



Overview of Violence Against Children: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & Prevention through Anticipatory Guidance

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989

- India ratified the UNCRC in 1992, and is bound to its implementation by International Law
- The UN CRC has implications both at policy or decision-making level and at practice or health care provision level
- UNCRC defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen(18) years.
- The UNCRC has 54 articles: 4 Articles are its “General Principles”

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>



Violence against children

- ▶ Includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers.
- ▶ Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years, have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>



Types of interpersonal Violence against Children

- ▶ Child Maltreatment : physical/sexual/emot/neg
- ▶ Bullying (including cyber-bullying)
- ▶ Youth violence aged 10-29 year
- ▶ Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)
- ▶ Sexual violence; acts of sexual trafficking; and online exploitation.
- ▶ Emotional or psychological violence

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>

Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) 2030

Target 16.2 :“End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children”



Ending Violence against Children

[HTTPS://SDGS.UN.ORG/GOALS](https://sdgs.un.org/goals)



Child Abuse (WHO)

- ▶ Child Abuse is a violation of basic human rights of a child.
- ▶ It constitutes all forms of physical, emotional ill treatment, sexual harm, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation
- ▶ Resulting in actual harm or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power



CHILD NEGLECT

- ▶ Child neglect has been defined as failure to provide for the development of child in all spheres: health, education, nutrition, emotional development, shelter and safe living conditions (WHO, 2002).
- ▶ Child neglect needs to be considered in relation to the financial and educational limitations of the parents and the family.



Magnitude of the Problem of Child Abuse

Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development 2007,
among young children (5-12 years)

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/4978.pdf/>

- ▶ Two of three (66%) children were physically abused
- ▶ About 54% children reported having faced one of more forms of sexual abuse.
- ▶ 50% of the children were emotionally abused.
- ▶ 70.57% of girls reported having been neglected by family members, and 48.4% of girls wished they were boys.



Risk Factors for Child Abuse

Community/societal

- High crime rate
- Lack of or few social services
- High poverty rate
- High unemployment rate


Parent-related

- Personal history of physical or sexual abuse as a child
- Teenage parents
- Single parent
- Emotional immaturity
- Poor coping skills
- Low self-esteem
- Personal history of substance abuse
- Known history of child abuse

Parent-related (continued)

- Lack of social support
- Domestic violence
- Lack of parenting skills
- Lack of preparation for the extreme stress of having a new infant
- History of depression or other mental health problems
- Multiple young children
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Denial of pregnancy

Child-related

- Prematurity
 - Low birth weight
 - Handicap
- 

Short- and Long-term Health Consequences

- ▶ Regressive behaviors that interfere with developmental milestones
- ▶ such as a return to thumb-sucking or bed-wetting,
- ▶ sleep disturbances,
- ▶ eating problems,
- ▶ performance problems at school,
- ▶ sexualized behavior.
- ▶ Affects on mental and physical health, reproductive health, academic performance, and social functioning



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

- ▶ ACE collectively encompasses child abuse and neglect
- ▶ Includes key elements of family dysfunction and a child's social environment.
- ▶ ACE can be defined operationally as childhood events, varying in severity and often chronic,
- ▶ Cause harm or distress, thereby disrupting the child's physical or psychological health and development

