

Psychosocial Interventions for Maltreated and Violence-Exposed of Child Abuse

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Description

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a 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.

Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary among professionals, between social and cultural groups, and 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 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". The WHO also says, "Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people

under 18 years old, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers. 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".

Among professionals and the general public, there is disagreement as to what behaviors constitute physical abuse of a child. Physical abuse often does not occur in isolation but as part of a constellation of behaviors including authoritarian control, anxiety-provoking behavior, and a lack of parental warmth. The WHO defines physical abuse as intentional use of physical force against the child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in harm for the child's health, survival, development, or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing.

Overlapping definitions of physical abuse and physical punishment of children highlight a subtle or non-existent distinction between abuse and punishment, but most physical abuse is physical punishment "in intent, form, and effect". As of 2006, for instance, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro wrote in the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.

- Neglectful acts can be divided into six sub-categories
- Supervisory neglect: characterized by the absence of a parent or guardian which can lead to physical harm, sexual abuse, or criminal behavior;
- Physical neglect: characterized by the failure to provide the basic physical necessities, such as a safe and clean home;
- Medical neglect: characterized by the lack of providing medical care;
- Emotional neglect: characterized by a lack of nurturance, encouragement, and support;
- Educational neglect: characterized by the caregivers lack to provide an education and additional resources to actively participate in the school system.

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