

Child abuse

by Sheenam Sheenam

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Effects of Child Abuse

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Abstract

Child abuse can be defined as the physical, sexual, or psychological maltreatment of a child. Child abuse can be in the form of physical abuse (physical violence like beating), emotional or psychological abuse (like berating and mental torture), physical neglect (child is not taken care of in terms of physical needs), and sexual abuse. The main perpetrators of child abuse are the parents, teachers, and caregivers. Child abuse can be intentional and sometimes unintentional. Child abuse can result in profound emotional and physical effects. Research shows that children who are abused have psychological and emotional problems in the future. This research explores the impacts of sexual abuse on children. The paper finds sexual abuse to have both psychological and physical effects on the survivors of sexual abuse. Children who experience sexual abuse face many impacts in the future, including shame, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety.

Introduction

Millions of children across the world undergo abuse in different settings like schools and homes. The most common forms of child abuse are sexual, psychological, and physical abuse. Parents, teachers, and caregivers are the main perpetrators of child abuse. It is estimated that about 10% of children in the USA are sexually abused before the age of 18. Physical abuse involves beating the child or subjecting the child to physical injuries through physical violence (Dubowitz, 2017). Signs of physical abuse include bruises, cuts, broken bones, bleeding, or even death. Sexual abuse involves penetration, fondling a child's genitals, rape, sodomy, and incest, exploitation through prostitution, or production of pornographic materials. The caregivers and parents may use force, coercion, enticement, and inducement to engage children in sexual abuse. Psychological or emotional child abuse involves terrorizing the child, humiliating the child, ignoring, and mental torture. Child abuse and neglect have devastating effects on the child. It leads to adverse physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive consequences such as depression, low self-esteem, antisocial behavior, alcohol abuse, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders.

Effects of child abuse

Research shows that child sexual abuse can have serious physical, psychological, and emotional health on the children—sexual adjustment of these abused children changes later in life. The severity of the impacts depends on how severe the traumas were. However, the effects can be long-lasting and very adverse. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common possible outcome of sexual abuse (Dubowitz, 2017). Other people may experience stress and anxiety. Others are depressed. Sexually abused children find it difficult to trust adults and their friends. They may also be paranoid and never trust anyone in the future. Such

children, therefore, require counseling to mitigate such effects. Age plays a significant role in how adverse the effects affect children.

Psychological effects of sexual abuse

Child abuse results in both short-term and long-term psychological harm. These children may be traumatized and depressed. Psychopathology is a common effect of sexual abuse in children in their later lives. Such children may develop insomnia, low self-esteem, somatization, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Suicidal thoughts are also effects of ⁸child abuse and neglect (Yang et al., 2018).

Research also establishes a nexus between child abuse and crime, especially for boys. Boys who underwent any form of abuse are likely to engage in alcoholism and substance abuse. Boys who are abused as children are likely to be involved in criminal activities than those who did not experience sexual abuse. Studies have established a ²correlation between child maltreatment and future juvenile delinquency. Children who have been mistreated physically or emotionally are likely to develop antisocial behaviors and engage in criminal activities. Boys who have experienced child abuse are likely to be aggressive, hostile, and bullying. The social learning theory can explain this phenomenon. According to social learning theory, children can learn violent behavior by observing others acting aggressively or themselves being the victims of violence. Abbassi and Aslinia (2010) explain that children who have mistreated are likely to develop antisocial and violent behavior.

Depression

This is a feeling of loss of bodily autonomy, which creates feelings of shame and despair. It reduces one's self-worth. Most people who were sexually abused as children have these feelings, which makes them have low self-esteem, shame, and lose self-worth. In some cases, the child may look depressed and may not want to interact with others (Dubowitz,

2017). The child may separate themselves from others and may look stressed and uncomfortable. This can be an effect of physical or sexual abuse.

