

Child abuse among children with disability



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Focus of the session

- Definitions
 - Child abuse (mal-treatment) & types
- Size of the problems
- Contributory factors to abuse
- WHO recommendations & our response



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What is Child Abuse?



The people who look after you should not hurt you
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U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 19



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Child Abuse: A Social Construction?

- In UK the government (1995) saw child abuse as socially constructed. They believed that:
“the best way to understand the mistreatment of children is by viewing parental handling of children as a continuum ranging from the acceptable/desirable through to the seriously abusive...professionals acting on behalf of society,(and presumably reflecting its views), determine the threshold of abuse and **this can shift overtime.**”

Corby, 2000

Compare what may be considered abusive in West compared to Malaysia
Think how attitudes change within a country over time.



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Types of Child Abuse

- Child abuse is any act of omission or commission that **endangers or impairs** a child's physical, psychological, emotional or social health and development.

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse (& neglect)



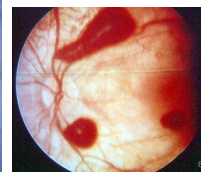
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Physical abuse

- **Physical Abuse:** “A child is physically injured if there is **substantial & observable injury** to any part of the child's body as a result of the non-accidental application of force or an agent to the child's body ...”

Child Act 2001



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Sexual abuse

- "A child is sexually abused if he/she has **sexually exploitation by any person for that person's or another person's sexual gratification.**"
Child Act 2001
- Absence of physical findings DOES NOT rule out sexual abuse
- Hymen finding not of vital importance
- Children with special needs also has puberty and sexual development



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Emotional abuse

- Emotional Abuse:** "A child is emotionally injured if there is substantial and observable impairment of the child's mental or emotional functioning"
Child Act 2001
- Some parents emotional blackmail their children



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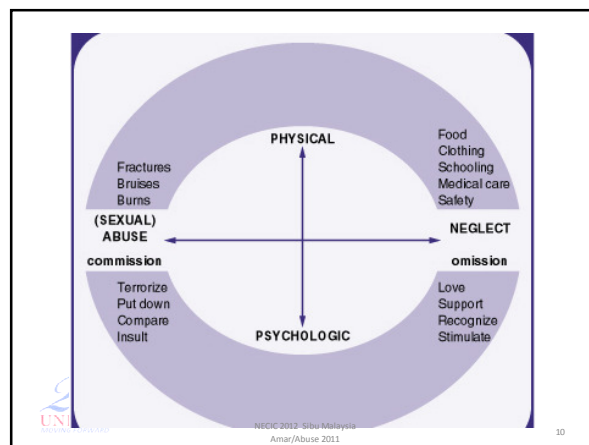
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Neglect

- Physical neglect:
 - Failure to thrive
 - Frequent infection
- Emotional neglect
 - Impaired development



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Extended spectrum of abuse: Societal abuse

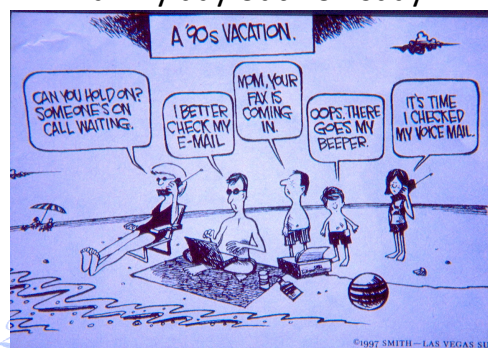
- Child abuse is any act of omission or commission that endangers or impairs a child's physical, psychological, emotional or **social health and development.**
Child Act 2001
- Children are abused and their development tends to be stunted **as a result of a broad range of perfectly legitimate social policies and public practices** which cause , permit and perpetuate poverty, substandard housing and neighbourhoods, **polluted and dangerous environments, schooling devoid of meaningful education.....**This massive abuse and destruction of children is a by-product of the normal workings of our economic and cultural institutions.....
Gil 1981



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Family day out nowsday



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How Common is Child Abuse?

- 3-29% of men, 7-36% of women sexually abused
Finkelhor 1994
- ~20% women & 10% men sexually abused as a child
WHO: Preventing Child Maltreatment 2006
- ≥ 10% girls & 3-5% boys sexually abused
Amar HSS et al, Child Abuse & Neglect 1996

- Number of children sexually abused:
– 550,000 girls under 18 yrs
– 275,000 boys under 18 yrs
- Reports account for 0.03% of abused children



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What about disabled children?

- 31-39% of disabled children has been abused
 - Physical abuse: 1.6-2.1 x
 - Sexual abused: 2.2 x
 - Emotional & neglect: 1.8-2.8 x
- Most children experienced multiple forms of abuse
- Incidences are under-reported



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Sullivan & Knutson 2000
Ammerman RT et al 1989
Hershkowitz et al 2007

Types of disability & abuse

- **Cerebral palsy** has 1.8x of all abuse
 - Physical abuse: 3x
 - Neglect: 2.7 x
- **Learning difficulty** has 4.7x all abuse
 - Physical: 3.7x
 - Emotional & neglect: 3.8-4x
 - Sexual abuse: 6.4x



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Spencer N et al 2005

Types of disability & abuse

- **Conduct disorder** has 7.6x of all abuses
 - Physical abuse: 4.1x
 - Emotional: 11.6x
 - Sexual: 7.65x



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Spencer N et al 2005

Take Home Message

At least 20% disabled children,
have been, & continue to be sexually abused.