ACEs are major public health problems



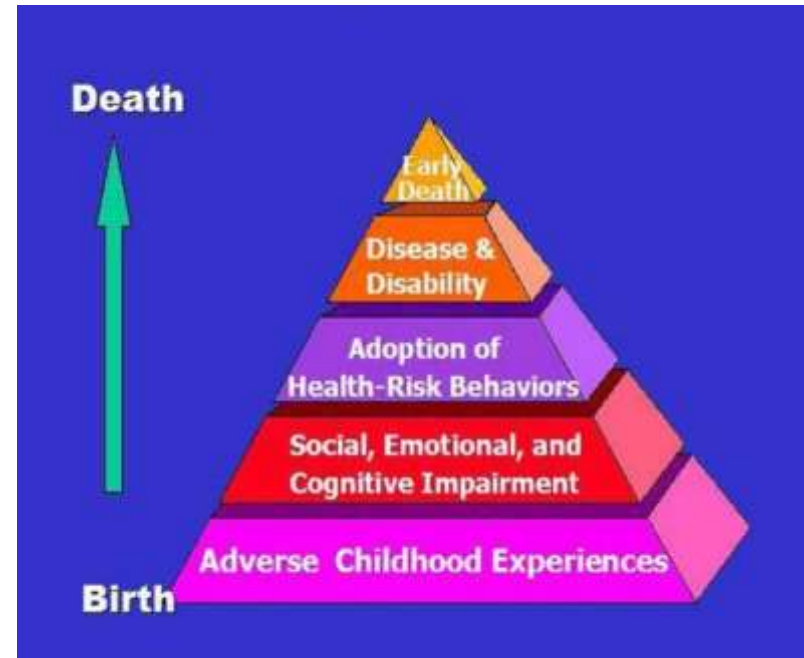
Relationship Of ACE With Development Of Several Adult Onset Diseases: A Well Designed Epidemiologic Research Study

- ▶ Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al.
- ▶ Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study.
- ▶ *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 1998; 14(4): 245-58.



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE Study)

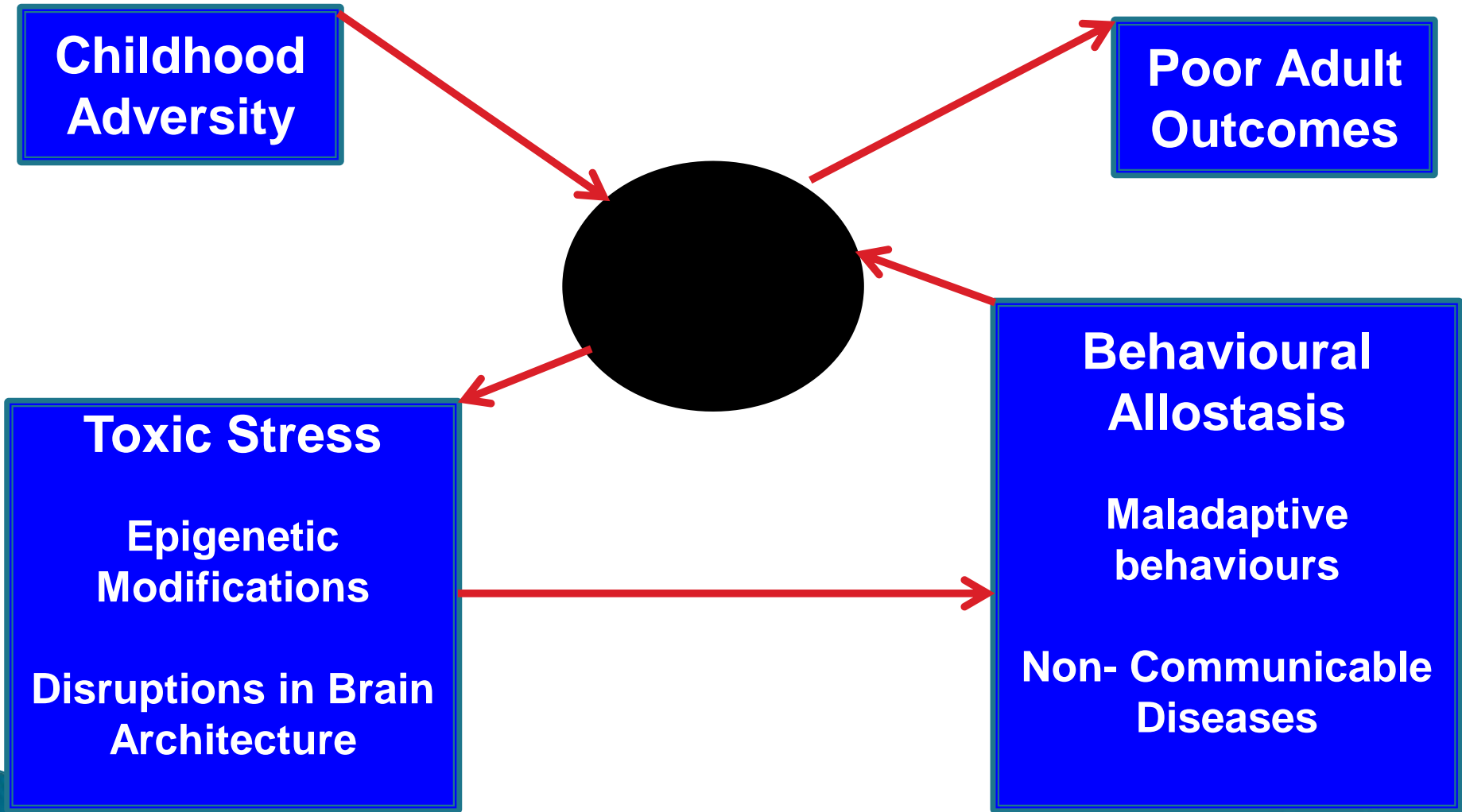
- ▶ Effect of child maltreatment on adult health
- ▶ Toxic Stress
- ▶ Epigenetic changes
- ▶ Higher prevalence of adult onset disease,
 - such as Hypertension,
 - Diabetes,
 - CAD,
 - Depression, Substance abuse



