

# Awareness and Prevention of Child Abuse

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### Abstract

Child abuse is the physical, sexual, emotional maltreatment or neglect of a child or children. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse and sexual abuse. In the child abuse Physical abuse involves physical aggression directed at a child by an adult. Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation. Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act. Emotional abuse is defined as the production of psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child as a result of behavior such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality. Child neglect is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety and well-being are threatened with harm. A child abuse fatality occurs when a child's death is the result of abuse or neglect or when abuse and/or neglect are contributing factors to a child's death. Child abuse is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes. Understanding the causes of abuse is crucial to addressing the problem of child abuse. A support-group structure is needed to reinforce parenting skills and closely monitor the child's well-being. Visiting home nurse or social-worker visits are also required to observe and evaluate the progress of the child and his/her caretaking situation.

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Child Neglect, Physical Abuse, Psychological Abuse, Sexual Abuse.

### Introduction

Child abuse is a global problem that is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. It is a state of emotional, physical, economic and sexual maltreatment meted out to a person below the age of eighteen and is a globally prevalent phenomenon. However, in India, as in many other countries, there has been no understanding of the extent, magnitude and trends of the problem. The 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 various and newer forms of abuse. Child abuse has serious physical and psycho-social consequences which adversely affect the health and overall well-being of a child.

### Definitions of Child Abuse

"Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes 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". (*World Health Organization*)

"Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (*The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act – CAPTA*)

"Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions, or processes do or fail to do which directly or indirectly harms children or damages their prospects of safe and healthy development into adulthood". (*National Commission. U.K. 1996*)

"Child abuse is the physical and/or psychological/emotional mistreatment of children". (Wikipedia)

### Types of Child Abuse

#### Physical

Physical Abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. Such injury or incidence is considered abuse

regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child. There may be single or repeated incidents.

**Signs of Physical Child Abuse**

**1. Physical Signs**

Sometimes physical abuse has clear warning signs, such as unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts. While all children will take a tumble now and then, look for age-inappropriate injuries, injuries that appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt, or a pattern of severe injuries.

**2. Behavioral Signs**

Other times, signs of physical abuse may be more subtle. The child may be fearful, shy away from touch or appear to be afraid to go home. A child's clothing may be inappropriate for the weather, such as heavy, long sleeved pants and shirts on hot days.

**3. Caregiver Signs**

Physically abusive caregivers may display anger management issues and excessive need for control. Their explanation of the injury might not ring true, or may be different from an older child's description of the injury.

**Emotional**

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and, therefore, Child Protection System (CPS) may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms are identified.

**Signs of Emotional Child Abuse**

**1. Behavioral Signs**

Since emotional child abuse does not leave concrete marks, the effects may be harder to detect. Is the child excessively shy, fearful or afraid of doing something wrong? Behavioral extremes may also be a clue. A child may be constantly trying to parent other children for example, or on the opposite side exhibit antisocial behavior such as uncontrolled aggression. Look for inappropriate age behaviors as well, such as an older child exhibiting behaviors more commonly found in younger children.

**2. Caregiver Signs**

Does a caregiver seem unusually harsh and critical of a child, belittling and shaming him or her in front of others? Has the caregiver shown anger or issues with control in other areas? A caregiver may also seem strangely unconcerned with a child's welfare or performance. Keep in mind that there might not be immediate caregiver signs. Tragically, many emotionally abusive caregivers can present a kind outside face to the world, making the abuse of the child all the more confusing and scary.

**Sexual**

Sexual Abuse is an involvement of a child in a sexual activity that s/he does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or is not developmentally prepared for, such as:

Contact	Non-Contact
1. Kissing or holding in a sexual manner	1. Obscene calls or obscene remarks on a computer or a phone or in written notes
2. Touching and fondling genital areas	2. Virtual sex
3. Forcing a child to touch another person's genital areas	3. Online sexual solicitation and grooming
4. Forcing a child to perform oral sex	4. Voyeurism
5. Vaginal or anal intercourse and other sexual activity	5. Exhibitionism
6. Biting a child's genital area	6. Exposed to pornography or used to make pornography
7. Incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure	7. Sexually intrusive questions or comments
8. Sex with animals	8. Forced to self-masturbate or watch others masturbate
9. Sexual exploitation, where sexual abuse of a child involves some kind of commercial transaction (monetary or in-kind)	9. Sexual exploitation and child sex tourism also may be abusive without physical contact (for example, a tour operator or taxi driver who arranges tours and/ or children for sex tourists is an exploiter of children as well)
10. Child sex tourism, where abusers travel to a place other than their home and there have sex with a child	

