Childhood Trauma: How effective Parenting goes a long way in solving the issue

Dr. Sumbul Shamsi

Assistant Professor, Fatma Teachers' Training College, Dubaliya,chandway, Kanke, Ranchi

Abstract

Childhood trauma, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as well as neglect and exposure to domestic violence, remains a pervasive yet under-addressed public-health crisis in India, home to the world's largest child population. Drawing on epidemiological estimates that as many as three-quarters of Indian children experience some form of maltreatment, this paper interrogates the intertwined social, psychological, and structural drivers of trauma. We highlight four principal risk domains: (i) domestic violence that normalises aggression and models dysfunctional conflict resolution; (ii) untreated parental mental illness, often shrouded in stigma, which erodes caregivers' emotional availability; (iii) deficient or authoritarian parenting practices that perpetuate inter-generational cycles of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse; and (iv) an education system largely absent of counselling and life-skills training that could buffer adverse experiences.

Using a multidisciplinary lens that synthesises developmental psychology, public-health data, and legal analysis, we propose a three-tiered response framework. Primary prevention centres on comprehensive parental-skills programmes that cultivate empathy, boundary-setting, and non-violent discipline. Secondary prevention mandates school-based mental-health curricula and teacher training to detect early warning signs such as social withdrawal, academic decline, and psychosomatic symptoms. Tertiary interventions require robust legal infrastructure—fast-track courts, stricter enforcement of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, and trauma-informed services—to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

We argue that only an integrated strategy—melding family-level behaviour change, educational reform, and judicial vigilance—can disrupt the cascade from childhood adversity to lifelong morbidity. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at fostering resilient, abuse-free environments in which India's children can thrive.

Everybody loves children. It's something innate to us. And how many times have we dreamt of being a parent to little children? Do you remember the excitement when you discovered you would be your parents? Happy kids and a happy family! Everything is figured out in our minds -- a loving parent, a patient parent who knows how to handle situations with calmness and composure, different from all the struggling families around us… UNTIL 'reality' hits us!

There is an adage by William Wordsworth, "Child is the father of the man," though paradoxical, gives a deep insight into the matter. It explicitly tells us that our childhood experiences shape who we become as adults. The traits, habits, behaviour and values we pick up knowingly and unknowingly from people around us form the foundation of our character. The formative years of our lives play a key role in shaping our personality.

Parenting isn't a piece of cake, which many of us would have thought initially. And nobody prepares us for the meltdowns, the tantrums, and sibling rivalry, with no guidance on the side, parents continue the same toxic cycle of mistreatment, yelling, shouting, hitting and emotional and verbal abuse.

Broken parents, raise broken kids. Period. This is the reason we see an overwhelming percentage of childhood trauma, children with little or no self-esteem; they are seen but not heard, which further leads to emotional and psychological turbulence.

So, let's delve deep into the issue of childhood maltreatment and trauma, how it is identified, what factors are responsible for it, and how effective parenting goes a long way in preventing harm to the child.

What is childhood trauma?

Childhood trauma is often described as serious adverse childhood experiences. Children may go through a range of experiences that are classified as psychological trauma; these might include neglect, abandonment, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse. They may also witness abuse of a sibling or parent, or have a mentally ill parent. Childhood trauma has been correlated with later adverse effects on health and psychological well-being. However, resilience is also a common outcome; many children who experience adverse childhood experiences do not develop mental or physical health problems.

India has the largest population of children in the world (over 200 million), and data from UNICEF shows that Indian children are disadvantaged in their rights, access to education and healthcare, and are often exposed to physical labour and early marriages.

It is estimated that up to 74% of Indian children report physical abuse; up to 72% report emotional abuse, and up to 69% report sexual abuse. Up to 71% of Indian children report overall neglect, up to 60% report emotional neglect and up to 58% report physical neglect.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

1. **Domestic Violence**

Parents' marriage and mutual relationship are the first blueprint for how a child should behave and resolve conflicts. This is exactly where they take cues from—sons repeat it, and daughters accept it.

According to studies conducted in India by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Child Protection Services, men who abuse their female partners are also responsible for harming the children in their families (CPS). According to OASH, children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse are at a high risk of developing long-term physical and mental health issues. Children who experience abusive and violent behaviour in the relationship of their parents are more likely to be violent in their future relationships. It has been tough for parents who safeguard their children if they are a parent who has been abused.

2. **Untreated Mental Illness**

In India, mental treatment is a taboo… a hush-hush matter. A visit to a psychiatrist is enough to declare someone a 'psycho' for life. Due to our society's harsh attitude, people have reservations about talking or discussing mental health issues. And an untreated mental illness is like an open wound, which often leads to maltreatment, especially of children who are the easiest targets. Such parents become unavailable for their children, as they themselves are fighting many battles within.

For example, think of a situation where your little one comes running to you, jumps onto you, and hugs you. You will reciprocate the same love and warmth. But what if you have a broken leg, and the same child comes running, jumps onto you, and hugs you? Would the response be the same in both situations?

According to a research, children of parents with mental illness go for maladaptive coping strategies: either they build walls around them, shut themselves down or prefer to remain in their cocoon; they start internalizing their problem by blaming themselves and questioning their sense of self-worth OR they start externalizing every problem, running away from situations, and staying outdoors for most the time.