Felitti VJ Am J Prev Med. 1998 May;14(4):245-58.



Detect Child Abuse Early To Prevent ACE And Poor Adult Health Outcomes



ACEs : Short, Medium And Long Term Health And Developmental Consequences

- ▶ Early adversities : Regression of development milestone
- ▶ Middle childhood : Internalizing and externalizing behavior problems
- ▶ Chronic health and Adult onset –Non Communicable diseases

Zulfiqar A Bhutta , Supriya Bhavnani , Theresa S Betancourt , Mark Tomlinson , Vikram Patel Adverse childhood experiences and lifelong health, Nat Med 2023 Jul;29 (7):1639-1648.



Mechanism Linking Ace To Health And Development

- a) Harmful social environments include : Financial insecurity, Poverty, Violence, Conflict, untreated chronic disease or disability
- b) B. Hazardous environmental conditions: Unsafe drinking water, Inadequate sanitation and Air pollution.
- c) C Interventions can help to prevent and mitigate the negative consequences of ACEs, and reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Reference: Bhutta ZA, Bhavnani S, Betancort TS, Tomlinson M& Patel V.
Nature Medicine | Volume 29 | July 2023 | 1639–1648



Mechanism Linking ACEs To Health And Development

- Social environments create adverse living conditions experienced by children and adolescents
- Physiological mechanisms through which ACEs influence lifelong health
- Understanding on how a variety of determinants of ACEs interact to modify risk and confer protection

