

The Scars of Childhood: Exploring the Impact of Emotional Abuse on Subjective Well-being and Suspicion in Institutionalized Adults (Male and Female) in Kolkata

Anwesha Majumder¹, Dr.Papia Mukherjee²

¹PhD scholar, Department of Psychology, ²Corresponding Author&Assistant Professor

^{1,2}Swami Vivekananda University



Abstract:

This paper examines the impact of childhood emotional abuse on the subjective well-being and suspicion levels of institutionalized adults (both male and female) in Kolkata, India. It draws information from various recent secondary sources, and a discussion on how emotional maltreatment during formative years leads to chronic psychological issues and contributes to the development of distrust in interpersonal relationships is carried out.

Keywords: Childhood abuse, emotional abuse, Kolkata, Institutional males, Institutional females, subjective well-being, suspicion

1. Introduction:

Childhood emotional abuse tends to leave a lasting effect and scar on the well-being, and also significantly increases the possibility of the development of heightened senses of suspicion. It tends to undermine the ability of children to trust, which may lead to complexities and difficulties in terms of developing strong and secure relationships. This potentially contributes to negative mental health effects such as anxiety, depression, and so on. It is also to be noted that childhood abuse and emotional distress may also have a significant negative impact on the perception, opinions and thought processes of the victim when they turn into adults and many researches and studies suggest that history of emotional abuse in childhood tend to make the individuals more likely to interpret some ambiguous scenarios and events as “malevolent”. The children who have been through abuse would have lower “life satisfaction” when they grow up and would not be able to be fully happy in joyous moments, and may also carry a feeling of worthlessness within

them. Many studies suggest that emotional abuse is also strongly associated with increased risks of developing mental health issues, and the victims may face difficulty in managing their emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, and stress. The children with histories of childhood abuse are also more vulnerable to practicing substance abuse in adulthood (D'arcy-Bewick et al., 2022; Barra et al., 2022).

2. Methodology:

The review paper has taken into consideration several secondary resources such as articles, journals, and research papers carried out by several scholars. The research explored and studied various papers in detail to find insightful information about the impact of emotional abuse in childhood on subject well-being of the institutionalised males and females. Recent studies have been reviewed, and insightful information and data have been extracted from them about both males and females in the Kolkata region. These findings and the insights have been further compared and contrasted, and some findings have been developed further, aligning with the main area of study.

Data analysis technique:

The study has taken into consideration a qualitative data analysis technique using thematic analysis, where various themes are generated, aligning with the core topic and the aim of the review. Critical discussion based on the review of pre-existing literature has been carried out corresponding to each theme. It is one of the most understandable, easy, and simple ways of extracting qualitative data from pre-existing studies.

Validity and generalizability:

The review paper is based on pre-existing research studies and literature carried out by reputed scholars. It should be noted that the study is generalizable and also valid. The review considered only the recent and most relevant sources for collecting and extracting data, and it thus ensured alignment with the contemporary psychological and social understanding of emotional support and personal agency. According to Akintunde et al. (2024), it should be noted that emotional abuse is referred to as behaviours like humiliation, continuous criticism, emotional neglect, isolation, threats, and so on. This may also typically involve some persistent patterns of behavior in the caregivers that further tend to diminish the child's self-worth and esteem, making them feel unsafe. González-García et al. (2020) further emphasised the fact that within India, abuse mostly tends to occur in conjunction with other socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental history of illness and mental health issues, abandonment, and so on, and these factors further heighten the possibilities of institutionalization in the later life stages.

3. Literature review:

Emotional abuse: definition and impact:

It should be noted that the introduction to childhood emotional abuse (CHA) can be referred to as a pervasive form of "maltreatment" that tends to lack any kind of physical evidence; however, it tends to significantly inflict some strong and intense psychological and cognitive harm. In India, particularly within the urban cities such as Kolkata, a large number of institutionalized adults have reported that they have faced emotional abuse in their childhood in terms of extreme neglect, verbal assault, psychological manipulation, and so on. These kinds of experiences further leave lasting negative implications for the psychological and mental health of the adult, especially within the sheltered institutions where there is limited emotional support and personal agency (D'arcy-Bewick et al., 2022). According to Gama et al.

(2021), it should be noted that emotional abuse is referred to as behaviours like humiliation, continuous criticism, emotional neglect, isolation, threats, and so on. This may also typically involve some persistent patterns of behavior in the caregivers that further tend to diminish the child's self-worth and esteem, making them feel unsafe. Barra et al. (2022) further emphasised the fact that within India, abuse mostly tends to occur in conjunction with other socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental history of illness and mental health issues, abandonment, and so on, and these factors further heighten the possibilities of institutionalization in the later life stages. Goodall and Sawrikar, (2023) conducted a study using Rating of Emotional Abuse in Childhood (REACH) Questionnaire which revealed that history of emotional abuse need to be assessed with regard to threatening and devaluing CEA as they represent some exclusive dimensions of CEA despite they mostly co-occur.

Subjective well-being of adults who underwent emotional abuse in childhood:

It should be noted that subject well-being is broadly defined as self-evaluation of an individual's life satisfaction in terms of the presence of various positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, motivation, and so on absence of all kinds of negative emotions, and anger, stress, and sorrow. A study by Danese and Widom (2023) confirmed that Emotional abuse in childhood tends to disrupt the components of subjective well-being of individuals by diminishing their self-esteem, their emotional regulation, and also their interpersonal trust. In Kolkata, there are many institutions for adults who are dealing with various mental and cognitive issues, such as "Caring Minds", "Bansdroni Freedom Welfare Society", "Angikar Wellness Foundation", "Kolkata Alive and Rising Foundation", and so on. However, in most of the institutionalised settings, emotional warmth and personalised care are limited, and these challenges are further more significant in the absence of this care and warmth. The study by Berzenski and Yates, (2019) had further confirmed through a developmental process analysis that emotional abuse is a stronger predictor of "relationship violences" as compared to other subtypes of maltreatments. Moreover, according to Riggs (2019), it is important to note that amongst the institutional adults, suspicion and mistrust are considered to be a constant cognitive and emotional stance, which is further categorised by the expectation of betrayal, harm, and inappropriate behaviours and habits. Further, the study by Bosquet Enlow et al. (2018), it can also be said that the survivors of emotional abuse, especially within institutional settings, mostly undergo an increased level of distrust and vigilance towards others. The BBC Subjective Well-Being Scale (BBC-SWB) is a great tool to measure of subjective well-being in the general population which consists of 24 questions and a finding suggested that most abuse often start from home (BBC, 2024).

Gender differences in terms of the impact of childhood emotional abuse:

The recent researches and studies also confirm the fact that gender also tends to have a great role in shaping the impact of childhood emotional abuse. Male survivors often have the tendency to socialise to suppress vulnerabilities, which leads to anger, emotional numbness, and also some anti-social behaviours. Also, the male victims are comparatively more likely to externalise the symptoms and also use to demonstrate distrust via withdrawal and aggression, often underdiagnosed because of stigma regarding the emotional sufferings of the male institutional adults. Furthermore, in the case of female survivors, they tend to internalize the abuse and which results in lowered self-esteem and depression as well as anxiety disorders. As per the comparative study carried out by Fernandes et al. (2021), the victim of childhood abuse also tends to show a high level of interpersonal suspicion, especially within the male-dominating institution, and most of the females are at heightened risk of re-victimization because of submissiveness and due to

the fear of losing in a relationship. Roy (2024) has conducted a study that found that the various institutionalised women in Kolkata have predominantly lower self-esteem and a high level of interpersonal suspicion as compared to the non-institutionalised women, provided all of them belong to the same or similar social and economic backgrounds. This is because individuals with a history of undergoing emotional abuse, within an institutional setting, often need to exhibit a higher level of vigilance and distrust towards others. As per Bharat et al. (2016) and Gallo et al. (2018), the institutionalised males are more prone to antisocial behaviours, whilst the females may exhibit issues like emotional withdrawal and fear. The gender-based stereotypes in the Indian society, such as suppressing men's emotions and considering women as "vulnerable", may also further complicate the patterns.

Psychological frameworks and the context of Kolkata:

Referring to the attachment theory by Bowlby stated that emotional abuse in childhood may disrupt the formation of secure attachments within the social realm and hence cause issues like anxious relational styles, avoidant nature, and so on. As per Thompson et al. (2022), the adults having these types of childhood histories tend to face difficulty in trusting others and in terms of managing emotional intimacies. Furthermore, aligning with the ecological systems theory, it can be said that the systematic neglect is often persistent within institutional settings and may tend to exacerbate the effects of past flashbacks of abuse. As per Deb and Ray (2022), in most of the institutes, there are rigid and strict routines to follow, an absence of strong emotional responsiveness, as well as sometimes inadequate counselling services. In the context of Kolkata, there scarcity of specially trained and experienced mental health professionals, especially within institutions like adult care homes that further tend to limit emotional healing and may remind one of past abuses. As per Jahangir et al. (2019) and Modi and Hai, (2019), trust becomes the main survival strategy for individuals in such contexts, and thus they start maintaining emotional distances in order to protect themselves from any kind of cognitive harm. Thus, it is important that the institutional structures of Kolkata should prioritize safety and emotional support over routine, which is often absent in many institutes.

4. Conclusion:

Emotional abuse may leave enduring psychological scars that may show repercussions in adulthood, especially amongst institutionalized individuals. In the Kolkata region, the convergence of a lack of emotional responsiveness and support of historical childhood emotional trauma may lead to poor subjective well-being, and males may develop anti-social behaviour, and women may become withdrawn and isolated from the societal realm. It is thus important for the institutes to foster emotional healing. Subject well-being of these individuals can further be enhanced through trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and context-specific approaches.

