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Child abuse: A curse on society

Saurabh Ram Bihari Lal Shrivastava, Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava, Jegadeesh Ramasamy

Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India

Address for correspondence:
Saurabh Ram Bihari Lal Shrivastava, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India.
E-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is a significant public health concern, affected by the child's age and gender, circumstances, and the kind of relationship between the victim and enforcer. Most of the estimates just reflect a superficial picture as majority of these cases is not reported. A wide range of potential risk factors has been identified that eventually precipitates the practice of child abuse across different settings. Abuse of children not only results in physical trauma, impact on the psychological development, risk-taking behavior among the victims, but even augmentation of the monetary expenses and overwhelming of the health infrastructure. In conclusion, to counter the global menace of child abuse, the need of the hour is to develop a multi-pronged strategy, well-supported with community-based initiatives to ensure early detection of abuse victims.

KEY WORDS: Abuse, children, policy, public health

Child abuse is a significant public health concern, affected by the child's age and gender, circumstances, and the kind of relationship between the victim and enforcer [1,2]. The entity of child abuse includes all types of physical/emotional/sexual abuse or exploitation, which can interfere with the child future growth and development [1]. According to the recent estimates released by the World Health Organization, globally both male and female children are exposed to different forms of abuse ranging from 20% to 50% [3]. However, these estimates just reflect a superficial picture as majority of these cases is not reported [4,5].

A wide range of parameters such as age, gender, personal history, perpetrator relationship with family, substance abuse among parents, mental health status of parents, failure of family planning, settings and circumstances, socio-cultural norms that encourage the use of violence, policies which amplify economic and social inequalities, inadequate social welfare schemes, and a weak legislative system, have been attributed for the causation of child abuse in variable settings [4-6]. Abuse of children not only results in physical trauma, impact on the emotional and psychological development, risk-taking behavior among the victims, but even augmentation of the monetary expenses and overwhelming of the health infrastructure [2,4,7].

As the problem of the child abuse is multi-faceted, to counter the same there is a need of a multi-pronged approach with involvement of all concerned sectors [8]. However, the crucial step is to develop a surveillance system which can identify all victims and thus help the health officials to take appropriate decisions [9]. In addition, due attention should be given to earmark a health ministry to supervise and collaborate

the routine work [9,10]; implementing steps to negate the economic and gender inequities [3]; strengthening police and judicial systems [4,10]; launching welfare policies for the benefit of the child [8]; sensitizing health care workers and general population to discourage the practice of harmful socio-cultural norms [1,8]; screening parents attitudes toward their children [11]; motivating doctors to have a high index of suspicion for child abuse [5,10,12]; facilitating the use of contraceptive measures, so that unwanted pregnancies can be prevented [12]; increasing accessibility to maternal and child welfare services [4]; encouraging development of community-based child abuse prevention strategies customized to the local settings [13,14]; ensuring provision of an integrated package of services to the victims (viz. medical care, forensic assessment, psychosocial support, rehabilitation services) [1,4,8]; ensuring home visits by trained workers to facilitate early recognition and periodic follow-up [15]; building linkages with the non-governmental agencies working for the children betterment [8]; and by establishing a mechanism to monitor the progress and evaluate the outcome of implemented strategies [4,8].

In conclusion, to counter the global menace of child abuse, the need of the hour is to develop a multi-pronged strategy, well supported with community-based initiatives to ensure early detection of abuse victims.

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