Anxiety

This is the loss of bodily autonomy whereby the survivor fears that the same act may recur. Children who have experienced sexual or physical abuse develop agoraphobia, whereby they fear being in public places. Most of these children become highly nervous with the people they interact with. Such people may develop a negative attitude to the people who harmed them (Dubowitz, 2017). For example, a girl who was raped at a young age may not get married because she has terrible memories of sex. Individuals with agoraphobia fear places that make them panic or feel embarrassed. Such people avoid public places, crowded places, and closed places. Children who have been abused are likely to have repeated memories of the previous events that lead to shame, horror, guilt, and irritability (Cicchetti et al., 2016).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

This includes intense memories of physical or sexual abuse. PTSD is a prolonged effect of a person who experienced a traumatic event such as sexual abuse that keeps disturbing her. Signs of PTSD include nightmares and flashbacks. PTSD occurs in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a severe accident, rape, natural disaster, combat, or personal violence. PTSD is mainly caused by traumatic events in one's life, such as stressful experiences, **exposure to actual or threatened death, or sexual violence**.

Complex post-traumatic stress disorder

This is a psychological disorder that develops due to prolonged and repeated experiences of traumatic events such as sexual abuse. The individual has little or no chance of escape. Children who are raped, molested, or gone through other forms of sexual abuse for a

long time typically experience complex post-traumatic stress disorders. This psychological disorder is associated with chronic sexual abuse in children or child neglect. Other disorders related to child sexual abuse include dissociative identity disorder and somatization disorder (Cicchetti et al., 2016).

These children are also likely to be involved in adulthood health or social problems such as suicide attempts, alcohol problems, family and marriage problems, and the use of illicit drugs. The child sexual abuse survivors may also be vulnerable to future adolescence and adulthood sexual revictimization. They have a clear high-risk sexual behavior correlation, such as having multiple sexual partners, and may later connect to other people's abuse due to the pain they went through (Cicchetti et al., 2016). The child sexual abuse effects are mainly compounded by different occurring abuse types and dysfunction, resulting in many risk factors for adverse health results, including adult diseases such as cancer, liver, lung, and heart diseases. Although these survivors are at a very high risk of poor health outcomes, these results can be fixed.

Physical effects

Apart from psychological effects, children who have experienced sexual abuse can have physical effects. These may range from injury, infections, and neurological damage. Injury may come from rape, sexual molestation, which may cause severe damage to the body's internal organs. Infections such as STDs are also physical effects of children who infected people who have been sexually abused. The other physical impact of sexual abuse is the neurological damage whereby sexual abuses alter the functioning and development. Research shows that severe child sexual abuse may affect brain development (Yang et al., 2018).

Infections

Child sexual abuse may result in sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, and gonorrhoea. Children normally lack enough vaginal fluids, the chances of such children getting infected with sexually transmitted diseases are high. Also, such children are not aware or unable to use contraceptives which increases the chances of being infected. They may as well become pregnant. Abused children may also develop physical health problems such as spinal cord injuries, hearing problems, speech difficulties, heart attack, diabetes, high blood pressure, brain damage, back problems, migraine headaches, or even death (Widom et al., 2012). These are the immediate effects of child abuse.

Problems at school

Sexually abused children may refuse to go to school and may have difficulties in learning. They may have problems in concentrating and learning in class and may have poor performance in school. Child abuse leads to slow cognitive development that affects performance in school (Cicchetti et al., 2016).

Bleeding, swelling, or bruising private parts

Children who have undergone sexual abuse may have physical injuries such as bleeding and bruises. This mostly happens when the child has been subjected to physical, sexual abuse such as rape. In extreme cases, the internal organs may be damaged, sometimes leading to death.

Cognitive and intellectual consequences

Research has established cognitive deficits in abused children. Children who have undergone maltreatment experience neurological impairment and delayed intellectual development. This has been evidenced by problems in the school performance of such children. Abused children are poor performers in school (Gould et al., 2012). They register poor grades and poor standardized test scores.

2 Conclusion

Child abuse can have devastating and long-lasting effects on the child. Children who have been abused are likely to have low self-esteem, increased fear, and guilt, suicidal thoughts, learning disorders, slowed cognitive development, aggressive behavior, and drug abuse. We should all stand against all forms of child abuse. We should show love and care to our children. Children who have undergone abuse need to be treated so that they do not experience severe consequences. The problems with anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other psychological disorders can have devastating effects on the child's life (Widom et al., 2012). Therapies can be used to reduce the effects of psychological disorders. There can be a family, group, or individual therapy. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is another intervention measure. Parents should take care of their children from sexual predators and other abuses. They should avoid leaving the children with strangers or people they suspect can harm their children. They should report any cases of sexual abuse if they suspect it.

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