

**EDITORIAL: Child Maltreatment**

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Children are the most vulnerable members of society. They are considered vulnerable since they are at a stage where there is greater reliance on others to get things done. They don't have knowledge of this world and wouldn't know right from wrong etc so someone can easily maltreat a child. Child maltreatment is the general term used to describe all forms of child abuse and neglect. There is wide range of variation about the definition of child maltreatment and unfortunately, there is no single, universally applied definition of child abuse and neglect. The literature gives an overwhelming explanation about child maltreatment. In many cases, child maltreatment has been defined with the spectrum of child abuse. Over the past several decades, different stakeholders including State and Federal legislative bodies, agency officials, and researchers—have developed definitions of maltreatment for different purposes. Definitions vary across these groups and within them (Goldman et al., 2003). According to WHO (2014), child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Exposure to intimate partner violence is also sometimes included as a form of child maltreatment. Herrenkohl (2005) stated that child abuse is "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. Within this broad definition, five subtypes are distinguished in this Special issue of this Journal – physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, emotional abuse, and exploitation. According to recent global data, more than one in four children worldwide reported having experienced severe and frequent physical abuse, while child sexual abuse was experienced by nearly one in five females and one in eleven males (UNICEF, 2012). The journal seeks articles addressing or relating to any of the topics i.e. child abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional/mental abuse, exploitation, risk factors of child maltreatment, impacts, social preventions, initiatives for maltreated children, and related issues. The literature shows that child abuse can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.

There are many interacting causes of child maltreatment. Characteristics or circumstances of the abuser, the child, and the family may all contribute. Consequences of child maltreatment include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development. WHO (2014) reports that every year, there are an estimated 34 000 homicide deaths in children under 15. This number underestimates the true extent of the problem, as a significant proportion of deaths due to child maltreatment are incorrectly attributed to falls, burns, drowning and other causes. In armed conflict and refugee settings, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse by combatants, security forces, members of their communities, aid workers and others. Child maltreatment causes suffering to children and families and can have long-term

consequences. Maltreatment causes stress that is associated with disruption in early brain development. Extreme stress can impair the development of the nervous and immune systems. UNICEF (2012) reported that maltreatment can have profound and damaging consequences during childhood and adolescence and throughout adult life. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are more likely to have poorer physical and/or mental health outcomes; social difficulties, such as insecure attachments with caregivers and problematic relationships with peers, and as adults later in life; cognitive dysfunction, attributable to the negative impact of excessive stress on brain development; high-risk behaviours, such as drug and alcohol abuse, early sexual activity and resulting teenage parenting; and behavioural problems, including aggression and adult criminality. In addition to addressing these crucial dimensions of children's rights, investing in protecting children has a direct positive impact on a country's human capital and economic growth and reduces the burden of government spending on the long-term consequences of abuse. The national child protection systems in any country are recognized as the most effective and sustainable means to protect children from all forms of maltreatment. The absence of such a system frequently leads to incomplete coverage, and to individual violations being addressed as separate, unrelated problems. The recognition of the damaging effects of child maltreatment has been facilitated by the adoption of the concept of 'significant harm', which emphasises the effects of ill treatment of a child's development (Lynch & Browne, 1997).

Due to the high prevalence and negative impacts of child maltreatment, this segment becomes an important topic for academic discussion and research. The objective is to provide evidence based information in order to adopt new child rights legislations and policies, or to modify the existing provisions. This special issue receives a number of papers on child maltreatment and the Journal considers five papers. Two of them are highlighted child maltreatment in Bangladesh, two in Malaysia, and one in Asian context. The first paper, by Islam and Hossain, explore the features of child trafficking in Bangladesh. They address the responses of the governmental and non-governmental organizations (GOs and NGOs) to the problem. This paper analyses the sources and causes of child trafficking and discussed the current initiatives of the GOs and NGOs with its limitations, and finally provided some way out alternatives. The paper argues that the GO-NGO responses are inadequate in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Bangladesh. The paper contributes a dynamic and multi-dimensional understanding of how the GOs and NGOs combating child trafficking issue in Bangladesh. The second paper, by Venkat, reviews the countrywide initiatives in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in relation to a development of child protection systems and those that enhancing regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration. This paper highlights that children are vulnerable on a number of fronts; such as home and family, schools and educational settings, care and justice system, and child labour in work settings. Due to this, child protection is a recent entry into the South Asian nations (i.e., Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Bhutan) agenda. By reviewing of the initiatives this paper suggests that the multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed at national and regional levels to develop best practices in child protection system in these nations. The third paper, by Sarker, examined teasing as one form of child abuse. It seeks to examine to what extent female child teasing affects the human rights in Bangladesh, where the 48.5 percent population is female. The specific objectives of this study were to explore rooted causes of teasing, place of occurrence of teasing, relationship between the victimized girls and the perpetrators, and the process of teasing applied by the perpetrators against the girls. He found that ineffective law and order, lack of socialization

of the perpetrators, fear to protest against perpetrators, patriarchal society, and peer group pressure was identified as causes of teasing. Public places, school premises, shopping centres, etc. were reported as the physical environment where the teasing takes place. The teasing comes in many forms; such as throwing rebuke related sex, pulling clothes and making barrier on the walkway. Impacts of teasing on human rights were found in terms of discontinuation of education, low performance, insecurity, stress, trauma and suicide. Initiatives to prevent teasing should include enactment of a specific law related to teasing, mass-awareness program, and moral education, and women empowerment, proper implementation of existing laws against teasing through close cooperation of community people, victims and the establishment of law enforcing agencies.

The third paper, by Nikku and Azlinda, reviewed the current thinking and action concerning breaking the cycle of child abuse in Malaysian society. The purpose is to illustrate some of the key issues, questions, and concerns for professional social work in the field of child abuse. The paper focuses on what social workers need to know and what do they know about child protection, and how to improve child abuse reporting, monitoring and review capacities in order to break the mould of child abuse and to craft a robust child protection system in Malaysia. This special issue ends with a field study by Siti Hajar et al., in which they looked girls' sexual misconduct. They used the Bronfenbrenner's theory on Human Ecology postulates that a human interaction with their environment produces certain types of behaviours. This paper examines the effect of social ecology, in particular the family ecology, on girls' sexual misconduct which later contributed to them being pregnant out of wedlock. They argue that the finding of their study support the theory's premise, which is, unfavourable conditions of family environment is detrimental to its members' behaviours, in particular children. Family ecology, such as poverty, parent's abandonment and violence in the family, depressing parent's marital relationship, broken family, and ineffective parents-child communication lead to child involvement in premature sexual behaviour, and later bruising their development when the misconduct contributed to their pregnancy. The findings have significant implication on the National Child Protection Policy. The existing policy needs to take into account the importance of a family-based intervention program to response to the social ill.

All the papers in this issue give some theoretical as well as contextual insights in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Asia. The results of these papers will have greater implication at policy level. We hope that the outcomes of those papers contribute to help to increase academic debates among the academicians and researchers in these regions.

## **References**

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