

Child Abuse in Low-Income Families in the US

Abstract

Child abuse is more prevalent in low-income families when compared to other populations in the United States. The global prevalence of this issue is at 22.3%, and the people living in poverty experience abuse as children more often when compared to others (Lively et al., 2017). Among the effects of child abuse on a person's wellbeing, there are mental health problems, including trauma and low resilience to suicidal behavior. Additionally, physical health problems, for instance, chronic inflammation, are also associated with child abuse. However, there is no single intervention strategy that would target child abuse mitigation, which was tested and proven effective by multiple studies because this issue requires more research to define the exact causes. This study examines the different causes of child abuse in low-income families in the United States.

Child Abuse in Low-Income Families: Causes and Impact on Designing Interventions

A problem under discussion is child abuse that occurs in low-income families. The purpose is to define child abuse, examine scholarly research on its prevalence, causes, and impact on the child's future. The research question for this paper is—what factors should be targeted to mitigate the effect of child abuse on the person's future? The hypothesis is that child abuse in low-income families occurs more often than in middle-class families, and the factors that contribute to this prevalence should be addressed to resolve this issue. A gap in research is a comprehensive analysis of causes that lead to child abuse because the understanding of this would help design effective interventions. Child abuse in low-income families is a multi-faced problem, and factors such as social environment, history of parents' abuse, social support, and others, which can be targeted when designing interventions.

Literature Review

Child abuse leads to a trauma that can cause mental health problems in the future, and the most significant is suicidal behavior, which is why it is vital to design and implement social care interventions. In a study by Allbaugh et al. (2017), the researchers focused on the resilience to suicidal behavior connected to childhood trauma in African American women. The experience of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as reported by 179 women, has a link to lower suicidal behavior resilience (Allbaugh et al., 2017). The study's goal was to examine the causes of suicidal intentions of African American women from low-income families to design remedies that can help treat them. The results show that any type of abuse during childhood is associated with lower resilience to suicidal behaviors.

Low-income families often live in communities that expose children and adults to violence and trauma, which affect parenting behaviors. Cross et al. (2019) examined a sample of low-income families to determine what factors lead to problematic parenting and child abuse as a result. The authors focused on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trauma exposure as

primary causes. Cross et al. (2019) examine the population, which predominantly African-American and low-income. The results suggest that maternal trauma and PTSD symptoms are positively associated with self-reported child abuse, meaning that in these low-income families, mothers who experienced traumatic events are at a higher risk of abusing their children. The hypothesis in this research was that in low-income communities, parents are at a higher risk of developing trauma in either childhood or adulthood when compared to other communities (Cross et al., 2019). This exposure causes mental health problems, predisposing parents to child abuse, as the result of this study confirms.

There are interventions capable of lowering the risk of child abuse in high-risk families. The highest risk of abuse is associated with low-income, and the majority of interventions target this population. Lively et al. (2017) state that parents who were abused are at risk of behaving in the same way with their children, as shown by studies on high-risk families. The authors report the global prevalence of child abuse at 22.6% (Lively et al., 2017). Moreover, the consequences include mental health and physical health problems, such as chronic inflammation or asthma. As Levey et al. (2017) conclude, home visits, early interventions starting during pregnancy, and lasting for at least two years can help reduce the risk of child abuse. Hence, outside intervention is needed to reduce the prevalence of child abuse in low-income families.

Within high-income families, child abuse is mitigated by community-level factors, unlike in low-income neighborhoods. Maguire-Jack and Font (2017) examine the individual and neighborhood level risks that impact the occurrence of child neglect and child abuse based on a population of 3,000 families from California. In comparison between high income and low-income families, the protective environment within the neighborhood acts as a social barrier for child abuse with high-income families. However, it has no impact on families living in poverty (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017). Neighborhood-level disadvantages also have a

detrimental effect on the prevalence of child abuse in families. The main conclusion is that "individual- and neighborhood-level poverty has consistently been shown to be associated with a higher risk for child abuse" (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017, p. 215). Hence, low-income families have more prevalence of child abuse, and community-level barriers do not impact this prevalence significantly.

