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# A case of alcohol-related child abuse in the Ukrainian academic environment

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**Short Report**

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## Abstract

# Introduction:

This paper explores the how members of the Ukrainian academic community react to a publicly reported case of alcohol-related child abuse occurring within an academic environment, focusing on the preference to ignore or neglect the issue of child maltreatment.

# Methods

The study was based on an incident of alcohol-related child abuse observed during a biological research conference in Ukraine in 2025. A post describing a case of alcohol-related child abuse observed during a Ukrainian scientific conference was published in an open academic social media group with approximately 33,700 members. Reactions from 208 unique participants were anonymously analyzed applying quantitatively and qualitatively characteristics.

# Results

Only 41.3% of respondents condemned the violence, while 11.1% tolerated or questioned whether the behavior constituted abuse, and 47.6% did not clearly express an opinion. Female respondents condemned violence more frequently than males, whereas males demonstrated higher levels of tolerance toward abusive behavior. Additionally, 31.3% of participants considered public discussion of the case inappropriate because it could damage the reputation of the scientific community, and 12.0% attempted to shift responsibility toward the individual who intervened and reported the abuse.

# Conclusion

The findings suggest substantial variability in how child abuse is perceived. In particular, the report reveals a clear gender disparity in perceptions of violence within the Ukrainian academic environment, as females were more likely to condemn the violence and less likely to consider publication of the incident inappropriate.

## Introduction

Finkelhor & Korbin (1988) designated child abuse as an international issue realized through the prescribed, proximate, and preventable harm to children that results from human. Abuse experience causes physical, mental, sexual, and social harm to the child and may result in various injuries or death (DiScala et al., 2000n et al., 2022). Dube et al. (2001) proved a strong dependency of parental alcoholism on child abuse, while Ledoux et al. (2002) confirmed the poor parental support with alcohol consumption by parents. These findings correlate with further involvement of children in alcohol abuse in Ukraine,

reported by Burlaka (2017). Although there are no studies that show a relationship between alcohol consumption and parental child abuse among academicians, some studies have shown that socioeconomic and educational factors affect parental malpractice (Merritt, 2009; Khosravan et al., 2018). Here, we would like to share our occasional experience of facing parental alcohol-related child malpractice and abuse occurring in the Ukrainian academic environment and the further reaction of academic-related people to it.

In June 2025, we participated in a biological research conference organized as a field session in a mountainous town in the Ukrainian Carpathians. During this conference, we faced child abuse that led to some further considerations we would like to express here. One of the conference participants, a female PhD student, came with her one-year-old child. During the dinner, she drank alcohol for a few hours while her child was present. Later, at nearly midnight, she returned to the rented room and started physical violence against the child. Awakened by the child's screams, one of us (AN) entered the room and stopped the violence. The police and conference organizers were informed immediately. However, the police only gave a verbal warning and left the child with the drunk mother. Conference organizers just covered up the situation and promised it would not happen again. Early in the morning, confused by the situation, we left the conference and returned home.

## Methods

We were surprised by the police's and conference organizers' reaction. Hence, we decided to publish an openly available post about it in one of the social networks, namely, in the open group of the Ukrainian scientific community. This group comprises ca. 33,700 participants. This group comprises ca. 33,700 participants, most of whom are associated with an academic or educational environment. From the total number, ca. 8,000 (23.7%) are active community members. In this post, AN explained the situation and raised the question of whether such behavior is acceptable for a scientist. In total, 208 unique individuals reacted to the post and were included in the further analysis. Because some participants posted multiple comments, only one response per individual was counted to avoid duplication. If the same person expressed different opinions across multiple comments (e.g., tolerated the violence in one comment but condemned it in another), only the response condemning the violence was included in the analysis.

Openly available information from personal profiles was examined solely to categorize respondents by sex (male or female). No additional personal data were collected or disclosed. Anonymous accounts and duplicate profiles were excluded to minimize potential bias. To protect confidentiality and prevent additional harm to the child involved, the name of the town, the conference title, the dates, the identities of participants, and the name of the scientific social network community are intentionally withheld.

## Results

In total, 208 unique persons (only 0.6% of the total community or 2.6% of its active part) openly reacted to the post (126 reacted directly, and 82 shared their opinions in the comments or reacted to comments).

