

Abuse and its Impact on the Mental Wellbeing of Children

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ABSTRACT

Children are an important asset for any nation. In the human life span, the childhood period is considered as the most significant, since it is the foundation period not only for their future but the future of nation as well. Children are the building blocks of a nation, they shape the particular nation. The growth and development of nation depends on its children. For the true prosperity of a nation the children should be raised in stress free environment. A safe and secure environment is a prerequisite for the true growth and development of a child. Child abuse or maltreatment of children takes a toll on the mental wellbeing of the child. This in the long run makes the society sick and maladjusted. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse and child maltreatment as "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. The ever growing complexities of life and the dramatic changes brought about by socio-economic transitions in India have played a major role in increasing the vulnerability of children to different forms of abuse. However, in India, and in other countries, there has been no understanding of the extent, magnitude and trend of the issue.

KEY WORDS: *Mental health, physical abuse, verbal assault, Emotional abuse.*

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INTRODUCTION

Child abuse has a drastic impact upon the life of child .It encroaches ones' mental, physical, emotional, & social aspect of life. This not only affects child at the later stage rather it is especially true for neonates, infants, and toddler stage also. Therefore, Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at increased risk for a number of problematic developmental, health, and mental health outcomes, including learning problems (e.g., problems with inattention and deficits in executive functions), problems relating to peers (e.g., peer rejection), internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety), externalizing symptoms (e.g., oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, aggression), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When grown as adults, these children continue to show increased risk for psychiatric disorders, substance use, serious medical illnesses, and lower economic productivity. Experiences of abuse in childhood have outcome of delinquency, violence, and suicide attempts in adolescence and adulthood. Adolescents and adults with a history of child abuse and neglect have higher rates of alcohol abuse and alcoholism than those without a history of abuse and neglect.

Child abuse (including all maltreatment types) involves any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm or threat of harm to a child (Gilbert et al., 2009).Broadly child abuse involves acts of commission through words or overt actions that have the potential for harm to a child. Child neglect, on the other hand involves acts of omission where there is a lack of care to provide for the development of a

child including their basic physical, emotional or educational needs, and failure to protect them from harm or potential harm (Connell-Carrick, 2003; English, Thompson, Graham, & Briggs, 2005).

Thus, abused children may become chronically withdrawn and anxious and lose basic social and language skills necessary for intimate relationships. They may become developmentally delayed, socially limited, and, in some cases, antisocial or chronically unable to protect themselves from others. **Child abuse can have a devastating impact on children.** The early trauma exposure makes children more likely to suffer mental health disorders including substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder later on in their lives.

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE & ITS IMPACT

1. Neglect & its impact

Then any other form of child abuse, more children die from neglect. Those children who continuously live through abuse and violence unnecessarily suffer the ill effects of this trauma for the rest of their lives.

Neglect is a broad term describing one of the primary maltreatment types that refer to deprivation, or “the absence of sufficient attention, responsiveness, and protection appropriate to the age and needs of a child” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012, p 2).

Physical neglect can be defined as the negligent failure of a parent or caretaker to provide adequate food, clothing,

shelter, medical care, or supervision where no physical injury to the child has occurred.

An example of inadequate supervision is when parents leave their children unsupervised during the hours when the children are out of school. Parents are often unable to arrange childcare services to meet their needs. Children left in these circumstances may also be particularly vulnerable to accidents, injuries, or crime. Because these parents don't perceive any wrongdoing, this is a complicated area that is subject to controversy regarding the age when children should be left alone, societal and community responsibilities to provide resources, and governmental requirements. Thus, in nut shell we can say that Physical neglect is the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a parent or caretaker under circumstances indicating lack of supervision or even threatened harm to the child's health, safety, or welfare.

Neglect may be suspected if any of the following conditions exist in a Child:

- Lacking adequate medical or dental care.
- Often feels sleepy or hungry.
- Demonstrates poor personal hygiene, often dirty, or is inadequately dressed for weather conditions.
- Feels depressed, withdrawn or apathetic; exhibits antisocial or destructive behavior, shows exaggerated fearfulness; or suffers from substance abuse, or speech, eating, or habit disorders (biting, rocking, and whining).

- There is evidence of poor supervision (repeated falls down stairs; repeated ingestion of harmful substances; the child is left alone in the home, or unsupervised under any circumstances (left in car, street).
- The condition in the home are unsanitary (garbage, animal, or human excrement); the home lacks heating or plumbing; there are fire hazards or other unsafe home conditions; the sleeping arrangements are cold, dirty, or otherwise inadequate.
- The nutritional quality of food in the home is poor; meals are not prepared.

