

# Role of Child Abuse and Neglect in Children's Speech and Language Problems

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**Abstract:** *It is frequently emphasized by many disciplines that child abuse and neglect have irreparable effects on children's development. In many studies conducted on this subject, it is emphasized that abuse damages children's intellectual, psychological, physical, language and spiritual development; it is also indicated that children are seriously affected by abuse and neglect process during early stages of life. In this respect, it is important to analyse the subject from this perspective, plan and perform practices involving effective language and speech interventions towards children who have suffered abuse and neglect. Therefore, focusing on the effects of abuse and neglect towards children's language and speech problems among parents, educators and experts will be effective. Within the scope of this research, negative effect of child abuse and neglect on children's development was discussed in terms of development of language and speech, and suggestions towards prevention and intervention were provided. It is thought that this subject will provide an important perspective in understanding of children's language and speech problems and will constitute a source for future studies.*

**Keywords:** *Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Language and Speech Problems, Prevention and Intervention.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Language and Speech Problems in Children

Humans' most basic needs include communicating with others and being in relationship with the social structure. This relationship plays an important role in formation of an individual's self and his/her adaptation. Besides, sharing emotions, thoughts, desires and beliefs with other people is required to establish a meaningful life process. While this process continues in its normal course for most individuals, speech and language problems emerge in some individuals, and some problems emerge in terms of both individual's mental development and social relationships. This process is especially among subjects that should be examined in terms of identification of children's speech and language disorders, understanding of their causes and establishing the process of diagnosis and treatment towards children. That is because it very difficult for children with language and speech disorders to cope with many future potential problems in the future.

### 1.2. Causes of Speech and Language Problems

Speech and language problems may occur due to many reasons. While some of these reasons are associated with biological and neurological structure, in some cases, these are listed as negative life experiences, traumas and individual factors. For instance:

- Structure disorders of speech organs structure (cleft lip and palate, hearing mechanism problems, disorders in mouth and throat structure, disorders of teeth structure etc.)
- Disorders of central nervous system (cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, aphasia etc.)
- Neurological disorders (Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, spina bifida etc.)
- Sensory incompetency (hearing loss, loss of vision)
- Presence of adverse environmental conditions and negative parent-adult models
- Traumas, inadequate life experiences, insufficient parenthood
- Cognitive disorders (mental retardation, down syndrome etc.)

- Emotional-social-psychological problems (father-mother or child with severe emotional problem, shyness, autism etc.)

- Bilingualism [1].

During the development process, children need caring and effective parents and positive adult models in a safe and healthy environment. It is concluded that language development is negatively affected from negative life experiences, insufficient social circle, traumas, abuse and neglect as a part of children's development processes. Among risks for developing speech and language problems include: Poverty, lack of social supports, level of parents' education, teen parents, depressed mothers, exposure to drugs and/or alcohol during or after pregnancy, poor nutrition, preterm/low birth weight, neglect and/or abuse, placement in kinship or foster care [2].

### **1.3. Role of Abuse and Neglect in Language and Speech Problems**

Child abuse-related numerical results show that 12 out of every 1000 children have experienced maltreatment [3]. According to The World Health Organization (2016), 40 million children under 15-year-old experience maltreatment that require medical and social services [4]. Children under 3 years have highest rates of abuse/neglect, and 76% of children who died of maltreatment were under 4 years of age. As can be seen in the literature, perpetrators of child maltreatment consist of parents: 83%, non-parent caretakers 11%, unknown people 6% [5]. Some factors, such as domestic violence 30-50%, substance abuse 50-80%, other socioeconomic factors, increase likelihood of child abuse in homes [6]. Without a doubt, children experience the most severe consequences of child abuse and neglect. These are negative life experiences in terms of children's development and adaptation, they are such experiences that children cannot cope with and prevent. Severity of this effect may vary in parallel to child's developmental process. A large number of factors affect this process or increase/decrease its effect, including type of abuse, child's age, duration and severity of abuse, presence/absence of social support in child's life, relationship/proximity with the abuser, emotional state during time of abuse. As a result of abuse, child's growth and development is affected in a negative way [7]-[8]-[9].

As shown by studies that examine developmental outcomes of abuse and neglect on children, abuse and neglect negatively affect children's language and speech processes. For example, 35% of children with speech/language delays experienced maltreatment, and children with disabilities have higher rate of exposure to abuse than normal children. This rate is determined as 9% for normally developing children and 31% for children with disabilities. While risk of abuse and neglect among children with hearing impairments is 2 times more; their physical abuse risk is 4 times more. Risk of abuse and neglect among children with speech delay is more than 5 times [10]. Negative effects of abuse and neglect during childhood period are very important for their aspect especially affecting development negatively [11]. These children have lots of physical, cognitive, socioemotional, relational, and psychological difficulties. These problems include higher medical and health concerns, less readiness for school, maladaptive coping styles, and experience problematic peer relationships [12].

### **1.4. Influence of Maltreatment on Speech and Language Development**

Earlier childhood is one of the most important and fast periods in human life that starts from the birth till 8-year-age, and it's been known as one the most critical period because, it involves completion of healthy cognitive, emotional and physical development of children [13]. During this period, brain development is fast; besides, physical, mental and social development, locomotor skills, language skills, emotion regulation skills, attachment formation, self-concept, behavioral control, and social skills are among the developmental accomplishments of early childhood. However, harsh and abusive parenting behaviors include maltreatment during the earliest years, hinders normal development by retarding or prohibiting the progress [14].

In typically developing groups, it is known that language learning is a highly robust phenomenon and by age of 4 years, children expected to develop sufficient linguistic skills through the influence of language, emotional growth and as well as learned behaviors [15]. Nevertheless, unlike typically developing groups, children exposed to maltreatment such as abuse, neglect or trauma are more likely to develop deficits that influence their

cognitive and language skills and their language delays, and their impairments are often recognized by clinicians and educators [16]. Quite remarkable results have been achieved when effects of abuse and neglect in terms of early neurobiological development were examined. For instance, maltreatment and traumatic experiences are known to link with serious, prevalent and long-term residual for a variety of neuropsychological functions and have compelling implications for speech and language development [17]- [18]- [19].

It is evident that child abuse/maltreatment contributes to delays in language development. Some studies reported that maltreated children exhibit deficits in general aspects of general speech and language developments, for example; articulation deficits, deficits in holding coherent narratives; difficulties in receptive and expressive language growth, deficits in communication skills, deficits in pragmatic language development so on and so forth [16]- [20].

Consequently, children exposed to abuse and neglect commonly experience speech and language problems [21]. Strong attachment relationships established with parents during early period is very important in children's language and speech development and their social developments in coming periods. Abuse and neglect also impair the quality of parent-child relationship and negatively affect development of attachment relationships [22]. Healthy parent-child relationship is crucial in terms of child's trust in his/her parents and others, feeling loved, believing in a safe world and enough confidence to explore, new skills and language acquisition [18].

### **1.5. Preventing and Intervention**

Consequently, children's abuse and neglect should be preventing due to their negative effects on children's all developmental processes. In this respect, it is necessary to conduct studies that include effective language and speech interventions towards children who are victims of abuse and neglect. Therefore, the prevention of child abuse and neglect will be more effective. That is because preventive practices may prevent the emergence of problem and postpone its origin.

Some of the main suggests on this subject include:

- Maltreated children's communication difficulties should be identified and treated as early as possible
- Specific interventions methods should be created to promote effective interventions for maltreated infants and children.
- Specific training programs should be implemented to raise awareness concerning common symptoms of child abuse and neglect, reporting protocol.
- Practitioners i.e. speech and language therapists, teachers, psychologists, social workers should be trained on this subject.
- Specialist teams should be established to provide medical, social, legal and psychological support exposed to abuse [8].
- Increasing parental education with respect to normal development as well as early intervention.
- Establishing prevention-based- programs for maltreated infants, toddlers, and preschoolers could increase parental involvement in early intervention [8].
- Appropriate measures should be taken in the fields where children suffer from abuse and should be controlled and monitored regularly (i.e. in families, schools, social clubs, and institutions) [8].
- Risky situations that result in child abuse and neglect should be controlled through practices towards improving inadequate conditions [8].
- Focus should be upon bringing in skills for protection against child abuse, coping and asking for help [8].
- Effective outside school programs may be implemented to give enough information and adequate skills to professionals in related to child abuse and neglect [8].

-Due to effects of abuse and neglect that can sometimes reach a fatal point on children, quick and effective decisions should be taken without any delays. For these reasons, effective prevention strategies should be determined by putting adequate pre- action plans in place [8].

In this context, multidisciplinary, national and international collaborative research and studies should be carried out related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Thus, the scope of such studies should include; parents/families/adults, children and adolescents, speech therapist/schools/teachers/educators, administrators, child-adolescent mental health experts, government policies, public and private institutions/, lawyers/laws/police, scientific research/field studies, social awareness, raising public awareness, media dimensions [8].

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