggressive behaviors similar to those of the aggressor, termed "reproducing the same aggressive behavior." Even if the behavior changes, they may still display aggressive tendencies, referred to as "identification with the aggressor."

Keywords: Identification, Identification with the Aggressor, Abused Child.

Introduction

For a long time, psychological terms have drawn researchers' attention due to their inclusivity of all aspects of psychology, understanding them comprehensively (thinking, behavior, emotions, and even the unconscious) for all ages and genders. This science, nurtured by the researcher Sigmund Freud as the spiritual father of psychoanalysis and the founder of the analytical school, studied unconscious mental processes and the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, delving deep into psychology and understanding internal defense mechanisms.

Through this investigation, we aimed to explore defense mechanisms in children, specifically focusing on the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in abused children. The goal was to analyze their behavior, understand its causes, and attempt to comprehend the changes that occur, seeking to unravel the mystery of the subject by accessing all the elusive information through a research study. Among the key reasons that motivated us to conduct this topic was completing the research circle regarding the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in abused children, as it had not received its due attention in research and inquiry. In addition, it was to understand the mechanism of "identification

with the aggressor" and how it occurs and its nature, especially among the most vulnerable group, abused children. The aim of this research was to analytically explain the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in children who have been abused, understand how it manifests through their behaviors, and whether the child repeats the aggressor's actions and displays aggressive behaviors or if their behavior changes but remains aggressive.

This research was essential because of our focus on children, especially those who have been abused, and understanding the behaviors that manifest in them due to this mechanism. Subsequently, our research question was: What is the nature of identification with the aggressor in abused children? This led us to formulate a hypothesis to guide our study, which assumed that identification with the aggressor appears in abused children through the manifestation of the aggressor's behaviors and the adoption of their qualities through repetition.

Certainly, we supported our scientific research with previous foreign and local studies that had addressed aspects of the topic, giving us insights into the subject matter. The gist of these studies was that by studying abused children from various categories (pedophiles, mothers, adults and children, and even prisoners accused of abuse), therefore, it became apparent that after the trauma of childhood abuse, children develop somewhat aggressive behaviors and mistreatment, activating defense mechanisms post the assault incident. This crystallized the topic and sparked the idea of studying the mechanism of identification with the aggressor, as discussed by Anna Freud in her research.

To accomplish our research, we divided it into two chapters, each branching into elements. The first chapter was theoretical, encompassing concepts of the analytical theory and studying them from various viewpoints. It began with Sigmund Freud's explanation of the psyche in general, focusing on defense mechanisms to explore the mechanism of identification, relying on several Arabic and foreign references.

We traced the lineage from the spiritual father of psychology, Sigmund Freud, to his daughter Anna Freud, who introduced us to the term "identification with the aggressor." She presented it as a defense mechanism that activates upon exposure to assault, where unusual behaviors and actions take over the child, unconsciously inheriting traits from the aggressor.

Since the subject revolves around abused children, we had to discuss childhood according to the analytical theory, the stages of psychosexual development, and all aspects of psychological growth. Through this, we managed to interpret our subject, stating that children have the mechanism of identification just like all mechanisms, but at developmental levels since childhood. It evolves if the child is subjected to abuse to become identification with the aggressor, and we provided clear details in the theoretical aspect.

As for the second chapter, we devoted it to the practical aspect as a field study comprising three sections, including a section for a survey study, another section for a basic study, and a third section for presenting and discussing the results. We applied the study in an educational institution, discussing the cases to be studied through interviews and administering tests to gather information, which illuminated the path towards solving the posed problem. The study followed a clinical approach with a case study technique, and despite the challenges we faced, whether with the cases, interviews, or even theoretical concepts, we managed to overcome them, answer the questions, discuss the topic, and understand the content of the intended study.

Research Problem

Childhood is the stage of life that extends from birth to adolescence. Based on modern psychological theories, a child is no longer seen as a mature person lacking knowledge, assessment capabilities, and judgment. Instead, they are regarded as individuals with a unique mentality and psychological growth governed by distinct rules and systems. Therefore, understanding a child's psychology, various developmental stages, and comprehending their normal and abnormal behaviors are highly important (Boubazine, 2008). Taking care of children and providing emotional and psychological security is crucial, along with protecting them from life challenges, which may lead to pressures such as repression, silence, ignorance, and violence, resulting in psychological problems among children.

Childhood, being a phase of preparation, formation, and growth, is seen as a critical and sensitive stage due to many children facing numerous psychological and behavioral problems during it. This stage is where all future actions and behaviors originate, shaping both positive and negative aspects of personality. It is also a significant phase in human life because a child's experiences, experiments, situations, and emotions leave imprints and effects throughout various stages of their life due to their limited experiences.

