

END VIOLENCE TOGETHER

For The Dignity Of Every Woman

FACT SHEET

CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is a crime and affects the child's psychological, emotional, physical and social well-being.

DEFINITION

Child abuse refers to the mistreatment, abuse or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian. Abuse may take place anywhere and may occur, for example, within the child's home or that of someone known to the child.¹ Child abuse includes:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse & exploitation
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse

Physical abuse may be one incident or it may happen repeatedly over a period of time. It involves the deliberate use of force against a child that either injures them or poses a risk of injury. Physical abuse includes:

- beating
- hitting
- shaking
- pushing
- choking
- biting
- burning
- kicking
- assaulting a child with a weapon ²

It also includes holding a child under water, or any other dangerous or harmful use of force or restraint. Female genital mutilation is another form of physical abuse.

Place Your Agency Information Here

Sexual abuse and exploitation involves using a child for sexual purposes. Examples include fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, exhibitionism, or involving a child in prostitution or pornography.

Neglect in most cases is chronic, and it involves repeated incidents. It involves failing to provide what a child needs for his or her physical, psychological or emotional development and well-being. Examples of neglect include failing to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter, cleanliness, medical care or protection from harm.³ Emotional neglect includes failing to provide a child with love, safety, and a sense of worth.

Emotional abuse involves harming a child's sense of self. It includes acts (or omissions) that result in, or place a child at risk of, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental health problems. For example, emotional abuse may include verbal threats, social isolation, intimidation, exploitation, or routinely making unreasonable demands. It also includes terrorizing a child, or exposing them to family violence.

An abuser may use a number of different tactics to gain access to a child's trust, exert power and control over them, and prevent them from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support. A child who is being abused is often in a position of dependence on the person who is abusing them, or is getting something from that person they cannot get elsewhere, such as love, freedom, attention, etc. Abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust. The abuse may happen once or it may occur in a repeated and escalating pattern over a period of months or years. The abuse may change form over time.

STATISTICS

- The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) estimated the extent of child abuse in Canada based on data from child welfare authorities. This study collected information from more than 7,000 child welfare investigations conducted across the country during a three-month period in 1998. According to the CIS-2003, an estimated 235,315 child mistreatment investigations were conducted by child welfare services across Canada in 2003.⁴
 - Physical abuse: 23% of investigations involved physical abuse as the primary reason for the investigation.
 - Sexual abuse: 3% of the investigations involved sexual abuse as the primary reason for the investigation.
 - Neglect: Neglect was the primary reason for investigation in 30% of all cases.
 - Emotional maltreatment: 15% of all investigations involved emotional maltreatment as the primary reason for the investigation.
 - Child welfare workers were able to confirm that the abuse had occurred in almost half (49%) of all cases.
- In addition to the CIS findings, the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS) found children in approximately half a million

- households had either heard or witnessed a parent being assaulted during the five years prior to the survey.
- Almost 4 in 10 children and youth (37%) suffered minor injuries and 1% suffered major injuries.⁵
 - Police were more likely to report injury among victims of family-related physical assault (54%) than family-related sexual assault (9%).⁶
 - Children under the age of 2 were at the highest risk of a major injury.⁷
 - According to data from 119 police services for 2004, physical force was the most prevalent cause of injury for children and youth in the case of family violence: this was true for 77% of physical assault survivors and 66% of sexual assault survivors.⁸
 - Many cases of child abuse are still not reported to either police or child welfare authorities.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Child abuse has devastating consequences. Depending on its form(s), duration and severity, abuse may affect:

- Every aspect of a child's life;
- Abuse may have consequences that are psychological, physical, behavioral, academic, sexual, interpersonal, self-perceptual or spiritual.⁹
- The effects may differ according to the nature of the response to the abuse, and whether the abuse was disclosed or reported.
- The effects of abuse may appear right away, or surface only in adolescence or adulthood.
- In some cases, the consequences are fatal.¹⁰
- Girls and boys are affected differently by abuse. Compared to boys, girls are more likely to internalize their response to violence, and experience, for example, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, low self-esteem and psychological disorders. Boys are more likely to externalize their response to violence, displaying, for example, increased aggression, delinquency and spousal abuse. Boys who have been exposed to violence in their homes are more likely to be violent in their adolescent and adult relationships than boys not exposed to violence.¹¹
- Behavioral or emotional problems were among the most common among maltreated children (27%), followed by depression or anxiety (17%) and learning disabilities (15%).¹²

RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE

A child who is being abused is usually in a position of dependence on the abuser, be that for love, food, shelter, attention, etc.. The power imbalance between the child and the abuser often increases the burden of disclosure. Children who are sexually abused, for example, may not tell anyone for a long time, or ever. Many children who experienced abuse while living in special needs institutions, child welfare facilities, youth detention facilities, and residential schools for Aboriginal children are only now, as adults, reporting the abuse.

Individuals who witness or suspect that a child is being abused may not report it because they:

- want to avoid the demands of becoming “involved”
- have personal views which condone the use of physical punishment
- believe that the abuse is not “serious”, especially if the child does not have visible or severe injuries
- believe that reporting the abuse to the authorities is not in the child's best interest
- believe that reporting may not solve the problem because, for example, there may be a lack of appropriate services to help the child
- lack knowledge about the signs and symptoms of abuse
- do not understand their responsibility to report abuse
- do not know that they can report anonymously to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Duty to Report: Child, Family and Community Service Act:¹³

The Act is BC’s child protection legislation and includes a duty to report where a person has reason to believe that a child (under 19) needs protection. Under s. 14 of the Act, anyone with a reason to believe that a child needs protection must report the circumstances to a child protection worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Section 13 of the act lists specific situations where protection is needed. These include (please refer to the Act for a comprehensive list):

- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be, sexually abused or exploited by the child’s parent
- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, or sexually exploited by someone else and the child’s parent does not protect the child
- Cases where the child is emotionally harmed by the parent’s conduct

RESOURCES

There are approximately 400 programs to assist with violence against women and children in BC. These include:

- Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs
- Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
- Outreach Programs
- Transition Houses
- Children Who Witness Abuse Programs
- Second Stage Houses
- Safe Homes

To find a program in your community you can call:

VictimLINK (Victim Information and Referrals) is a Multi-lingual line.

- Call toll-free in BC at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day

- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Service Vancouver's TTY Service at (604) 875-0885. If calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect

Helpline for Children

- Call 310-1234 (no area code required), 24 hours a day everyday
- To use the TDD (Telephone Device for the Deaf),
- Call 1-866-660-0505

CONTACT US

- If you want more information
- If you need help
- If you want to volunteer or make a donation

PLACE YOUR PROGRAM NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION HERE.

REFERENCES:

- 1 Department of Justice, Canada, 2006. www.justice.gc.ca
- 2 *Child Abuse: A fact sheet from the Department of Justice Canada*, Department of Justice, 2006. Available at:
<http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/childafs.html#ftn1>
- 3 Ibid
- 4 *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2006
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Ibid
- 9 *The Consequences of Child Maltreatment: A Reference Guide for Health Practitioners*, Health Canada, 1998.
- 10 *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2006
- 11 *Violence Prevention and The Girl Child: Final Report*, Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence, 1999; "Children Witnessing Family Violence," Mia Dauvergne and Holly Johnson, in *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, 2001
- 12 *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2006
- 13 *Sexual Assault: Victim Service Worker Handbook*, Victim Services and Community Programs Division, 2005