**Signs of Sexual Abuse might include**

**Behavioral Signs**

Does the child display knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to his or her age, or even seductive behavior? A child might appear to avoid another person, or display unusual behavior- either being very aggressive or very passive. Older children might resort to destructive behaviors to take away the pain, such as alcohol or drug abuse, self-mutilation, or suicide attempts.

**Physical Signs**

A child may have trouble sitting or standing, or have stained, bloody or torn underclothes. Swelling bruises or bleeding in the genital area is a red flag. Pregnancy, especially under the age of 14, is a strong cause of concern.

**Caregiver Signs**

The caregiver may seem to be unusually controlling and protective of the child, limiting contact with other children and adults. Again, as with other types of abuse, sometimes the caregiver does not give outward signs of concern. This does not mean the child is lying or exaggerating.

**The Online Risk**

Warning signs of online sexual child abuse are these:

1. Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night, and may turn the computer monitor off or quickly change the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.
2. You find pornography on your child's computer.
3. Your child receives phone calls or mail from people you don't know, or makes calls to numbers that you don't recognize.

4. Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.

#### **Neglect**

Neglect is usually defined as depriving a child of adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care and education. Neglect also harms children although it is more about being inactive and not doing something than the previous forms of abuse, which are more active.

#### **Signs of Neglect might include is**

##### **Physical Signs**

A child may consistently be dressed inappropriately for the weather, or have ill-fitting, dirty clothes and shoes. They might appear to have consistently bad hygiene, like appearing very dirty, matted and unwashed hair, or noticeable body odor. Another warning sign is untreated illnesses and physical injuries.

##### **Behavioral Signs**

Does the child seem to be unsupervised? Schoolchildren may be frequently late or tardy. The child might show troublesome, disruptive behavior or be withdrawn and passive.

##### **Caregiver Signs**

Does the caregiver have problems with drugs or alcohol? While most of us have a little clutter in the home, is the caregiver's home filthy and unsanitary? Is there adequate food in the house? A caregiver might also show reckless disregard for the child's safety, letting older children play unsupervised or leaving a baby unattended. A caregiver might refuse or delay necessary health care for the child.

Although people usually think of child abuse as someone physically harming a child, it is important to keep in mind that about 60 percent of child abuse cases actually involve neglect. It is sometimes easier to see the signs of physical abuse when a child is hit, kicked, or burned, but looking for signs of neglect is important too, as the consequences can be just as tragic.

#### **Causes of Child Abuse**

There is not any single fact which causes child abuse; abuse usually occurs in families where there is a combination of risk factors. Abuse and neglect occur most often in families who are under pressure and lack support. Most abuse other than sexual abuse occurs in families to which some, or all, of the following apply:

1. Poverty
2. Unemployment
3. Lack of education
4. Inadequate housing
5. Serious marital problems
6. Frequent changes of addresses
7. Violence between family members
8. Loneliness and social isolation
9. Lack of support from the extended family

#### **In Some Cases the Abuser may also Display the following**

1. Very high expectations of the child and what the child should achieve
2. The parent may have been abused as a child
3. A lack of knowledge and skills in bringing up children
4. Low self-esteem and self confidence
5. Racism
6. Depression

7. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
8. Mental or physical ill health
9. Work pressures

#### **Certain Community Attitudes may Encourage Child Abuse. These include**

1. Acceptance of the use of violence and force
2. Acceptance of physical punishment of children
3. Acceptance of parents "ownership" of children and their right to treat children as they see fit
4. Inequality between men and women

#### **Effect of Child Abuse**

There is no broadly accepted framework on the effects of child sexual abuse. However, Finkelhor and Browne have developed a list of areas that are affected by the sexual interaction of adults with children. It is a fairly comprehensive framework and seems to be gaining wide acceptance in the professional community. All the effects are listed in terms of the molested child, but they are feelings, misconceptions, and thought patterns the molested child may carry into adulthood.

