Relationship of Child Abuse and Attachment Disorder

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Aim of the presentation

- To understand Child abuse
- To understand Attachment Disorder
- To understand the link between Child abuse and Attachment Disorder
- To understand the impact of child abuse.
- Take home message.
Child Abuse

- The mother of almost all abuses is home.
- If you want to raise a resilient and self confident child, provide your presence.
- If you want to protect your child, provide unconditional love and care.
- If you want to spoil your child provide them unconditional presents.
What is Child Abuse?

- The mistreatment of children at the hands of parents or caretakers has a long history.
- For centuries, this behaviour was protected by laws that gave children few, if any, rights.
- Children were treated as property owned by the parents.
- Parents, particularly fathers, had great liberty over the treatment and discipline of children.
- Our history is rich of child abuse by parents/caregivers.
- "Child Abuse has been defined as an act, or failure to act, on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in the death, serious physical or emotional harm, Sexual Abuse, or exploitation of a child, or which places the child in an imminent risk of serious harm" (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g).

- These laws put CHILD FIRST.
- These laws can be considered as contradictory to the traditional method to disciplining a child.
- Wadeema law is passed in UAE to protect children in 2016.
Types of Abuse

- **Emotional**
  - Constant belittling, shaming, and humiliating, naming and negative comparison. (Case of John...always compared with his brother (you are a blob).

- **Physical**
  - Severe discipline, such as using a belt on a child, or physical punishment.
  - ASD child...spoon

- **Sexual**
  - Very complicated; doesn't always involve body contact; Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is sexually abusive. (Watching inappropriate material) UAE cases.

- **Neglect**
  - Failing to provide basic needs: Adequate food, clothing, hygiene, or supervision.
  - A parent might become physically or mentally unable to care for a child.
  - Alcohol or drug abuse may seriously impair the ability to keep a child safe
Impact of Child Abuse and Neglect.

- **Child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars.** *Scars* might be physical, but emotional scarring has long lasting effects throughout life:
  - Damaging a child’s sense of self.
  - Ability to have healthy relationships. If you can’t trust your parents, who can you trust?
  - Ability to function at home, at work and at school.
  - Abused children cannot express emotions safely and may come out in unexpected ways.
  - **Core feelings of being “worthless” or “damaged.”** If you’ve been told over and over again as a child that you are stupid or no good, it is very difficult to overcome these core feelings.
The core element of all types of child abuse is the emotional effect on the child. Children need predictability, structure, clear boundaries, and the knowledge that their parents are looking out for their safety. Abused children cannot predict how their parents will act. World for them can be unpredictable, frightening place with no rules. Whether the abuse is a slap, a harsh comment, stony silence, or not knowing if there will be dinner on the table tonight, the end result is a child that feel unsafe, uncared for, and alone.
The most important property of humankind is the capacity to form and maintain relationships. These relationships are absolutely necessary for any of us to survive, learn, work, love and procreate. Human relationships take many forms but the most intense, most pleasurable and most painful are those relationships with family, friends and loved ones. Within this inner circle of intimate relationships, we are bonded to each other with "Emotional Glue" - bonded with love.
What is attachment Disorder?

- The word attachment is frequently used by mental health, child development and child protection workers but it has slightly different meanings in these different contexts.
- In the field of infant development, attachment refers to a special and unique bond that is formed between mother and/or primary caregiver.
- The attachment bond has several key elements:
  - An attachment bond is an enduring emotional relationship with a specific person.
  - The relationship brings safety, comfort, soothing and pleasure.
  - Loss or threat of loss of the person evokes intense distress.
Attachment in Animals

- Harry Frederick Harlow (October 31, 1905 – December 6, 1981) was an American psychologist best known for his maternal-separation, dependency needs, and social isolation experiments on rhesus monkeys, which manifested the importance of caregiving and companionship to social and cognitive development.
  - He created inanimate surrogate mothers for the rhesus infants from wire and wool.
  - In one situation, the wire mother held a bottle with food, and the cloth mother held no food.
  - In the other situation, the cloth mother held the bottle, and the wire mother had nothing.
  - Harlow next chose to investigate if the infants had a preference for bare-wire mothers or cloth-covered mothers.
  - Overwhelmingly, the infant preferred spending their time clinging to the cloth mother. Even when only the wire mother could provide nourishment, the monkeys visited her only to feed.
  - Harlow concluded that there was much more to the mother-infant relationship than milk, and that this "contact comfort" was essential to the psychological development and health of infant monkeys and children.
  - It was this research that gave strong, empirical support to Bowlby’s assertions on the importance of love and mother-child interaction.
James Robertson Observation

