

International Perspectives for Research on Child Abuse and Neglect

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**Paper Presented at
One Day National Seminar
on
New Perspective in Research**



**Organized by
Association of International Researchers of Indian origin (AIRIO)
Kerala Chapter
&
Marthophilus Training College**

**Venue
Marthophilus Training College,
Nalanchira, Thiruvananthapuram - 695015, Kerala, India**

16th July, 2015

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to find out the significance of international perspectives for research on child abuse and neglect. Child abuse is not a new phenomenon .Increased international communication and exposure has brought awareness in many that child abuse is a phenomenon intrinsic to all human society since the beginning of time. Abuse of children and adolescents is a complex international problem that seems to defy simple analysis and easy answers. We need to raise the public's awareness of the devastating effects of child abuse. Survivors of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk for problems later in life such as low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior that affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole. This includes the worst forms imaginable of child labor, involvement in armed conflict, exposure to female genital mutilation, child marriage, being sold into slavery, or being solicited over the internet. Whereas individual studies often use different definitions of the term, the results cannot be compared with each other and there is no universal standard exists for optimal child care or for child abuse .Most international communities have tended to focus only upon societal, or extra familial, abuses to children. In many others, the focus has been on issues relating to child labor, beggary, prostitution and marriage. In some more developed countries, attention has turned toward more intra-familial abuses and issues. Moreover, many abused and neglected children never come to the attention of government authorities or individuals who can make efforts to protect a particular child. It is clear that a significant number of children will remain at high risk for experiencing violence and other negative outcomes. Given all of this information, it is hoped that national and international partnerships will continue to make efforts to improve service availability and quality to children across the world.

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Keywords: International, Perspectives, Research, Child abuse, Neglect.

Introduction

Child abuse, mistreatment, and neglect are problems threatening the health and welfare of children and adolescents internationally. This is true for any nation and culture. Unfortunately, each year an estimated 300 million children worldwide are subjected to daily violence, exploitation and abuse (Daro, 2006). Survivors of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk for problems later in life such as low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior that affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole. This includes the worst forms imaginable of child labor, involvement in armed conflict, exposure to female genital mutilation, child marriage, being sold into slavery, or being solicited over the internet.

The objective of the paper is to find out the significance of international perspectives for research on child abuse and neglect.

Child Abuse Is not a New Phenomenon

Since the first parent-child dyad, adult caretakers have struggled with the demands presented by their children (deMause, 1974; TenBensel, Rheinberger, & Radbill, 1997). Child abuse is more than bruises and broken bones. While physical abuse might be the most visible, other types of abuse, such as emotional abuse and neglect, also leave deep, lasting scars. There are four major types of child maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Although any of the forms may be found separately, they often occur together.

Neglect: is failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., lack of appropriate supervision or failure to provide necessary food, shelter, or medical care).
- Medical
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs).
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs or exposure to domestic violence).

These situations do not always mean that a child is neglected. Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating that the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's needs continue to be unmet, then further child welfare professional intervention may be required.

Physical Abuse: is physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual Abuse: includes activities by a parent or caretaker such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Emotional Abuse: is any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. (Also called psychological abuse) – engaging in any pattern of behavior that has caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders in children (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families & et al, 2003).

The impact of abuse is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Abuse and neglect are associated with short and long-term consequences that may include brain damage, developmental delays, and learning disorders, problems forming relationships, aggressive behavior, and depression. The earlier abused children get help, the greater chance they have to heal and break the cycle-rather than perpetuate it. By learning about common signs of abuse and what you can do to intervene, you can make a huge difference in a child's life.

Child Abuse Is an International Tragedy

Over the past twenty years the Internet has become an integral part of our lives. We have eagerly embraced its potential for communication, entertainment and information seeking for many of today's children, the Internet, mobile phones and other technologies are a constant and familiar presence. For them, the distinction between online and offline has increasingly become meaningless, and they move seamlessly between both environments. With many of their extraordinary benefits, however, come hazards. The Internet and associated technologies have made abusive images of children easier to create and distribute, and provide significant new opportunities for abusers to access and make contact with children and young people online or offline (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011).

Child abuse and maltreatment are complex problems with serious immediate and long-term ramifications for children, their families, and for society. These problems transcend all structures in society, including familial, educational, health, social, and legal. The long-term effects of child abuse can afflict our society for years to come, as young victims become adults

(Lungren, 1996). Increased international communication and exposure has brought awareness in many that child abuse is a phenomenon intrinsic to all human society since the beginning of time. Infanticide, ritual mutilation, corporal punishment and battering, sexual exploitation, slavery and abandonment are still present in many societies. In many cultures, children are still commonly regarded as parental property. And, family is seen as the one entity in almost all cultures that outsiders do not intervene upon very easily. Obviously, this inherently protects abusing families from external inspection and intervention (Gordon A. Crews & Angela D. Crews, 2010).

