Chapter 9
Attentiveness to the Voiceless:
A Closer Valuation of Child Abuse and Neglect in the Early Childhood Years

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ABSTRACT

Children worldwide begin life with greater vulnerability as they suffer from various forms of mistreatment, discrimination, and exploitation at the hands of those who are supposed to protect and provide for them. This chapter focuses on how the rights of the child are violated through child abuse and neglect based on socioeconomic status in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies. Child abuse and neglect are social ills that threaten to diminish the social and moral obligation of every parent causing moral decay in the youth populace. While neglect may be viewed as parental behaviour of failure to nurture children, children suffer various forms of abuse from trusted relatives, caregivers, and strangers. Factors such as political instability, famine, and poverty have robbed children of their right to normal life. The chapter will also explore the criticisms or loopholes in the children's rights so that parents and caregivers can infuse them in their nurturing of the child.

OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Define child abuse and explain how it affects children in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase.
- Define child neglect and explain how it affects children in the ECD phase.
- Identify types of abuse and neglect, and how that affects quality of learning in ECD.

- Identify intervention stratagems for dealing with child abuse and neglect in institutions of learning.
- Assess the efficacy and effectiveness of victim friendly courts, legislative structures and human rights drives in alleviating suffering to the children.
- Engage in discussions on child abuse and neglect with the aim of making awareness to influence legislative attention and action.

INTRODUCTION

According to The United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child (UNCRC), any human being who has not attained the age of 18 years is defined as a child and should still be living under the protection of parents or legal guardians. These human rights also state that children have the right to life, education, food, health, water, identity, freedom, and protection (UNCRC, 1989). The original legitimately binding international instrument is the United Nations' 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which ensures that the full range of human rights; civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights are observed. Worldwide, governments have endorsed commitment to the protection and guarantee that children's rights are observed and at the same time holding themselves accountable for this commitment before the international community. Despite the existence of the strong and legal statutes, constitutional, legislative and civic environment meant to protect children's rights, media is amassed with child abuse and neglect globally. Hence, this chapter intends to highlight the magnitude of detrimental child abuse and neglect. For example, the IOL News reporter Charles informed the public on the 18th May 2018 that forty-one percent of rapes committed in South Africa were against very young children (www.iol.co.za/news). On the 31st May 2018, Pitt of New24 also reported a similar incident where a 9-month-old was allegedly sexually abused (www.news24.com/SouthAfrica). These stories confirmed earlier reports by Richter (2003) and Bird and Spurr (2004) that abuse and maltreatment of children in South Africa was outrageously high as established by extensively described rape of numerous infants and toddlers in 2001. In Latin America, watchdogs on the prevalence of violence against children estimate that thirty percent of children experienced violence (in the past 12 months) (Hillis, Mercy, Amobi & Kress, 2016). UNICEF (2019:6) in their Humanitarian Action for Children overview gave details of numerous types of violence against children in various countries in need of humanitarian aid:

Five hundred thousand children in eastern Ukraine affected by conflict are in urgent need of protection.

Two hundred and forty-one thousand children in Libya require humanitarian assistance due to protracted conflict, political instability, deteriorating public services and a dysfunctional economy.

In Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, 1.5 million children will require humanitarian assistance due to political violence causing economic instability.

More than 2.5 million Syrian children are living as refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, where demand for basic services such as health and education continues to outstrip the capacity of institutions and infrastructure to respond.

Four hundred thousand Rohingya children, have fled violence in Myanmar and settled in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh.

Children who survive these horrific incidences are scared for life where very few of them receive healing later through their spiritual faith.

Early childhood is an important phase which forms the foundation of long-term cognitive learning, emotional stability and social interaction (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). Neuroscience has established and

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