While some of these conditions may exist in any home environment for a variety of different reasons, e.g., poverty, welfare reform, and limitations on entitlement programs, it is the extreme or persistent presence of these factors that indicate some degree of neglect.

2. Physical-Abuse

Physical abuse may be defined as any non-accidental act that results in physical injury. It means unreasonably severe corporal punishment or unjustifiable punishment often represents physical injury. Intentional, deliberate assault, like burning, biting, cutting, poking, twisting limbs, or otherwise torturing a child, is also included in this category of child abuse. This usually happens when a person is frustrated or angry and strikes, shakes, or throws the child. In other words, it is a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent

or caretaker delays seeking care for a child or fails to seek appropriate care.

Indicators of physical abuse

- Physical abuse can be diagnosed by injuries such as loop marks, slap marks, or grab marks are highly suspicious and in some cases indicative of inflicted trauma.

3. Emotional Abuse

Emotional maltreatment can cripple and handicap a child emotionally, behaviorally and intellectually, in the same manner just as physical injuries scar and incapacitate a child. Emotional Abuse may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It include by suppressing the child's opportunities not to express their views, deliberately silencing them or making fun of what they say or how they communicate. It damaged ones 'Self-esteem. Severe psychological disorders have been traced to excessively distort parental attitudes and actions. A distinctive characteristic of emotional abuse is the absence of positive interaction (e.g. praising) from parent to their child. Emotional problems are accompanied with behavioral ones may be present, in varying degrees, following chronic and severe emotional child abuse, especially when there is little or no nurturing.

This is especially even true for neonates, infants, and toddlers stage also. These children may become chronically anxious and lose basic social and language skills that are necessary for any relationships. They may become

developmentally delayed, socially limited, and, in some cases, antisocial or chronically unable to protect themselves from others.

Emotional abuse/neglect may damage children of all ages but may be critical with infants and toddlers leaving them with permanent developmental deficits. Emotional abuse involves verbal abuse or verbal assault.

Verbal assault involves (belittling, screaming, threats, blaming, and sarcasm), unpredictable responses, continual negative moods, constant family discord, and chronically communicating conflicting messages are examples of ways parents may subject their children to emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse may be suspected if the child:

- Refuses to eat adequate amounts of food and is therefore very frail.
- Is unable to perform normal learned functions for a given age (walking, talking); exhibits developmental delays, particularly with verbal and nonverbal social skills.
- Displays antisocial behavior (aggression, behavioral disruption, bullying others) or obvious “delinquent” behavior (drug abuse, vandalism); conversely, is abnormally unresponsive, sad, or withdrawn.
- Constantly “seeks out” and “pesters” other adults, such as teachers or neighbors, for attention and affection.
- Displays exaggerated fears.
- Apathy, withdrawal, and lack of response to human interaction

- Suffers from sleep, speech, breathing disorders.
- Suffers from enuresis (bed wetting) and fecal soiling.

4. Sexual Abuse

Sexual child abuse is a type of maltreatment, violation, and exploitation that refers to the involvement of the child in sexual activity to provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator. It may be defined as forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. In other words, it may include contact for sexual purposes, molestation, statutory rape, prostitution, pornography, exposure, incest, or other sexually exploitative activities.

ABUSE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Child abuse and neglect often leave long-term scars on the child, which is difficult to erase from the mind and the body too. It can even have impact on the way the child will manage relationships during adulthood and can dent their self-confidence:

Academic Achievement

Abuse increase children's risk for experiencing academic problems. Abuse and neglect have profound effects on selected aspects of children's cognitive development. Abuse affects student's academic achievement in forms of lack of concentration in the class, at greater risk of being the victims of bullying in school having problems in learning and solving homework in addition to increase absenteeism. Although many attempts have been made to disentangle the effects of abuse. However, severe neglect may interfere

with the development of executive functioning, and both neglect and abuse increase the risk of attention regulation problems, lower IQ, and poorer school performance.

Emotion Regulation

Infants have limited capacities to regulate their own emotions and are dependent on caregivers to help them deal effectively with distress. When children feel upset or distressed, parents' availability and soothing presence can help them feel that they can cope with the strong negative effect, such that they are able to develop autonomous and effective means of regulating emotions over time. When children regulate their emotions well, they react to challenge with flexible and socially acceptable responses. Abused and neglected children, however, may not have such scaffolding experiences. It is likely that abused and neglected children experience not only a lack of support and an absence of positive affect but also harsh, inconsistent, and insensitive parenting.

Peer Relations

Children's relationships with their peers are critical to their sense of well-being. Abused and neglected children have problematic peer relations as they are unable to trust and adjust with everyone. The physical abuse child always face peer rejection amongst classmates; in particular, these children were perceived as engaging in more aggressive behavior and less cooperative, positive social behavior, all of which were significantly associated with rejection by peers. Problematic emotion regulation and higher levels of aggression are found in abused and neglected children

which can become apparent to peers when frustrations and challenges arise in school and playground environments.

