



Breaking the Cycle: How Child Abuse and Neglect Ignite the Path to Addiction

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

The WHO defines child abuse and neglect as “all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, negligence, and exploitation that cause or have the potential to cause harm to a child’s health, development, or dignity.” Children who experience these forms of maltreatment often face long-lasting consequences that extend throughout their lives. These effects may include an increased risk of violence, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development, lower academic achievement, and limited employment prospects (1).

Various types of abuse—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—are strongly linked to an increased likelihood of alcohol and substance abuse. The lasting physical and psychological trauma from abuse often leads to substance use as a coping mechanism, compounded by impulsive behavior and an inability to manage stress. Adults abused as children often face challenges such as maintaining stable employment, managing financial difficulties, and coping with poor health (2).

Children who are at a heightened risk for abuse and neglect are more likely to suffer from emotional and cognitive difficulties. They may struggle with learning and concentration, and often display emotional reactions that mirror those of the adults around them. These children may express negative emotions as a way to regulate their feelings or communicate with others, often resulting in anxiety, stress, and a deep mistrust in relationships (3). The devastating effects of abuse or neglect, if unresolved, can perpetuate across generations. Those experienced maltreatment as children may unknowingly pass on similar patterns of abuse to their own children, contributing to a cycle of trauma. Parents who were victims of abuse are statistically more likely to abuse their children, and they may also develop substance use disorders later in life (4).

To break the cycle of child abuse and neglect, a coordinated approach is necessary. This requires collaboration among different support systems, such as healthcare professionals, child welfare services, and programs aimed at assisting parents. A



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multi-faceted strategy is crucial to prevent abuse and foster safe, nurturing environments for children. Through education, public awareness campaigns, and advocacy, healthcare organizations can address the underlying causes of maltreatment at societal, community, organizational, and family levels. This ensures that all children have the chance to grow up in safe and supportive environments by promoting awareness and equity regarding child abuse and neglect (5).

Child abuse and neglect are not only immediate tragedies but also have long-lasting consequences that affect the health, development, and well-being of those involved. The link between early maltreatment and future substance abuse underscores the pressing need for intervention and prevention. To stop the cycle of trauma and addiction, a coordinated, multi-dimensional approach is essential. Through increased awareness, education, and support for stronger protective systems, society can promote resilience in children and end the cycle of abuse and addiction across generations, guaranteeing that every child has the chance to flourish in a safe, nurturing environment.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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