

Child abuse types and features: literature review



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An ugly word that has manifested into action and has resided in the homes of many today (specifically in north America) is abuse. Abuse takes many forms and leaves its mark in many different ways. In addition to this, abuse also often occurs between people who are close to each other (within the family), which would say that domestic abuse is most common in our society. Although abuse is certainly not restricted to the family, this paper will examine the different ways that abuse takes place within the context of children being the victims. The biggest issue that takes place is child abuse is that fact that a child seeks after security. Proof of this is seen how children cling on to a security blanket, or a teddy bear or rag doll that they drag around with them wherever they go. In other words, children who have been or who are being abused receive the exact opposite of what they truthfully desire and need. With this, the focus will be centred towards the physical and emotional effects of physical abuse and sexual abuse amongst children. This topic is certainly a sensitive topic for many, and this paper will even contain personal stories of individuals that have become victims to all kinds of abuse.

To understand abuse, we must firstly understand how abuse actually works. It is common for people to find themselves in an abusive relationship. Although, it is interesting to note that people who are in abusive relationships tend to either stay in that relationship or leave and find themselves in the same situation with another individual.

Why does this occur? Why do people stay with those who are abusive towards them? This is commonly seen in marital relationships, but it is

interesting to note that it is applicable to a parent-child relationship, because there is a cycle, and it's referred as the cycle of abuse.

When dealing with physical abuse, this occurs in a cycle of three phases. It begins with a tension-building period, then an acute battering incident, and concluding with a reconciliation/loving phase. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the abuse tends to have a pattern of getting worst and worst.

2Although, it all begins at the first stage.

Tension building said to have been done by both members (the abuser and the victim). Let's say that the incident is between a husband and a wife, the wife can try to please her husband by working to keep him calm through the way she converses with him; in other words, to not provoke him to anger.

Although, it is important to remember that the abuser is always responsible for his/her actions. Although the point that the victim provokes the anger of the abuser is often used from the abuser to the victim. 3This is how the tension arises. The second phase is when the physical assault actually occurs. Although, only about half of the instances of physical abuse actually result in visible injuries, while the rest of injuries go unnoticed to the eye.

4On this phase, it is interesting to note that these abusive relationships that do not terminate in divorce are at high risk to terminate due to the untimely death of someone. 5During the third phase, this is where any physical tension or physical or physical abuse is absent. Thus, this is usually where the 'lovey' phase of the relationship takes place. Although, in many cases of studies, it was difficult to find any positive behaviour, but there was at least no form of tension building or physical assault taking place. 6This is a

general point of how abusively occurs, it is foundational to the remainder of this topic because of abuse cycles around these phases.

Continuing forwards with physical abuse, it is important, yet difficult to draw the line between abuse and discipline. A Decima poll was taken up and found that one in three Canadian parents “ admit to slapping and spanking, and parents of young children under six are twice as likely to use physical punishment as parents of older children.”⁷ Although, experts find difficulty in finding where they are to draw the line between discipline and abuse when examining this poll. Therefore, a further examination by a 1991 Gallup poll found that one in six Canadians (17 percent) exclaim that they have “ personal awareness of a serious instance of physical abuse of children by a parent.” With this, another study was done that showed that about 37% took no action whatsoever to make efforts to intervene.⁸ These numbers show that abuse in Canada is surely not a foreign concept, but seems to have made its home here. Although, there is more to understand when dealing with studies on abuse.

Very little attention is given to the specific impact of child abuse on the children themselves. This research is crucial for two main reasons. Firstly, research has been showing that the temperament of infants has a profound effect on the interaction between the caretaker and infant.⁹ Further studying on these children would help to determine the characteristics in the infant that contribute the difficulties of the parents which leads their frustration to abuse. The second reason would be to examine more precisely the distorting on the infant’s development, and by how much these distortions can be treated by remedial measures.¹⁰ Nevertheless, studies have been done,
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showing that physical abuse has had effects. These can be seen through neurological damage, growth failures, and psychological damage.