Personality Disorder

Findings from several studies indicate that children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at greater risk for a number of externalizing behaviors, including conduct disorders, aggression, and delinquency.

Physical abuse is associated with elevated antisocial and depressive personality disorder symptoms; sexual abuse is associated with elevated borderline personality disorder symptoms; and neglect is associated with elevated symptoms of antisocial, avoidant, borderline, narcissistic, and passive-aggressive personality disorders, as well as with attachment difficulties and other interpersonal and psychological problems.

Impact of Abuse on mental health

There is evidence of a significant association between maltreatment and poor mental health in childhood and later life. Children, who are abused, physically, emotionally, sexually or neglected, have different adult brains than their counterparts who were not abused. Current research suggests that those who were abused are left vulnerable to a lifetime of mental illness and psychological problems, perhaps due to certain changes in brain structure.

A systematic review and meta-analysis of the literature on the long-term health consequences for children exposed to abuse and neglect found evidence to suggest a causal relationship between child maltreatment and a range of mental health issues and other problems including:

- Depressive disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Eating disorders
- Behavioral and conduct disorders
- Drug use
- Vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Other Effects of child abuse:

Develop Trust Issues: It is very difficult for children to trust other people, especially when their parents have been responsible for abuse. If one's parents can be trusted, who else can? An abused child may not be able to form strong relationships nor maintain a healthy relationship.

Unable to Express Emotions: Abused children are unable to vent their feelings and emotions positively. This results in bottling up of emotions and may give way to different psychological problems. Abused children often resort to alcohol or drugs during adulthood to assuage the pain as they can suffer from anxiety and depression.

Feelings of Being Worthless: It is extremely difficult to overcome negative feelings if one is constantly being berated or even beaten up. An abused child develops feelings of inferiority and often being worthless and thus settles for lesser education and low-paying jobs when they grow up.

SUGGESTIONS:

The first step in helping to prevent child abuse is to recognize the signs. To be sure, it may be difficult to

recognize when a child is being abused, as many children are not able to share this either out of fear or embarrassment and even as the signs are not always visible to the eye. Indeed, it is not always physical. Other forms of abuse include verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and economic abuse. Once it is detected following are some suggestions which can help to prevent child abuse:

- Though, Parenthood (caring for their children) is naturally gifted, but few may not be able to manage their physical and emotional needs adequately. Many parents would often equate disciplining children with abusing them and will need counseling to understand the role of a parent in a better manner. Moreover, Parents should be educated regarding child care and parenting strategies, or helping with economic support and stability during times of difficulty.
- Encourage parents to teach their children the correct names for their private parts so the children have the language to communicate abuse.
- Introduce the concept of "OK and Not OK" touching as opposed to "good touch - bad touch" which can be confusing to children.
- Provide parents with guidance about language they should use and appropriate times for reinforcing messages of personal space and privacy.
- Knowledge is power, and awareness brings advocacy. Educate those around you about the realities of abuse. Whether it is where you work, where you exercise, where you practice your faith, or where your own

circle of friends and family are, educate them about this issue.

- Innovative community based health programs which are culturally and gender appropriate and reaches out to all segments of the population need to be developed. Substantial improvements can be achieved only when a comprehensive strategy for mental health which incorporates both prevention and care elements is adopted.
- Faith based organizations, civic groups, community leaders, and local and state legislatures can all come together to both fight child abuse. Through this, one can bring attention to the needs of these children who become victim of various forms of abuse.
- Positive changes to the care giving environment, in the form of providing nurturing and consistent care, can help children to recover from their experiences of maltreatment. Children and young people may also need specialist therapeutic support to help them recover from adverse impacts of maltreatment and to make sense of their experiences.

CONCLUSION

Child abuse not only having immediate affects but also long term consequences. It appear to influence the course of development by altering many elements of biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and behavioral development. Poor or weak school performance and educational achievement are among the consequences of child abuse and neglect. Brain development is affected. Abused child have hesitated

attitude with their peers, or having problem with executive functioning; the ability to regulate physiology, behavior, and emotions is impaired; and the trajectory toward more problematic outcomes is impacted.

Abuse and neglect have adverse impacts for most children, affecting particularly in emotional, behavioral and mental well-being, which is considered as an integral part of overall-health and quality of life. These impacts appear to be cumulative and vary depending on a number of factors, including severity of the maltreatment, its duration, the age of the child and the individual susceptibilities and resiliencies of the child. Providing earlier, effective and holistic support to parents, whilst keeping the child's welfare in mind, can reduce the risk of maltreatment.

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