ETHICS IN CHILD PROTECTION: A NURSE’S PERSPECTIVE

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SDG TARGET 16.2 IN THE
2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES EACH
ONE OF US TO END ABUSE,
EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND
ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND
TORTURE AGAINST CHILDREN
Child abuse and neglect

- Occurs all the time in various forms of environment
- But goes undetected by authorities entrusted with its prevention and mitigation.
- Sometimes, the very authorities mandated to protect children are perpetrators

Rescue interventions become complex process
About 3 in 4 children or 300 million children aged 2–4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers.

WHO (2020) estimate that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years, have experienced violence or neglect in the past one year.
Consequences of child maltreatment can be devastating:

- Physically, psychologically, socially, economically and spiritually
- At individual, society, and multi-generational levels

- Preventing child maltreatment requires a multi-sectoral approach.
- Effective prevention approaches include:
  - Supporting parents
  - Teaching positive parenting skills
  - Enhancing laws to prohibit violent punishment.
  - Ongoing care of children
Nurses, as part of the health care system and institutions of care, are constantly faced with ethical dilemmas as they prevent, rescue, manage, and rehabilitate children who are at risk of or have experienced abuse and/or neglect.

Balancing ethical principles such as autonomy, beneficence and justice become very challenging.
Ethical Frameworks as the basis of care in child abuse or neglect

1. Duty based (deontological) framework - commonly used & underpins most guidelines and professional codes
   - Advocates for children to be treated as ends, *never* as means to an end
   - All interventions taken to prevent, rescue and manage child abuse and/or neglect must consider fundamental principles of Autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence, and justice.
2. Best outcomes (Consequentialist) framework proposes that the rightness or wrongness of the actions depends on the nature of their consequences.
   • Interventions are right if they result in the greatest overall good for the greatest number of people.

3. Virtue-based framework proposes that actions are based on good character traits (virtues) such as courage, kindness etc. and not bad ones (vices) such as deceit etc. This requires the nurse to demonstrate compassion.
Ethical dilemmas in child maltreatment

**Requirement** - The nurse reports to relevant authorities if there is suspicion or reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected.

The nurse’s dilemma:

- How should reporting without permission of parents, guardians, and the child be done?
- But what if the suspicion turns out to be untrue?
- What about if withholding information results in more risk / abuse / death?
- What about if the authorities will make the abuse situation worse?
- What if the parents will refuse because of culture?
* Misinforming or withholding information in research, e.g., purpose of a study from prospective participants in a child maltreatment research project?
* Using children in war & warlike situations
* Decisions on the best standard of care
* Decisions on what to disclose to families
* Handling information that may be considered confidential
* Establishing children's right to protection
Confidentiality and mandatory reporting requirements

* Intervening with drug-exposed new-borns
* Reporting maltreatment to agencies one might not have confidence in
* Reporting own colleagues / loved ones
* Reporting and requiring justice while at the same time ensuring help for the perpetrators?
Sample ethical dilemma in socially sensitive research:

- Whether information obtained in a study of children's behavior should be disclosed to parents or guardians?
  - Criminal activities, e.g., substance abuse behaviors, prostitution, sexual behaviors, violence
  - Whether to emphasize the principle of beneficence or respect for persons in determining whether or not to disclose to a parent information revealed by a child, especially if the child is an adolescent
Waiving requirements of some aspects of informed consent provided certain limits are observed—waiver of parental permission in situations when parents are not likely to act in the child's best interests.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

I NOW WELCOME
QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION