

# Child abuse and maltreatment

[Society](#), [Child Abuse](#)



" Nearly five children die every day in America from abuse and neglect," according to Every Child Matters Education Fund (as cited by The National Children's Alliance, 2009). This goes to show that child abuse is a major issue in today's modern society. In fact, statistics show that there are over 3 million reports of child abuse each year in the United States alone (" National Child Abuse Statistics," n. d. ).

While the definition of child abuse and neglect changes from state to state, it is defined by The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) 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. (" What is Child Abuse and Neglect? " 2008) Most states have also recognized four major types of abuse in which children may experience.

It is very common for serious problems to arise from child maltreatment, and tend to cause long-term traumatization. When it comes to dealing with children in court who have been exposed to abuse, special precautions and procedures must be taken into account. All of these topics help to lend some insight as to how serious the issue of child abuse truly is in today's society. To begin with, the four major types of child maltreatment are: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

Neglect occurs when a parent, guardian, or other caregiver fails to provide for the basic needs of their child such as feeding them, offering shelter, getting them medical attention, providing the child with an education, or ignoring the child's emotional needs. Physical abuse takes place when

someone such as a parent, guardian, or other caretaker intentionally causes physical harm to a child in various ways such as punching, kicking, biting, beating, stabbing, shaking, throwing, hitting, or choking.

Sexual abuse includes different activities such as rape, sodomy, incest, indecent exposure, exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials, or fondling a child's genitals ("What is Child Abuse and Neglect?" 2008). While boys and girls do face fairly equal amounts of physical abuse and neglect, it is four times more likely for a girl to experience sexual abuse than a boy (Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 379). According to CAPTA, sexual abuse is defined as: the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children or incest with children. ("What is Child Abuse and Neglect?" 2008) Lastly, emotional abuse is described as acts or behaviors which negatively affect a child's sense of self-esteem or self-development.

This can be caused from constant criticism, rejecting the child, threatening them, or withholding love, guidance, and emotional support. However, it is very difficult to prove that a child has been emotionally abused without evidence of harm or mental injury. ("What is Child Abuse and Neglect?" 2008). Out of all these different types of maltreatment, neglect is by far the most common. According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human

Services (2010), “ over two-thirds (70%) of maltreatment victims experience neglect. About 15% are physically abused, and 9% are sexually abused.

Only 7% reportedly are emotionally abused, a figure that is probably greatly underestimated” (as cited in Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 378-379). While these four types of child maltreatment are the most common, there are several other well-known examples of child abuse as well. According to Emery and Laumann-Billings (1998), “ an estimated 1, 200 to 1, 500 young children are murdered each year by a parent or other person,” (as cited in Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 380). This form of infant abuse is known as infanticide, or the killing of an infant up to two years of age (Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 80). According to data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), children younger than 1 year accounted for 46. 2% of child fatalities in 2009 (as cited in the Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). Infanticide can be broken down further into two terms, neonaticide and filicide, depending on how long after birth the child was killed. For example, if a new-born baby is killed within 24 hours after his birth, it would be neonaticide. If the child is killed after he reaches the age of one year, it would be filicide.

These two terms exist because of the substantial differences between mothers who commit neonaticide and those who commit filicide. Shaken baby syndrome is another form of child abuse in which the parent, guardian, or caretaker shakes the baby so hard that serious brain damage occurs (Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 383). Several common symptoms of shaken baby syndrome are seizures, inability to lift head, difficulty breathing, difficulty speaking, blindness, lethargy/decreased muscle tone, extreme irritability, or inability of eyes to focus or track movement (“ The National Center on

Shaken Baby Syndrome,” n. . ). In some cases, death may even occur. According to Russell (2010), “ of those children diagnosed with SBS, about 30% die as a result of their injuries, and only 15% survive with no lasting effects (as cited in Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 383). Not only are children affected while the maltreatment is happening, but thememoriesof the abuse can have negative consequences for children, families, and society that last lifetimes, if not generations. First of all, a person’s physical and mental health could be negatively affected.

