

What are the causes of child abuse?

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There is not any single fact which causes child abuse; abuse usually occurs in families where there is a combination of risk factors. Abuse and neglect occur most often in families who are under pressure and lack support. Most abuse other than sexual abuse occurs in families to which some, or all, of the following apply:

- Poverty
- Lack of education
- Serious marital problems
- Frequent changes of addresses
- Violence between family members
- Lack of support from the extended family
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Unemployment
- Inadequate housing

In some cases the abuser may also display the following:

- Very high expectations of the child and what the child should achieve
- The parent may have been abused as a child
- A lack of knowledge and skills in bringing up children
- Low self esteem and self confidence
- Depression
- Alcohol and/or drug abuse
- Mental or physical ill health
- Work pressures

Certain community attitudes may encourage child abuse. These include:

- Acceptance of the use of violence and force
- Acceptance of physical punishment of children
- Acceptance of parents "ownership" of children and their right to treat children as they see fit
- Racism
- Inequality between men and women

Who are the abusers?

With child sexual abuse, the overwhelming majority of abusers are male, and the majority of victims are females although many boys are also abused. Sexual abuse is associated with attitudes to women and sex that men learn from a young age as well as unequal power relationships between men and women and adults and children.

Both men and women commit physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. It often depends on which parent spends most time with the child. Child abuse usually takes place in the home with someone that the child knows rather than with strangers.