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Social and Psychological Impact of Child Abuse

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Abstract:

Child abuse is a common and worrying problem that affects many children in South Sudan. This paper highlights a variety of forms of child abuse, such as physical abuse, neglect, sexual offence, emotional damage, slapping, shaking, throwing, kicking, biting and burning. The paper discusses the risk factors and people who are involved in child abuse, as well as the position of early detection and intervention. Furthermore, it examines the long-term consequences of child abuse, such as physical, mental and health issues, weakened social relationships, and increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors. Again, the paper stresses the need for multi-dimensional interventions, which include legal measures, public awareness campaigns, and support services, to fight child abuse and protect the rights and safety of children. Any national damage or mistreatment to a child under 18 years old is considered child abuse.

Keywords: Child abuse, harmful effects, weakened social relations, multi-dimension intervention

1. Introduction

Child abuse is not only physical violence directed at a child; it is rather any form of ill-treatment by an adult which threatens a child's life, for example, neglect. When such abuse occurs at home, and the abuser is a parent or a caregiver to the child, then it takes the form of domestic violence. Nevertheless, children are sometimes abused by adults whom children rely on, for example, workers and teachers. Also, there is what we call deliberate abuse of the child; this happens when parents and caregivers are not able to handle and care for the child and may result in dysfunctional conduct and exploitation. Any intentional maltreatment of a child under 18 years old is considered child abuse.¹

1.1. Definition of Terms

The terms 'abuse' and 'maltreatment' are often used identically in the literature. Child maltreatment can also be a sunshade term covering all forms of child abuse and neglect. In actual fact, abuse refers to an act of commission, while neglect refers to acts of mission.

1.1.1. Forms of Child Abuse

Child abuse is demonstrated in many, and each form has its own detrimental effect on the child's well-being and development.

- Physical Child Abuse – This form of abuse involves the intentional annoyance of physical harm or injury to the child by the caregiver or parent. It includes hitting, kicking, burning and so on.
- Sexual Abuse – This kind of abuse involves any form of sexual activity or contact with the child, such as harassment, misuse and acquaintance to inappropriate sexual contact, leading to thoughtful upset and psychological suffering.
- Emotional Abuse – Emotional abuse refers to the emotional maltreatment of a child, such as isolating or humiliating the child; it also means injuring the child's self-esteem or emotional well-being, which can be verbal and emotional assault, like berating a child continuously.
- Medical Abuse – Medical child abuse occurs when someone gives false information about an illness in a child that requires medical attention, putting the child at risk of injury and unnecessary medical care.
- Child Neglect – This occurs when the caregiver fails to provide for the basic needs of the child, including food, shelter, education, clothing, clean living conditions, affection, supervision, dental, and medical care.²

However, child abuse is obviously done by someone who is close to the child and trusts him, such as parents and other relatives. Therefore, it is important that a social worker should report any suspected child abuse to the concerned authorities.

¹ Editorial (1848) Triple infanticide – suicide du meurtrier. Annales Médico-psychologiques 11: 108

² Mental Health. Oxford, Oxford University Press, page 396 – translation of a passage in Tardieu (1860)

The paper also draws the attention of the concerned authorities, social workers and advocates that an abused child always feels guilty, ashamed or confused and develops a fear of telling anyone of being abused by a parent, relative or family member.³

1.1.2. Causes of Child Abuse

Child abuse is a multifaceted issue with various causes and consequences, which can be caused by many factors, including the following:

- Parenting Panache – Deprived parenting, such as lack of supervision, poor discipline and insufficient emotional provision, contribute to child abuse. For example, parents who are stressed or have undergone trauma before may get engaged in abusive behavior.
- Socio-Economic Aspect – This includes poverty, social isolation, and unemployment, which contribute to child abuse, and usually, parents who struggle hard to improve their financial and social conditions engage in abusive behaviours.
- Subsistence Abuse – Subsistence abuse includes alcohol, drugs and addiction that contribute to child abuse. Likely, parents who are influenced by drugs and alcohol engage in abusive behaviour.
- Inadequate Laws and Policies – This involves a lack of resources to report and address child abuse contributing to child abuse. The fact is that unclear laws and policies do not protect children nor hold offenders accountable. Instead, it makes child abuse continue.
- History of Trauma – Also, the history of trauma, such as physical and sexual abuse, increases the risk of child abuse, meaning that parents who experienced trauma before may get engaged in abusive behaviors.⁴ Therefore, it is important that serious observations should be applied to monitor the child in the following conditions:
 - ✓ The situation where the child starts to avoid friends and reduces his or her usual activities
 - ✓ Behavioral change, such as aggression, anger, unfriendliness, abrupt changes in child's academic performance.
 - ✓ Misery, nervousness, unusual fear, and sudden loss of self-confidence
 - ✓ Frequent absences from school, disobedient, development of defensive behavior
 - ✓ Efforts to commit suicide

The following impacts are also to be put into consideration when addressing the issue of child abuse:

- Usually, there are unexplained injuries that affect the child, such as discolourations, broken bones, or burns.
- Injuries that do not match the given explanation and injuries that are not compatible with the child's developmental ability.
- Unappropriated sexual behavior and knowledge that is against the age of the child.
- Unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection at early child age.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior with other children, such as emotional abuse, may result in long-lasting suffering for the child.⁵

1.1.3. Child Abuse Effects

Child abuse effect is beyond immediate experiences that affect the child in adulthood. These effects include physical health. Children who experience this kind of abuse suffer from physical injuries, impaired brain development and long-term health issues.

1.2. Social Development

The effect of child abuse hampers both health and social relationship development, leading to communication constraints and trust with other social groups.

1.2.1. Behavioral Problems

Usually, abused children show behavioral problems such as withdrawal and aggression.

1.2.2. Long-Term Consequences

Here the effect continues into adulthood, contributing to challenges of making relationships, keeping employment, and the overall well-being of the child.

1.2.3. Emotional Effect

The emotional effect leads to depression, stress that derives from trauma, including other mental disorders.

³ Hygiène 15: 361-398. 6. Brockington I F (1996) Motherhood

⁴ National Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act /NCAPTA/2019 Preventing child abuse and neglect.
www.act.hhs.gov/resource/child.abuse-prevention-and-treatment-act.

⁵ Rothamel (1845) Eine Mutter führt durch allmälige Entziehung der Nahrungsmittel den Tod ihres ehelichen Kindes herbei. Henke's Zeitschrift für der Staatsarzneikunde 50: 139-156. 4. Boys-de-Loury, d'Hygiène

2. Intervention and Preventive Measures

The preventive measures include a variety of approaches such as education, awareness support services for the families in need and intervention strategies as follows:

- Legal Protection – Enforcing and implementing laws that protect children from abuse are vital in making a conducive environment for the well-being of the children.
- Education and Awareness – Providing inclusive education on child abuse and development and building of parenting skills that will help avoid behavioral abuse.
- Early Intervention – This helps in the early identification of potential abuse that will help in appropriate intervention to support and prevent any harm to the child.
- Supportive Services – This involves supportive services delivered to families facing challenges of poverty and subsistence abuse, which will, in turn, reduce any risk that the child may face.⁶

3. Recommendations

- The author recommends positive promotion of parenting techniques and awareness campaigns to prevent physical abuse.
- Encourage healthy emotional expression, proper mental health support, and promotion of relationships with respect to prevent emotional abuse.
- The implementation of comprehensive sexuality education
- Empowerment of children to express themselves against abuse as a preventive measure. Providing support services to families
- Community earlier intervention in any abuse to the child

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, child abuse is a problem that concerns every community and government that has long-lasting impacts on children; it is important to condemn the use of violence in any form, despite the fact that some people still use physical punishment to discipline their children. On the other hand, parents and caregivers use physical punishment with the intention of helping their children improve their behavior. However, several studies proved that such actions lead to bad behavior, or else may lead to mental health problems, bad relationships with parents, contributing to lower self-esteem and poor academic performance, and that any physical punishment to the child may leave long-lasting emotional scars.

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⁶ American academy of pediatrics