

18.63x23.02	1	6 עמוד	THE JERUSALEM POST - FRONT	14/02/2011	26104942-8
מכון חרו - 29450					

Child neglect 'neglected,' US expert to tell Israelis

Pediatrician Howard Dubowitz, here for conferences, says more manageable cases are often overlooked

• By RUTH EGLASH

Child neglect is an issue that has been neglected, with professionals, the media and the public focused more on physical and sexual abuse of children, a visiting US professor and expert in the field of child abuse and neglect told *The Jerusalem Post* on Sunday.

Howard Dubowitz, MD, a professor of pediatrics at University of Maryland School of Medicine, will be tackling the less sensationalist, more ambiguous topic of child neglect at two conferences in Israel this week. The first is the National Council for the Child's Annual Conference in Beersheba on Monday and Tuesday, while on Wednesday he will speak to medical, welfare and educational professionals at a symposium organized by the Haruv Institute in Jerusalem.

"It sounds clichéd but neglect has been neglected, yet it is such a pervasive and common problem," Dubowitz, who has worked in the field for more than 30 years, told the *Post*.

"There are a slew of studies that show how the consequences of neglect can be very serious and last a lifetime," he added, describing how neurological research into neglected infants show changes in brain patterns; neglected youths are more likely to become delinquent and adults neglected as children often adopt criminal behavior.

"Further studies show that there is a link between neglect and physical and mental health problems in individuals later on in their lives," said Dubowitz. "The bottom line is that even though neglect does not sound as harmful as physical or sexual abuse, nevertheless it can be very damaging."

According to statistics published Sunday by the National Council for the

Child, neglect, which can be defined as omissions in basic care, is the most common type of abuse experienced by children in Israel.

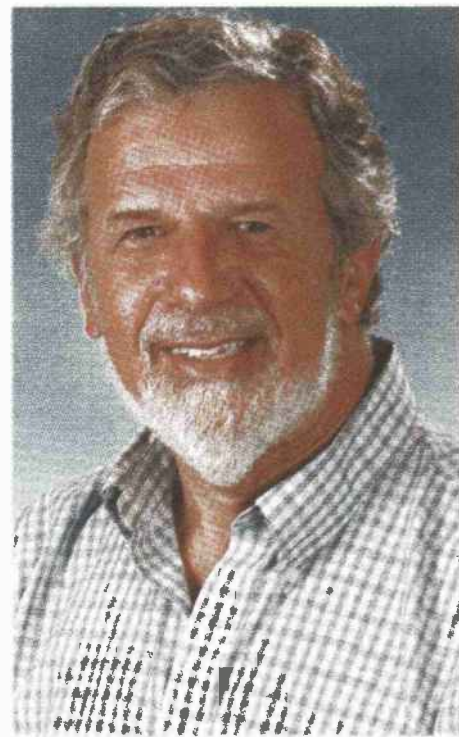
Broken down, the NCC figures show that 30 percent of reported abuse involves some type of neglect – such as not feeding a child properly or not taking him to school. Physical abuse makes up 27%, sexual abuse 12% and emotional abuse 12%, among others. The main perpetrators of child abuse were by parents, NCC research shows.

This data is reflected in figures from the Haruv Institute, a center for advanced research and training in the field of child abuse within the Israeli family. In 2009, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs reported that 42% of the cases it received were dealing with abuse.

While lack of supervision and failure to provide children with basic necessities is clearly more prominent than physical or sexual abuse, Dubowitz said that many health and educational professionals were too consumed with determining when to alert social welfare agencies and were paying less attention to the softer, more manageable cases of neglect.

"It is a pity that we [as professionals] get too focused on where the cases cross the threshold but it is important to find balance and to be reasonable," he said, adding "It is understandable that professionals want to know at what point a situation is neglect and when to call in agencies but sometimes pediatricians, teachers or friends need to act even when the situation does not rise to [an extreme] level."

Dubowitz, however, was quick to add that "many people have the view that children are neglected because their parents don't want to care for them



HOWARD DUBOWITZ

but, even after 30 years in this field, I believe that most parents want to be good, it's just that sometimes problems get in the way of their ability to be good."

He continued: "It is so convenient to point the finger at parents for messing up but sometimes a child is particularly challenging or there are other, outside factors that prevent good parenting."

Dubowitz said he planned to urge professionals at both conferences to spend less time blaming bad parents and more time "finding ways to help these families because in the long-term most children end up staying in the family home with their parents."