Among the incidents that can alter a child's psychological trajectory and cause behavioral changes and actions, we mention any form of abuse and its various manifestations. All behaviors exhibited by an abused child post-assault are directly related to their childhood experiences. Therefore, it is critical to differentiate between normal and abnormal behaviors in children.

Speaking of abuse and inflicting harm on a child, some studies suggest that the abuser seeks to repair the crack in their self-image by transitioning to action. This crack stems from deep narcissistic fractures, and in cases of sexual abuse, a lack of primary love may be part of the abuser's psychological makeup. Abuse is defined as an act of penetration, regardless of its nature, exerted on others using violence, coercion, verbally, materially, or unexpectedly, resulting in harmful psychological effects on the victim (Qana, 2014).

This means that the abuser often repeats what was done to them, leaving them with an unconscious narcissistic wound. This applies particularly to pedophiles who were abused during childhood. From this perspective, we consider the category of abused children, not limited to any specific form of abuse but including physical, sexual, verbal, etc. Here, without specifying the type of abuse, we state that it has an effect on the child's life. The child feels that the world is unsafe, lacks self-esteem, and may develop anxiety and various social and psychological problems.

Frustrations resulting from the absence of emotional security can be more dangerous when they stem from the family. They can lead to a halt in psychological growth and the emergence of anxiety and aggression. Abuse acts as a psychological shock, an external assault, a real and serious incident that threatens the child. The abrupt and severe intrusion of abuse into a child's life may create an imbalance and psychological disturbance, forcing the child to adapt and cope to restore balance and overcome the negative experience.

Among the factors that play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the experience are age, health condition, mental growth, and the family support received during and after the abuse, whether the abuse is external or within the family, and the reactions of family members, their presence or absence. This abuse leaves grave consequences on the child's psychological development, and the symptoms that appear afterward can persist for a long time, leaving sensory impressions stored in memory regardless of the details of the incident, they are well preserved.

When these experiences are stored, they regulate within the psyche, and here some defense mechanisms come into play to overcome and regulate them. One of the prominent defense mechanisms introduced by Sigmund Freud is identification, which is one of the closest mechanisms that appears in abused individuals to repair the internal crack. This makes the child engage in behaviors whose source is unknown but are a result of identification. The ego adopts them unconsciously to avoid directly expressing the conflicts experienced by the individual and their impact, aiming to reduce anxiety and the danger faced.

Anna Freud first introduced the term “identification with the aggressor” in cases where children exhibit arrogance and are capable of defending themselves strongly against any attack. In the case of children who have been abused, identification manifests in the form of aggression because it represents a form of reactive response to the frustrations and realities they face. The error lies in responding in the same manner as the aggressor.

Among the previous studies, we have a study by Jennifer Steel (2004) titled "The Psychological Effects of Child Sexual Abuse, Characteristics Related to Maltreatment." This study was conducted in the Psychology Department at the University of Washington. It aimed to study child sexual abuse and its impact on individual psychological characteristics later on. The study included a sample of 285 males and females, including non-patients, treated patients, and untreated psychiatric patients, who were surveyed about their sexual history using a descriptive approach (Zaher, 2020).

The results indicated that they reported unwanted forced sexual contact and mentioned childhood sexual abuse. A pattern related to the relationship between the characteristics of the aggressor and maltreatment emerged, indicating psychological constriction (strength, resistance), psychological constriction during adolescence, an unintended negative factor, and maltreatment.

Through the research conducted and studies on abused children, behaviors that are not reinforced and unintended have emerged, but their source could be the identification with the aggressor. Based on the discussion about abused children, abuse, and the mechanism of identification, the following question is raised: What is the nature of identification with the aggressor in abused children?

Study Hypothesis:

Identification with the aggressor in abused children is manifested by the emergence of the same behaviors and actions as the aggressor, mimicking the aggressor's behavior through repetition.

Study Objectives:

The current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- The main objective is to understand the mechanism of identification with the aggressor and attempt to analyze it analytically in abused children.
- The secondary objective is to study how the impact of the aggressor affects the child psychologically, leading to unconscious behaviors.

Operational Definitions:

Identification with the aggressor:

It is a psychological defense mechanism measured by the Children's Apperception Test (C.A.T.), which involves the child adopting the aggressor's behaviors and actions through unconscious imitation, meaning that the child denies their own traits and adopts the traits of the aggressor.

