

Impact of Emotional Abuse on Self-Concept

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Abuse is one of the biggest social evil and has been happening in all societies. It is more dangerous than physical abuse and even sexual abuse. It has been found out that every second, a child is emotionally abused in India. Therefore there has been relatively little research addressing the full range of emotional abusive experiences and none considering their long term impact on self-concept. The paper include an overview of current research investigation aspects of emotional abuse and also contains a detailed discussion of emotional abuse, which is described as the most hidden and underestimated form of child maltreatment. It can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development including self-concept, self-esteem, adjustment etc. Mental health of young people get affected ny emotional abuse as mental health includes a person ability to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. Self-concept is our personal information of who we are, comprise all of our thoughts and feelings regarding ourselves physically, personally, and socially. Emotional Abuse is done by parents, relatives and caregivers. The paper discuss the impact of emotional abuse on self-concept, while antagonizing emotional abuse the paper raises questions about the forms of emotional abuse and also conclude various research studies on emotional abuse. The paper notes that the tendency in society is to address the forms of child maltreatment which involve identifiable acts of omission or commission by adults which produce negative consequences for children.

Keywords: *Emotional Abuse, Self Esteem, Child Abuse.*

The foundation for good mental health are laid down in the emotional development that occur in infancy and later childhood and frequency of response to an infant or child from a present or primary caregivers(O'ahgan1993:Oates 1996).If a parent in advertently engages in a pattern of in appropriate emotional response, the child can be said to have experienced emotional abuse (O'Hagan 1993).Mostly people are unaware of the severe psychological trauma that sexual and physical abuse can leave on a child. However according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, psychological abuse is the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse. And yet, emotional abuse remains a somewhat stigmatized topic.

Emotional Abuse is also known as psychological abuse, mental abuse and psychological violence. It is an act which include confinement isolation, verbal assault, humiliation,

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intimidation, infantilization or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, self-esteem and self-worth. Emotional Abuse sometimes defined as chronic verbal aggression by researchers and still it is remain a somewhat stigmatized topic. There aren't even any laws against emotional abuse. However, a new study suggests that victims of emotional abuse or neglect can develop similar and often worse mental health problems than victims of sexual or physical abuse. Emotional abuse is the least studied of all the forms of child maltreatment and its etiology is less developed (National Research Council 1993). Researches argued into the impact and prevalence of emotional abuse has been plagued with disagreements about how to define it, measure it test it. (Nesbit & Karagansis 1987; Giorannoni 1989; Claussen & Crittden 1991 & Mc Gee & Wolfe 1991, D'Hagan 1993).

Briggs and Hawkins note that by the “very nature of adult-child relationship and cultural influences, most adults will have inflicted emotional abuse on children, probably without relisting it(1991,p.21)unlike physical and sexual abuse, where single incident may be considered abusive ,emotional abuse is characterized by a climate or pattern of behavior occurring over time(O'Hagan 1993:Mc Dowel 1995 as cited in Wood ham & Lapsley 1996.

The definition from Dr. Marti Tamn Loring a clinical social worker, sociologist and director of Mental Health and Human Development and the Emotional Abuse Institute, says its best “Emotional Abuse is a process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroy the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the victim are considerably belittled”

There are some of the short term effects and long term effects of Emotional Abuse:

Short term effects: Feelings surprise and confusion, Feelings misunderstood and defensive, Feeling desperate, overly, needy; requiring constant reassurance, Questioning yourself and memory, Experiencing anxiety, agitation, or fear; hyper vigilance and Experiencing shame, embarrassment or guilt.

Long term effects: Withdrawal, Low self-esteem and self-worth, Emotional instability, Sleep disturbances, Physical pain without cause, Suicidal ideation, thoughts or attempts, Extreme dependence on the abuser, Underachievement, Inability to trust, Feeling trapped and alone and Substance abuse.

Types of Emotional Abuse in a nutshell

1) **Hypercritic** – parents who are hypercritical towards their children make them feel stupid and embarrassed for failing to understand something or live up to their absurd expectations. These parents are impossible to understand satisfy and find fault in everything their children do. Hypercritical parents typically use words like ‘you should be ashamed of yourself’, what is wrong with you?’, and any other remarks that affect and humiliate their child.

Effects on self-concept - Children who are brought up by hypercritical parents suffer from extremely low self-esteem and self-concept, strong sense of unworthiness and self-hatred. The message they get is ‘I am not worthy’.

2) **Neglect** – In neglect, the parents will provide basic needs for the children but generally uninvolved in their lives. Compared to other types of emotional abuse, neglect has to do more with what parents did not do to their kids. On the physical aspect, neglectful parents do not give enough physical nurturance such as pampering, understanding and hugging their

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children. On the emotional side, these parents are unable to show empathy and sympathy when their children are in trouble or in stress.