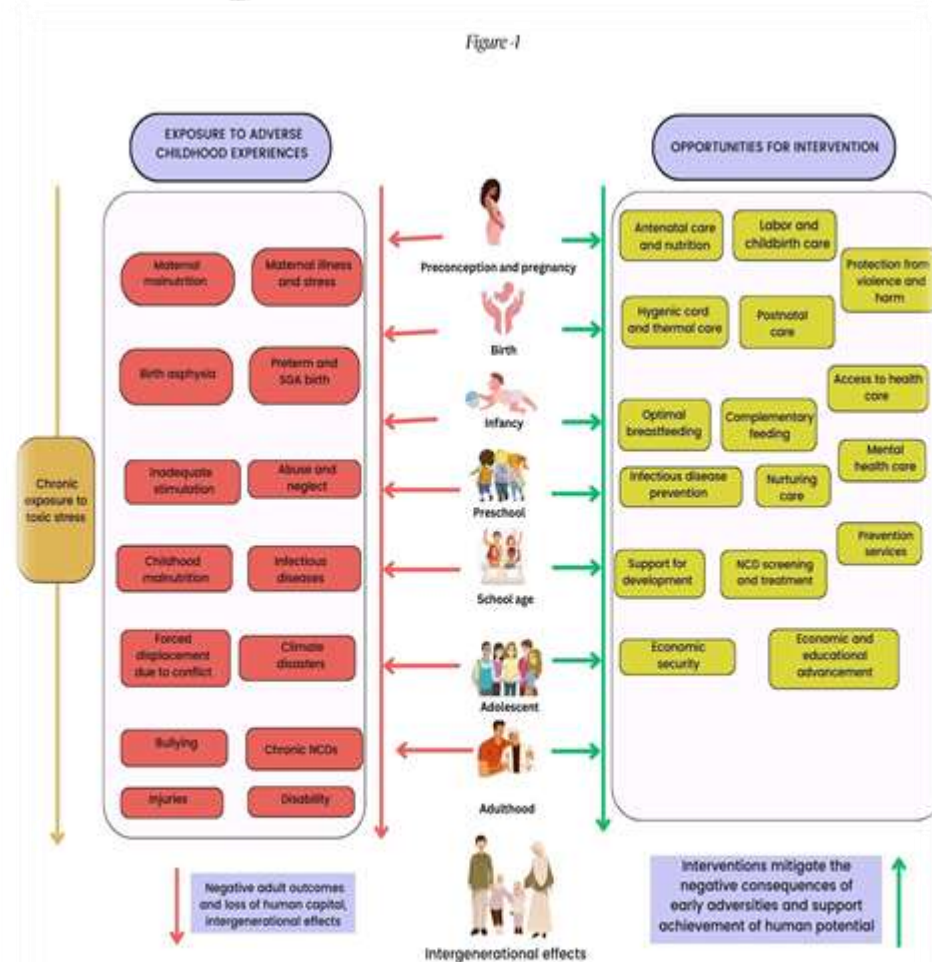


Fig.11 Adverse childhood experiences and opportunities for intervention across the life course.



Impact Of ACEs Mediated Through Biological Systems

- The brain is particularly vulnerable to adversities throughout childhood,
- Brain development unique characteristics is its plasticity to adapt to environmental stimuli, but it wanes across life course.....
- Certain areas of the brain undergo critical periods of development at different times:
 - Sensory and motor function areas develop early in childhood
 - Higher-order functions like language and cognition continue to develop into adolescence

Reference: Bhutta ZA, Bhavnani S, Betancort TS, Tomlinson M& Patel V. Nature Medicine | Volume 29 | July 2023 | 1639–1648