The cycle of abuse can continue through mothers copying this behavior when parenting their children. St-Laurent et al. (2019) examine the low-income families where mothers were abused as children to determine if this circle ends naturally or continues. Notably, among the 193 families, 73 reported being maltreated and 119 non-maltreated during childhood. The mothers who were victimized as children and continued the cycle also were at a sociodemographic risk, experienced intimate partner violence, and had no family support. Hence, there are factors impacting the likelihood of abused mothers continuing the cycle with their children, suggesting that one effect of child abuse is the risk of copying this behavior. Low-income is one risk factor associated with a higher prevalence of child abuse, but there are others. Yang and Maguire-Jack (2018) focus on cumulative risk in their research. Mainly, the findings suggest that within the 1,181 low-income families, child abuse is prevalent in families with 5 or more risk factors. This finding implies that there is a threshold of risk factors that a low-income family can tolerate to avoid child abuse. However, when the number of factors is higher than 5, this tolerance decreases significantly. One reason for this is that a family is capable of dealing with stress to a certain degree and a large number of risk factors deplete this capability. Hence, it is more effective to address multiple risks at once, rather than focusing on only one to reduce the risk of child abuse.

Methodology

This paper on child abuse is a result of the author's desk research. Hence, the methodology used was a literature review, where 6 articles published between 2016 and 2020 were located

through the library resource. The keywords for searching the articles are: “child abuse,” “low-income families child abuse,” “prevalence of child abuse in the United States.” For the purpose of this analysis, only 6 articles were selected, based on their relevance to the topic and the number of citations in other sources. The results were analyzed using textual analysis. The sample and population of this research are low-income families with children living in the United States. The procedure for this research included reviewing the articles, comparing the findings, and compiling the results.

Results

The results suggest that child abuse is highly prevalent, and the population of low-income families in the United States is at the most risk of maltreating their children. Moreover, the societal factors that would serve as barriers against child abuse in high-income communities do not prevent this abuse in low-income communities (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017). The impact of child abuse on a person's future mental health is detrimental, and one example is lower suicide resilience as examined in the population of African-American women from low-income families (Cross et al., 2019). However, low income is only one out of the many factors that impact the prevalence of child abuse, and a single-family is capable of tolerating up to 2 of these factors (Yang & Maguire-Jack, 2018). The more negative factors within a family, including the experience of abuse by the parents, the higher the likelihood of child abuse.

Discussion and Conclusion

Child abuse is associated with the income levels of the family. Moreover, it appears that this issue occurs in cycles, with parents abused as children continuing to mimic this behavior with their children, and an outside intervention can help address this problem. Some interventions reviewed in this study focus on the prenatal period and last for years after a child's birth. Moreover, this research shows that a single family can be subjected to 5 or more

adverse factors that impact child abuse behaviors. The importance of these findings is in the ability to recognize the multiple elements that child abuse consists of, which also suggests that there is no simple remedy for this problem. The programs and interventions targeting this issue should consider that past experiences of parents, trauma, social and family support, and other issues all contribute to behaviors classified as child abuse.

The implications, for instance, for social workers are that low-income families should be monitored more closely to identify the causes of child abuse early on and prevent the adverse impact on the child's behavior in the future. One potential way to continue this research is by examining the interventions for such families that can effectively prevent child abuse, for instance, educating the parents on how to treat children. In this way, the research will not only identify an issue but also offer a useful way to resolve it.

In summary, this paper presents research findings for a study on child abuse in low-income families living in the United States. This review shows that child abuse is a complex issue, but low-income is a severe risk factor that is not mitigated by other social barriers. Moreover, mothers abused as children are likely to continue this cycle and behave in a similar way with their children.

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