

# Child abuse: the hidden tragedy

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



Child abuse is the physical or emotional abuse of a child by a parent, guardian, or other person. Reports of child abuse, including sexual abuse, beating, and murder, have jumped in the United States and some authorities believe that the number of cases is largely under reported. Child neglect is also included in legal definitions of child abuse to cover instances of malnutrition, desertion, and inadequate care of a child's safety.

When reported, inadequate foster care services and a legal system that has trouble accommodating the suggestible nature of children, who are often developmentally unable to distinguish fact from make-believe, complicate child abuse cases. During the years of 1985 and 1996, there was a 50 percent increase in reported cases of child abuse. In 1996, three million cases of child abuse are reported in the United States each year. Also that same year some twelve hundred children died from abuse across the country.

Treatment of the abuser has had only limited success and child protection agencies are overwhelmed. Recently, efforts have begun to focus on the primary prevention of child abuse. Primary prevention of child abuse must be equipped on many levels before it can be successful. Prevention, on the social level is very important and could possibly save a life. According to the American Humane Association prevention should include widening the financial self-sufficiency of families, discouraging corporal punishment and other ways of violence.

Making healthcare more available and affordable, increasing and developing coordination of social services, evolving the identification and treatment of

psychological problems, and alcohol and drug abuse, providing more affordable child care and preventing the birth of unwanted children. Prevention plans on the family level include helping parents meet their basic needs, identifying problems of substance abuse and spouse abuse, and educating parents about child behavior, discipline, safety and development.

In the case of child abuse, primary prevention is defined as any intervention designed for the purpose of preventing child abuse before it occurs. In 1993, three million children in the United States were reported to have been abused. Thirty-five percent of these cases of child abuse were confirmed. Data from various reporting sources indicates that improved reporting could lead to a significant increase in the number of cases of child abuse verified by child protection agencies. The lack of verification does not indicate that abuse did not occur, only that it could not be verified.

The facts are that each year 160, 000 children suffer severe or life-threatening injury and 1, 000 to 2, 000 children die as a result of abuse. Of these deaths, 80 percent involve children younger than five years of age, and 40 percent involve children younger than one year of age. One out of every 20-murder victim is a child. Murder is the fourth leading cause of death in children from one to four years of age and the third leading cause of death in children from five to fourteen years of age.

Deaths from abuse are under reported and some deaths classified as the result of accident and sudden infant death syndrome might be reclassified as the result of child abuse if comprehensive investigations were more routinely done. Most child abuse takes place in the home and is started by persons are

know to and trusted by the child. Even though it has been widely publicized, abuse in day-care and foster-care setting accounts for only a small number of confirmed cases of child abuse. In 1996, only two percent of all confirmed cases of child abuse occurred in these settings.

Child abuses if fifteen times more likely to occur in families where spousal abuse occurs. Children are three times more likely to be abused by their fathers than by their mothers. No differences have been found in the incidence of child abuse in rural versus urban areas. Following are the types of abuse and the percentages of the different types. Not only do children suffer from the physical and mental cruelty of child abuse; they endure many long-term consequences, including delays in reaching developmental milestones, refusal to attend school and separation anxiety disorders.

Further; consequences include an increased likelihood of future narcotic abuse, combative behavior, high-risk health behaviors, illegal activity, personality disorders. Investigations have shown that a affectionate, loving, tender and caring enjoyable environments during the first three years of a child's life is significant for correct intellectual growth. There have been some recent changes in regards to the causes of child abuse. The results of investigation originated by the National Research Council's Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect showed the first important step away from the simple cause and effect patterns.

The panel established that the simple reason and effect patterns have certain limitations, mostly related to their narrow focus on the parents. They stated that in some families that there is cycles of abuse that is started and

is carried over generations. These patterns are limited by asking only about the isolated set of personal characteristics that might cause parents to abuse their children. The panel attempted to examine the roots of child abuse, in order to find effective ways in preventing it.

The panel developed an ecological model; this model considers the origin of all forms of child abuse to be a structured process. This ecological model views child abuse within a system of danger and preventive factors correlating across four different levels: (1) the person, (2) the family, (3) the neighborhood and (4) the community. Certain factors are more closely linked with some forms of abuse than others are. Many people have argued that our society does not really value its children.

This argument can be highlighted by the fact that one in four children in the United States lives in poverty and many children do not have any form of health insurance. The presence of high levels of violence in our society is also thought to contribute to child abuse. Poverty, is the most repeatedly and persistently noted risk factor for child abuse in the American society. Physical abuse and neglect are more prevalent amid the people who are the poorest. Whether or not the pressure of poverty-related conditions brings this on. Or as a result from greater observation by public agencies, resulting in over reporting is debated.

Other conditions include unreachable and unaffordable health care, broken social services and lack of help from extended families and communities. Parents who were abused, as children are more likely than other parents to abuse their own children are. Lack of parenting skills, impractical

expectations about a child's abilities, unawareness of ways to handle a child's behavior and of typical child development, will contribute to child abuse. It is believed that forty percent of established cases of child abuse are related to substance abuse. Other factors that increase the risk of child abuse include emotional immaturity of the parents.