Abused Child:

This refers to a child aged between 6-13 years old who has experienced verbal, physical, emotional, or harmful actions or aggressive behavior during childhood.

Theoretical Framework of the Study:

The individual's personality is viewed as a system of motives, barriers, impulses, and unconscious energy used to relieve psychological pressures. If these pressures remain in the psyche, they can lead to anxiety, maladjustment, and affect mental health and balance. This unconscious psychological energy is inherent in humans and serves as a driving force for their actions, viewed as defense mechanisms by psychology. Specialists can interpret and understand the content and purpose of these defense mechanisms, as their exaggeration or absence can have significant effectiveness.

Definitely, this system also includes the child, especially since childhood is the beginning of personality formation and employs all components of the psyche. Childhood is a very sensitive stage where the foundations of personality are built in various forms. Therefore, any event experienced by a child has both immediate and long-term psychological effects, as the child also employs unconscious defense mechanisms. From this standpoint, we cast light on the abused child and the nature of their defense mechanisms, precisely focusing on "identification with the aggressor," aiming to explain the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in abused children and analyze its nature.

Speaking about motives, emotions, and internal psychological forces, we delve into the realm of psychology's father, Sigmund Freud. He compared the human psyche to an iceberg floating on the surface of the sea, where only a small part, which he called consciousness or the ego, is visible. The larger, submerged part below the surface he termed the unconscious. He emphasized the significance of unconscious motives in understanding human behavior because behavior is driven by unconscious instincts. Freud's works are characterized by two topographies: the first includes:

- The Conscious: This is the region of awareness, the conscious part of the individual connected to the external world, and it is the superficial part of the psyche.
- The Preconscious: This latent part can be retrieved into consciousness.
- The Unconscious: This constitutes most of the psyche, hidden and difficult to retrieve because it is a repressed part conflicting with the ego, as mentioned in the second topography.

In his second topography, Freud clarified other elements in the psyche:

The Id (Le ça): It operates according to the pleasure principle, being the oldest part of the psyche involving repressed unconscious processes seeking gratification.

The Ego (Le moi): This part operates according to the reality principle. It is the administrative part of the conscious self, responsible for intentional behavior, working to fulfill the desires of the id within the bounds of reality and adaptation.

The Superego (Le sur moi): This part operates according to the principle of ideals, social values, and the higher standards of society. It has authority and ethical supervision, determining whether the ego fulfills the id's desires or represses them into the unconscious.

Freud did not stay at these discoveries only; he also spoke about "defense mechanisms," which are means that individuals resort to when faced with setbacks. These mechanisms can be negative, positive, or neutral, depending on their level of use. If overused or lacking, they can lead to negative outcomes.

According to La Planche and Pontalis (1967), defense mechanisms represent different types of processes where defense can be identified. Defense constitutes a set of processes aimed at reducing or eliminating any modification that might threaten the individual's psychological well-being and stability. These defenses work partially and unconsciously.

All individuals possess these defense mechanisms, whether well-adjusted or not, adults or children, and they operate unconsciously, at different levels, and are employed appropriately to achieve psychological adaptation, relieve anxiety, find solutions to urgent but unconscious needs and motives, or discharge them. Consequently, defense mechanisms describe unconscious reactions to resolve psychological conflicts between the individual's reality (ego) and their unconscious repressions and instincts.

Identification with the aggressor is a defense mechanism introduced by Anna Freud, as mentioned in psychiatric literature. It is an unconscious defense mechanism where an individual merges himself or herself with another in a close emotional bond, as stated in Freud's legacy. Anna Freud introduced the concept of identification with the aggressor as one of the defensive maneuvers, which we will delve into in our discussion (Latifi Al-Sharbeen, 2006).

Identification serves as a way to construct the ego and psychological themes and as a defensive mechanism to resolve shock. It is the first appearance of an emotional attachment to an external object that allows the child to transcend primary narcissism. From this statement, we can infer that identification with the aggressor allows the child to overcome the narcissistic injury inflicted by the abuse (Majdoub, 2018).

Further, we can say that identification is adopting the qualities of an external object by someone. These qualities belong to another person, meaning the person who identifies becomes similar to the other person in terms of their personality traits, behavior, thoughts, and emotions (Al-Khalidi, 2009).

In this context, we can say that in abnormal situations, a child may only identify with the terrifying aspect of the father figure, leading to the development of a harsh and strict "superego." This means identifying with the image of the father's "cruelty and punishment." This image is projected externally onto authority figures, becoming a source of threat and dread (Abbas, 2004).