#### **Traumatic Sexualization**

The child's sexuality is distorted by age-inappropriate sexualization. The perpetrator rewards inappropriate sexual behavior, by trading gifts, affection, privileges, or attention for sex. He is overly attendant to or distorts the meaning and importance of bodily parts. He also conveys misconceptions and confusions about sexual behavior and accepted morality. The abusive behavior may associate in the child fearful memories and events with sex. The child may develop distorted views of sexual norms, become confused over sexual identity, become sexual aggressive, or tend to extremes, with either a heightened sensitivity or attraction to sexual behavior or highly negative feelings to all sexual activity.

#### **Betrayal**

The child's expectations of how or what others will provide for care and protection can be severely warped. Grief reactions, depression, hostility and anger are all common expressions towards the sense of betrayal. The child may display an impaired ability to judge the trustworthiness of others. All or nothing extremes in behavior or thinking may be expressed. The child may be delinquent, aggressive, and show discomfort in close relations, or he or she may become overly attached and be indiscriminate in relations with all adults.

#### **Powerlessness**

Continued invasion gives rise to feelings of vulnerability, and may damage self-efficacy if the child cannot convince others of the abuse or sees no one stopping the abuse. The child may become fearful and anxious, suffer nightmares, become depressed, run away, or show truancy. Eating and sleeping disorders may occur. The child may try to gain control of conflicting emotions by recapitulating the experience by trying to abuse others.

#### **Stigmatization**

The child's sense of being is denigrated and the child is isolated from a larger society. The perpetrator may explicitly denigrate and blame the victim, or the child may blame himself or herself for the abuse, and therefore feel an overwhelming sense of shame and responsibility. The child's sense of self-esteem is lowered. The child has a feeling of being

different from everyone around him or her. The child will isolate himself or herself from peers, may participate in criminal or delinquent behavior, may abuse drugs and alcohol, may practice self-mutilation and may become suicidal. Boys suffer confusion over sexual identity and fear of homosexuality. They display increased aggressive behavior after the abuse. Boys have a greater tendency than girls to re-enact their abuse by abusing other children.

#### **How to Prevent Child Abuse**

Prevention efforts most commonly occur before a problem develops so that the problem itself, or some manifestation of the problem, can be stopped or lessened. Child abuse and neglect prevention covers a broad spectrum of services—such as public awareness, parent education, and home visitation—for audiences ranging from the general public to individuals who have abused or neglected a child. Community groups, social services agencies, schools, and other concerned citizens may provide these services. Typically, prevention activities attempt to deter predictable problems, protect existing states of health, and promote desired life objectives. More specifically, family support services, a major component of child abuse prevention, are designed to strengthen and stabilize families, increase parental abilities, provide a safe and stable family environment, and enhance child development.

#### **Types of Prevention Activities**

Child abuse and neglect prevention activities generally occur at basic levels at three:

1. Primary, or universal, prevention activities are directed at the general population with the goal of stopping the occurrence of maltreatment before it starts.
2. Secondary or selective prevention activities focus on families at high risk of maltreatment to alleviate conditions associated with the problem.
3. Tertiary or indicated prevention activities direct services to families where maltreatment has occurred to reduce the negative consequences of the maltreatment and to prevent its recurrence.

#### **Primary or Universal Prevention**

Primary prevention includes activities or services available to the general public. Frequently such activities aim to raise awareness among community members, the public, service providers, and decision-makers about the scope and problems associated with child maltreatment. For example: Public awareness campaigns informing citizens how and where to report suspected child abuse and neglect; Public service announcements on the radio or television encouraging parents to use nonviolent forms of discipline.

These types of programs are particularly popular during April, which is designated by presidential proclamation as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Other primary prevention efforts focus on support services available to the general population, such as pediatric care for all children, childcare, or parent education classes.

#### **Secondary or Selective Prevention**

Secondary prevention activities focus efforts and resources on children and families known to be at higher risk for maltreatment. Several risk factors such

as substance abuse, young maternal age, developmental disabilities, and poverty are associated with child maltreatment. Programs may direct services to communities or neighborhoods that have a high incidence of one or several risk factors. Examples of secondary prevention programs include the following:

1. Parent education programs located in high schools for teen mothers;
2. Substance abuse treatment programs for parents with young children;
3. Respite care for families who have children with special needs;
4. Family resource centers offering information and referral services to families living in low-income neighborhoods.