Which is often largely applied to age, as in the case of teenage parents. Without proper support with their child they might with struggle poor coping skills, which is often related to age but also occurring in older parents. Also they might have a poor self-esteem; also other psychological problems experienced by the young parents. A common factor is that single parenthood along with many burdens and hardships of parenting that must be handled alone, if there is no help of a partner. In many cultures social isolation of the teenage parents from family and friends that can result in the lack of support.

The United States Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect has called for a universal system of early intervention. That would be grounded in the creation of caring communities that could contribute an effective base for facing the child abuse crisis. The panel stated that the successful tactics for preventing child abuse require intervention at all levels of society. The panel was unable to agree of the final plans concerning which programs or services should be offered to prevent child abuse. This is because research on the prevention of child abuse is limited by the complexity of the problem.

A broad range of programs has been developed and implemented by public and private agencies at many levels, little evidence supports the

effectiveness of these programs. Principal prevention strategies are based on the risk factors that have a low value Which are not as likely to be effective as more broadly based social programs. Also, programs focused on a society level rather than on the individual level prevent the stigmatization of a group or an individual. Society strategies for preventing child abuse that are proposed but unproven include increasing the value society places on children.

Enlarging the economic self-sufficiency of families, enhancing communities and their resources, discouraging excessive use of corporal punishment and other forms of violence. Making health care more accessible and affordable. Increasing and improving treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. Developing the identification and treatment of mental health problems, increasing the availability of affordable child care and preventing the births of unwanted children through sexeducation, family planning, abortion, anonymous delivery and adoption. It is important to create opportunities for parents to feel entitled to act on their own behalf.

Honor the wholeness of the family. Strengthen parents' ability to cultivate the faith in there development of their children and themselves. Create links with community support systems, a network of churches and other organizations. Provide a setting where parents and children can gather, interact, support, and learn from each other. Strengthen community awareness of the importance of healthy parenting practices. In the United States specific methods of delivering services to families include home

visitations, early postpartum contact, intensive community leaders contact, parent training and free health care clinics.

It is important that help be made possible to those parents that have been identified as people with drug problems. It is critical in treating parents who abuse alcohol or drugs. Also it is important to identify and counsel parents who suffer from spousal abuse. Identifying and dealing with parents with mental health problems is also important. Yet these might not always be the soul issues for abuse; other topics need attention include economic, job-related. Providing a sensitive ear also being a resource of referrals.

That can help with these issues may take community leaders a giant step towards assisting a needy parent. Also other areas that can be addressed is the need for assistance in education about time management and budgeting skills, stress management, coping and parenting skills such as appropriate discipline. According to the American Humane Society: only home visitation has been found to be effective in reducing the incidence of child abuse. Home visitations are now being widely embraced the concept of home visitation as a method of preventing child abuse by identifying family needs and providing the appropriate services.

Also home visitation has the benefits of improving parents' feelings toward their children and the interactions between parents and children. The success of home visitation depends of the support of health care, social services and childcare. Some of the reasons for child abuse center on the needs of the parents. To prevent child abuse, it is important to first help and



support the parents. Parents who have multiple emotional, medical, financial and social needs find it difficult to meet the needs of their children.

It is critical that community leaders develop an understanding attitude toward parents to help the children. Prevention of child abuse and negligence can be achieved using tactics pointed at helping parents protect and nurture their children. Community leaders could establish group-parenting classes to discuss issues such as: safety issues, nutrition and feeding concerns, discipline and normal child development. Classes should be divided into two groups: one for the parents of infants and one for the parents of toddlers, since these two groups will require a different focus.

Providing childcare during these classes may be necessary to ensure attendance. It is also important to try to give very specific and concrete suggestions to parents instead of talking in broad generalities. Community leaders could suggest that parents use an egg timer to help children anticipate and be more compliant with bedtime or use time-out as an alternative to spanking a child for bad behavior. Parents should be reminded of and taught to distinguish between childish behavior and willful disobedience.

To discipline only those actions that are in the child's control according to the child age and development. In conclusion, many things need to happen at international, national, state and community levels to prevent child abuse. Studies have shown that countries with the most generous social services have the lowest rate of child homicide. People should lobby for greater availability of drug and alcohol treatment programs, more shelters for the

homeless, more accessible mental health care and more shelters for abused women and children.

These programs and those that provide parenting skills, support groups and respite care for parents and care givers should be available in every community. Child abuse is a complex problem with many causes, it is important that people not take a defeatist attitude toward its prevention. Despite the absence of strong evidence to guide preventive efforts, society can do things to try to prevent abuse. Showing increased concern for the parents or care givers and increasing attempts to enhance their skills as parents or care givers may help save the most vulnerable people, our children, from the nightmare of abuse and neglect.