

# Models of abuse

[Psychology](#), [Abuse](#)



Psychological Model of Abuse - Also known as emotional or mental abuse  
Emotional abuse can be described as constantly mistreating a child and therefore affecting their emotional state and development. Emotional abuse can be inflicted upon a child in many different ways; these can include telling a child that they are “worthless or unloved”. It may also include not allowing the child opportunities to express themselves, or teasing them about the way in which they communicate or what they say.

This type of abuse can result in psychological trauma, which can include anxiety, chronic depression or post dramatic stress disorder. If the family dynamics change, it becomes much more difficult for that family to function in a socially acceptable way, which can lead to scapegoating. Scapegoating is when one member of a family is blamed for the dysfunction of that family; this usually begins with an adult within the family. Theorists believe that the scapegoat becomes necessary for the family to survive.

Medical Model This theory involves issues around the idea that the causes of child abuse were viewed as a disease. In 1962 Kempe and Kempe developed the phrase ‘the battered child syndrome’, which in 1976 was changed to ‘Child abuse and neglect’. Kempe and Kempe concluded that many parents, especially the main carers, who abuse their children, may have suffered from experiences of abuse or “poor attachment” in the early stages of childhood. In addition to this research, Kempe and Kempe ensured that children in abusive situations were removed from the abusive family and taken to a safer environment. The parents were also given treatment to help them bond with their children during these early stages.

**Sociological Model** This theory is about the changing patterns in society. It is believed that children who are in a family who suffer from unemployment, poverty, poor housing and health deprivation, are more likely to be victims of child abuse. Children need to grow up in a healthy and safe environment in order to grow and develop properly. Victims of child abuse are more likely to treat their children in the same way, this is called a “ cycle of abuse”. However, this is not always true and many victims of abuse may just need a little help and support in order to develop strong relationships with their own children.

**Feminist Model** This addresses the “ imbalance of power between men and women within society and with particular reference to child sexual abuse and the abuse of adult male power.” (Child Care Learning and Development – page 179)

It is suggested that child sexual abuse is the function of keeping together families that are at risk of failing and collapsing, for example, the “ abuse of a teenage girl by her father who is considered to be seeking emotional and sexual gratification because communication and sexual relations with his wife have broken down (Kempe and Kempe 1978).” (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/05/17127/21832>) This perspective sees abuse as an extreme example of dominant male power over women and children, for example, men will sexually abuse children as way of putting their position of power across.

Statistics show that women spend more time caring for their children than men do and with regard to physical abuse, women have been as responsible as men, but feminists argue that in proportion to how much time a woman

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spends with their children, they will actually inflict less abuse than a man would in the small space of time they spend with their children. Also, mothers have been blamed for neglect and emotional abuse to a greater extent than fathers because they are expected to be the main care-giver for their children. “ The role of men in neglect and emotional abuse has been ignored” and the fact that a father may not spend much time with his children is not usually defined as neglect.

Similarities Psychological and feminist: both have the scapegoating concept, where one member of the family, in the feminist case, the father figure, will blame their family's dysfunction on the child, which can result in the father sexually abusing the child or other physical abuse. They are both ways of making the parent feel as if they are superior to the child; they do this by abusing them either emotionally or sexually/physically. The sociological theory may also be linked to the psychological theory of scapegoating; parents and families in poverty may blame their child for their lack of finance and their unemployment. They may make the excuse that they cannot work because they have children to look after.

Psychological and medical are similar because they have a similar cause – one cause is that one or more parents have a mental condition which makes them abuse their child. The psychological theory and the sociological also have the “ cycle of abuse”; children who were abused as children do not know any other way of parenting and so abuse their own children, which can result in depression and trauma, which can continue the cycle. The sociological and medical models are similar as the reason for abusing the children is that they don't know any other way; a parent with medical issues

may not understand that it is wrong to abuse their children or that they may not be able to control their own problems and so lash out at the child in a fit of frustration, whereas in the sociological model, the parent is stuck in the cycle of abuse and doesn't know any other way of caring for their child. Both of these models state that the parents in these situations may require help to form healthy relationships with their children.

**Differences** The psychological and sociological models are different in the fact that the psychological model is related to mental issues and the sociological is what is socially acceptable. But of course, they all result in a child being abused. Medical model is viewed as a disease which isn't the parent intentionally abusing their child whereas psychological is more that the parent blames their child for the family's dysfunction and will therefore abuse the child for doing so; but in the parents mind, they are simply disciplining the child. The feminist model and the medical model are different in the sense that the abuser in the feminist, the father, doesn't have a health or mental problem, he simply wants to express the fact that he is dominant.

**Conclusion** Some of these models can be interconnected and can have many factors which contribute to the abuse of children within a family, for example, if a parent has a mental illness which causes them to abuse their child, this could be referred to as a medical model or psychological model of abuse; either way the child will still be abused and this can have very negative effects on how they will act in society and how they raise their own children. For example, if a child is sexually abused as a child, they may act in unacceptable ways at school, or may not trust the same sex as their abuser. If a child is abused, researchers suggest that they will then abuse their

children in later years; however, on the other hand, this may have a more positive effect on how they raise their children as they may not want them to go through the trauma and abuse they received as a child.

I believe that all of the models in this essay may be true in some cases, but I do not believe that the feminist model gives enough blame to the mother. As they state, the mother generally spend that most time with the children, and this can have a negative effect on her mental health; she may blame her children for issues such as postnatal depression. It is far more likely that this will lead to child abuse than the father simply abusing his children to come across as the dominant one. “ Mothers are almost twice as likely to be directly involved in child maltreatment as fathers.” (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chapterthree.cfm>), however this does not usually involve sexual abuse; “ Mothers are not more likely to be the perpetrator when it comes to sexual abuse; fathers are more likely to be reported for this crime.”