Family support activities that are available to individuals identified as at risk or community members in a high-risk neighborhood also are considered secondary prevention. For example, local hospitals or community organizations may offer prenatal care and parenting classes to new or expectant parents. Local agencies may provide home visitation services for at risk families with infants and young children. Family support services are intended to assist parents in creating safe home environments and fostering healthy children.

#### **Tertiary or Indicated Prevention**

Tertiary prevention activities focus efforts on families in which maltreatment has already occurred. The goal of these programs is to prevent maltreatment from recurring and to reduce the negative consequences associated with maltreatment (e.g., social-emotional problems in children, lower academic achievement, decreased family functioning). These prevention programs may include services such as:

1. Intensive family preservation services with trained mental health counselors available to families 24 hours per day for several weeks;
2. Parent mentor programs with stable, non-abusive families acting as "role models" and providing support to families in crisis;
3. Mental health services for children and families affected by maltreatment to improve family communication and functioning.
4. A combination of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services are necessary for any community to provide a full continuum of services to deter the devastating effects of child maltreatment.

#### **Major Prevention Program Models**

Many popular prevention programs are patterned after one of four models:

1. Public awareness activities
2. Parent education programs
3. Skills-based curricula for children
4. Home visitation programs

#### **Public Awareness Activities**

Public awareness activities are an important part of an overall approach to addressing child abuse and neglect. The purpose of public awareness activities is to raise community awareness of child abuse and neglect as a public issue and to provide the public with information about available resources and solutions. Such activities have the potential to reach diverse community audiences: parents and

prospective parents, children, and community members, including professionals, who are critical to the identification and reporting of abuse.

In designing prevention education and public information activities, national, State, and local organizations use a variety of media to promote these activities, including:

1. Public service announcements
2. Press releases
3. Posters
4. Information kits and brochures
5. Television or video documentaries and dramas

Through these media, communities are able to promote support for healthy parenting practices, child safety skills, and protocols for reporting suspected maltreatment.

### **Organizations Supporting Public Awareness Activities**

#### **State Children's Trust Funds**

State Children's Trust Funds (CTFs) exist in all 50 States and the District of Columbia with the specific goal of preventing child maltreatment. CTFs coordinate prevention activities throughout their State by promoting and funding a variety of community-based programs including public awareness campaigns, home visitation programs, skills-based curricula for children, and parent education and support activities. In addition, many CTFs develop and distribute posters for community groups, schools, and many other professionals working with children. The poster may encourage parents to use positive discipline techniques or encourage children to say "no" to touch that makes them uncomfortable.

#### **Don't Shake the Baby Campaign**

One of the largest public awareness initiatives focuses on the prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome. A national network of *Don't Shake the Baby State* contacts was established to ensure that all professionals involved in the care of children (e.g., teachers, physicians, nurses, home visitors, parent educators) become aware of the dangers associated with shaking infants. In addition to professionals, this campaign targets parents to alert them to the dangers of shaking their baby as well as playing with the baby in certain ways (e.g., throwing the baby in the air, bouncing the baby on a knee, twisting the baby in the air).

#### **Prevent Child Abuse America**

Prevent Child Abuse America, formerly the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPA), is a leading national organization actively engaged in public awareness activities. Prevent Child Abuse America, together with Marvel Comics, developed Spider-Man comic books that address child sexual abuse and child safety issues. This organization also distributes an information packet each year to assist community groups planning Child Abuse Prevention Month activities. Both the national office and Prevent Child Abuse America State Chapters throughout the country provide public awareness and other activities to prevent child abuse and neglect.

#### **Blue Ribbon Campaign**

The Blue Ribbon Campaign began as a tribute from a Virginia grandmother to a grandchild whose battered body was found at the bottom of a canal. By tying a blue ribbon—signifying the pain and

bruises suffered by abused children—around the antennae of her van, Bonnie Finney sought to raise awareness of the devastating effects of child abuse and neglect. Since those early days in the 1980s, the Blue Ribbon Campaign has grown into a national effort to raise awareness of the scope and problem of child maltreatment. The blue ribbon, often worn during April for Child Abuse Prevention Month, serves as the most recognized symbol for child abuse prevention.