Since identification was a significant concern for Freud, he distinguished three patterns of identification. After mentioning that identification is an expression of an emotional bond with another person, where the father figure serves as an example, he further explains that the second pattern involves selectively adopting a single characteristic from the person/object, and the third pattern focuses on the possibility of two "I's" sharing a common element and a similar position in a different location (Vanieh, 2013).

A valuable concept like identification must have various types, as mentioned earlier in several topics. One of these types is the identification with the aggressor introduced by Anna Freud in 1949, presented as a defense mechanism by seizing a part of the goal or through imitating aggressions.

Speaking of defense mechanisms, we mention a very important mechanism in this context, which is identification. We also refer to it as identity formation, impersonation, or identification. Identification is the blending, fusion, or merging of one thing with another, making them one.

Identification with the aggressor is a psychological process through which an individual assimilates a part or characteristic of another person and transforms it entirely or partially. Therefore, Freud always emphasizes the importance of the child's relationship with the mother and father because it is a very significant relationship, and any event within it has a profound, lasting, and deep impact. Thus, the relationship controls the determination of identity.

Therefore, the impact of identification with the aggressor and the feeling of guilt is limited to the initial stage where the child builds the "superego." The aggression is directed towards the object, forming internal criticism opposing the ego and its danger. This is manifested in the burden of guilt carried by the ego (Doucet, 1998).

Identification with the aggressor is a defense mechanism in childhood ego, whereby the person transforms from a victim to a perpetrator, susceptible to attack, into someone who acts like the aggressor. It involves adopting the characteristics and behaviors of another person unconsciously, as seen in many pedophiles who, if their history is studied, were often victims of abuse during childhood or adolescence. Subsequently, the mechanism of identification with the aggressor is activated, and the person acquires the traits of the aggressor, repeating the same actions unconsciously to alleviate anxiety, create inner balance, and somewhat satisfy the superego.

Identification with the aggressor can be understood as a two-stage process: the first involves shock, and the second is defensive. Once the shock occurs and the abuse persists, the self-structure and psyche develop, and the mechanism of identification adapts to the circumstances. This mechanism is prevalent among individuals with psychological trauma who feel responsible for the shocks they experienced. They perceive others as threats and derive their impressions from this perception. The subject responds to this perceived threat, partially attacking it with justifications for their actions, resulting in aggression towards others. This realization occurs through identification with the other (Christopher Perry, 1990).

The mechanism of identification with the aggressor indicates that the person facing danger aligns with the aggressor using various methods, by assuming responsibility for the attack, either imitating the physical or moral aspects of the aggressor, or adopting specific symbols of power. Identification is not merely a direct aggressive response but rather a complex reaction to anxiety.

The concept of identification with the aggressor highlights two seemingly contradictory principles that are nevertheless complementary in the unconscious logic: the principle of equivalence (sameness) and the principle of differentiation (otherness) (2003, Claude Lhote).

Since identification, like other defense mechanisms, arises from human development, meaning that a child can embody this mechanism as soon as a shock or assault occurs, childhood becomes a very sensitive stage. Therefore, understanding this stage and the child's characteristics and the nature of identification with the assaulted child becomes essential.

Childhood is a critical stage in human life, extending from birth to adolescence, characterized by specific traits and continuous developmental stages. Children experience this stage under the care and influence of their parents.

Freud's psychosexual development comprises five distinct stages, each with different erogenous zones and developmental characteristics. These stages are as follows:

1. **Oral Stage:** Extending from birth to around one year old, the pleasure center in this stage is the mouth (sucking, feeding). The role of the mother is crucial in nurturing the child through cuddling and affection, as she represents the source of instinctual satisfaction. Lack of satisfaction in this stage can lead to anxiety and disturbances.
2. **Anal Stage:** From two to three years old, the pleasure center shifts to the anal region, associated with functions like defecation. The satisfaction is derived from these elimination functions. The pleasure zone shifts and evolves biologically during this stage, with either control or lack of control.
3. **The Phallic-Oedipal Stage:** From four to six years old, the child becomes interested in their genitalia and understands the differences between the sexes, girls and boys. This stage reveals girls' attraction to their father (the Electra complex) and boys' attraction to their mother (the Oedipus complex). However, the magnitude of conflicts in this stage is significant, and the fear of punishment in the child may create a dent in them, affecting them as a primary stage in the formation of identification with the aggressor, as discussed by Anna Freud in her interpretation, which we will delve into in explaining the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in the assaulted child.

