



Causes, Consequences and Prevention of Adolescent Abuse

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Abstract:

Adolescent abuse is very much prevalent in every society. It is any action by another person that causes significant harm to adolescents. It can result from physical, emotional or sexual harm. It is often in the form of an action and there are also some instances of inaction which cause harm, such as neglect. The present study is a modest effort to understand the adolescent and various forms of abuses. Moreover, it undertakes the consequences and preventive measures of the adolescent abuse. It is the responsibility of the society to implement primary prevention programme particularly family and schools to help adolescents to grow and develop. These primary preventive measures that can help the society to overcome from abuse problem. Mental health professionals as well as paediatricians along with protection services can help the adolescents to deal with the consequences of abuse.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Abuse, Types, Causes, Consequences, Prevention*

1. Introduction

Every adolescent has a right to lead a safe-livelihood and a life free from cruelty. On the contrary, abuse violates that right of the child. Every year millions of children around the world are the victims and witnesses of physical, sexual and emotional violence. This has become a conundrum with serious life-long consequences smacking on the victim's physical and mental health well-being and development throughout their lives and, by appendage, on society in common. Adolescence spans the second decade of life. During this period there occurs adjustments to change in the self, alterations in family and peer group relations and institutional changes. The individual differences are the key part in development. The changes that occur during this period are sweeping, spanning biological, physical, psychological and behavioural domains of functioning. Because of the breadth of these changes this period is somewhat risky, as the problem in one domain may spill over and influence functioning of other domains. But these types of transition represent an ideal time for interventions, so even small alterations in one domain have large, cascading and potentially long-term effects across other domains.

Adolescent abuse in India, though widespread, is difficult to document because it is shrouded in secrecy. Owing to the fear of social stigma, reluctance of family members and various other factors deter the families from disclosing instances in abuse. Adolescent abuse encompasses physical, emotional, neglect and sexual behaviours leading to significant maladaptive behaviour in them. In Indian society adolescence place an additional burden on females with biological development. The adolescents are often pressurized towards social role conformity, requiring major changes in the psychological sphere. The adolescents are often confronted with difficulties and problems related to family society and their own physical aspects and emotional needs. Violence against women and girls is a growing global phenomenon and India is no exception to it. Crimes are perpetuated both on adolescents and by adolescents. Physical, mental and psychological violence against adolescents both at home and outside is a growing phenomenon and a cause for grave concern. Crimes against adolescents take many shapes and forms, ranging from eve teasing and abduction to rape, incest, prostitution, battering, sexual

harassment at the work place etc. Social stigma acts as a barrier and prevents the registration of police cases. Some major causes of violence against adolescents are the social custom of dowry, low status of women and girls in society, false sense of superiority of adolescent boys and young men and the desire to show-off and take revenge.

Adolescents due to their inherent vulnerability are susceptible to various forms of abuse because of temporary helplessness and reliance on adults as they have limited knowledge about danger and self-protection. Researchers emphasize that statistics shown regarding abuse especially sexual abuse is only a tip of iceberg. Feelings of guilt, helplessness, shame, and fear of the reactions from other family members as well as threats from the perpetrator are the reasons for not reporting about the abuse and seeking assistance. If reported it may be after months or even years after the incident especially in cases if the abuser holds a close relationship with the victim. For effective education, parents and teachers must be well-informed about the intricate impact of sexual abuse on children and other pertinent aspects surrounding this issue. Whatever advice or instructions are given to children, they must be grounded in honest explanation and a good knowledge of the facts. It is thus critically important for parents and teachers to distinguish between factual information and misconceptions regarding abuse and related issues. Abuse is any form of behaviour or act that is intentional to have authority over, intimidate, force, or hurt another person. It is a mishandling of an authority which uses the connections of closeness, faith and reliance to make the sufferer vulnerable. The **WHO (2002)**¹ defines abuse and neglect or maltreatment, as all forms of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or neglectful action, or commercial or other mistreatment ensuing in definite or possible harm to the child's health, continued existence, growth or self-esteem in the circumstance of a relationship of accountability, trust or authority.

1.1 Types of abuse

Abusive or offensive behaviours or an act comes in various forms, but the most common result of abuse is the emotional effect on the child. If the child is being abused by a slap, a cruel remark, gritty stillness, the conclusion is adolescents feel insecure, uncared for, and all alone. There are mainly four forms of abuse that has been defined i.e. physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. It is very essential to remind that if an adult is suffering from one type of abuse, it is most likely that he/she is suffering from other form of abuse as well. The four forms of abuse and their effects are discussed below:-

1.2 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as "physical injury caused by punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child. Physical abuse is the most visible form of adult ill-treatment"(**American Humane Society, 2022**)². Physical injury that ranges from small bruises to brutal 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 an adult. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

1.3 Emotional Abuse

Opposite of some people's beliefs, words can hurt and emotional abuse can severely damage a child's mental health or emotional development. It includes a way of behaving that impairs adolescent's emotional development or sense of sense of worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and therefore, it may be difficult to intervene.

