



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Child Abuse

Dr. Kavita H Kulkarni

Assistant professor in sociology,
GFGC Kittur

Abstract:

Exploitation and mistreatment of children, which encompass non-physical harm but are equally detrimental, must be incorporated into the definition of child abuse. Burgess (1979:143) offers a broader perspective on child abuse, defining it as any child experiencing non-accidental physical and mental harm due to actions or negligence by parents, guardians, or employers.

Concept of Child Abuse:

Child abuse denotes the state of emotional, physical, financial, and sexual exploitation inflicted upon individuals under the age of eighteen, prevalent globally. However, in India and many other nations, understanding the extent, scope, and patterns of this issue remains deficient. The complexities of modern life and economic advancements in India have increased children's vulnerability to various forms of abuse. Despite extensive planning, welfare programs, legislation, and administrative efforts over six decades, a significant majority of Indian children continue to suffer. In numerous families, parents neglect them, caregivers abuse them, and workplace supervisors exploit them sexually. While the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of children in India is escalating, it has yet to gain the attention of sociologists and experts. Public and governmental acknowledgment of this problem remains lacking. Public outrage and professional concern have not translated into effective action. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child abuse encompasses all forms of physical and/or emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment, or exploitation, leading to actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity within a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Some studies limit "child abuse" to children who have sustained serious physical harm deliberately rather than accidentally (Garden and Gray, 1982:5). This definition faces skepticism from social scientists due to ambiguities in the term "serious" and variations in "physical harm." Kempe and Kempe (1978) define child abuse as a condition concerning those intentionally harmed by physical assault. However, this definition is narrow, as it confines abuse to acts of physical violence causing diagnosable harm. Verbal abuse, threats of physical violence, and excessive physical discipline not requiring medical attention are also encompassed in the definition of child abuse.

A child, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, is "every human being under the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Throughout discussions, the significance of the CRC in addressing child abuse was emphasized. Article 19 of the convention specifically deals with child abuse, outlining measures for its identification, reporting, investigation, treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines child abuse and neglect as "at a 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." According to CAPTA, a child is someone who has not yet reached the age of 18, or as defined by the child protection law of the State in which the child resides. Under the basic standards set by CAPTA, each state is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. Most states recognize four major types of abuse: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse. While any form of child abuse may occur individually, they often co-occur.

Child Abuse Worldwide:

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly 53,000 child deaths in 2002 were attributable to child maltreatment. In the Global School-Based Student Health Survey conducted across various developing countries, between 20% and 65% of school-going children reported experiencing verbal or physical bullying in school in the past 30 days. Similar rates of bullying have been observed in developed countries. An estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 have experienced forced sex or other forms of sexual violence, including physical contact. UNICEF estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt, and Sudan, 3 million girls and women undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) annually. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 218 million children were involved in child labor in 2004, with 126 million engaged in hazardous work. Estimates from 2000 suggest that 5.7 million were in forced or bonded labor, 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.

Child abuse is typically classified into three main types:

Physical abuse: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), physical abuse involves inflicting physical harm upon a child. This may include burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming a child. The parent or guardian may not have intended to harm the child. However, it may result from excessive discipline or physical punishment inappropriate for the child's age. Indicators of physical abuse, as outlined by Sloan (1983:2-3), include injuries, burns, fractures, cuts and abrasions, abdominal injuries, and human-bite marks. Social indicators of physical abuse include the child being wary of adult contact, becoming unsettled when other children cry, displaying aggressive behavior, appearing fearful of parents or caregivers, and being reluctant to go home or crying at the prospect.

According to a national report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, two out of every three children experienced physical abuse. Out of 69% of children physically abused in 13 sample states, 54.68% were boys. More than half of the children in all 13 sample states were subjected to some form of physical abuse. Out of those physically abused in family situations, 88.6% were abused by parents. 65% of school-going children reported facing corporal punishment, with two out of three children being victims of such punishment. 62% of the corporal punishment occurred in government and municipal schools. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, and Delhi consistently reported higher rates.

Psychological abuse: Psychological abuse involves neglect or mistreatment of children. 'Neglect' is challenging to define precisely as it may involve neglecting the physical, emotional, moral, or social needs of children. Physical neglect is defined as "failure to provide the essentials for normal living, such as food, clothing, shelter, care, and supervision, and protection from assault." Emotional neglect includes both the absence of expressed love and affection and the deliberate withholding of contact and approval. Moral neglect includes exposure to situations (alcoholism, obscenity, illicit sexual relations) that contradict societal norms of moral behavior. Social neglect involves failing to train or educate a child.

Emotional abuse may be described as negligent treatment of a child under the specific age prescribed for children by society (18 for girls and 16 for boys in India) by a person responsible for the child's upbringing, care, and welfare, causing harm or impairment. Emotional abuse of a child includes blaming, belittling, neglecting, consistently treating siblings unequally, and a constant lack of concern by the parent/guardian for the child's welfare. Emotional abuse is seldom manifested in physical signs. According to the WHO, emotional abuse is also known as verbal abuse, psychological abuse, and mental abuse. It includes acts or failures to act by parents or caregivers that have caused or could cause serious social, cognitive, emotional, or psychological injury. This can include extreme or unusual forms of discipline, such as confinement in a closet or dark room or being tied to a chair for extended periods or threatening or intimidating a child. Less severe acts, but no less damaging, include belittling or dismissing treatment, using harsh terms to describe the child, habitually blaming the child, or making the child a scapegoat. The social characteristics of emotional abuse include behavioral disorders (biting, thumb-sucking), conduct disorders (destructive behavior, cruelty, stealing), masochistic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play), psycho-psychotic reaction (insanity, phobias, obsession), behavioral extremes (appearing excessively compliant, extremely passive or aggressive, highly demanding or undemanding), lag in emotional and intellectual development, and attempted suicide.

According to the national report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, every child reported facing psychological abuse. An equal proportion of both girls and boys reported facing psychological abuse. In 83% of the cases, parents were the abusers. 48.4% of girls wished they were boys.

Apart from the aforementioned three types of child abuse, we can also refer to social abuse of children, such as kidnapping children and forcing them to beg on the streets

References

1. Burgese, R.L; “Child Abuse: A social Interactional Analysis” in Advances in Clinical Child Psychology, Vol. 2, Plenum Press, New York, 1970.
2. Kempe, R.S and Kempe C.H; Child Abuse, Fontana, London, 1978.
3. Kewalramani, C.S; Child Abuse, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 1992.
4. Ministry of Women and Child Development, New Delhi, 2007.
5. Sloan, Irving; Child Abuse: An Interdisciplinary Analysis, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975.