References

1. Akintunde, T.Y., Isangha, S.O., Iwuagwu, A.O. and Adedeji, A., 2024. Adverse childhood experiences and subjective well-being of migrants: Exploring the role of resilience and gender differences. *Global Social Welfare*, 11(3), pp.243-255.
2. Barra, S., Aebi, M., d'Huart, D., Schmeck, K., Schmid, M. and Boonmann, C., 2022. Adverse childhood experiences, personality, and crime: distinct associations among a high-risk sample of institutionalized youth. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(3), p.1227.
3. BBC., 2024. "The scale of abuse" | Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31090416>
4. Berzenski, S.R. and Yates, T.M., 2019. A developmental process analysis of the contribution of childhood emotional abuse to relationship violence. In *The effect of childhood emotional maltreatment on later intimate relationships* (pp. 180-203). Routledge.
5. Bharat, A., Jain, N., Gupta, B.K. and Bharat, V., 2016. To determine the pattern and effects of verbal, emotional and physical abuse in both sexes. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 3(4), pp.818-25.
6. Bosquet Enlow, M., Englund, M.M. and Egeland, B., 2018. Maternal childhood maltreatment history and child mental health: Mechanisms in intergenerational effects. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 47(sup1), pp.S47-S62.
7. Danese, A. and Widom, C.S., 2023. Associations between objective and subjective experiences of childhood maltreatment and the course of emotional disorders in adulthood. *JAMA psychiatry*, 80(10), pp.1009-1016.
8. D'arcy-Bewick, S., Terracciano, A., Turiano, N., Sutin, A.R., Long, R. and O'Súilleabháin, P.S., 2022. Childhood abuse and neglect, and mortality risk in adulthood: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 134, p.105922.
9. Deb, S. and Ray, M., 2022. Child abuse and neglect in India, risk factors and protective measures. In *Child safety, welfare and well-being: Issues and challenges* (pp. 47-72). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
10. Fernandes, G., Fernandes, M., Vaidya, N., De Souza, P., Plotnikova, E., Geddes, R., Holla, B., Sharma, E., Benegal, V. and Choudhry, V., 2021. Prevalence of child maltreatment in India and its association with gender, urbanisation and policy: a rapid review and meta-analysis protocol. *BMJ open*, 11(8), p.e044983.
11. Gallo, E.A.G., Munhoz, T.N., de Mola, C.L. and Murray, J., 2018. Gender differences in the effects of childhood maltreatment on adult depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Child abuse & neglect*, 79, pp.107-114.
12. Gama, C.M.F., Portugal, L.C.L., Gonçalves, R.M., de Souza Junior, S., Vilete, L.M.P., Mendlowicz, M.V., Figueira, I., Volchan, E., David, I.A., de Oliveira, L. and Pereira, M.G., 2021. The invisible scars of emotional abuse: a common and highly harmful form of childhood maltreatment. *BMC psychiatry*, 21, pp.1-14.
13. González-García, C., Águila-Otero, A., Montserrat, C., Lázaro, S., Martín, E., del Valle, J.F. and Bravo, A., 2022. Subjective well-being of young people in therapeutic residential care from a gender perspective. *Child Indicators Research*, 15(1), pp.249-262.

14. Goodall, K. and Sawrikar, V., 2023. The Rating of Emotional Abuse in Childhood (REACH) Questionnaire: A new self-report measure assessing history of childhood emotional abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 146, p.106498.
15. Jahangir, S., Nikhil, P.N.N., Bailey, A. and Datta, A., 2018. Contextualizing elder abuse and neglect in institutional and home settings: Case studies from India. *Abuse and neglect of the elderly in India*, pp.175-188.
16. Riggs, S.A., 2019. Childhood emotional abuse and the attachment system across the life cycle: What theory and research tell us. In *The effect of childhood emotional maltreatment on later intimate relationships* (pp. 5-51). Routledge.
17. Roy, S., 2024. Care Crises the Urban Middle-Class Elderly Women in India are Facing. In *Women in Bengal* (pp. 47-56). Routledge.
18. Schlenso-Schuster, F., Keil, J., Von Klitzing, K., Gniewosz, G., Schulz, C.C., Schlesier-Michel, A., Mayer, S., Stadelmann, S., Döhnert, M., Klein, A.M. and Sierau, S., 2024. From maltreatment to psychiatric disorders in childhood and adolescence: the relevance of emotional maltreatment. *Child maltreatment*, 29(1), pp.142-154.
19. Thompson, R.A., Simpson, J.A. and Berlin, L.J., 2022. Taking perspective on attachment theory and research: Nine fundamental questions. *Attachment & human development*, 24(5), pp.543-560.