1.4 Adolescent sexual abuse

Adolescent Sexual Abuse (ASA) is a form of abuse in which an adult or older adolescent who is in a relationship of accountability, trust or control, uses an adolescent for sexual stimulation (**Medline Plus, 2008**)³. The ASA means making inappropriate touches or interactions between an adolescent and an older

or more knowledgeable adult or adult (stranger, sibling, parent or caretaker), when the adult is being used as an object of gratification for the adult's needs. Such contacts or interactions are carried out against the adolescent using power, deception, bribes, pressure or demands (UNICEF, 2001)⁴. It is defined as the misuse of power and authority, combined with force or compulsion, which leads to the misuse of children in situations where adolescent sufficiently older than the victim to have greater strength and power, seek sexual gratification through those who are developmentally immature, and where, as a result, consent from the victim is a non-concept. Such gratification can involve explicit sexual acts, or may involve persistent and inappropriate actions not directly involving contact (Miller et al., 2007)⁵. Teens engaged in such activities and are subjected to sexual abuse, rapes or murder as they are not aware of the fact that the unknown person whom they communicate with can be a predator who can harm them severely (Undiyaundeye, 2014)⁶.

1.5 Neglect

It is a pattern in which the adolescents' basic needs, which include sufficient food, garments, security, sanitation, or care is denied. Adolescent neglect is not always easy to identify. In cases of serious illness or injury or untreated depression or anxiety, sometimes, a parent might become physically or mentally unable to care for an adolescent. Other times, substance abuse including alcohol or drug abuse may seriously impair judgment and the ability to keep an adolescent safe. Neglect is an act of omission, where people, typically caregivers, fail to provide adequate care to another person dependent on them. There are various forms of neglect including physical, medical, emotional, and educational.

2. Consequences of abuse

The consequences associated with adolescent physical abuse go beyond what many people think of initially. Not only are there potential physical injuries like broken bones, head trauma, abdominal injuries, skin injuries, and so on, there can also be behavioural, emotional, and psychological effects from exposure to abuse of this kind. Research has found links between physical abuse, depression, and aggressive behaviours but the relationship among these variables appears different when looking at men versus women (Scarpa et al., 2010)⁷. Depression can be a difficult disorder to live with as it can impact us personally and professionally, so understanding the link between depression and adolescent trauma is an important area of study. Adolescents who have been physically abused may still feel the effects long after their injuries have healed. Being shaken, hit or physically abused in any way as an adolescent can lead to poor physical or mental health later in life, including depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, childhood behavioural or conduct disorders, drug use, suicide attempts, obesity, sexually transmitted infections and risky sexual behaviour (Norman, 2012)⁸.

2.1 Symptoms

An adolescent who's being abused may feel guilty, ashamed or confused. The adolescent be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, especially if the abuser is a parent, other relative or family friend. That's why it's vital to watch for red flags, such as:

- Withdrawal from friends or usual activities
- Changes in behaviour — such as aggression, anger, hostility or hyperactivity — or changes in school performance
- Depression, anxiety or unusual fears, or a sudden loss of self-confidence
- Sleep problems and nightmares
- An apparent lack of supervision
- Frequent absences from school
- Rebellious or defiant behaviour
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide

Specific signs and symptoms depend on the type of abuse and can vary. Keep in mind that warning signs are just that — warning signs. The presence of warning signs doesn't necessarily mean that a child is being abused.

2.2 Physical abuse signs and symptoms

- Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, broken bones (fractures) or burns
- Injuries that don't match the given explanation
- Injuries that aren't compatible with the child's developmental ability

2.3 Sexual abuse signs and symptoms

- Sexual behaviour or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age
- Pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection
- Genital or anal pain, bleeding, or injury
- Statements by the child that he or she was sexually abused
- Inappropriate sexual behavior with other children

2.4 Emotional abuse signs and symptoms

- Delayed or inappropriate emotional development
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Depression
- Avoidance of certain situations, such as refusing to go to school or ride the bus
- Appears to desperately seek affection
- A decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills

2.5 Neglect signs and symptoms

- Poor growth
- Excessive weight with medical complications that are not being adequately addressed
- Poor personal cleanliness
- Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- Hoarding or stealing food
- Poor record of school attendance
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care

2.6 Parental behaviour

Sometimes a parent's demeanour or behaviour sends red flags about adolescent. Warning signs include a parent who:

- Shows little concern for the adolescent
- Appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the adolescent
- Blames the child for the problems
- Consistently belittles or berates the adolescent and describes the adolescent with negative terms, such as "worthless" or "evil"
- Expects the adolescent to provide attention and care to the parent and seems jealous of other family members getting attention from the adolescent
- Uses harsh physical discipline
- Demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance
- Severely limits the adolescent's contact with others

- Offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all
- Repeatedly brings the adolescent for medical evaluations or requests medical tests, such as X-rays and lab tests, for concerns not seen during the health care provider's examination

2.7 Physical punishment

Adolescent health experts condemn the use of violence in any form, but some people still use physical punishment, such as spanking to discipline their children. While parents and caregivers often use physical punishment with the intention of helping their adolescents or making their behaviour better, research shows that spanking is linked with worse, not better, behaviour. It's also linked to mental health problems, difficult relationships with parents, lower self-esteem and lower academic performance. Any physical punishment may leave emotional scars. Parental behaviours that cause pain, physical injury or emotional trauma—even when done in the name of discipline—could be child abuse.

