

Child Abuse, Investigation & Management: Forensic Nursing Perspective

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Abstract

Introduction

Forensic nurses are often called upon to testify as expert witnesses in court cases involving child abuse. Therefore, it is essential for the nurse to maintain accurate and detailed documentation throughout the case and to be prepared to present evidence in a clear and concise manner.

Child abuse is a serious and prevalent issue that requires special attention and expertise, especially in the field of forensic nursing. Forensic nurses play a crucial role in the assessment, treatment, and management of child abuse cases, as well as in providing expert testimony in legal proceedings. This comprehensive note will discuss the management of child abuse from a forensic nursing perspective, focusing on a case study that involves treatment and the creation of a medico-legal report.

Keywords : Child abuse, victim, accused, crime scene, forensic perspective

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Introduction

Child abuse is also known as child endangerment or child maltreatment that is physical, mental sexual, emotional and/ or maltreatment or neglect of a child that is especially by parents or a caregiver. It may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential wrongful harm to a child and can occur in a child's home, or in organizations, schools, or communities.

In India, child abuse cases are unfortunately prevalent. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, there were over 100,000 reported cases of child abuse in India in 2020. However, it is important to note that

many cases of child abuse go unreported, making the actual number of victims likely much higher.

Child abuse is a serious issue that affects children all around the world, including in India. Forensic nursing plays a crucial role in the management and treatment of child abuse cases from a medical-legal perspective. It is important for forensic nurses to be well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to handle such sensitive cases effectively.

Child abuse can categorize as following aspects :

- **Physical abuse.** Physical child abuse occurs when a child is intensely physically injured or put at risk of

harm by another person.

- **Sexual abuse.** Child sexual abuse is the any sexual activity with a child. This can involve sexual contact, such as intentional sexual touching, oral-genital contact or intercourse. This can also involve noncontact sexual abuse of a child, such as exposing a child to sexual activity or pornography; observing or filming a child in a sexual manner; sexual harassment of a child; or prostitution of a child, including sex trafficking.
- **Emotional abuse.** Emotional child abuse means injuring a child's self-esteem or emotional well-being. It includes verbal and emotional assault such as continually belittling or berating a child as well as isolating, ignoring or rejecting a child.
- **Medical abuse.** Medical child abuse occurs when someone gives false information about illness in a child that requires medical attention, putting the child at risk of injury and unnecessary medical care.
- **Neglect.** Child neglect is failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, clean living conditions, affection, supervision, education, or dental or medical care.
- **Other.** In other cases, child abuse is done by someone the child knows and trusts often a parent or other relative. If you suspect child abuse, report the abuse to the proper authorities.

Biological evidences regarding forensic perspective

- Semen or seminal stains
- Urine
- Blood or blood stains
- Saliva
- cells and tissues
- prostate secretions
- hairs
- teeth
- faecal or faecal stains
- vomit and stomach contents
- sweat secretions
- physical injuries

Key role of forensic investigating officer for sexual abuse

The role of forensic investigating officer is categorised for rape victim, accused and crime scene.

Rape victim (Child)

- Treat the child gently with kindness

- Examination and collection of evidence material as soon as possible
- Collect the samples of blood, pubic hairs, finger nail scraping, swabs from thighs and underarms, vaginal swabs rectal swabs and oral swabs.
- If bite marks present, take a photograph with scale.
- Injuries of victims
- Victim's menstrual history
- Provide moral and psychological support to the victim throughout investigation.

Accused

- The accused should be sent to nearest hospital for medical examinations like
- Cloths worn by the accused at the time of committing offence.
- Collect the loose hair sample ie pubic hairs
- Fingers nail scraping or clipping
- Penile swabs for detection of vaginal epithelial cells
- Odonatological examination to confirmation bite marks

Crime scene

- Taking the crime scene photographs
- Preparing sketches
- Developing fingerprint and footprint
- Trace evidences may be present like loose hairs, blood stained seminal stained, weapons lighters gas medications, rope, soil.

Other investigation

For Identifying abuse or neglect can be difficult. It requires careful evaluation of the situation, including checking for the physical and behavioural signs.

Factors that may be considered in determining child abuse include :

- Physical exam, including evaluating injuries or signs and symptoms of suspected abuse or neglect
- Lab tests, X-rays or other tests
- Information about the child's medical and developmental history
- Description or observation of the child's behavior
- Observing interactions between parents or caregivers and the child
- Discussions with parents or caregivers
- Talking, when possible, with the child

If child abuse or neglect is suspected, a report needs to be made to an appropriate local child welfare agency to further investigate the case. Early identification of child abuse can keep children safe by stopping abuse and preventing future abuse from occurring.

Management

Treatment : Treatment can help both children and parents in abuse situations. The first priority is ensuring the safety and protection for children who have been abused. Ongoing treatment focuses on preventing future abuse and reducing the long-term psychological and physical consequences of abuse.

The first step in managing a case of suspected child abuse is a thorough assessment of the child's injuries. Forensic nurses are trained to conduct comprehensive physical exams, document injuries using forensic photography, and collect evidence such as swabs for DNA analysis. In Sarah's case, it is crucial to assess the pattern, location, and severity of bruises to determine if they are consistent with accidental injuries or physical abuse.

Medical care : If necessary, help the child seek appropriate medical care. Seek immediate medical attention if a child has signs of an injury or a change in consciousness. Follow-up care with a health care provider may be required.

Psychotherapy

Talking with a mental health professional can:

- Help a child who has been abused learn to trust again
- Teach a child about healthy behavior and relationships
- Teach a child conflict management and boost self-esteem

Several different types of therapy may be effective, such as :

Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps a child who has been abused to better manage distressing feelings and to deal with trauma-related memories. Eventually, the supportive parent who has not abused the child and the child are seen together so the child can tell the parent exactly what happened.

Child-parent psychotherapy. This treatment focuses on improving the parent-child relationship and on building a stronger attachment between the two.

Psychotherapy also can help parents :

- Discover the roots of abuse

- Learn effective ways to cope with life's unavoidable frustrations
- Learn healthy parenting strategies

If the child is still in the home, social services may schedule home visits and make sure essential needs, such as food, are available. Children who are placed into foster care may need mental health services.

Conclusions

Child abuse is a serious and prevalent issue that requires special attention and expertise, especially in the field of forensic nursing. Forensic nurses play a crucial role in the assessment, treatment, and management of child abuse cases, as well as in providing expert testimony in legal proceedings.

In conclusion, the management of child abuse from a forensic nursing perspective is a challenging yet rewarding endeavor that requires specialized knowledge, skills, and compassion. Child abuse is a serious issue that affects children all around the world, including in India. Forensic nursing plays a crucial role in the management and treatment of child abuse cases from a medical-legal perspective. It is important for forensic nurses to be well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to handle such sensitive cases effectively.

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