- James, a Psychiatric Social Worker (1948), made observations on separated young children in children's ward at the Central Middlesex Hospital in London.
- He was shocked by the unhappiness he saw among the youngest children, in particular those aged under 3.
- The competent, efficient doctors and nurses gave good medical care but seemed unaware of the suffering around them.
- It was presumed that children will be happy when given physical care.
- Children initially protested at separation from the parents, but then settled, becoming quiet and compliant. However, Robertson saw this as a danger signal.
- Based on several years of observations in long and short stay wards, James Robertson formed a theory of phases of response of the under 3's to a stay in hospital without the mother:
  - Protest,
  - Despair
  - Denial/Detachment (James Robertson, 1953).
Attachment Theory (Bowlby; 1907-1990)

- John Bowlby, British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, known for his theory on attachment.
- Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of a secure and trusting mother-infant bond on development and well-being.
- Attachment is described as a long-lasting psychological connection with a meaningful person that causes pleasure while interacting and soothes in times of stress.
- The quality of attachment has a critical effect on development, and has been linked to various aspects of positive functioning, such as psychological well-being.
Attachment by Classical Conditioning

1. Before conditioning
   - Food
     - Unconditioned Stimulus
   - Happy Baby
     - Unconditioned Response

2. During conditioning
   - Mother + Food
     - Neutral Stimulus
   - Unconditioned Stimulus
   - Unconditioned Response

3. After conditioning
   - Mother
     - Conditioned Stimulus
   - Happy Baby
     - Conditioned Response
Bowlby believed that children have an innate need to develop a close relationship with one main figure, usually the mother.

When this does not occur, it has negative consequences on development, causing a decline in intelligence, depression, aggression, delinquency, and affectionless psychopathy (a situation in which one is not concerned about the feelings of others).
Attachment Disorder

- This can be identified as early as at the first birthday.
- The signs can be one or more of the following concerns:
  - Detached and unresponsive behaviour
  - Difficulty being comforted
  - Preoccupied and/or defiant behaviour
  - Inhibition or hesitancy in social interactions
  - Being too close with strangers
  - Severe colic and/or feeding difficulties
  - Failure to gain weight
Types of Attachment Disorder

Children who have attachment issues can develop two possible types of disorders:

- Reactive Attachment Disorder.
- Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder.
Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

- Children with RAD are less likely to interact with other people because of negative experiences with adults in their early years.
- Difficulty to calm down when stressed and do not look for comfort from their caregivers when upset.
- May have little to no emotions when interacting with others.
- Appear unhappy, irritable, sad, or scared while having normal activities with their caretaker.
DSED

- Children with DSED do not appear fearful when meeting strangers.
- Overly friendly, walk up to strangers to talk or even hug them.
- Younger children may allow strangers to pick them up, feed them, or give them toys to play with.
- When in a stranger situation, they do not check with their parents or caregivers, and will often go with someone they do not know.
Reasons

- The exact cause of attachment disorders is not known, but research suggests that inadequate care-giving is a possible cause.
  - Physical or emotional abuse or neglect.
  - Severe problems or difficulties in their early relationships.
  - Inadequate care in an institutional setting or other out-of-home placement.
  - Multiple traumatic losses or changes in their primary caregiver.
- The physical, emotional and social problems associated with attachment disorders may persist as the child grows older.
Child Abuse and Attachment Disorder

- These children have extreme difficulty attaining normal developmental milestones.
- They need special treatment and support.
- Children with pre-existing attachment problems are often more prone to be victimized and abused.
- This is due to their propensity to keep secrets, lack of boundaries with strangers, and often seeking attention from adults.
Attachment and mental health

- Children with insecure attachments are more likely to develop psychopathology in childhood and in adulthood.

- Children with an insecure attachment are more likely than other children to live in high-risk families and environments, thus, placing them at additional risk for the development of later psychopathology.
Attachment and mental health

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) reviewed hundreds of cross-sectional, longitudinal, and prospective studies of both clinical and non-clinical samples and found that attachment insecurity was common among people with a wide variety of mental disorders, ranging from mild distress to severe personality disorders and even schizophrenia.

Consistently compatible results have also been reported in many other recent studies.
Case 1

- A child 3 ½ year old was referred to our service.
- Mother was having mental health issues
- The child was with the child care and social worker were involved with the family.
- The child was transferred from one foster care to another.
- There was no attachment developed with neither her biological parent or foster care.
- The child had difficulties with communication, social relationship and motor coordination.
- She could speak but would ask the same question again.
- She could go with any stranger.
- She is attending a special school with ASD diagnosis
Case 2

- A boy 4 year old was referred to us.
- Mother had psychological problem and had no contact with the child.
- The child was under the child care and social worker were involved with the family.
- The child was transferred to a nice family with strong family ties and traditions.
- The child was presenting difficulties with social interaction and communication and he was having difficulties with coordination.
- He was quarried with ASD but I thought that we should wait until he gets adjusted within the new family environment.
- There was a big improvement across all areas in a very short period of time.
- He was attending a mainstream school.
“A child who is being abused by the parents, does not stop loving them but stops to love him/herself.”
References

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