Moreover, this stage contributes to the formation of narcissistic identification, which the second form is related to the father figure. If the father is authoritarian, he may represent a threatening and intimidating figure. Therefore, identification plays a significant role in forming the Oedipus complex, and this stage represents a blend of "love, attachment, and aggression," referring to the relationship with parents, which is a source of both satisfaction and frustration simultaneously (Abbas, 2004).

4. **Latency Stage:** From six years to puberty and adolescence, in this stage, sexual impulses diminish, and social factors play a significant role in satisfaction and control. The superego begins to act and dominate in this stage, employing three primary defense mechanisms:

A. Repression: Pushing impulses and desires into the unconscious to keep them away from the conscious conflict zone.

B. Identification: Absorbing traits and characteristics of another person, merging with them. In this stage, the child engages in identification with "ego ideals," differentiating them into two types:

- **Primary Narcissistic Identification:** Rooted in the oral stage with the mother, involving attachment.
- **Secondary Narcissistic Identification:** Occurs with the father figure during the Oedipal stage.

To strengthen the ego and reinforce its strength in the child, the mechanism of sublimation comes into play.

C. Sublimation: An unconscious defense mechanism that redirects impulses and conflicts towards moral and social pathways. It involves rationalizing and placing the personality in an ethical and social realm where it can accept commands and norms.

5. Sexual stage: This stage occurs during adolescence and is predominantly focused on sexual maturity. It involves seeking positive and healthy solutions for Oedipal desires. However, failure to resolve these desires can lead to psychological disorders.

When discussing the stages of a child's psychosocial development, we also emphasize the importance of emotional and social growth. Emotions encompass nearly all aspects of feelings and sensations (Angler, 1998). Therefore, emotional development evolves alongside a child's personality, as they grow older. From attachment to differentiation to the emergence of the self, a child in these stages seeks affirmation, attention, gratitude, and understanding of their achievements, independence, competition, possession, and at times even conflict to affirm their identity. Children in this stage strive for a place in their family and surroundings, seeking encouragement, appreciation, and understanding of their accomplishments, as well as independence, competition, and ownership at times, even engaging in conflicts and aggressive behaviors to assert themselves.

This development is referred to as social growth, as the child needs to create social relationships, initiating connections beyond the family, which helps them acquire social values and different lifestyle patterns. They start to express needs for connections and engage in new life experiences.

However, it is crucial for parents to provide a safe environment for their child during these developments. The child must feel secure and not experience fear or deprivation because such frustrations can hinder their growth, leading to fear, anxiety, especially separation anxiety from the mother, and shocks between parents and aggressive behaviors that may be exercised against them, whether from within the family or outside, and in any form of abuse: verbal, physical, emotional, sexual. These abuses can have a significant impact on the child in various ways, ultimately resulting in the appearance of unusual behaviors in a child who has experienced assault is expected, and as such, an experience can be shocking and have psychological repercussions, altering their traits, behaviors, and actions.

An assaulted child may feel incapable of asserting itself and may suppress their desires to escape frustration. They often lack confidence and may tend towards withdrawal out of fear of danger and harm.

Several effects manifest on an assaulted child, depending on the type of assault. For example, children who have experienced sexual abuse or physical mistreatment tend to repeat such mistreatment, showing significantly higher rates of deviant behavior compared to others. They may exhibit aggressive or deviant behaviors towards other children, animals, or engage in sexual acts, show early sexual interests, self-destructive behaviors, among other signs. Moreover, they may experience various psychological disorders such as isolation, withdrawal, shyness, sleep disturbances, disrobing, extreme fear, eating disorders, lack of self-confidence, escapism, feelings of sadness and frustration, self-neglect, and various physical symptoms (Kashik, 2012).

As professionals, we understand that all these behaviors are reactions to the assault and are expected to occur. However, what is particularly concerning is the transformation of the child into a somewhat

violent person. The impacts of assault encompass all aspects of personality, and its effects can last a lifetime if not addressed psychologically due to the severe impact on mental health.

Upon delving deeper into cases of assaulted children, we often find repeated instances of what happened to them or the occurrence of similar behaviors that were inflicted upon them. The child may unconsciously replicate the aggressor's behaviors, manifesting in aggressive actions. For instance, if the assault was verbal, the child may raise their voice, or if it was sexual, they may harass other children with aggression and heightened emotions, engage in sexual play with peers, or exhibit deviations and inclinations. These recurring effects lead us to link this analysis to an important concept discussed by Anna Freud, which is the mechanism of identification with the aggressor in assaulted children. This means that the child adopts the identity of the aggressor, taking on their values, positions, and behaviors, merging into this person's model and may even act out what was done to them on someone else.