During a study conducted in 1974, a sample of abused children was examined for neurological damage. The study showed that 53% of the children pertained some level of neurological abnormality. In addition to this, a third of this 53 % children had a severe abnormality. ¹¹This can surely be linked to physical assault to the head of the child, but violent shaking leads to this as well. Nevertheless, the evidence from this study concluded that the nervous system of abused children can also be a risk from environmental and psychological stresses that the children are exposed to.

¹²These neurological abnormalities can certainly be caused by living within an abusive environment. Studies have shown that children with immersion burns, pattern burns, head and internal injuries may point towards this sort of abuse, making these signs an indication for physical abuse. ¹³

It is sad to say, but it is often the case that growth retardation accompanies child abuse. With the use of many studies, it is clear that poor physical growth and poor nutrition is found in about 25-35% of abused children.

¹⁴Continuing on growth failures, it is clear that children who are undernourished (being a form of abuse) and physically abused have a much poorer mental function. ¹⁵These statistics make sense because, during the growth of children, the brain and other vital organs are growing. So, if they are not met by proper nutrition or take multiple blows to the head, or receive aggressive shaking, then, logically, this statistic must make sense.

Nevertheless, there are also signs of psychological damage when speaking of abuse done to children.

Several studies done in the mid-1970s examined the behaviours of 50 children, 4 and a half years after they had been abused. These studies showed that over half of the children had poor self-concepts, they were sorrowful individuals, and they exhibited behaviours that made peers, parents, and teachers reject them. ¹⁶In fact, there were nine characteristics that caused this. These characteristics are imparted capacity to relax/enjoy life, psychiatric symptoms (such as tantrums, hyperactivity, and bizarre behaviours), low self-esteem, academic learning difficulties, withdrawal, opposition, hypervigilance, compulsivity, and pseudo nature behaviour. ¹⁷These figures are staggering because it shows that abuse certainly has a long-term effect on children; not just in terms of growth issues or neurological damage (as said above), but even with how they behave and acts towards others. It seems that the issues that come out of abuse will be issues that they face for their lifetime.

Emotional abuse is very interesting, because unlike physical abuse, you cannot see it or point it out as easily. This is why it's interesting to see that abuse can and does take place in many different forms. Knowing this should keep the eyes of parents, teachers, and leaders in general peeled for these different forms of abuse. Luckily, there are signs for all sorts of abuse, even emotional. Although, it's significant to note that even people who " have normally healthy interactions with no display of physical or sexual violence can engage in emotionally abusive interactions form time to time." ¹⁸Moving forwards, infants who are not met with their sufficient level of emotional care are linked with an uninvolvement with their parents (through basic interactions). An effect of this emotional abuse is found in multiple things,

such as their play time. The infants that are not met by their emotional needs are seen to be lacking in their persistent and creative qualities than of those infants who have their needs met; also, their play seems to be disorganized compared to the other children. 19 In addition, these children have been found to have “ depressive qualities of listless metric retardation and lack of energy.” 20

Another test was done that composed of the mothers of the emotionally abused infants, and a complete stranger. Now, it would certainly be uncommon for an infant to react more positively towards a stranger than their mothers. Although, this was the case; about 20% of the responses towards the strangers was more positive than towards the mothers. 21With this study, 40% of children responded the same way towards both the strangers and their mothers, while the last 40% of these children were clearly more positive towards their mothers. 22This study is very interesting for the fact that it seems that the parents should be heartbroken. The fact that children who are not met by their emotional needs from their parents react more positive to strangers than towards their actual parents, seems to indicate that these children are just seeking an emotional bond from an older, more authoritative figure. Whether that is their parents or not, they desire to have that need met as a primary need; a need of top importance.

Nevertheless, some of the children (40%) still react more positive to their parents rather than a stranger. Reading this sounds like as though these children are still giving their parents (specifically in this study, their mothers) another chance to be their primitive source of emotional care, rather than looking towards a stranger for that need to be met.

Sexual abuse appears to be the one form of abuse that is least reported.

