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MEDICINE AND SURGERY

**CHILD ABUSE: MEANING,TYPES, EFFECTS AND PREVENTION**

Child abuse also known as child maltreatment is a physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children by their parents , close relatives or guardians. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act as a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child . This can occur in a child’s home, schools , or any other place.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse , neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation which results to an actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility or power.

Types

The World Health Organization(WHO) distinguishes child maltreatment into physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Physical abuse doesn’t frequently happen in isolation but as a part of a constellation of behaviors including lack of parental warmth, authoritarian control and so on but most physical abuse is usually seen as punishment which leads to either bruises, scratches, burns, broken bones, scars and so on and physical abuse can be also seen as rough treatment that could cause any of the injuries listed above. The effects of this abuse on victims are ; physical and mental difficulties in future, suicidal ideation, anxiety(fear), depression, aggression, personality disorders and so many other things.

Sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation or satisfaction. Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed towards the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act. Forms of Sexual abuse could include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of genital parts to child, displaying pornography to child, having an actual sexual contact with the child, physical contact with the child’s genitals or using the child to produce pornography. Some kids may be warned to not tell any other person whatever is done to them in other to avoid being killed .These things done to the child are seen to have a major effect on the victim and they are guilt and self-blame, flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, fear of things associated with the abuse, self-esteem difficulties, self-dysfunction, chronic pain, addiction, self-injury, suicidal ideation, somatic complaints, depression, anxiety, unnecessary stress and so many others. It could cause some mental issues to the victims too that’s why it’s important we care for one another and mind the way we treat others because we wouldn’t know what one has passed through . Victims of Sexual abuse are exposed to a high rate of getting sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and other common infections due to lack of decreased knowledge of sexual topics , usage of protectives , engagement in risky sexual practices. Most sexual offenders happen to be acquainted with the victims approximately about 30% are relatives of the child could be brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins and around 60% are other acquaintances such as friends of the family , neighbors , babysitters, teachers ; strangers happen to be roughly 10% involved in sexual abuse cases.

Psychological Abuse as defined by APSAC in 1995 said it is the ‘’spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting, corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, or neglect’’ or ‘’A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another’s needs’’. Other definitions say ‘’ Mental injury’’, ‘’ it’s the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse and neglect’’. Victims of emotional abuse may react by distancing themselves from the abuser, fighting back by insulting the abuser and so on. This abuse could result in abnormal or disrupted attachment development, tendency of victims to blame their selves for the abuse.

Children who are victims of neglect could have a more difficult time forming and maintaining relationships, such as romantic or friendship ,later in life due to the lack of attachment they had in the earlier stages of life.

**Effects**

Child maltreatment causes suffering to children and families and can have long-term consequences. Maltreatment causes stress that is associated with disruption in early brain development. Extreme stress can impair the development of the nervous and immune systems. Consequently, as adults, maltreated children are at increased risk for behavioral, physical and mental health problems such; perpetrating or being a victim of violence ,depression, smoking ,obesity ,high-risk sexual behaviors ,unintended pregnancy ,alcohol and drug misuse. Via these behavioural and mental health consequences, maltreatment can contribute to heart disease, cancer, suicide and sexually transmitted infections. Violence against children is also a contributor to inequalities in education. Children who experienced any form of violence in childhood have a 13% greater likelihood of not graduating from school. Beyond the health, social and educational consequences of child maltreatment, there is an economic impact, including costs of hospitalization, mental health treatment, child welfare, and longer-term health costs.

**Risk factors;**

Several risk factors for child maltreatment have been identified. Not  all risk factors are present in all social and cultural contexts, and the list here provides an overview when attempting to understand the causes of child maltreatment.

**Child**

It is important to emphasize that children are the victims and are never to blame for maltreatment. Characteristics of an individual child that may increase the likelihood of being maltreated include: being either under four years old or an adolescent ,being unwanted, or failing to fulfil the expectations of parents ,having special needs, crying persistently or having abnormal physical features, having an intellectual disability or neurological disorder ,identifying as or being identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

**Parent or caregiver**

Characteristics of a parent or caregiver that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include: difficulty bonding with a newborn ,not nurturing the child ,having been maltreated themselves as a child ,lacking awareness of child development or having unrealistic expectations ,misusing alcohol or drugs, including during pregnancy, having low self-esteem ,being involved in criminal activity ,experiencing financial difficulties.

**Relationship**

Characteristics of the relationships within families or among intimate partners, friends and peers that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include: family breakdown or violence between other family members ,being isolated in the community or lacking a support network , a breakdown of support in child rearing from the extended family.

**Community and societal factors**

Characteristics of communities and societies that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include: gender and social inequality, lack of adequate housing or services to support families and institutions; ,high levels of unemployment or poverty, the easy availability of alcohol and drugs, inadequate policies and programmes to prevent child maltreatment, child pornography, child prostitution and child labour.

**Prevention of child abuse include;**

Be a nurturing parent, help a friend, neighbor or relative, help yourself, get involved, monitor your child’s television, video, and internet viewing/usage, promote programs in school, teach the children good norms, enforce laws and attach punishments to them, avoid non- violent parenting