This identification with the aggressor in the case of the victimized child can be explained based on the idea that when a child is subjected to assault, they experience shock and a loss of senses after being overwhelmed by the trauma. This makes the child magnetically astonished, adopting the desires and behaviors of the aggressor. Instead of understanding the role of the aggressor, the child automatically takes on their characteristics and actions. This means that the child goes through two stages: the first one is automatic and begins with the shock, while the second one is defensive and purposeful, meaning that all the child's behaviors due to alignment are activated and repeated as a defense in two relational parts - the victim part and the aggressor part.

Anna Freud first addressed the topic of the identification with the aggressor in detail in the psychiatric dictionary. She explained it as the child's agreement with the aggressor in something or part of something unpleasant, presenting it as a defense mechanism to accommodate an unpleasant, shocking, and painful event. In this way, the child shifts from being threatened to being a threatening "threatened source". According to Anna, alignment with the aggressor occurs through incorporation during the initial stage of forming the higher self, specifically during the Oedipus complex, where the child aligns with the father or another person. Freud emphasizes that such a process happens during a struggle with a painful issue while developing the higher self. The child assimilates with the aggressor by externalizing criticism, while the fear of punishment remains present, especially during the Oedipal stage.

In this context, external criticism conflicts with the higher self and merges with it, leaving the child to employ unconscious defense mechanisms to push those motives outside the self. This is what is referred to as identification with the aggressor in the victimized child, where the child replicates the aggressor's abusive behaviors and projects them onto others. This aspect will be further studied empirically in the applied field.

Methods and procedures:

Research instruments

Given that the topic has a psychological analytical aspect and is specific to children, the choice was made to rely on the "C.A.T Drawing Test" as a tool for application.

C.A.T Drawing Test:

Definition:

The C.A.T Drawing Test is a diagnostic tool used for children aged between 3 and 12 years in the process of diagnosis, therapy, and identifying psychological, social, and relational tendencies with all those around them. It helps in discovering their personality and the defense mechanisms used by the child through their descriptive expression of drawings on the sheets (Shortoni, 2016).

Objectives:

It is an assisting tool to confirm or discover new relationship links for the child after gathering information and data during interviews. It helps in identifying the mechanisms the child uses and their inclinations. From an analytical perspective, it reveals the child's reactions, mental abilities, and behaviors in their environment.

Instructions:

I will now present you with images and I would like you to narrate a story based on what you see in these pictures, starting from the beginning, through the events, and ending with the story. You can mention what is happening in the picture and what the animals are doing in it.

Application:

During the session, the specialist encourages the subject to answer and asks questions about the events without suggesting any ideas to the child. The specialist observes the case, records the answers, notes the time taken to respond, and the total time for the story. The child is allowed to answer comfortably and is not restricted by time. The specialist should observe the mood of the story (sad, happy, imaginative, etc.) and note how the story concludes.

Interpretation (Analysis):

Based on the following:1. The main theme.2. The main protagonist. 3. The basic needs of the protagonist.4. The environmental principle.5. The characters in the stories. 6. Meaningful conflicts.7.The nature of anxiety.8. Basic defenses against conflicts and situations.9. The severity of the super-ego.10.The interplay between the ego and intelligence (Shortoni, 2016).

Presentation and discussion of results:

General conclusion about the first case:

After conducting several interviews with the case and applying the C.A.T Drawing Test for Children, we conclude that someone close to them has subjected the child to physical abuse, likely the father, from a young age. This abuse has clearly affected the child's behavior, as evidenced by the aggression displayed, which is likely modeled after the abusive behavior of the father, and this initial alignment is clearly evident in drawing 08. Subsequently, the alignment with the abuser expanded to include anyone, indicating a direct action mechanism following verbal or physical abuse. The child's statements indicate this during interviews, such as "I hit back immediately" and recounting fights in the institution, reflected in drawing 07 with the statement "The monkey threw a stone at the tiger, so it came to eat it," which directly portrays aggressive behavior and retaliation, aligning with the abuser. The child also exhibits a justifying style as a defense mechanism in drawing 07, stating "The monkey

threw the stone at the tiger, so it came to eat it," and even during interviews when recounting the altercation with their classmate, they said, "She pushed me, so I hit her with a stone."

This was deduced through analyzing responses to some drawings in the C.A.T, particularly drawings 02-07, which clearly show alignment with the abuser. Drawings 02-06 also depict the child's need for parental affection, joy, and tenderness, as well as living in a sad reality, as indicated by the repetition of the word "sadness" in "sad lion" and "sad sleeping bear." Drawings 02-07 also reveal the child's need for independence and strength, which can be linked to entering adolescence, where they reenact the Oedipal complex. Regarding the alignment and its nature in this case, it is often a replication of the same behavior as the abuser.