The comparatively low number of responses may be explained by a general lack of interest in the topic. Nevertheless, because the participants represented independent research and educational institutions of different levels from across Ukraine, the obtained results may be regarded as conditionally illustrative, while still requiring further and more in-depth investigation.

Only 41.3% of the persons, who reacted to the post condemned such child violence. From this number, only 16.8% clearly condemned violence (i.e., expressed, mostly agressively, opinion that such violence is unacceptable), while the other 24.5% neutrally condemned (i.e., expressed the opinion that such violence was undesirable but could be conditionally accepted or justified, for example, as a consequence of parental stress). Besides this, 11.1% of reacted persons tolerated such violence or doubted that such behavior was violent (Fig. 1). Thus, 47.6% of reacted persons did not expressed their opinion regarding the violence. Interesting that female persons condemned violence much more actively (43.6% of female reacted persons) compared to males (37.3% of males). Vice versa, males tolerated the violence much more actively (17.3% of males expressed a tolerance reaction) than females (only 7.5% of total reacted females expressed the tolerance).

Figure 1: Comparison of reactions within the Ukrainian academic community to a social media post describing child violence. A – percentages calculated from the total number of respondents. B – percentages calculated within sex-specific groups.

Besides this, the publication of this post elicited another unexpected reaction from the community. Regardless of the reaction to violence, 31.3% of total reacted persons found this publication inappropriate because it discredits the scientific community. The comparatively high proportion of respondents who considered publication of the incident inappropriate may reflect a protective attitude toward the perceived moral and intellectual reputation of the academic community and at the same time, traditional alcohol behavior tolerance in Ukraine. In this context, socially stigmatized issues such as alcohol abuse and child violence may be viewed as incompatible with the expected image of an educated professional environment, potentially encouraging denial, minimization, or reputational defensiveness.

Despite the offender being female, 36.0% of male respondents considered publication of the incident inappropriate, compared to 28.6% of female respondents. We suggest that this reaction may reflect an attempt to protect the reputation of the academic environment and avoid unwarranted extrapolations regarding the scientific community as a whole. The higher tolerance of violence among male respondents and their greater concern regarding reputational damage may also reflect broader gendered social norms present in post-Soviet societies, where certain forms of family violence have historically been more normalized or less openly condemned. At the same time, this pattern may be associated with hierarchical structures and reputational cultures within some academic environments, particularly those traditionally dominated by men. However, these interpretations remain hypothetical and require dedicated sociological investigation.

Finally, regardless of the reaction to violence and publication of the respective post, 12.0% of total reacted persons tried to shift the blame. These reacted persons tried to accuse the author of the post (AN) of inappropriately or insufficiently responding to the violence. In this respect, 14.3% of females and 8.0% of males suggested that AN did not advocate for the child enough (e.g., suggesting that he should have called the police sooner). This also supports the finding that, in general, females more actively react to child violence and do not tolerate it.

This case also highlights the need for safeguarding protocols within academic events, particularly when alcohol is served and participants attend with children. Organizers should establish clear behavioral policies regarding alcohol consumption, child safety, mandatory reporting procedures, and emergency responses to suspected abuse or neglect. Designated safeguarding contacts, confidential reporting mechanisms, and explicit procedures for responding to incidents involving vulnerable persons may help reduce the level of conflict situations and improve child protection within academic environment in general.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study should be considered preliminary, as it has several important limitations that should be acknowledged. It is based on unadjusted comparative data derived from a relatively small sample size and does not account for potential confounding variables. Although we attempted to maintain a neutral position, the study may also be considered partly biased due to the direct involvement of the authors in the incident. Nevertheless, we believe this report is important because it aims to draw attention to the issue of child maltreatment within the Ukrainian academic community and to identify key directions for future research. More comprehensive studies applying rigorous statistical approaches and involving more accurately defined study groups are still required.

## Conclusion

Hence, this brief exploration showed how the Ukrainian academic community reacts to child violence. Publication of such posts on social networks can be illustrative and useful for further analysis. It was found that males are more tolerant of violence while preferring not to see such publications and/or avoid sharing their opinion. In contrast, females are actively reacting to the publication of child violence cases and, in general, more actively condemn it.

## Declarations

**Author contributions:** A.N. – conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft. M.S.-N. – formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft.

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**Human Ethics and Consent to Participate.** The study is based on the authors' personal experience and on publicly available data on a social network, without disclosure of any private information, and therefore, in accordance with local legislation, it does not require consent. No ethical approval was required for this type of study, in accordance with the regulations of the Ukrainian authorities.

