



Introduction to Child Abuse across the Globe

Aiman Mohammed Suhail Kapadia

H.R. College of Commerce and Economics Hsnc Univerity

Abstract. Child abuse is a profound violation of innocence and trust, often leaving children in a state of deep vulnerability and fear. It creates lasting trauma that can overshadow a child's development, leading to feelings of isolation and sorrow. Many children experience neglect or betrayal from the very individuals meant to protect them, which complicates their ability to trust others. Despite the stigma surrounding their experiences, some find the strength and resilience to speak out, seeking justice and empowerment. The journey toward healing is not easy, but through endurance and support, survivors can embark on a path toward recovery and reclaim a sense of hope for their futures.

Index Terms- Child abuse is a profound violation of innocence and trust, often leaving children in a state of deep vulnerability and fear. It creates lasting trauma that can overshadow a child's development, leading to feelings of isolation and sorrow. Many children experience neglect or betrayal from the very individuals meant to protect them, which complicates their ability to trust others. Despite the stigma surrounding their experiences, some find the strength and resilience to speak out, seeking justice and empowerment. The journey toward healing is not easy, but through endurance and support, survivors can embark on a path toward recovery and reclaim a sense of hope for their futures.

I. Introduction

Background

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or other caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with.

The terms child abuse and child maltreatment are often used interchangeably, although some researchers make a distinction between them, treating child maltreatment as an umbrella term to cover neglect, exploitation, and trafficking.

Different jurisdictions have developed their own definitions of what constitutes child abuse for the purposes of removing children from their families or prosecuting a criminal charge.



Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary among professionals, and between social and cultural groups, as well as across time. The terms abuse and maltreatment are often used interchangeably in the literature. Child maltreatment can also be an umbrella term covering all forms of child abuse and child neglect. Defining child maltreatment depends on prevailing cultural values as they relate to children, child development, and parenting. Definitions of child maltreatment can vary across the sectors of society which deal with the issue, such as child protection agencies, legal and medical communities, public health officials, researchers, practitioners, and child advocates. Since members of these various fields tend to use their own definitions, communication across disciplines can be limited, hampering efforts to identify, assess, track, treat, and prevent child maltreatment.

In general, abuse refers to (usually deliberate) acts of commission while neglect refers to acts of omission. Child maltreatment includes both acts of commission and acts of omission on the part of parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child. Some health professionals and authors consider neglect as part of the definition of abuse, while others do not; this is because the harm may have been unintentional, or because the caregivers did not understand the severity of the problem, which may have been the result of cultural beliefs

about how to raise a child. Delayed effects of child abuse and neglect, especially emotional neglect, and the diversity of acts that qualify as child abuse, are also factors.

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." In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) uses the term child maltreatment to refer to both acts of commission (abuse), which include "words or overt actions that cause harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a child", and acts of omission (neglect), meaning "the failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm". The United States federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum, "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".

Child abuse 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 socioeconomic 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. According to WHO: "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional illtreatment, 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."

Child abuse is a violation of the basic human rights of a child and is an outcome of a set of interrelated familial, social, psychological and economic factors. The problem of child abuse and human rights violations is one of the most critical matters on the international human rights agenda. In the Indian context, acceptance of child rights as primary inviolable rights is fairly recent, as is the universal understanding of it. The National Study on Child Abuse undertaken by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, in 2005, attempts to understand the extent of the problem, its dimensions as well as its intensity. In addition, it examines two aspects:

- Strategies to address the problem of child abuse
- Identification of areas of further research, based on the findings of the study

II. Theoretical Literature

Child Abuse across the Globe

The UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children³ has given the following overview of the situation of abuse and violence against children across the globe.

- WHO estimates that almost 53,000 child deaths in 2002 were due to child homicide.
- In the Global School-Based Student Health Survey carried out in a wide range of developing countries, between 20% and 65% of school going children reported having been verbally or physically bullied in school in the previous 30 days. Similar rates of bullying have been found in industrialized countries.
- An estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact.
- UNICEF estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and Sudan, 3 million girls and women are subjected to FGM every year.
- ILO estimates that 218 million children were involved in child labour in 2004, of whom 126 million were engaged in hazardous work. Estimates from 2000 suggest that 5.7 million were in forced or bonded labour, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography and 1.2 million were victims of trafficking.
- Only 2.4% of the world's children are legally protected from corporal punishment in all settings.

One of the major problems in understanding the scope of the subject of 'child abuse' is that it is extremely difficult to get responses from children on such a



sensitive subject because of their inability to fully understand the different dimensions of child abuse and to talk about their experiences. It is therefore difficult to gather data on abused children. Further, definitions of abuse are not yet consistent within countries, much less from country to country or region to region.



Figure 1: Dispersion of different type of child abuse all over the world

Yet governments do estimate that the number of abused and neglected children is alarming, and unless governments get their act together and respond to the situation by way of both prevention and treatment, we will be doing a grave injustice to our children and would be denying them their basic rights.

Child abuse in Asia

While certain child abuse and neglect issues are common in almost all countries at the global level such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, abandonment and, increasingly, problems of street children, there are also many issues which are prevalent only in certain regions of the world. For instance, in Asia where population density is high, the issues of child labour and child sexual exploitation are also high. Political instability and other internal disturbances, including conditions of insurgency in many countries in Asia are also creating major problems, with increasing number of child soldiers, refugee children, trafficked children and children on the streets.



Figure 2: Child Across The Globe

Prevention of child abuse and neglect is still an uncharted field in Asia. The largest population of children in the world live in South Asia and majority of these children lack access to proper health care, nutrition and education. This reflects the socio-economic reality of the developing countries of the Asian region. The main factors that contribute to the magnitude of the problem of child abuse are poverty, illiteracy, caste system and landlessness, lack of economic opportunities, rural-urban migration, population growth, political instability and weak implementation of legal provisions.