General Conclusion about the Second Case:

Through the interviews conducted with the case and after applying the C.A.T Drawing Test for Children, we observed that the child aligns with a specific personality. However, instead of aligning with the hero, the child aligns with their older brother. The case revealed that since childhood, when subjected to abuse, the children defend themselves, and their older protective brother intervenes to defend them. This means that the tendency to be harmed and to defend oneself became ingrained in the child. This was evident in a recent altercation where the child intervened to defend their younger cousin, even resorting to physical violence against those who harmed their cousin. This defense of the younger sibling mirrored the actions of their older brother, who is usually calm and dislikes conflicts but reacts violently in such situations, reproducing the aggressive behavior. This alignment with the older brother is apparent in the child's desire to emulate them, as expressed in statements like "My brother, my right arm," wishing to be like them, which was also evident in drawing 02, where they mentioned potentially defending their cousin just like they did in the recent altercation.

Therefore, the child exhibits similar behaviors and attitudes to their older brother, which is the mechanism of alignment. The results of the C.A.T test confirmed and explained this alignment, especially since alignment with the older brother was evident. The mechanism of alignment with the abuser is apparent in drawings 02-04-07, where the child mentions their brother defending them and in drawing 04, where they imagine scenes of hitting and fleeing out of fear of punishment and aggressive behavior. After analyzing the case, we conclude that the child is generally calm and dislikes violence but engages in conflict as a reaction to the abuse, considering this abuse as unjust. This indicates alignment with the abuser because the child defends itself by producing the same aggressive behavior as the abuser, such as hitting and self-defense.

General Conclusion about the Third Case:

The child Ayman is very reserved and does not provide details about his life even after multiple interviews and numerous questions. His answers were brief, often limited to "yes" or "no," and he showed significant resistance in his responses. Even when using reinforcement techniques, his statements remained superficial. However, the C.A.T test helped us interpret Ayman's case. It appears that he experiences verbal abuse from his peers due to his visual impairment, with them mocking him by saying, "You're blind" and laughing at him in class. This has led him to engage in fights and display aggressive behaviors, including physical attacks on his classmates in the institution, a behavior confirmed by teachers and specialists.

His reactions manifest as physical assaults, evident in him hitting his peers and justifying his actions by claiming they mocked him, saying "I didn't intend to hit him; he was mocking me." This is clear in the

test analysis, particularly in drawing 07, where he depicts a tiger attacking a monkey and wanting to eat it because it is hungry. This indicates a mechanism of transitioning into action by producing aggressive behavior in response to the verbal abuse he faces. The mechanism of alignment with the abuser is apparent in drawing 02, where he projects the father figure onto the larger bear, reflecting his perception of his father's aggression, as he mentioned in interviews "My father punishes me and hits me for not studying" and in the altercations, he has been involved in.

In drawing 08, where he depicts his father warning him and a state of panic, this reflects alignment with the abuser, which is also evident in drawing 07 with his alignment with the aggressive tiger. Additionally, there is a sense of sadness in the child, as seen in his depiction of the lion in drawing 03, and his statement during interviews that "I have many people who harm me" and even saying "I don't remember anything nice or good happening in my life."

This analysis indicates that Ayman exhibits a tendency towards aggressive behavior as a defense mechanism against verbal abuse, aligning with the aggressor and replicating similar behaviors, particularly those of his father.

Fear and anxiety about the future are evident in image 04, where "the mother and her son are going somewhere bad happened" and in image 08 when the father warns his son. It can be argued that there is sibling rivalry between him and his siblings, including his twin brother, as seen in the lack of detail in the relationship between the mother and the children in image 01 and even image 04 with the phrase "the mother carries her son and the other one behind her." Therefore, we can conclude that the child is experiencing sadness, anxiety, and verbal abuse from others. This has led to a form of alignment with the aggressor, not in the exact behavior but leaving an impact on his psyche. Mechanisms of defense have also emerged enactment, alignment with the aggressor, projection, resistance during interviews, and justification.