Physiological Mechanisms Through Which ACEs Influence Lifelong Health

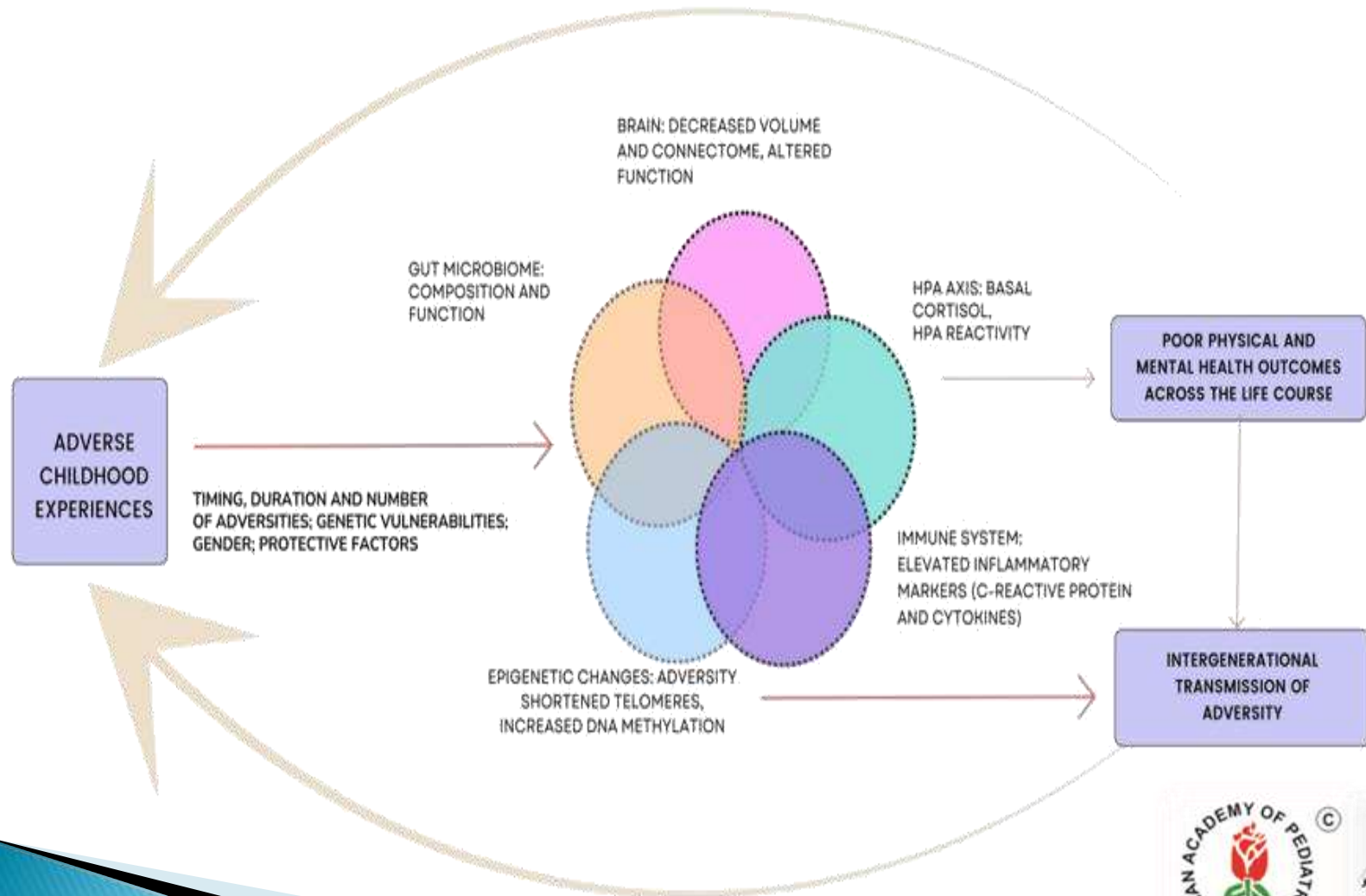


FIG. 2 | MECHANISMS BY WHICH ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IMPACT NEURODEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH OUTCOMES



Characteristic Of ACEs During Adolescence

- The prefrontal cortex (which is responsible for impulse control and inhibition) matures later than the limbic region (which controls emotions, such as the craving for social rewards).
- This is a key reason why impulsivity, risk-taking behaviors & a range of risk behaviors such as substance use, risky sexual behavior and self-harm emerge at this stage of life
- The role of emotion regulation as a key mediator between early adversity (including trauma exposure) and outcomes in later life is an important area of research.
- Emotion regulation acts as a trans-diagnostic factor underlying internalizing and externalizing behavior in adolescents



Protecting Factors that Mitigate Extent Of Long-term Consequences of ACEs.

1. **Unique genetic and environmental** characteristics of every child.
2. **Parenting:** children who experience highly responsive care demonstrate lower risk of elevated cortisol due to adversities, while a child in less-responsive care may have a more severe stress response.

Garner A & Yogman M. Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering With Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health . Pediatrics (2021) 148 (2): e2021052582



Role of Doctors in Management of Child Abuse

- ▶ Key responsibility to make early diagnosis of child abuse
- ▶ Provide prompt comprehensive medical and psychological treatment
- ▶ Keep accurate medical documentation, forensic evidence collection for legal purpose, provide confidentiality, emotional support



Talking to the Child

- ▶ A traumatized child needs a trauma informed approach
- ▶ Non leading, non suggestive, developmentally appropriate history taking
- ▶ Medical history obtained whenever possible independent of caretaker
- ▶ Verbatim record of questions asked and child's response



Trauma-Informed Approach(TIC)

1. Victim-centered : Remain open, nonjudgmental
2. Empower Patient : Ask permission & Avoid Blame
3. Allow child control when feasible :Safety & Respect
4. Transparency :Explain what you want to do
5. Review limits of confidentiality early on
6. Minimize re-trauma & Psychological safety



Prevention

1. Often Neglected
2. Prevention, reduce the resources directed to Child Abuse
3. Provision of anticipatory guidance
4. The UN General Comment 13 notes that- “prevention measures should be directed at all stakeholders, children, families, teachers and communities, professionals and institutions in both Government and civil society”



