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## PREVENTING CHILDHOOD FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

**Dr. Shaloo Saini**

Assistant Professor, M.K. College of Education  
Jalandhar, Punjab, India

### Abstract

Psychological abuse of the child is a maltreatment that is difficult to access or identify but its impact is deep-rooted in the personality and behavior of the children. The impact of psychological abuse experienced by the child is reflected in his personality in the later stages of his age. Psychological abuse is as painful as physical and sexual abuse but still not much understanding has been developed about it. The psychological abuse exerts a negative impact on the physical health, mental health and social behaviour of children. Research has shown that that the people having criminal tendencies have the experienced troubled childhood or aggression and cruelty in childhood. Some parents, teachers and caregivers may be vigilant towards the physical and sexual abuse of the child but they might be ignorant about the psychological abuse which the child might be experiencing because much less is known about the symptoms, causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of Psychological abuse(Kimber,2017).Therefore the present research paper has been written to understand the types of Psychological abuse, factors responsible for Psychological abuse, identifying the Psychologically abused child and interventions to prevent the childhood from Psychological abuse.

**Keywords:** Childhood Abuse, Physical Abuse, Psychological Abuse, Sexual Abuse.

### Introduction

“We can cure physical disease with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and hopelessness is love” Mother Teresa. Parents and care givers are always occupied with their efforts to fulfill the basis survival needs of children like food, clothes, shelter, education, but sometimes forget that there is one more need of their children that needs to be addressed by them. And this need is the need of love. Mother Teresa has rightly quoted that “There are many in the world that are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love”. The children need to be loved, cared, and protected so that they feel that they are an important part of their family and develop a strong sense of belongingness towards the family. It will make happy and contented within and if children will be happy, they will spread happiness around them. While struggling with the challenges of life to meet the needs of family and the children, the parents undergo various types of stress and frustrations. This stress and frustration is sometimes exhibited in the behavior of the parents. Unfortunately, the children are the soft targets and they become the victims of this outlet of frustration sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly. It is difficult to estimate the harm we are causing to the children by victimizing them. The harm might not be depicted in their behavior presently but it stays in their subconscious mind and it is sure to reflect in their behavior and personality in their future life. Physical, sexual, and psychological trauma in childhood may lead to psychiatric difficulties that show up in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. The victim’s anger, shame, and despair can be directed inward to spawn symptoms such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress, or directed outward as aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity, and substance abuse (Finkelhor,1986). Research has shown that that the people having criminal tendencies have the experienced troubled childhood or aggression and cruelty in childhood. The Parental practices and the family environment which is non beneficial and abusive for the children may ruin their present as well as their future. Rizvi and Najam (2014) found that psychological abuse by parents is significantly related to the Mental Health problems of adolescents.

American Psychological Association broadly categorized Child Abuse in three categories:

1. **Psychological Abuse:** It refers to the intentional verbal and behavioral practices towards the children which make them feel worthless, unloved, unwanted and endangered.
2. **Physical Abuse:** It refers to purposefully beating, hitting and injuring the children which gives them physical harm.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** It refers to the intentional molestation of the children through touching inappropriately, showing up of adult content or fondling for sexual pleasure.

This research paper discusses the Childhood Psychological Abuse in detail:

### Childhood Psychological Abuse

American Psychological Association defines psychological abuse as the caregiver-inflicted bullying, terrorizing, coercive control, severe insults, debasement, threats, overwhelming demands, isolation towards the children and not attending to the physiological and psychological needs of the children. Withholding emotional support, isolation, or terrorizing a child are forms of psychological abuse. Domestic violence that is witnessed by a child is also considered a form of psychological abuse. American Psychological Association (Oct 8,2014) stated that among the three types of abuse, (Physical, Psychological and Sexual Abuse)



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psychological maltreatment is found to be most strongly associated with depression, general anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, attachment problems, substance abuse, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal tendencies. It indicates that the psychological abuse is more dangerous than the physical and sexual abuse. Children who are emotionally abused and neglected face similar and sometimes worse mental health problems in comparison to the children who are physically or sexually abused, yet psychological abuse is rarely addressed in prevention programs or in treating victims. Psychological Abuse may have many harmful effects on the on the personality, development and health of Children. Psychologically abused children may experience emotional problems, social isolation, depression, insecurity, self-doubt and behavioural problems in comparison to the children who are not victim of such maltreatment.