Emotional abuse or even physical abuse can be hard to detect, but sexual abuse may even be the hardest to detect for the fact that people do not like to confess what has been done to them. Firstly, it is important to understand what is sexual abuse can range from. Which can be from sexual exposure things (such as pornography from a young age) to the touching or fondling of another, or even sexual intercourse. Examples of this can be an adult showing his/her genitals to a child, an adult asking a child to undress, an adult touching the genitals of a child, asking a child to touch the genitals of the adult, forced masturbation, ²³and the list goes on. Although, a fair question to ask is “ How can most people get away with sexually abusing children?” One of the main reasons is given by Hancock, when she says, “ As a child, you don’t feel like you have any right to question what an adult is doing. You’re brought up to respect adults and think that they know what is best. I found myself saying, ‘ Well, I guess it must be O. K. ... He’s a grown up.” ²⁴It’s true. As children are brought up, they are taught to listen to their elders, and that older people are right because of their age and wisdom of life, which isn’t always true. Nevertheless, people who have done through sexual abuse don’t want to speak up about their troubling past experiences because they believe that It’s nobody else’s business, or that they undermine what occurred, or even because they don’t want their parents to figure out because there’s a sense of shame for what happened.

²⁵Nevertheless, there are symptoms that can be seen for those who have been sexually abused as children. These symptoms can range from symptoms of PTSD and depression, drug abuse and alcoholism, suicidal

thoughts and tendencies, underachievement at school and at work, and even issues with intimate relationships. 26It's helpful to have these symptoms because knowing and understanding them could change, or even save a life from brokenness. Sexual abuse is certainly more of an issue for women than it is for men, because even have a tendency of wanting to exercise a level of dominance over women, but it is important to know that men can and are sexually abused. In fact, a study done in 2003 showed that U. S. male adults, about 14. 2% of them, were sexually abused before the age of 18. 27This shows that it isn't just an issue with women, but also for men.

Overall, abuse is a vague, yet common word seen manifest into actions in north America. Whether it is physical abuse, emotional abuse, or even sexual abuse, it is a common issue that seems to be getting more attention as studies are done on it. As seen, the outcomes of those who have been sexually abused must be taken seriously in order to show to other victims that they can speak up and receive justice for the acts that have been committed against them. Whether it is those who have been physical abusive by a parent or sexually abused by and uncle, all victims should feel safe and secure to open up to people who can work to find justice being done for those who have been robbed of their childhood, and even their lives.

1John M. Drescher. *Seven Things Children Need*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press), 1976, 35.

2Anne L. Horton. *Abuse and religion: when praying isn't enough*. (Lexington, Mass. u. a.: Lexington Books), 1988, 18.

3Ibid, 19.

4Ibid, 19.

5Ibid, 19.

6Ibid, 19.

7John Frederick, Conway. The Canadian family in crisis. (Toronto: J. Lorimer), 2003, 90.

8Ibid, 90.

9Neil Frude. Psychological approaches to child abuse. (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield), 1981, 120.

10Ibid, 120.

11Ibid, 154.

12Ibid, 155.

13Karel Kurst-Swanger, and Jacqueline L. Petcosky. Violence in the home: multidisciplinary perspectives. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 2003, 65.

14Neil Frude. Psychological approaches to child abuse. (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield), 1981, 156.

15Ibid, 156.

16Ibid, 156.

17Ibid, 157.

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18Karel Kurst-Swanger, and Jacqueline L. Petcosky. Violence in the home: multidisciplinary perspectives. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 2003, 113.

19Neil Frude. Psychological approaches to child abuse. (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield), 1981, 126.

20Ibid, 126.

21Ibid, 125.

22Ibid, 125.

23Maxine Hancock, and Karen Burton. Mains. Child sexual abuse: hope for healing. (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers), 1997, 6.

24Ibid, 5.

25SiteWizard. " Lucy Faithfull Foundation." Child sexual abuse facts. Accessed March 24, 2017. [https:// www. parentsprotect. co. uk/quick_facts. htm](https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/quick_facts.htm), para 4.

26" The 1 in 6 Statistic." 1in6. January 1, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2017. http://1in6.org/the-1-in-6-statistic/?gclid=CjwKEAjwh9PGBRCfso2n3ODgvUcSJAAhpW5ouQSjBwcKyLP9OXyXNvkR4iuZVypisYN9E6MePsf9oRoCOpPw_wcB, para 2.

27Ibid, para 2.

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