Analyzing the results in light of the hypothesis and previous studies using the analytical approach

To conduct our research related to the subject of alignment with the aggressor in abused children, we had to start with a hypothesis as a starting point to set study boundaries and guide our research. Therefore, we hypothesized that alignment with the aggressor in abused children manifests in the appearance of similar behaviors and actions to those of the aggressor, repeating them. This hypothesis served as a temporary answer to the question (What is the nature of alignment with the aggressor in abused children?). Naturally, this required us to utilize a clinical approach and rely on case study methodology to conduct a field study, which included three cases aged between 10 and 12 years. We conducted interviews with them and used the Children's Apperception Test (C.A.T) to gather information. This deliberately chosen sample led us to conclude that when a child is abused; it affects them psychologically, leading to changes in their behavior, becoming aggressive. This was inferred from our analysis of the three cases, combined with the information gathered from interviews and the results of the C.A.T. Our conclusions were also supported by the study conducted by Majahid Fatima Zahra (2012), which discussed the characteristics of abused children and how abuse affects their behavior and actions.

Going deeper into the analysis with the cases, we found that this change in behavior triggers a mechanism in the child that leads directly to action immediately after experiencing abuse. This was evident in the first case, which was subjected to physical abuse by burning, where alignment with the aggressor appeared, and there was a change in aggressive behavior, becoming direct and often

replicating the same behavior. At this point, when discussing alignment, we can relate the results to Jennifer Steele's study (2004), which indicated that the impact of childhood sexual abuse leads to mistreatment and aggression. Focusing on the replication of the same behavior, Zahraa Jaadouni's study (2010) provided an explanation that these behaviors stem from repairing the narcissistic rupture. We addressed this in theoretical framework through a detailed explanation from Anna Freud about how alignment with the aggressor manifests when abuse occurs by absorbing unusual behaviors and actions from the aggressor subconsciously.

Note: The first case experienced physical assault, which significantly influences the psyche because the effects of burns remain on the skin for a long time, reminding the individual of the painful event. This is significant considering the impact of the skin, as described by researcher Didier Anzieu in the concept of "Le moi peau" (the skin ego) and the skin's eight psychological functions, including biological and social responses of the skin (such as scars and marks) and the skin's role in recharging libido due to its constant stimulation, maintaining internal energy tensions and distributing them among psychological subsystems.

As for the remaining cases, they led to the same result: responding to abuse with aggressive reactions involving physical assault. However, there was a slight difference in the second case with the presence of alignment with the aggressor, but what pacified it was alignment with the older brother and emulating him. From this, we concluded that if the abused child finds someone to rely on, it might reduce the level of alignment with the aggressor. Therefore, the second case was a calm child, and their aggression only surfaced when provoked.

In the third case, a difference emerged in that this alignment does not always entail replicating the same type of abuse. It may change depending on the severity of the abuse experienced, leading to a more violent response, as the child here was subjected to verbal abuse and responded with physical violence. It is important to note that several factors contribute to the social and psychological changes that occur in an individual.

After discussing the study results, we concluded that our study aligns with previous studies we relied on, even though they did not specifically focus on our topic. However, they were similar in results to some extent because our findings showed that children who experience abuse exhibit aggressive behaviors taken from the aggressor's personality, often replicating the same actions. This confirms the hypothesis that alignment with the aggressor in abused children manifests in the appearance of the same behaviors and actions as the aggressor.

Thus, we were able to achieve the main goal of the study, which was to understand the mechanism of alignment with the aggressor and interpret it analytically in abused children.

Conclusion

In conclusion of our research study on the topic of alignment with the aggressor in abused children, and after detailing the theoretical and practical aspects, each containing its specific elements, due to the importance of the subject related to psychological analysis in general and the mechanism of alignment with the aggressor in particular, and due to our interest in children and childhood, we were curious to study this topic to understand the mechanism of alignment in abused children. The study began with a theoretical framework as a basis, trying to address the most important aspects brought by Sigmund Freud regarding the topic. Then, we continued with Anna Freud's detailed explanation of the mechanism of alignment with the aggressor analytically. Since the topic involves two variables, we

gave the second variable, represented by the abused child, its due research and inquiry about growth stages and childhood in detail. In the theoretical aspect, we linked the variables to understand the nature of how the mechanism of identification with the aggressor works in children theoretically. Then, it was necessary for us to enrich our study with an applied aspect, where we present the topic in real-life situations and study relevant cases through a thorough approach. This involved studying three cases, conducting interviews, and providing further clarification through applying tests on them. These are the steps of the clinical method based on case study. We were able to reach results indicating that the victimized child exhibits a mechanism of identification with the aggressor by producing aggressive and hostile behaviors. This can either be by reproducing the same behavior as the aggressor through embodying their traits or by changing the behavior but remaining within the framework of aggression, meaning only the type of aggression changes. This signifies identification with the aggressor. We arrived at through discussing the study topic after presenting all the information we could gather on the subject these results. This was our primary goal.

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