Effects on self-concept – children of neglectful parents draw the message that they are unwanted and unlikeable. When these children feel they are unwanted they will tend to develop behavior of extreme defensiveness.

3) Abandonment or rejection – If a child experiences rejection, it could have a lasting negative effect on relationships, Physical abandonment occurs when there is death, divorce or illness, and emotional abandonment occurs when parents silent treatment, puts the child off or pass their parental responsibility to someone else. Words that these parents use sound like 'I'm busy?', 'go away', or 'don't disturb me'.

Effects on self-concept – children who are consistently abandoned by their parents tend to gain intense insecurity and self-obsession. As adults they may lack the confidence and lack of self-esteem.

Current Data on Emotional Abuse

Child maltreatment is major social problem in India that results 83% were emotional abuse by parents, teacher and caregiver .Approximately 5 to 11 years were classified as victims of child neglect and facing emotional abuse. The Adverse Childhood experience(ACE) study which is one of the largest studies regarding adult wellbeing, found increased risks for suicide attempts, alcoholism drug abuse and depression for those with a history of abused compared to those who were not exposed to abusive experiences. In 2008, approximately 55,196 children (7.3 percent of all substantiated cases of child maltreatment) were officially counted as victims of child emotional abuse.

Research Studies on Emotional Abuse

According to Levy (1995) violence is experienced in 28% of teen relationships. Emotional abuse of teen women also occurs in all social classes, races, and ethnic groups. Threats and verbal abuse were the most predictive signs of courtship violence. (Ryan, 1995). Nicaragua is the only country where emotional abuse is recognized as a crime. It is part of what is referred to as Law 230. The law indicates that acts of violence need not leave physical scars and recognizes psychological damages as well. The literature indicates that psychological damages include anxiousness, inability to sleep and living in fear. In the Journal of Interpersonal Violence, the team examined 465 young adults aged 17 to 25 years. They reported two types of abuse physical which includes hitting, punching, kicking and use of a weapon; and, psychological abuse including arguing, name-calling etc.

Self-Concept

The reemergence of the self-concept is even more dramatic within psycho- logical social psychology. Much of this revitalization of interest in self- phenomena (e.g. self-awareness, self-esteem, self-image, self-evaluation) is due to the "cognitive revolution" in psychology (Dember 1974; Manis 1977), generally at the expense of behaviorism. As a result, the self-concept has become conspicuous in areas and traditions that were previously considered alien terrain. It is the concept the individual has of himself as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being. Rosenberg defines the self-concept broadly as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (1979:7). Epstein suggests that the self-concept can best be viewed as a theory that a person holds about himself as an experiencing, functioning being in interaction with the world.

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Research Studies Emotion Abuse in relation to Self-Concept

The impact of Emotional Abuse can be profound and long lasting on self-concept. As a result of Abuse children lose control in their lives, to regain confidence and self-concept. Kent and Waller (1998) discovered that emotional abuse predicted more depression and anxiety than other forms of abuse. Julia(2013) in her study examine variation in violent crime rates within schools over time to estimate its effect on academic achievement. Adejobi et al.(2013) to examine the effect of child maltreatment on academic performance of senior Secondary school students in Ibaden, Nigeria. Based on the studies of emotional abuse it was clear out that emotional can be profound and long lasting impact on self-concept. However self-concept is least discoverable concept in relation to emotional abuse.

Preventing Emotional Abuse and Enhance Self-Concept of Emotionally Abused Person

Emotional abuse is a form of trauma that can cause damage to a child's developing brain, leading to learning difficulties, problematic behaviors, and also increase cases of physical and mental health problems. As a society, we have responsibility to cure child emotional abuse. To achieve this, we must initiate, support services and policies that restrict emotional abuse and enhance children's development, health and safety .We must also promote public education to create awareness about protective factors that reduce risk of emotional abuse

Activities, such as home visiting programs and parent support self-help groups should be conducted for preventing emotional abuse. These programs can offer education on child development, child problems and expectations of children of each developmental stages, and appropriate strategies for communicating with children, methods, and guidance on how to support and nurture children. Even legal action can be taken in India against parents, teacher and caregiver who emotionally hurt children with threats, verbal abuse, neglect and other forms of non-physical harassment. And there are so many child care organization in India on whom child can report emotional abuse incidents.

DISCUSSION

The emotional abuse of children may be the most damaging form of maltreatment, affecting their emotional and physical health as well as their social and cognitive development. There is no single cause of emotional abuse. Instead, there are usually multiple and interacting contributors – at the levels of the child, parent, family, community and society. The consequences of child emotional abuse can be devastating and long-lasting, and include: increased risk for a lifelong pattern of depression, estrangement, anxiety, low self-esteem, inappropriate or troubled relationships, or a lack of empathy. As a society, we have a collective responsibility to prevent emotional abuse.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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