2.8 Risk factors

Factors that may increase a person's risk of becoming abusive include:

- A history of being abused or neglected as an adolescent
- Physical or mental illness, such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Family crisis or stress, including domestic violence and other marital conflicts or single parenting
- An adolescent in the family who is developmentally or physically disabled
- Financial stress, unemployment or poverty
- Social or extended family isolation
- Poor understanding of adolescent development and parenting skills
- Alcohol, drugs or other substance abuse

2.9 Complications

Some adolescents overcome the physical and psychological effects of adolescent abuse, particularly those with strong social support and resiliency skills who can adapt and cope with bad experiences. For many others, however, child abuse may result in physical, behavioural, emotional or mental health issues—even years later. Here are some examples.

2.10 Physical issues

- Premature death
- Physical disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- Substance abuse
- Health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease and cancer

2.11 Behavioural issues

- Illegal or violent behaviour
- Abuse of others
- Withdrawal
- Suicide attempts or self-injury
- High-risk sexual behaviours or teen pregnancy
- Problems in school or not finishing high school
- Limited social and relationship skills
- Problems with work or staying employed

2.12 Emotional issues

- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty establishing or maintaining relationships

- Challenges with intimacy and trust
- An unhealthy view of parenthood
- Inability to cope with stress and frustrations
- An acceptance that violence is a normal part of relationships

2.13 Mental health disorders

- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders
- Behaviour disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Trouble sleeping (insomnia) and nightmares
- Attachment disorders

3. Prevention of adolescent abuse

Important steps are dire essential to protect adolescent from exploitation and adolescent abuse, as well as prevent abuse in your neighbourhood or community. The goals are to provide safe, stable, nurturing relationships for adolescents as mentioned below.

3.1 Offering love and attention

Nurture and listen to adolescents is be involved in adolescent's life to develop trust and good communication. Encouraging adolescents is dire essential to tell if there's a problem. A supportive family environment and social networks can help in improving adolescent's feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

3.2 Not responding in anger

If feel overwhelmed or out of control the adolescents are need to take a break. The parents do not take out anger on adolescents. Let them to talk with their health care provider or a therapist about ways they can learn to cope with stress and better interact with adolescents.

3.3 Think supervision

The parents do not leave young adolescents at home alone. In public, keep a close eye on adolescents. Volunteers at school should know the adults who spend time with adolescents. When old enough to go out without supervision, encourage adolescent to stay away from strangers and to hang out with friends rather than be alone. Make it a rule that adolescents tell where he/she is at all times. Finding out who's supervising adolescents is dire essential.

3.4 Knowing adolescent's caregivers

Check references is important for babysitters and other caregivers. Making irregular, but frequent, unannounced visits to observe what's happening is very important. Under no circumstances parents should not allow substitutes for usual adolescent care provider if don't know the substitute.

3.5 Emphasizing negativity

Make sure is that the adolescents understand that he/she doesn't have to do anything that seems scary or uncomfortable. Encouraging adolescents to leave a threatening or frightening situation immediately and seek help from a trusted adult or parents. If something happens, encourage adolescents to talk to another trusted adult about what happened.

3.6 Teaching adolescents to stay safe online

Putting the computer in a common area of home but not the adolescent's bedroom is very ideal. Using the parental controls is to restrict the types of websites adolescent can visit. Checking adolescent's privacy settings on social networking sites is essential. Covering online ground rules, such as not sharing personal information; not responding to inappropriate, hurtful or frightening messages and not arranging to meet an online contact in person without parents' permission is practiced. Telling adolescents to let the parents know if an unknown person makes contact through a social networking site is advised.

4. Conclusion

Adolescent abuse is a maltreatment of an adolescent who is under 18 years of age. It is any action by another person that causes significant harm to an adolescent. The effects of adolescent abuse are devastating. The adolescents are abused usually in four ways Physical abuse, Emotional abuse, Sexual abuse and Neglect. The outcome of abuse can result in both short- and long-term consequences ranging from social problems, emotional problems, cognitive problems, educational problems, low self-esteem and self-harm or sometimes it may lead to suicide. At the same time, there are primary preventive measures that can be taken to avoid adolescent abuse. Schools should be the prime target for the working professionals to create awareness among the young adolescents about abuse. Parents should educate their children about the child abuse and the effects of child abuse.

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