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An overview of child abuse in Saudi Arabia

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Statement of the Problem: In Saudi Arabia, child abuse still having underreporting problem, and remains a common problem in the country. Professionals and public servants of all child-focused fields must combat this problem through the implementation of an awareness program to increase reporting and easy detection of abuse.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The search engines used for this review were: PubMed databases, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The research limited results to within Saudi Arabia and utilized the following keywords: maltreatment, child protective services, reporting child abuse, child abuse types.

Findings & Conclusion: Child abuse is a public health concern globally, as well as within Saudi Arabia. A reporting system to indicate its prevalence was introduced to Saudi Arabia in 2010, and served as the first annual registry report for the region. Since that time, through the efforts of the National Family Safety Program, the reporting data has improved. According to current literature, physical abuse and neglect are currently the most common types of abuse, followed by sexual and emotional abuse. Parents are the most common perpetrators. The most common risk factors include: large family size of more than six people, paternal unemployment, and/or divorced parents. Although child protection teams now exist and notify the social protection department, police, and regional principals, under-recognition and under-reporting continue to pose major challenges.

Recommendations: The recommendations put forth at the conclusion of this review are as follows: first, public child abuse prevention programs must be implemented which apply to all thirteen regions of Saudi Arabia, including rural areas. Secondly, health care providers should receive training to recognize and report child abuse through implementation and follow-through on guidelines, workshops, and mandatory training programs. Additionally, it is important to implement a large-scale parenting education program for parents, as they are the most common perpetrators. Implementation of school curriculum which teaches children how to protect themselves from abuse will also be vital. Finally, to conduct and evaluate the effectiveness of these preventive programs regularly, with emphasis on sustainability and regular follow ups as key elements of a successful program.

Biography

Nehal Shata MD, MPH began her career in Public Health as a Paediatrics Teaching Assistant at King-Abdulaziz University Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She obtained her Master of Public Health at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Her capstone project on child abuse outlined an overview of the situation in Saudi Arabia. After completing her degree, she did a year at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine as a Post-doctoral Research Fellow investigating how sleep disturbance during critical illness modulates outcomes in children. She is currently a Pediatric Resident at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, where she will continue her work as a Child Advocate in Public Health.

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