3. **Lack Of Parenting Skills**

Parenting doesn't start when we become parents; it starts long before that. And I have no qualms in mentioning that most of the parents in India are highly incapable of parenting their kids. Most parents find it hard to break the generational cycle of bad parenting and end up repeating the same toxic pattern of authoritarian approach, where a child's emotional and psychological needs are overlooked in the name of discipline!

The carrot-and-stick policy is widespread among Indian families.

Parents rely on 'perceived' parenting styles intertwined with how they have seen parenting in their own families, which often predicts impaired emotional and psychological development.

Most importantly, there are unrealistic expectations from children. Every second, parents in India want their children to secure outstanding grades, to be doctors, or to be in some esteemed IITs. The children have become more like trophies in their parents' hands, to be boasted about and shown off in their social circles rather than normal human beings!

4. Lack of Education in Schools

Where are the schools which can turn the tide? Why doesn't the education system provide a haven for such children? Why don't schools have counselling classes like arithmetic and sciences to help little ones handle their big emotions?

Counselling children is more important than teaching them trigonometry! We have never seen schools teach children emotional regulation, resilience, or anger management techniques.

HOW TO IDENTIFY TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

Recognizing trauma indicators can help stop it in its tracks.

1. Emotional and Behavioral issues: (a) societal withdrawal where children avoid peers, or social gatherings or even family and relatives (b) lack of trust (c) avoids maintaining eye contact (d) highly aggressive behaviors (e) showing anxiety or tendency to cry at any given moment (f) prefers loneliness
2. Academic Underperformance: Parents, Teachers, or Facilitators often dismiss the problems of poor grades, lack of interest, and concentration in studies as 'some scheme/carelessness/laziness' of the child without intervening to look deep into the problem.
3. Physical/health issues: Unexplained injuries, upset stomach, frequent headaches, bedwetting, etc.

We have already discussed the factors behind childhood trauma and how to identify a potential victim; it is equally important to look for the solution.

The first and foremost solution is **Parental Training,** which can help curb almost all the cases related to childhood trauma. Through proper parenting/education, one finds it easy to obliterate factors like domestic abuse, mental health concerns, and break the unhealthy and damaging generational cycle.

(i) **Marital relations:** How spouses treat each other is imprinted on kids' minds. Parents should learn conflict resolution, respect, and not show their mutual problems or discuss them with their kids. Don't use kids as punching bags. Keep your issues to yourself. Keep kids out of melodramas and tearjerkers.

(ii) **Setting boundaries:** Are boundaries only meant for kids? Boundaries of shouting, screaming, anger, tantrums, mistreatments, and lies? Where are the parents' boundaries themselves? Boundaries are the standards we set for ourselves to control our response, and children follow them.

(iii) **Be a role model:** If you want your kids to do certain things or act or behave in certain ways, do it yourself. Kids don't listen; they copy your actions. Be someone they look up to. This will help you build a connection with your kids, which later comes in handy while correcting their mistakes.

(iv) **Breaking the cycle:** To raise emotionally and psychologically healthy kids, parents should heal themselves. If they had adverse experiences, they should heal themselves, as an open wound is dangerous not only for the parent but also to people and kids around them. Change the pattern of parenting you received from your parents and instantly stop the unhealthy cycle of hitting and yelling. This will not deter them from confiding in you. When we irrationally react to situations, shout, and yell, kids shut themselves down, start telling lies, and stop trusting us with their problems.

If we focus on learning how to raise kids, how to learn to parent ourselves first, most of the issues will vanish on their own.

Even after that, if problems arise, they should be tackled educationally and legally.

Educational Programs: Like extracurricular activities, schools should incorporate life-skill topics

into their curriculum, such as mental health, emotional regulation, anger management, emergency handling techniques, etc. Teachers are not mere lecturers on different subjects but facilitators, trained in children's rights and well-equipped with different coping mechanisms to help them deal with difficult and uncomfortable situations. Schools should act as centers offering healing and therapy to the victims of trauma, be they children or their parents.

Legal Framework: It is essential to enforce strict laws to protect children from trauma and abuse in India, which is home to significant number of children facing trauma and abuse.

Prompt legal avenues and fast-track courts need to act as a deterrent in India, with the scope of punishment for the perpetrators. There should be an appropriate mechanism in place to address the abuse/trauma kids face, while assuring the safety and protection of their rights.

The government needs to take concrete steps to implement regulations and policies to protect the welfare of children, not only on paper but also in action.

Conclusion

All in all, the lack of practical parenting skills is a major contributor to childhood trauma and maltreatment in India. A multifaceted approach is needed to tackle the menace of childhood trauma; along with effective parenting skills, which is a significant prerequisite, legal reforms, changes in how educational institutions work, and community awareness are needed. Only then can we pave the way for a safe and evil-free society for the children in India.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood_trauma

https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/child-maltreatment-india/#:~:text=We%20estimate%20that%20up%20to,to%2069%25%20report%20sexual%20abuse.&text=Up%20to%2071%25%20of%20Indian,to%2058%25%20report%20physical%20neglect.

☐ WHO. (2024). *Child maltreatment*. World Health Organization. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment

UNICEF India. (n.d.). *End violence against children*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-violence-against-children

Grassroots India. (n.d.). *Child abuse*. Retrieved from https://grassrootsindia.org/child-abuse/

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. (2012). Government of India.

Tulir – Centre for the Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.tulir.org/

****