

ABSTRACT

The present experimental study focused the impact of child abuse related anxiety in delay of cognitive processes of children in terms of change blindness. A sample of the study consisted of 50 abused (boys=23 & girls=27) and 50 controls i.e. non-abused (boys=22 & girls=28) with an age range of 8-12 years ($M=9.82$, $SD=1.63$) belonging to lower, middle and upper socioeconomic classes. The data were collected from Child Protection Bureau, Government of Punjab, NGO Sawera and four private and public schools from Lahore, Multan and surrounding areas. The sample was drawn taking informed consent. The children were screened out for abuse by administering Child Abuse Scale (Malik & Shah, 2003). For the present study Revised Manifest Anxiety Scale for Children (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978) was translated into Urdu and administered to determine the levels of anxiety in both groups. Cronbach Alpha coefficient of CAS was .94 ($p < .0001$) and translated version was RCMAS .80 ($p < .0001$) for the present sample. A Change Blindness including weapon, non-weapon and neutral scenes was designed (Malik & Humphreys, 2005) using flicker paradigm (Rensink, O'Regan, & Clark, 1997) on E-prime software (Schneider, Eschman, & Zuccolotto, 2002) that automatically registered the number of correct and wrong responses along with reaction time for each stimulus. A semi-structured interview was developed and used with both groups of children in which they were inquired about the re-experiencing of the events by watching the similar scenes in the experiment and writing/telling a story at the end of the experiment. Then debriefing sessions were conducted with the children after the task accomplishment while asking their feedback and experience regarding the experiment. The themes of stories were qualitatively analyzed using Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 1995; 2001). The results indicated that abused children had higher levels of anxiety and less mean accuracy and more reaction time (delayed responses) than controls contributing to their change blindness due to traumatic re-experiences. These findings were supported by the qualitative analysis in the form of the parental negative attitude and abuse related themes depicted in their stories. Mostly abuse was prevalent in lower class and children of less educated mothers but no gender differences were suggested. The results are discussed in specific reference to Pakistan's socio-cultural context While taking this initial step in examining the relationship between child abuse related anxiety and underlying cognitive dysfunctions.