The forensic evaluation of the emotional maltreatment of children

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Emotional Maltreatment – AAP definition

“A repeated pattern of extreme incident(s) of caretaker behaviour that thwart the child’s basic psychological needs (safety, socialization, emotional and social support, cognitive stimulation, respect) and convey that a child is worthless, defective, damaged goods, unloved, unwanted, endangered, primarily useful in meeting another’s needs and/or expendable”

Intention to harm not required
• Involves a ‘**relationship**’ between the child and parent – a repeated pattern of damaging interactions that becomes typical of the relationship
  • Undermines development and socialisation
  • Incorporates negative ideas into sense of self
  • Increases risk of psychopathology including violence
• Usually chronic, pervasive
• May be triggered by alcohol/drugs – may be single extreme incident
• “**Soul murder**” – pervasively and insidiously destructive
Co-existence of EA with other abuse types

- UK data
  - 81% neglected children also emotionally abused
  - 81% physically abused children also emotionally abused
- Argument that we should acknowledge existence of E.A to raise its profile of harm, therefore we need to;
  - **DEFINE** emotional abuse
  - Categorize the **TYPE/s** of emotional abuse occurring
  - State the **EFFECT/S** – cumulative harm
  - Make recommendations

*Glaser et al. Emotional abuse and emotional neglect: antecedents, operational definitions and consequences*
Concepts surrounding emotional abuse
Ecological model of child EM – humans as psychological beings’

To be loved and cared for
To be respected as unique and valued

To be safe from danger
To be safe from racial prejudice
Not to be imprisoned, detained, persecuted

To love and care for others
To have control in one’s life

To be safe from danger and fear
Not to be shunned, bullied, isolated
To be protected from corrupting influences

Basic human right
Affects evolving capacities, identity and behaviour
Ecological model of child EM – risk factors

Large ratio children/adults
Father absence
Aberrant parent substitute
Low extended family support
FV, substance abuse
Mental illness

Tolerance to FV
Poor view of child rights

High maintenance stages
Disability
Temperament
Negative mood/behaviour

Low expectation for parenting
Inadequate prevention/corrective response to violence
Poverty
Substance abuse, criminality etc

Basic human right
Affects evolving capacities, identity and behaviour
Tiers of concern as applied to EM

**Tier 0** – social and environmental risk factors

**Tier 1** – caregiver risk factors – drugs, alcohol, mental health

**Tier 2** – harmful child-caregiver interaction – categories of EM

**Tier 3** – child’s functioning of concern – indicators of impairment – “harm”

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Glaser, D Child abuse and neglect 2011
### Ways of thinking about emotional abuse – theory to practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harmful parental attributes (tier 1)</th>
<th>Forms of adult ill-treatment (tier 2)</th>
<th>Indicators of impairment (tier 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Negative attributes</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family violence</td>
<td>Exploiting/corrupting</td>
<td>Emotional state – depression, anxiety, suicide and self-harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse</td>
<td>Terrorizing</td>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>Denying emotional responsiveness</td>
<td>Developmental/educational attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolating/failure to promote socialization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally inappropriate interactions/expectations/unreliable or inconsistent parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to recognize boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Negative attributes- Spurning/rejecting/belittling | • Belittling/degrading/hostility/rejection of child/sig others  
| • Shaming/ridiculing/humiliating the child – eg normal emotions  
| • Singling out  
| • Spurning, damaged due to abuse, deserves abuse |
| Terrorising | • Exposing to frightening, dangerous, chaotic situations  
| • Threatening to abandon  
| • Threatening or perpetrating violence to child/loved one  
| • Rigid parenting with threats if expectations are not met |
| Exploiting/corrupting | • Modelling, encouraging, permitting antisocial behaviour  
| • Modelling, encouraging, permitting trust betrayal or cruelty to another  
| • Incest, sexual grooming |
| Isolating | • Confining the child/limiting freedom  
| • Restricting social interactions including as a result of EN or physical neglect |
| Developmentally inappropriate expectations/interactions | • Undermining child’s important relationships  
| • Parentification  
| • Dominance, coercion, intrusiveness, double binds, falsehoods  
| • Rigid, harsh, inconsistent parenting |
| Emotional unresponsiveness/neglect | • Detached due to incapacitation/lack of motivation  
| • Failure to express warmth, affection, love  
| • Inattentive to child’s needs to be safe and secure |
| Failure to recognise boundaries | • Factitious illness by proxy  
| • Using child in inter-parental disputes |
Categorization and inter-relationship of neglect and EA

Physical/environmental
Medical
Abandonment
Neglect
Supervisory
Educational/developmental