30-50% of these children are physically abused
or neglected



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- Child Act 2001, disability act & our response
- WHO recommendations



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Abuse at home/ institutions: Contributory factors

Child factor

- Underlying physical illnesses
- Temperament of the child
- Easy target: frequent intimate opportunity with carer, lack of mobility, lack of voice



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Case study 1:

A child with spastic quadriplegic CP

Medical problems:

- Poor swallowing
- Gastro-oesophageal reflux
- poor feeding
- Drooling
- Constipation
- Poor growth
- All limbs are in contracture



Totally dependent

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Case study 1:

A child with spastic quadriplegic CP

- Cortical blindness
- Poor sleep
- Intellectual impairment
- Seizures



Higher emotional, physical, economic and social demands on the carer and family



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Case study 2:

A 6-years old kid with dyslexia

- Specific reading disorder: can't read or write properly
- Obesity
- Considered "naughty" in the class
- Both parents are busy



Conflicts between the child and family/ teachers



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Abuse at home: Factors that influence family stress

Parental stress

- Poor self esteem
- Poor knowledge & lack of awareness
- Parenting skills
- Being abused as a child
- Mental illnesses



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Abuse at home: Factors that influence family stress

Social-situational stress

- Poverty
- Social stigma & isolation
- Barriers to support services
- Marital discordance
- Parent-child relationship



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Abuse in institutions: Contributory factors

Teachers/ Carers

- Limited knowledge & lack of awareness
- Limited resources
- Underpaid staffs
- Multiple carers
- Lack of monitoring & reporting mechanism (Paedophile ring)



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Marginalised in society: Contributory factors

Community

- Myths: evil spirits, witch crafts, virgin cure
- Disabled children being used as beggars/ prostitution
- Unproven medical treatment: routine hysterectomy
- "Ignorance is a bliss"
- Fail to value these children



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Child abuse is a public health issue

- Primary prevention:
 - Public awareness & education
- Secondary prevention:
 - Prevention to those at risk
- Tertiary prevention
 - Provide services to those with problems



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WHO recommendations for preventive measurement

Societal & Community

- Implementing legal reform & human rights
 - UNCRC to Child Act 2001
 - Disability Act
 - Strengthening & monitoring in our system
 - Promoting social, economic & cultural rights



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WHO recommendations for preventive measurement

Societal & Community

- Social & economic policies
 - Early childhood education & care
- Universal access to services
- Child protection system



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WHO recommendations for preventive measurement

Societal & Community

- Changing cultural & social reforms, increase public awareness
- Social-economic structuring
- Environmental risk factor reduction
- Working with families



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WHO recommendations for preventive measurement

School & service providers

- Training for staffs
- Home visits
- Counseling services
- Parenting skills for parents
- Respite care & coping mechanism
- Sexual education
- Tackle school bullying



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Case study 3:

A child with intellectual disability & blindness

- Brain tumour & post-op complications: paraplegia, blindness, panhypopituitary, poor cognitive function
- Poverty
- Poor family support
- Social isolation



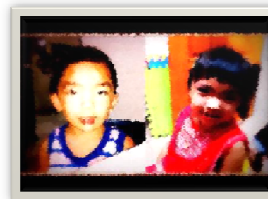
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Case Study 4:

Siblings with Cornelia De Lange

- Mother also have LD
- Poor parenting skills
- Low income group



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Suggestion

1. Advocate for Child Rights
2. Be aware of the problem and dispel myths
3. **Do not be afraid** to get involved
4. Push for more sustained prevention activities
5. Re-structure existing services
6. Provide services for "survivors" & "abusers"
6. Transforming how society views children & disability
7. More research



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Tips

- Work with the family and society
- Remember change does not come easily or quickly – dealing with a child's life needs long-term team work and follow-up



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Take Home Message



“In all actions considering children ...
the best interest of the child shall be a primary
consideration”

Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

This must be our central guiding principle
i.e. the child's rights are paramount

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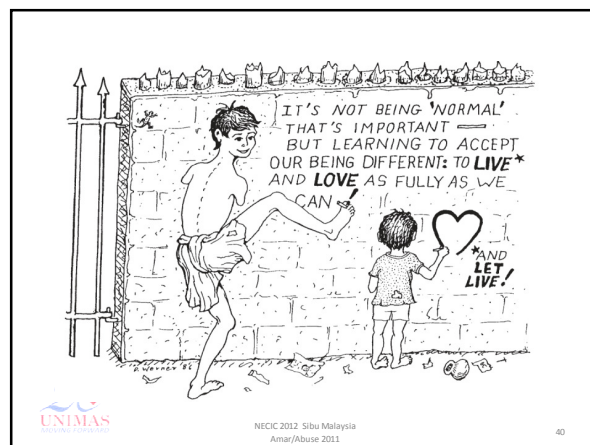
- “The true measure of a nation’s standing is
how well it attends to its children – their
health and safety, their material security, their
education and socialization, and **their sense of
being loved, valued, and included in the
families and societies into which they are
born**”

UNICEF 2007, Wellbeing report



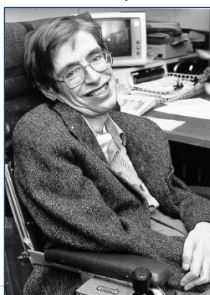
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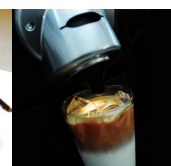
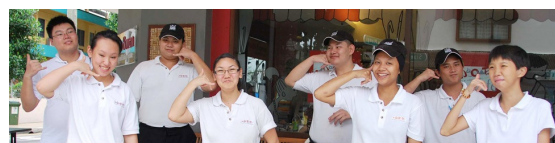
We will never know the full potential of a child
unless he/ she is included in our society



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Joan Bowen café, Singapore



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Every child matters.



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With thanks to Dato' Dr Amar Singh HSS & Ms. Gill Raja (FSS, UNIMAS) for their advice towards this lecture content
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