Mostly, the approaches for prevention and methods of treatment of child abuse do not cover the entire gamut of abuse. Lack of reliable data on the incidence of child abuse and of knowledge of methods of prevention and treatment has been recognized and is being addressed by sovereign governments, national and international organizations e.g., UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International, ISPCAN, etc.

III. Child Abuse in India

Nineteen percent of the world's children live in India. According to the 2001 Census, some 440 million people in the country today are aged below eighteen years and constitute 42 percent of India's total population i.e., four out of every ten persons.



This is an enormous number of children that the country has to take care of. While articulating its vision of progress, development and equity, India has expressed its recognition of the fact that when its children are educated, healthy, happy and have access to opportunities, they are the country's greatest human resource.



Figure 3: Child Abuse Spread in India

Critical Concerns

- Every fifth child in the world lives in India
- Every third malnourished child in the world lives in India
- Every second Indian child is underweight
- Three out of four children in India are anaemic
- Every second new born has reduced learning capacity due to iodine deficiency
- Decline in female/male ratio is maximum in 0-6 years: 927 females per 1000 males
- Birth registration is just 62% (RGI-2004)
- Retention rate at Primary level is 71.01% (Elementary Education in India)
- Girls enrolment in schools at primary level is 47.79% (Elementary Education in India Progress towards UEE NUEPA Flash Statistics DISE 2005-2006)
- 1104 lakh child labour in the country (SRO 2000)
- Children born with low birth weight are 46%



- Immunization coverage is very low (polio -78.2%, measles-58.8%, DPT-55.3%, BCG78%)

The National Policy for Children, 1974, declared children to be a 'supreme national asset'. It pledged measures to secure and safeguard all their needs, declaring that this could be done by making wise use of available national resources. Unfortunately, ten successive Five Year Plans have not allocated adequate resources to meet the needs of children.

An exercise on child budgeting carried out by the Ministry of Women and Child Development revealed that total expenditure on children in 2005-2006 in health, education, development and protection together amounted to a mere 3.86%, rising to 4.91% in 2006-07.

Forms of Child Abuse

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slapping/kicking • Beating • Pushing • Shaking | <p>Severe forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual assault • Making the child fondle with private parts • Making the child exhibit private body parts • Exhibiting private body parts to a child • Photographing a child in the nude. <p>Other forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forcible kissing • Sexual advances during travel situations • Sexual advances during marriage situations • Exposure children | <p>-</p> <p>Humiliation in the lowering of self esteem of the child by harsh treatment, ignoring, shouting, or speaking rudely, name calling and use of abusive language</p> <p>Comparison in between siblings and the other children</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of attention to girls as compared to brothers • Less share of food in the family • Sibling care by the girl child • Gender discrimination |
|---|--|---|---|

However, the share of resources for child protection was abysmally low at 0.034% in 2005-06 and remained the same in 2006-07. Available resources have also not been utilized effectively for achieving outcomes for children. As a result, the status and condition of children have remained far from secure.



Harmful traditional practices like child marriage, caste system, discrimination against the girl child, child labour and Devadasi tradition impact negatively on children and increase their vulnerability to abuse and neglect.

Lack of adequate nutrition, poor access to medical and educational facilities, migration from rural to urban areas leading to rise in urban poverty, children on the streets and child beggars, all result in break down of families. These increase the vulnerabilities of children and exposes them to situations of abuse and exploitation. According to the report published in 2005 on 'Trafficking in Women and Children in India', 44,476 children were reported missing in India, out of which 11,008 children continued to remain untraced. India, being a major source and destination country for trafficked children from within India and adjoining countries has, by conservative estimates, three to five lakh girl children in commercial sex and organized prostitution.

IV. Conclusions

Child abuse is a serious global health problem. Although most studies on it have been conducted in developed countries, there is compelling evidence that the phenomenon is common throughout the world. Much more can and should be done about the problem.

In many countries, there is little recognition of child abuse among the public or health World Report on Violence and Health professionals, Recognition and awareness, although essential elements for effective prevention, are only part of the solution.

Prevention efforts and policies must directly address children, their caregivers and the environments in which they live in order to prevent potential abuse from occurring and to deal effectively with cases of abuse and neglect that have taken place.

The concerted and coordinated efforts of a whole range of sectors are required here, and public health researchers and practitioners can play a key role by leading and facilitating the process. Preventing child abuse is not simply a matter of parents doing a better job, but rather it is about creating a context in which —doing better| is easier. Enlightened public policy and the replication of high-quality publicly supported interventions are only part of what is needed to successfully combat child abuse.

It remains important to remind the public that child abuse and neglect are serious threats to a child's healthy development and that overt violence toward children and a persistent lack of attention to their care and supervision are unacceptable.



Individuals have the ability to accept personal responsibility for reducing acts of child abuse and neglect by providing support to each other and offering protection to all children within their family and their community.

As sociologist Robert Wuthnow has noted, every volunteer effort or act of compassion finds its justification not in offering solutions for society's problems but in offering hope —both that the good society we envision is possible and that the very act of helping each other gives us strength and a common destiny (Wuthnow, 1991: 304). When the problem is owned by all individuals and communities, prevention will progress, and fewer children will remain at risk.

References

1. Shobha Tandon Textbook of Paediatric Dentistry, Third Edition, Volume 2 Authors- Shobha Tandon, Shalini S. Gupta, A Balamutugan www.unicef.org
2. <http://www.childlineindia.org.in/India-Penal-Code-and-Child-related-offenses.html> <http://www.childlineindia.org.in/Juvenile-Justice-Care-and-Protection-of-Children-Act-2000.html>