Emotional

Denying emotional responsiveness

Negative attributes
Terrorizing
Failure to recognise boundaries

Emotional maltreatment
Isolating
Inappropriate developmental expectations/overprotection
Exploiting/corrupting
“Emotional abuse and emotional neglect: antecedents, operational definitions and consequences”

Glaser et al 2001
## Harmful parental attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental attribute</th>
<th>% of children in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness including suicide attempt/threat</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family violence</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol and/or drug abuse</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Forms of ill-treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of adult ill-treatment</th>
<th>% of children in sample affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally inappropriate interactions (inability to control, inappropriate impositions and exposures, overprotection)</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denigration/belittling/spurning/rejection</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally unavailability/neglect</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using child for adult’s emotional needs - parentification</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mis-socialisation</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator of impairment in development - HARM</td>
<td>% of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional state</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* unhappy/low self esteem/fear 38%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Oppositional 26%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental/educational attainment</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical state</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* physically neglected/unkempt 18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (sexualized behaviour)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Indicators of Impairment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Impairment</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No domain</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 domain</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 domains</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 domains</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 domains</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 domains</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 domains</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes

• Known to services for mean length of time of 4.06 years prior to being registered
• Mean age higher for registration for EA than other abuse forms
• High rate of removal from home – indicative of serious harm resulting from EA
• Good prognosis when child re-homed
• Parental acknowledgment of EA associated with better prognosis
Cumulative harm – what happens to these children?

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – must consider the effects of cumulative patterns of harm on a child’s safety and development sec 10 (3) e
- Complex trauma
  - Disturbed attachment and affect regulation
  - Shifts in emotional states and behavior
  - Aggressive behavior and self-endangering behaviors
  - Self-hatred, self-blame, feelings of ineffectiveness
  - Disturbances in memory and attention
  - Disturbances in inter-personal relationships
  - Despair, suicidal preoccupation, risk taking
  - Somatisation
  - Anxiety and personality disorders
What the children say

• Long term harm is more likely to result from emotional abuse than physical harm

• The personal meaning and perception of the child who experiences violence and abuse is weighted more heavily by the child than an actual injury in relation to the psychological distress

_Cichetti and Toth 2000, Levy and Orlans 1998_
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The assessment of the emotionally abused child
Recognise and define emotional maltreatment

- Consider causes for child's presentation/concerns in functioning

- Poor mental health
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Family violence
- Caregiver Hx of abuse

- Categories If none identified, is there an alternative cause..?

What are the forms of carer ill-treatment?

- Behaviour/Emotional state
- Developmental/educational attainment
- Peer relationships
- Physical state

What are the identifiable current or future harms?

- Behaviour/Emotional state
- Developmental/educational attainment
- Peer relationships
- Physical state

Consider...

- Psychological support/education/Family-based therapies/support
- NGO's in-home support programs
- Rehab/behaviour change programs/parental mental health assessments
- Developmental/Paediatric assessment
- Full-time childcare
- Trial of capacity to change/alternative placement
- Identify resilience promoting factors

Remember social/community Fx
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EA behaviour type</th>
<th>Information gathering (child, carer, others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative attributes</td>
<td>Ask child about feelings of worth, safety, being loved, feeling happy, opportunities for socialisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorising</td>
<td>Ask about family violence, discipline in the family, who gets angry and why, what happens when carers get angry, feelings of fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrupting or exploiting</td>
<td>Child victims of sexual exploitation, ask about drug use at home, inappropriate knowledge of drugs of abuse and effects of alcohol intoxication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreliable/inconsistent parenting</td>
<td>Ask child where they feel safe, who makes them feel safe, where they like to be, who cares for them, is child’s wellbeing a priority?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolating</td>
<td>Ask child about daily tasks, who performs them, how they are done, who prepares food, who cares for younger children, role at home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Denying of emotional responsiveness - emotional neglect | Security of attachment (warmth and love)  
Relationship with carers (reliably responsive)  
Is child left alone/abandoned?  
Changes of primary caregiver? Stable placement? |
| Failure to recognise boundaries                     |                                                                                   |
Words that count.....

• "it is a time for us to remind ourselves that our youngest, smallest citizens do have an emotional life of their own which is every bit as valid, important and vulnerable as that of older, bigger people"
References & resources

• Emotional abuse and emotional neglect: antecedents, operational definitions and consequences; Glaser D et al 2015
• Understanding the effects of maltreatment on brain development; Child Welfare Information Gateway April 2015
• The effects of child maltreatment on the developing brain; Glaser D; Medico-legal journal 2014 Vol 82 (3) 97-111
• The neuroendocrinological sequelae of stress during brain development: the impact of child abuse and neglect; Panzer ; African Journal of psychiatry Feb 2008

• www.developingchild.harvard.edu
• www.childtrauma.org
• www.nctsn.org