For instance, adults who have been physically abused or neglected are more likely to be suffering from asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, bronchitis, and many more. Some mental effects of abuse could be a mental disorder, depression, isolation, fear, an inability to trust, anxiety, and so on. Additionally, people who have been abused in the past have much higher chances of committing violent crimes and becoming juvenile offenders (“ Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect”, n. d. ).

According to English, Widom, ; Brandford (2004), “ a National Institute of Justice study showed that abused and neglected children were 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile, 2. 7 times more likely to be arrested for violent and criminal behavior as an adult, and 3. 1 times more likely to be arrested for one of many forms of violent crime (juvenile or adult),” (as cited in “ Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect”, n. d. ). Additionally, adults who were abused by their parents when they were kids are very likely to abuse their own kids.

A lot of people who faced abuse are also very likely to have problems withdrug abusein their future (“ Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and  
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Neglect", n. d. ). Suicidal thoughts and attempts to commit suicide are also very common among victims of child abuse. Lastly, child maltreatment is very expensive for society. These costs include direct costs which are the costs associated with the immediate needs of the abused and neglected child, and indirect costs which are the costs associated with the longer term and the secondary effects of child maltreatment.

Some examples of direct costs would be hospitalization, child welfare, law enforcement, chronic health problems, and is estimated annually to cost over 24 million dollars. Some examples of indirect costs would be special education, adult criminality, juvenile delinquency, mental health, health care, and the estimated annual cost is around or over 69 million dollars. Together, the total of the direct and indirect costs for people who have suffered from child abuse can be around 90 million to 100 million dollars yearly (" Chapter Six: What Are the Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect? n. p. ). Finally, special procedures and precautions must be taken when dealing with abused children in the courts. This is where the forensic psychologist may become involved. Some of the issues the forensic psychologist may be involved with is figuring out the most appropriate procedure for taking the child's testimony, finding out under what conditions would a child's out-of-court statement (hearsay) be admissible, figuring out if the child is competent enough to provide an accurate testimony in the court of law, and if abuse or neglect occurred, and if so, who is responsible.

The first issue is very important because it is very common for the child to be under enormous duress in the presence of the defendant, or the child's possible abuser. The child is under even more pressure if they have to testify

against their own parent or guardian. According to Partlett and Nurcombe (1998), The child is notoriously vulnerable while giving evidence against abusers, especially parents, when proof of the charge will result in separation. Many children are highly susceptible and subject to recantation when faced with the reality of parental separation (as cited in Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 91-392). In order to solve this issue, many states have made and passed recent legal rules which limit the defender's confrontation with the child by allowing the child's testimony to be taken through closed-circuit TV, or another room. Another tricky part of abused children and courts is the child evaluation. When evaluating the children, the clinicians have to be very careful and have to be very sensitive and skillful to a wide range of factors. The evaluator should also try to avoid tating their personal opinions when with the child. K. S. Budd, Felix, Poindexter, Naik-Polan, and Sloss (2002), report that Clinicians may be asked to assess the child's developmental or emotional functioning and needs, the effects of maltreatment on the child, the risk of harm should the child be united with his or her parents, the impact of separation from the biologicalfamilyon the child's functioning, or the advantages and disadvantages of potential visitation or placement options (as cited in Bartol ; Bartol, 2012, p. 80). Lastly, in some cases it may be necessary for the courts to appoint someone to represent the child such as a guardian ad litem (GAL), to represent the child's best interests or if the child cannot do so by themself. Two responsibilities of the child's GAL is to get a clear understanding of the situation and the needs of the child, and to make recommendations to the court concerning the needs of the child ("Representation of Children in Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings," n. p. ).

Overall, child abuse is a serious issue in today's society. " In 2009, Children's Advocacy Centers around the country served over 254, 000 child victims of abuse, providing victim advocacy and support to these children and their families. In 2010, this number was over 266, 000" (National Children's Alliance, 2010). Everyday children are exposed to child abuse and everyday children die from it. Will there ever be a day when children don't have to be afraid of the abuse? Probably not; and that is the twisted society in which we live today.