Theme: Child Abuse and Neglect

The temporal impact of economic insecurity on child maltreatment: A systematic review *(Trauma Violence Abuse. 2020;21:157-78)*

Poverty and economic insecurity adversely affect child and adolescent health.18% of the global population and 22% of the Indian population fall below the poverty line. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread socioeconomic deprivation. Economic hardships increase family stressors, marital conflicts and parental depression resulting in harsh parenting and child maltreatment.This systematic review of 26 longitudinal studies from Australia, USA, Japan and UK revealed that income losses, food insecurity, housing and bill paying hardships, and maternal depression predict child abuse and neglect. Parental employment buffered these effects. Recommendations are given for research, practice and policy emphasising on conducting robust scientific studies to strengthen correlation between various types of child maltreatment and economic insecurity, and for improving multisystem collaboration, child welfare services, cash incentives and parental employment opportunities to reduce prevalence of child maltreatment in underprivileged families.

Child maltreatment and depression: A meta-analysis of studies using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire *(Child Abuse Negl. 2020;102:104361)*

Major depressive disorder (MDD) in childhood and adolescence increases morbidity and mortality in this age group and is known to track into adulthood. Early detection and timely management improves prognosis.This random effects meta-analysis is the largest ever study on defining the association of adult depression and childhood maltreatment using a single tool; the Childhood trauma questionnaire. 190 studies that included 68830 individuals were analyzed. Higher child maltreatment scores were associated with depression (g=1.07; 95% CI, 0.95-1.19) and with increased depression symptom score (z=0.35; 95% CI, 0.32-0.38). Although all forms of child abuse were associated with MDD, emotional abuse and emotional neglect were found to be more strongly associated compared to physical abuse, sexual abuse and physical neglect.Longitudinal studies are required to establish a causal relationship.

Clinicians should screen all cases of MDD for childhood maltreatment and strategize management modalities accordingly. Pediatricians should educate regarding positive parenting skills during well child visits.

Childhood maltreatment and its mental health consequences among Indian adolescents with a history of child work *(Aust N Z J Psychiatry. 2020;54:496-508)*

There are 11.72 million child workers in India as per Census, 2011. Socioeconomic deprivation, loss of educational opportunities, risky working environment and abuse results in poor health. This cross-sectional survey conducted on 132 working Indian adolescents aged 12 to 18 years estimated 83.3% prevalence of mental disorders in the study population. All reported at least one form of victimization and exposure to criminal activity. More than 80% reported one or more types of abuse or neglect (physical abuse 72.73%, emotional abuse 47.7%, general neglect 17.4%); 45.5% lived in unsafe homes. Emotional abuse was strongly associated with mental disorders. Juvenile victimization questionnaire was used to assess child abuse and the culturally adapted Hindi versions of the Youth's inventory–4R and the Strengths and difficulties questionnaire were used to diagnose mental disorders and emotional and behavioral problems.

Health professionals should screen for mental health issues in all working adolescents. Timely management of mental disorders would ensure emotional well-being over the entire life span.

Improving measurement of child abuse and neglect: A systematic review and analysis of national prevalence studies *(PLoS One. 2020;15:e0227884)*

United Nations sustainable development goal (SDG) 16.2 aims at ending abuse, violence, trafficking and exploitation of children. Hence, it is important for all nations to collect reliable data to monitor their progress towards reaching this SDG. This systematic review analyzed 30 national prevalence studies conducted in 22 countries. Though the studies provided useful prevalence data, the limitations noted included failure to assess all the five types of abuse, use of a validated and reliable instrument to collect data, inclusion of both children and adults and lack of longitudinal follow up regarding nature, severity and frequency of abuse. The authors have given recommendations and suggestions for planning and investing in robust scientific studies to precisely measure the prevalence of child abuse and neglect.

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