**Data availability.** Anonymized data supporting the findings of this study can be obtained from the authors upon request.

**Competing interests.** The authors declares no conflict of interests.

**Consent to Publish.** No personally identifiable information was gathered or incorporated in this paper. Therefore, no consent for the publication was necessary.

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# Figures

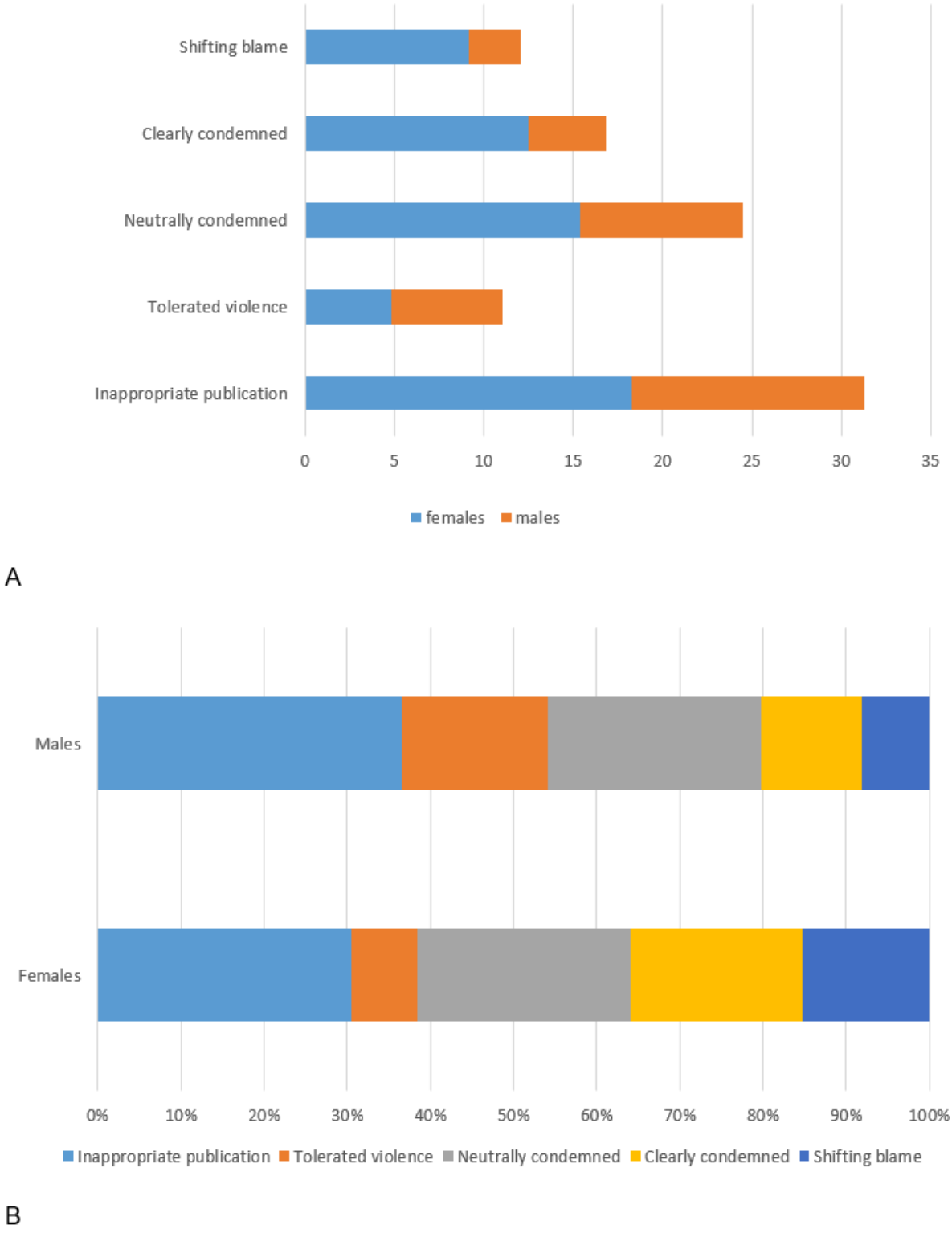



**Figure 1**

Comparison of reactions within the Ukrainian academic community to a social media post describing child violence. A – percentages calculated from the total number of respondents. B – percentages calculated within sex-specific groups.