#### **Parent Education Programs**

Parent education programs focus on enhancing parental competencies and promoting healthy parenting practices and typically target teen and highly stressed parents. Some of these programs are led by professionals or paraprofessionals, while others are facilitated by parents who provide mutual support and discuss personal experiences. These programs address issues such as:

1. Developing and practicing positive discipline techniques;
2. Learning age-appropriate child development skills and milestones;
3. Promoting positive play between parents and children;
4. Locating and accessing community services and supports.

Parent education programs are designed and structured differently, usually depending on the curriculum being used and the target audience. Programs may be short-term (i.e., those offering classes once a week for 6 to 12 weeks) or they may be more intensive (i.e., those offering services more than once a week and for up to 1 year). Popular parent education programs include:

1. Parents as Teachers
2. Every Person Influences Children (EPIC)
3. The Nurturing Program

In addition to parent education programs, mutual support groups also may strengthen families and help prevent child maltreatment. For example, *Parents Anonymous* affiliates work within their communities and States to provide support and resources to overwhelmed families struggling to cope with everyday stresses and strains.

#### **Skills-based Curricula for Children**

Many schools and local community social service organizations offer skills-based curricula to teach children safety and protection skills. Most of these programs focus efforts on preventing child sexual abuse and teaching children to distinguish appropriate touching from inappropriate touching. Many curricula have a parent education component to give parents and other caregivers the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize and discuss sexual abuse with their children. Curricula may use various methods to teach children skills including:

1. Workshops and school lessons
2. Puppet shows and role-playing activities
3. Films and videos
4. Workbooks, storybooks, and comics

Examples of skills-based curricula include programs such as *Talk about Touching*, *Safe Child*, *Reach*, *Recovery*, *Challenge*, *Good Touch/Bad Touch*, *Kids on the Block*, and *Illusion Theater*.

### Home Visitation Programs

Home visitation programs that emphasize the health and well-being of children and families have existed in the United States since the late 19th century. Organizations and agencies in fields as varied as education, maternal and child health, and health and human services, use home visitation programs to help strengthen families. Home visitation programs offer a variety of family-focused services to pregnant mothers and families with newborns. Activities encompass structured visits in the family's home, informal visits, and telephone calls. Topics addressed through these programs often include:

1. Positive parenting practices and nonviolent discipline techniques;
2. Child development;
3. Maternal and child health issues;
4. Accessing available social services;
5. Establishing social supports and networks;
6. Learning to advocate for oneself, one's child, and one's family;
7. Preventing accidental childhood injuries through the development of a safe home environment.

Recent evaluations suggest that both short- and long-term positive outcomes may occur for mothers and children receiving home visitation services. During a two-year period, nurses provided home visitation services to a group of poor, unmarried, teen mothers in Elmira, New York. Only 4 percent of the nurse-visited families had verified reports of child abuse and neglect compared to 19 percent of the families who did not receive home visits by nurses. A follow-up study further supported these positive results: the number of verified reports of child maltreatment for the nurse-visited group of mothers was nearly half that of mothers who did not receive home visitation services during the next 15 years. Additional positive outcomes among nurse-visited mothers included lower levels of smoking, fewer and better-spaced subsequent pregnancies, and more months working, as well as fewer emergency room visits by children for injuries. Several studies of home visitation programs using nonmedical

professionals also showed a significantly lower number of verified maltreatment reports for home-visited mothers.

### Conclusion

Child abuse is founded in families where there is a combination of poverty and lack of education. Abuse and neglect occur most often in families who are under pressure and lack support. People usually think of child abuse as someone physically harming a child, but it is keep in mind that about 60 percent of child abuse cases actually involve neglect/Psychological abuse. It is sometimes easier to see the signs of physical abuse when a child is hit, kicked, or burned, but looking for signs of neglect is important too, as the consequences can be just as tragic. But the unseen abuse is never being seen and it's more dangerous for a child. Child abuse should be removed from society and this can be done only with the support of public. To prevent the child abuse April month is known as "**national child abuse prevention month**" globally. So not only in April but also we should keep in mind to prevent the child abuse each day of every month.

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