ISSUE DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Violence committed in any public institution against any person under 18 years old an issue that had been present all over the world for a long time. Child maltreatment can mean physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect. Generally, boys and girls are at an equal risk of physical and emotional abuse and neglect, while the victims of sexual abuse are mostly girls. When reaching adolescence, children might have to face peer violence and intimate partner violence as well.

Public Institutions means any institution to which the public or any class or section of the public are granted access. It is an institution controlled or managed by a body most of whose members are elected or appointed by or under the scrutiny of a public authority. Kindergarten, primary school, high school are all examples of public institutions in which children are generally abused.

The UNICEF published a Child Protection Strategy in 2021 with the purpose to provide a clear vision and strategic framework for its work in the issue by 2030. Their vision is a peaceful world free of child abuse, exploitation and neglection. This Strategy has had several positive results so far. The number of abused children who were reached by related services increased by 54%, the number of parents and caregivers who took part in education programs grew by 14% and 98 countries are committed to coordinating national responses to online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Definition of Key Terms

Child exploitation: child domestic work, child soldiers, the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict, sexual exploitation and pornography, the use of children for criminal activities including the sale and distribution of narcotics and the involvement of children in harmful or hazardous work.

Abuse: improper treatment or usage; application to a wrong or bad purpose; an unjust, corrupt, or wrongful practice or custom

Violence: a more extreme kind of abuse when the victim starts to fear their lives. Includes the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm or maldevelopment.
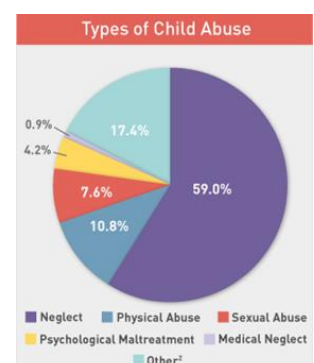
Dysfunctional family: a family in which conflict, misbehaviour, and often child neglect or abuse on the part of individual parents occur continuously and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions.

General Overview

The history of this problem is lengthy. Early civilizations regularly abandoned deformed or unwanted children, and the ritual sacrifice of children to appease the gods took place in the Egyptian, Carthaginian, Roman, Greek, and Aztec societies. In some societies the father had complete control over the family, even to the extent that he could kill his children for disobedience. Sexual abuse of children was common in earlier times. Children were also sold as prostitutes.

The abuse of is children is still an existing problem today as children are the most common victims, mostly because they are the most easily influenced and hurt. They will always be unarmed, usually won't know how to protect themselves or might not even know that they are being abused as they don't understand what is happening.

Types of Child Abuse

The causes of child abuse cannot be explained easily as the reasons are often complex.
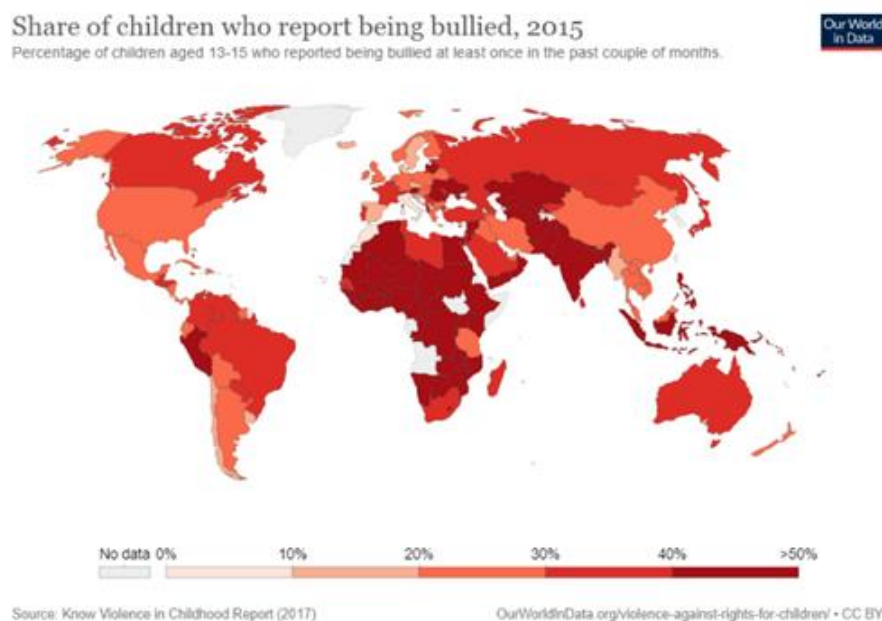
Causes of child abuse can include:

a history of being abused or neglected as a child: people who had been victims of child abuse themselves tend to abuse children the same way, mainly because that's what they were used to, and they don't know the right way of dealing with kids and might not even realize that they are becoming what they'd feared
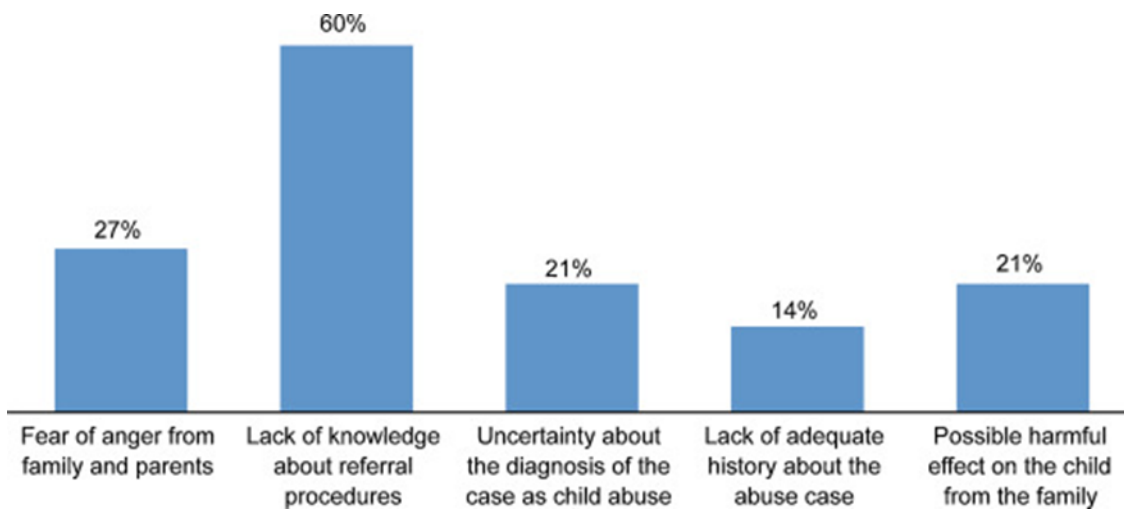
untreated mental illness: mentally ill people can find it hard to adequately deal with other people. This becomes an even larger problem when it comes to handling a child. Caring for them may seem difficult and confusing to mentally ill people.

intake of hard substances: students, school staff or members of society who are intoxicated tend to lose control of their inhibitions and often act in an irrational manner. Hence, the effect of drugs on the human body can serve as a catalyst for school violence.

being raised in dysfunctional homes: worry, hatred, inferiority complex, anger and other negative emotions which fuel violent behaviour, could develop in people when they are exposed to poor parenting or disaccord amongst family members. Also, in homes where parents/guardians display violent behaviour, children/wards usually adopt violence as a way of asserting authority. A large proportion of child physical abuse cases go undocumented and unreported. There is a wide range of reasons for this, such as fear of the abuser or invalidating the feelings of the victim to a point where they feel like they'd overreacted.

Share of children who report being bullied, 2015
Percentage of children aged 13-15 who reported being bullied at least once in the past couple of months.

No data 0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   >50%

Source: Know Violence in Childhood Report (2017)   OurWorldInData.org/violence-against-rights-for-children/ • CC BY
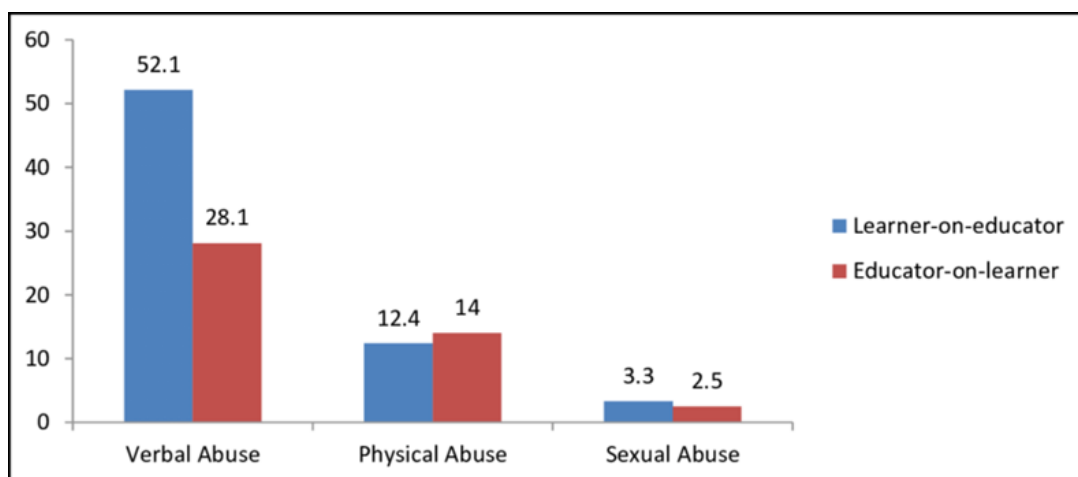
Effects on the victim:

development of trust issues: it is very difficult for children to trust other people, especially when they'd been victims of abuse. If the abuser is a trusted person, for example a beloved teacher, being hurt by them can cause long-term problems. An abused child may not be able to form strong relationships nor maintain a healthy relationship.

inability to express emotions: abused children are unable to vent their feelings and emotions positively. This results in bottling up of emotions and may give way to different psychological problems. Abused children often resort to alcohol or drugs during adulthood to assuage the pain as they can suffer from anxiety and depression.

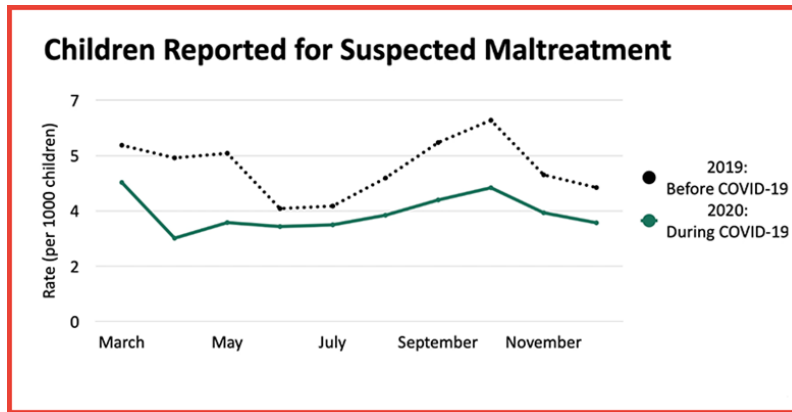(Source: Burton & Leoschut 2013: 27-28).

Major Parties Involved

USA: 48% of American children experience abuse in public institutions. Child maltreatment occurs in every State. States have their own requirements for reporting and responding to child abuse and neglect. Prevent Child Abuse America is the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens. They promote programs and resources informed by science that enable kids, families, and entire communities to thrive.

Pakistan: In 2020, 2960 causes of child abuse, as many as 1510 girls and 1450 boys were sexually exploited in Pakistan. 8 children were abused every day in one form or the other. According to a new index, Pakistan is the least safe country to be a child. In March 2020, Pakistan's parliament took steps to address this, passing a law responding to concerns – the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Bill. It provides for a dedicated agency to respond more quickly when children go missing; creates a helpline for missing child alerts; makes it incumbent on local police chiefs to respond within two hours of the alert; requires police to complete their investigations of these cases within three months; and introduces a life sentence for child abuse.

China: China does not have a specific law enforced to protect the welfare of children. Articles concerning this topic are present, but they lack a systematic regulation. There are more than 30 organizations within the Chinese government to which child protection is related, but none of them are specifically established with the purpose of tackling child abuse. Currently, a large number of child abuse incidents in China have not been legally dealt with. Punishments carried out by law have been light, such as 5-day detentions for the offenders in many cases.

Niger: In Niger, more than 80 per cent of children have experienced violent discipline, just six in 10 children have a birth certificate and 28 per cent of girls are married before 15. The child protection system lacks quality services. Extremely low government funding (0.16 per cent of the approved budget in 2016) and weak coordination mechanisms between the social welfare and justice sectors undermine the ability of service providers to prevent and respond to cases of violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Singapore: According to the data shared by MSF (Ministry of Social and Family Development), the number of enquiries received by MSF's Child Protective Service (CPS) jumped from 2,022 in 2015 to 5,223 in 2020, due to the world pandemic worsening the situation. As per the data shared by MSF, the number of child abuse cases has grown by three times since 2011. The Community Guardian App (CGA) is one of the service offerings as part of the MSF's National Anti-Violence Helpline (NAVH). The CGA was launched on 30 July 2020.