Delivering the message of Prevention

- ▶ Shift from acute care to one which now focuses provision of anticipatory guidance
- ▶ Even if we can't “immunize” every child against the possibility of CA; We can likely help protect some from being abused !
- ▶ “Life Skills education” is extremely important and must not be ignored



Positive Parenting

- ▶ Positive parenting is an umbrella term for different approaches to raising children without violence (Haldorsson, 2018).
- ▶ There are five key principles for effective and child-centred action to promote positive parenting:
 - Children's rights
 - Research informed
 - Evidence informed
 - Inclusivity
 - Working together



Positive Parenting

Benefits to the Child

- ▶ Less depression, less disruptive behaviour, decreased substance misuse & delinquency

Benefits to the Parents

- ▶ Less depression and anger,
- ▶ less domestic violence,
- ▶ improved work functioning



Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Anticipatory Guidance about Personal Space & Privacy information

- ▶ Annual health maintenance assessment in children from early as 3 years of age
- ▶ Encouraging parents to teach their children the concept of “OK and NOT OK” touching and the need to tell if anyone touches their “private” parts
- ▶ Encourage parents to teach their children not to keep secrets



Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse India

- ▶ Close Vigilance of institutional facilities (Children's home, hostels etc) is essential.
- ▶ A Child Protection policy should be in place.
- ▶ Background check of all staff and workers
- ▶ Media: Role in awareness and sensitization
- ▶ Need to inform and educate all concerned parents, teachers, health worker, Anganwadi



Collective responsibility

- ▶ It is the collective responsibility of parents, physicians, allied multidisciplinary professionals and our institutions to deliver and reinforce children's right to personal space and privacy.
- ▶ . . . children armed with information about personal safety are 6-7 times more likely to develop protective behavior . . .

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INSPIRE –Seven strategies to end violence against children (WHO)

INSPIRE: Seven strategies to end violence against children



Implementation and enforcement of laws



Norms and value change



Safe environments



Parental and caregiver support



Income and economic strengthening



Response and support services



Education and life skills

An Integrated & Strategic Approach to Ending Violence



The Behavioral Health Sector Response to Child Sexual Abuse, Exploitation, and Trafficking: A Call to Action

Rajeev Seth ¹ and Jordan Greenbaum²

Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health

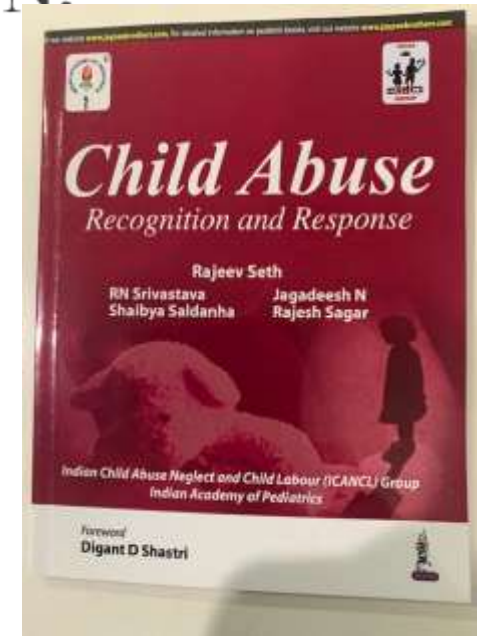
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342231220479>



International Centre™
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Child Abuse: Recognition & Response

Seth Rajeev, Srivastava RN, Jagadeesh N.
Shaibya S & Sagar R (2020)



▶ **The book is available online at:**

▶ https://www.jaypeebrothers.com/pgDetails.aspx?cat=s&book_id=9789389776386

▶ https://www.amazon.in/Child-Abuse-Recognition-Response-Rajeev/dp/9389776384/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=child+abuse%3A+recognition+and+response&qid=1582975282&sr=8-1





Please Join

Indian Child Abuse,
Neglect and Child Labour (ICANCL) Group
<http://www.icancl.org>

a Chapter of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics
Website: <http://icancl.org>



THANK YOU