### Types of Child Psychological Abuse

1. **Rejection:** Rejection refers to make the child feel useless or worthless through the multiple actions such as pushing away, ignoring his ideas and feeling, refusing to help etc.
2. **Scorn:** Scorning includes demeaning the child, reticulating the child, criticizing, humiliating and insulting the child and making the child feel ashamed.
3. **Terrorism:** Threatening the child or someone dear to him (eg mother) with physical violence, abandonment or death. Terrorism also includes threatening to destroy the child's possessions and giving punishments on non-compliance of instructions given. Placing the child in dangerous situations and imposing strict unreasonable rules on the child is also terrorism for the child
4. **Isolation:** Making the child physically and socially disconnected with other by limiting his opportunities to socialize makes the child isolated and alone.
5. **Corruption or exploitation:** When the child is encouraged for inappropriate or deviant behavior; the child is exposed to anti-social activities; child is treated as servant or the child is encouraged to participate in sexual activities these entire actions against the child amounts to their exploitation and corruption.
6. **The absence of emotional response:** Ignoring the emotional needs of the child like love care concern affection warmth healthy communication and encouragements amount to the absence of emotional response to the child.
7. **Neglect:** It refers to deliberate noncompliance to the health and educational needs of the child. And not being available for the child whenever his child approaches them for help and assistance. Ignoring the comfort and presence of the child.
8. **Exposure to domestic violence:** If the parents quarrel with each other and get violent in front of their children it also amounts to psychological abuse for the child. Because such an environment is not good for the healthy development and wellbeing of the child, such an environment creates fear hostility and anxiety in children.
9. **Saying unkind things to the child:** Emotionally abusive parents do not regard the children and say things or convey feelings that can hurt the child deeply. They make the child feel unwanted and insulted by their words and actions for example they may tell the child I wish you were not born; You are stupid and using abusive words etc.

### Factors responsible for Psychological Abuse

The factors that may be responsible for creating the circumstances that leads to the psychological abuse of the children are cases of substance abuse by father or other member of family; financial constraints and inability to fulfil the needs of children; Single parents or divorced parents; Mental Health problems in the family for example if the adults in the family are experiencing mental health problems, there are chances that the children will be psychologically abused in that family. The criminal activities taking place around the children are also responsible for psychological abuse of children for example If the child have become victim of some criminal activity undergoing in the environment encompassing him/her, there are the chances that the child will have to face psychological abuse from the people involved in the criminal activities. Besides that, the children possessing certain type of physical or mental disabilities do not only have to deal with the challenges of their life but they are also prone to various types of psychological abuse by the people around them. The family problems like domestic violence and quarrels amongst the parents, aggression with elderly, aggression with females etc, in such families the children often become victims of psychological abuse. Parenting is a skill and not all the parents specialize in this skill. Sometimes the parents do not even realize that their actions might be causing psychological harm to their child. One important reason is the Stress and Lack of Support to caregiver, If the parents or the caregivers of the child are in stress and does not have enough support from other family members, there are the chances that their children will become the victim of this frustration.

### Identification of Psychologically abused Child

The child experiencing psychological abuse can be identified through the traits discussed below. These traits have been suggested by National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (UK); US department of Health and Human Services and Mayo



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Clinic. The child depicting these one or more of these attributes must be identified and must be attended by the caregivers, teachers and other stake holders to solve their problem and protect them from psychological abuse.

1. The child feels excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong.
2. The child shows an extreme in behavior which means that the child is extremely complaining, extremely demanding, extremely passive or extremely aggressive.
3. The child does not seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver and keeps unhealthy view of Parenthood.
4. The child socially withdraws himself/herself from friends or usual activities and has no interest in social activities.
5. The child depicts sudden changes in behavior such as aggression, anger, hostility or hyperactivity.
6. The child shows the signs of Depression, anxiety or unusual fears or a sudden loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.
7. The child remains frequently absent from school or is reluctant to ride the school bus.
8. The child shows reluctance to leave school activities, as if he or she doesn't want to go home.
9. The child attempts at running away or tries to attempt suicide.
10. The child has developed a rebellious or defiant behavior. And the child has an acceptance that violence is a normal part of relationships
11. The child has delayed or inappropriate emotional development.
12. The child shows signs of Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem.
13. The child complaints of Headaches or stomachaches with no medical cause.
14. The child shows signs of decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school.
15. The child shows sign of Loss of previously acquired developmental skills.
16. The child has difficulty in trusting, being friendly and maintaining relationships with others.
17. The child has Inability to cope with stress and frustrations. And the child desperately seeks affection from others.
18. The child depicts an inappropriate behavior for example acts either inappropriately adult (taking care of other children) or inappropriately infantile (thumb-sucking, throwing tantrums)

