

# Studies of child neglect (Psychological abuse) and gender disparities in different socio- economic status groups

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## ABSTRACT

The present study were attempted to find out the prevalence of child neglect among children and prevalence of gender disparities in abuse across three socio-economic groups in Allahabad district. A total sample of 180 children in age group of 9-18 years from three socio-economic status families were selected using stratified random sampling technique. Sixty respondent and their parents from each socio-economic group (30 boys and 30 girls) were selected for the study. Socio-economic status scale was use to assess the socio-economic status of the respondents. Self-made interview schedule for parents and children was used to assess the prevalence of abuse. The present study indicated that child neglect was more prevalent in lower socio-economic group among boys and girls followed by middle and upper socio-economic group. Socio-economic status had a significant effect ( $P < .01$ ) and gender had a non-significant effect on the prevalence of psychological abuse. The study indicated that parents were mostly responsible for inflicting psychological abuse on children. In the present study, it can be concluded that the child neglect was prevalent among children in all the socio-economic groups and it was suggested that awareness campaigns, role of mass media, law of policies for protection of children's rights can prove to be helpful in preventing child abuse.

## INTRODUCTION

Child neglect is generally characterized by omissions in care resulting in significant harm or risk of significant harm. Neglect is frequently defined in terms of a failure to provide for the child's basic needs, such as of adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, or medical care. Children with histories of maltreatment such as physical and psychological neglect and physical

abuse are at risk of developing psychiatric problems. Such children are at risk of developing a disorganized attachment which is associated with a number of developmental problems including dissociative symptoms as well as anxiety, depressive and acting-out symptoms (Currie and Widom, 2013). The problem of child abuse and human rights violation is one of the critical matters on the international human rights agenda as abused children suffer long term physical and

psychological damage that impairs their ability to learn the socialize making it difficult for them to perform well in school and develop close and lasting friendship. Childhood neglect can negatively affect a child's long term health and physical development; intellectual and cognitive development; emotional and psychological development; and social and behavioural development (De Panfilis, 2006). Childhood neglect is the failure of a parent or guardian to provide necessary care resultant in harm or threat of harm to the child (Schumacher *et al.*, 2001). Child neglect is the inhibition of a child's physical, psychological, moral or social development due to negligence on the part of the parents, caregivers or other adults to provide the basic essentials. Child abuse, in its broadest sense, is the child being intentionally exposed to circumstances, which result in the inhibition of his/ her physical, sexual, economic or psychological development by parents, caregivers or other adults. Children who are exposed to neglect or abuse suffers from health problems such as psychological problems, developmental delay, depression, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, poor academic and work performance, learning disorders, difficulties in peer relationships or criminal tendencies. In order to mitigate its impact, the causes of child neglect and abuse should be identified and preventive measures should be taken both governmentally and as a community (Bicakci *et al.*, 2016).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

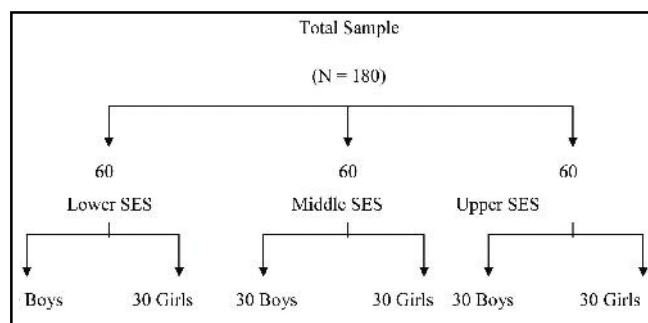
Allahabad district was purposively selected for the study as the researcher was familiar with the place. Allahabad district is divided into 21 blocks according to Allahabad Municipal Corporation. Out of which 6 blocks were selected for the present study using random sampling technique. Families belonging to the three socio-economic status *i.e.* lower, middle and upper from each block were selected using stratified random sampling technique. From each socio-economic group a total of 10 families from each block were selected, among which 5 families having an index child as a boy and 5 families having an index child as a girl were selected using purposive sampling technique.