Children Reported for Suspected Maltreatment

Rate (per 1000 children)

March　May　July　September　November

2019: Before COVID-19
2020: During COVID-19

Timeline of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

2017 - UNICEF Theory of Change: This paper complements the Strategic Plan by elaborating the broad Theory of Change that underpins it. This overarching Theory of Change summarizes how concrete actions that UNICEF takes at the country, regional and global levels contribute to the impacts and outcomes across each of the five goal areas of the plan, as well as the cross-cutting priorities of gender equality and humanitarian action. The paper also elaborates the more specific outcome-level theories of change that help to explain how UNICEF will contribute to the outcomes in the Strategic Plan and the assumptions and risks framing the organization's work in obtaining results. The impact statement of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, is 'Realizing the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged'. This envisaged impact will be contributed to through five Goal Areas:

(a) Every child survives and thrives;

(b) Every child learns;

(c) Every child is protected from violence and exploitation;

(d) Every child lives in a safe and clean environment;

(e) Every child has an equitable chance in life.

These areas continue to represent the greatest challenges to the world's children. It is only by making significant progress in all five areas, and the cross-cutting priorities of gender equality and humanitarian assistance, that the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged, will be realized.

2019 - #ENDviolence Youth Manifesto: UNICEF brought more than 100 young people from around the world together to craft a youth manifesto for ending violence in schools. Their overarching principles are diversity and tolerance and protection for all students. They commit to being kind, reporting violence and taking action. Their demands are for everyone to take them seriously, establish clear rules, for the policymakers to make laws restricting weapons, ensure their safety to and from school, provide secure school facilities, train teachers and counsellors, teach consent and respond to sexual violence.

2021 - UNICEF Child Protection Strategy: The vision of the UNICEF Child Protection Strategy is a world where all children are free from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices. The purpose of this Strategy is to provide a clear vision and strategic framework for UNICEF's work in Child Protection for the decade to 2030 to meet this challenge. It calls upon every sector of society — not just governments — to work together and invest together to prevent violence against children. This includes scaling-up preventative and responsive health-care services, violence prevention and case detection, and mental health services, all delivered at the community level. It includes ensuring universal access to safe schools — especially as education systems begin to re-open following the COVID-19 pandemic. It also includes putting child protection at the heart of economic plans and priorities as countries continue to fight poverty within their borders and rebuild systems shattered by the pandemic. But this work must also be about changing minds in our families, homes and communities. Progress on violence depends on making some fundamental changes in social norms, attitudes, and behaviours.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

To create effective ways to prevent child abuse in public institutions, we need to set up a vigilant and well-informed community that is confident in making judgments and assertive in taking actions. Additionally, schools and educational institutions have a great role to play in tackling this issue as they not only provide children education, but also must consider it a priority to ensure children's safety and protection. So, it is essential that parents, teachers, and educators working with children and young people are able to understand the role each of them must play in protecting children.

The first step in eradicating child abuse or neglect is to learn and recognise the signs and signals first which may occur through criticising, rejecting, degrading, ignoring, isolating, corrupting, exploiting, and terrorising a child. Sometimes lack of awareness and misconceptions also hinder the possibility of preventing and finding appropriate solutions to concerning situations. Therefore, preventive measures include proper communication, educating all members of public institutions

about the signs, investing in prevention programs, establishing connection and trust between individuals and educating all to work as a team.

Several attempts have been made to fight this issue. In many countries' schools' prevention programs and materials with regard to school sexual abuse came into vogue.

A lot of parties are involved in dealing with cases of child abuse, from medical specialists to youth care workers and criminal justice authorities. The government wants them to work together in response to cases of (suspected) child abuse. This is referred to as a multidisciplinary approach.

UNICEF works with partners on a number of issues by strengthening child protection systems and promoting positive social norms in all contexts - development and emergency - to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse directed at children.

Educating people is one of the easiest procedures which can help us bring a better future for our children. This includes teaching children about their rights, too, so that they can more easily easily recognize when they are being abused.

Supporting prevention programs is also essential, as too often, intervention occurs only after abuse is reported. Greater investments are needed in programs that have been proven to stop the abuse before it occurs - such as family counselling and home visits by nurses who provide assistance for new-borns and their parents.

Investing in kids in a way of encouraging leaders in the community to be supportive of children and families. Supporting legislation to better protect our children and to improve their lives.

Expansion of helplines and information sharing.

Focusing on the functioning of judicial and social services, improving information systems, so that vulnerable children are better protected against violence and abuse.

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