**Interventions to Support the Child showing the Symptoms of Psychological Abuse**

1. Offer your child love, attention and support. Be patient and calm with the child and encourage the child to tell you what happened while maintaining his/her trust on you.
2. Make the child understand that he or she isn't responsible for the abuse.
3. Offer comfort to the child. You might say, "I'm so sorry you were hurt," "I'm glad that you told me," and "I'll do everything I can do to help you." Let the child know you're available to talk or simply listen at any time.
4. Report the abuse. Contact a local child protective agency or the police department. Authorities will investigate the report and, if necessary, take steps to ensure the child's safety.
5. Help the child remain safe. Ensure the child's safety by separating the abuser and the child and by providing supervision if the child is in the presence of the abuser. Seek medical attention and counseling support for the child
6. The Anger management classes, Parenting classes and other counseling session can be arranged for the parents, caregivers and the children.
7. If the abuse has occurred at school, make sure the principal of the school is aware of the situation, in addition to reporting it to the local or state child protection agency.
8. Don't respond in anger. If you feel overwhelmed or out of control, take a break. Don't take out your anger on your child. Talk with your doctor or therapist about ways you can learn to cope with stress and better interact with your child.
9. Think supervision. Don't leave a young child home alone. In public, keep a close eye on your child. Volunteer at school and for activities to get to know the adults who spend time with your child. When old enough to go out without supervision, encourage your child to stay away from strangers and to hang out with friends rather than be alone — and to tell you where he or she is at all times. Find out who's supervising your child — for example, at a sleepover.
10. Know your child's caregivers. Check references for baby sitters and other caregivers. Make irregular, but frequent, unannounced visits to observe what's happening. Don't allow substitutes for your usual child care provider if you don't know the substitute.
11. Emphasize when to say no. Make sure your child understands that he or she doesn't have to do anything that seems scary or uncomfortable. Encourage your child to leave a threatening or frightening situation immediately and seek help from a trusted adult. If something happens, encourage your child to talk to you or another trusted adult about the episode. Assure your child that it's OK to talk and that he or she won't get in trouble.
12. Teach your child how to stay safe online. The Parents, caregivers and Teachers must monitor the internet activities of the children and if they lack internet literacy then they must seek the help of experts in monitoring the internet activities and safety of their children.



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13. Reach out. Meet the families in your neighborhood, including parents and children. Consider joining a parent support group so you have an appropriate place to vent your frustrations. Develop a network of supportive family and friends. If a friend or neighbor seems to be struggling, offer to baby-sit or help in another way
14. Suggest for the Therapy and drug treatment or alcohol treatment (if necessary) to the Parents and caregivers of the children. Community programs such as home visits by nurses and social workers can assist families to change behaviors or prevent the start of abuse in high-risk families.
15. School-based programs designed to improve parenting, communication and self-image may also help in preventing future abuse and may lead to identifying abused children.

### Conclusion

We often come across the videos depicting child abuse but are unable to take any action or help to the child. Sometimes we sympathies over it and share it with others too but we must send it to suitable authorities like the government child protection help lines, NGO's and police services, so that the timely proper action could be taken and the child could be prevented from being abused. In the developed and modern educated modern communities of the country, the conditions of children are good but in some rural backward underdeveloped regions the children still live miserable lives. Children are young, innocent and weak they cannot protect themselves they need our support and strength and we must help them to live a happy, healthy and protected childhood. As the Mother Teresa quoted "Do not wait for leaders, do it alone person to person". We must be vigilant about the psychologically abused children around us and provide them our help and assistance. We must spread awareness about psychological abuse of children amongst the parents, teachers and other caregivers and seek the help of government wherever needed.

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