No Universal Standard Exists for Optimal Child Care

The main challenge to improving the evidence base is the range of different definitions of child abuse and neglect. Because individual studies often use different definitions of the term, the results cannot be compared with each other. The same is true if different data collection methods are used. Before exploring the myriad international issues related to child abuse and neglect, one must first understand the extent and characteristics of these problems. This is not a simple task in that there are many issues and definitional questions which arise almost immediately. These are presented below to illustrate the difficulties in attempting to determine the true extent of various types of child abuse and neglect and controversies dealing with international definitions of child abuse. One of the most basic limiting issues surrounding this research is how to define what is universally defined as abuse and/or neglect.

No universal standard exists for optimal child care or for child abuse because child rearing beliefs and behaviors differ cross-culturally. There are many practices or disciplines that are considered acceptable in a particular culture but as abusive or neglectful by outsiders. Thus, international cultural conflicts in child abuse definitions can arise. Future international cross cultural definitions of child abuse must involve a determination of the parameters for acceptable and unacceptable behavior both between and within cultures. Until this time, child abuse must be understood and examined within the cultural context in which it occurs.

The investigation and study of child abuse, including the use of inappropriate physical and emotional means to discipline and control children, is only beginning in many parts of the world. Most international communities have tended to focus only upon societal, or extra familial, abuses to children. In many others, the focus has been on issues relating to child labor, beggary, prostitution and marriage. In some more developed countries, attention has turned toward more

intra-familial abuses and issues. Moreover, many abused and neglected children never come to the attention of government authorities or individuals who can make efforts to protect a particular child (Gordon A. Crews & Angela D. Crews, 2010).

Protecting Children on an International Level

Given the size of these problems on an international level (Klevens and Whitaker, 2007); many child maltreatment experts have recently called for greater attention to primary prevention. Primary preventive measures have to be developed in parallel to care measures so that the incidence of child abuse can be reduced in the future.

The aim of primary prevention efforts is to prevent abuse before it occurs. Recent reviews (Kindler, 2008) have focused on identifying programs or strategies that have been effective in preventing child abuse or neglect. To add to these efforts, the goal of this review was to identify gaps and future directions for developing and evaluating interventions from a public health perspective. Public health (Gauthier, Stollak, Messe, and Arnoff, 1996) focuses mainly on primary preventive interventions and develops these based on known, modifiable risk factors. Preventive interventions targeting risk factors that are highly prevalent in a population will generate a greater impact on the problem at the population level than targeting factors that are less prevalent. Given equal impact, interventions that are delivered by individuals to individuals (vs. delivered by society to individuals, society, or to the environment) or that require more individual involvement or effort or repeated doses tend to be more costly, and thus less attractive from a public health perspective. Regarding effectiveness, respondents from developed countries generally found prevention strategies in general more promising than their counterparts working in developing countries (Daro, 2007). In contrast, those working in developing countries were more optimistic than their colleagues in developed countries about the potential benefits of professional training as a child abuse prevention strategy.

Protecting children on an international level from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and world development. In turn, this helps them develop into productive citizens who can contribute to their communities (from local neighborhoods to the global community).

The prevention of and appropriate response to violence against children remains an on-going and worldwide concern and challenge. The world report on violence against children notes that “documentation of the magnitude of violence against children shows clearly that this is a

very substantial and serious global problem” (Pinheiro 2006, p.6). The Report emphasises that violence against children occurs in every society and country and has a profound impact on the holistic health and well-being of children. This report also highlighted the importance of equipping parents and caregivers of children with the knowledge and skills to parent without violence.

Conclusion

Abuse of children and adolescents is a complex international problem that seems to defy simple analysis and easy answers. We need to raise the public's awareness of the devastating effects of child abuse. It appears that there may be hope for an emerging global agreement on the major behaviors that constitute child abuse and neglect. It must be expected that some differences will continue to exist between the definitions embraced in various parts of the world. This will probably be true in developing versus developed countries. Local cultural and social conditions will always frame the relative emphasis professionals may place on the various behaviors of their people. This is especially true in generally perceived private matters such as possible child abuse and neglect. This will probably always be the case despite the fact that those working in diverse arenas are dealing with situations and offenses involving many of the same characteristics. As has been repeatedly discussed, children who have experienced physical mistreatment, sexual abuse and parental or societal neglect can be found in many countries around the world, regardless of a country's economic conditions. Sadly, much of the world's response to child abuse and neglect, however, will always inherently be linked to levels of funding. Although the proportion of developing countries establishing formal child abuse policies and response systems is growing, wide discrepancies remain in terms of service availability. Although much has been, and is being, learned about how to establish effective surveillance and response systems, it is clear that a significant number of children will remain at high risk for experiencing violence and other negative outcomes. Given all of this information, it is hoped that national and international partnerships will continue to make efforts to improve service availability and quality to children across the world. It appears that the best bet will continue to be through ongoing education and training programs and dissemination of best practices. Fortunately, it also appears that this is being realized on an international level.

The goal of child abuse prevention is simple to stop child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, sparing children and families emotional and physical trauma and decreasing the need for costly intervention and treatment services.

The best way to prevent child abuse and neglect is to support families and provide parents with the skills and resources they need. This can only be done if we, both as a society and as individuals, take responsibility to offer parents and families the support and tools they need to provide healthy, nurturing homes for their children.

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