Children in the age groups of 9-18 years and their parents belonging to the lower, middle and upper socio-economic status families were selected to study the prevalence of child abuse. A total sample of 180 children comprising of 60 children each (30 boys and 30 girls)

and their parents from lower, middle and upper socio-economic status families, respectively were selected. Parents of the same sample were taken to administer the schedule targeted for them.

### Procedure of the study:

A total sample of 180 children was purposively drawn to assess the socio-economic status using socio-economic status scale devised by Kuppuswami (1962). A self structured interview schedule was develop and administered on the selected sample of children to assess the prevalence of psychological abuse. A self made questionnaire was also developed and administered on the parents of the identified samples to assess the methods adopted by parents to deal with their children.



## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The prevalence of child neglect is highest in boys belonging to the lower socio-economic group *i.e.* 14.6 followed by middle socio-economic group *i.e.* 11.76 and upper socio-economic group where the mean values of prevalence of child neglect was 10.4 (Table 1) which may be attributed to the fact that parents who belong to lower socio-economic status are laid down with many problems like illiteracy, poverty and face a lot of economic hardships which predisposes them to abuse their children. The data also indicates the prevalence of psychological abuse as reported by parents which was highest (21.9) in lower socio-economic group followed by middle socio-economic group (17.8) and the lowest prevalence (15.7) was seen in the upper socio-economic group parents. The result are in accordance with the study carried out by Briggs and Hawkins (2005) which states that child abuse affects all social classes, there is evidence to show that the risk of abuse is higher in lower socio-economic status groups due to lower knowledge and skill base. There are differences in parental involvement across

**Table 1 : Prevalence of child neglect among boys across three socio-economic groups as reported by children and their parents**

Neglect child abuse reported by	Lower socio-economic status		Middle socio-economic status		Upper socio-economic status	
	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation
Children	14.6 ± 0.23	2.22	11.76±0.30	1.67	10.4 ± 0.31	1.09
Parent	21.9 ± 0.296	1.62	17.8 ± 0.29	1.612	15.7 ± 0.32	1.76

**Table 2 : Prevalence of child neglect among girls across three socio-economic groups as reported by children and their parents**

Neglected child abuse reported by	Lower socio-economic strata		Middle socio-economic strata		Upper socio-economic strata	
	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation	Mean ± SE (n=30)	Standard deviation
Children	14.4 ± 0.31	1.71	12.46±0.24	1.34	10.4 ± 0.22	1.21
Parent	20.9 ± 0.37	2.07	18.3 ± 0.32	1.78	14.8 ± 0.30	1.67

social classes. Children from low income families are least likely to reinforce safety concepts at high and low socio-economic status children were the ones least likely to trust their parents to provide protection.

The data in Table 2 indicates the prevalence of child neglect among girls across three socio-economic strata reported by children and parents. It is evident from the Table 2 that the prevalence of child neglect is highest in girls belonging to the lower socio-economic group *i.e.* 14.4 followed by middle socio-economic group *i.e.* 12.46 and 10.4 in upper socio-economic group. The prevalence of child neglect amongst girls in low socio-economic group *i.e.* 20.9 and in middle socio-economic group *i.e.* 18.3 and minimum in upper socio-economic group *i.e.* 14.8 as reported by parents. This may be due to the fact that parents have to struggle a lot in the lower socio-economic status families to fulfil the basic needs of the family members. Parents in lower socio-economic groups are more subjected to alcohol and substance abuse which makes them more prone to maltreat their children. The results are in accordance with the study conducted by Zielinski (2007) on assessing the long term impact of socio-economic status on child abuse which revealed that lower socio-economic status place victims at significantly increased risk for problems like lowered self esteem, blocked aspirations, status frustration, impaired efficacy, fatalism, lowered mastery and personal control.

**Conclusion :**

In the present study, it can be concluded that child abuse is prevalent in all three socio-economic status families irrespective of the gender. Child neglect was found to be more prevalent in the families belonging to lower socio-economic group followed middle socio- economic

groups then upper socio-economic group. The middle socio-economic groups were focuses on the need of creating awareness about child’s rights. They were running the programmes for the prevention of child abuse at a mass level as well as help the children to develop to their full potentialities. The effects of being abused have serious consequences during both childhood and adulthood.

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