
RISK FACTORS OF INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

This article analyzes the main risk factors influencing the occurrence of inappropriate treatment of children in social work practice. It highlights the social, economic, psychological, and family causes and conditions of child abuse and neglect. The role of social workers in early identification, prevention, and protection of children from this issue is also examined. The article substantiates the importance of preventive measures and strengthening effective approaches within the social work system.

Keywords: Social work, children's rights, inappropriate treatment, abuse, risk factors, child protection, social protection, family problems, prevention, social services.

Introduction

Today, inappropriate treatment of children (including violence, neglect, and exploitation) is considered a serious global social problem. This issue negatively affects not only the child's physical and mental health but also their personal development, access to education, and the process of becoming a fully functioning member of society. Therefore, the child protection system, especially the field of social work, plays an important role in addressing this issue.

In social work practice, it is of great importance to study various risk factors contributing to the occurrence of inappropriate treatment of children. Among these factors, family conflicts, economic difficulties, the psychological condition of parents, and the insufficient level of social support systems are particularly significant. Early identification of these factors and reducing their negative consequences are among the main responsibilities of social workers. In addition, social workers play an important role in protecting children, ensuring their safety, and carrying out preventive work with families. From this perspective, a deep analysis of the risk factors of inappropriate treatment of children is relevant both in practical and theoretical terms.

This article highlights the main risk factors of inappropriate treatment of children in the context of social work, their underlying causes, and social work approaches to reducing them.

MAIN PART

The analysis of factors leading to inappropriate treatment of children shows that this issue cannot be explained by a single cause, but rather develops as a result of the interaction of various social, economic, and psychological factors. Therefore, a comprehensive and systemic approach is essential in analyzing this problem. "Inappropriate treatment of children is a complex social phenomenon, and its occurrence is influenced by several factors simultaneously. From the perspective of social work, a systematic analysis of these factors is crucial in preventing the problem and developing effective intervention measures"[1]. From this perspective, in social work practice, each family and child situation should be assessed individually, as risk factors may manifest differently in each case. A systematic analysis enables social workers to identify the root causes of the problem, determine early intervention measures, and develop effective strategies aimed at protecting the child.

Socio-economic factors. One of the most common causes of inappropriate treatment is economic difficulties within families. Poverty, unemployment, and material deprivation increase stress among parents, which in some cases may lead to neglectful or abusive behavior toward children. In addition, harsh living conditions limit children's access to education and healthcare services.

Family and upbringing factors. Family conflicts, divorces, and poor relationships between parents negatively affect a child's psychological well-being. The acceptance of violence as a "normal method" of upbringing is also considered a dangerous factor. In such families, physical or psychological pressure on children may increase.

Psychological factors. Depression, stress, drug addiction, or alcohol dependence among parents increase the risk of inappropriate treatment of children. The lack of psychological stability reduces the ability of parents to show proper and caring behavior toward their children.

Lack of social support systems. Insufficient assistance from community structures, social services, and government institutions is also an important factor. If a family is left alone in coping with difficulties, the risk of negative treatment toward children increases. The weakness of the social work system hinders the effective implementation of preventive measures.

Role and intervention of social work. Social workers play an important role in the early identification of this problem, monitoring at-risk families, and providing them with necessary support. Inappropriate treatment can be prevented through individual and family counseling, psychological support, and referral to social services. In addition, strengthening a preventive approach in social work increases the effectiveness of the child protection system. Overall, the role of social work is essential in ensuring timely intervention, reducing

risk factors, and promoting a safer and more supportive environment for children and families.

“Overall, inappropriate treatment of children is a multifactorial process, and eliminating it requires a comprehensive approach and active involvement of the social work system”[3]. At the same time, preventing this problem should not rely only on reactive measures but also on preventive strategies. Continuous work with families, improving parents’ caregiving competencies, and strengthening the social support system can significantly reduce the risk of violence against children. In addition, raising public awareness of children’s rights is also of great importance.

In Uzbekistan, the concept of “violence and negligent treatment of children” is primarily based on a legal framework. According to the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, negligence and indifference are not included in the definition of violence. Violence and negligent treatment are defined as follows: “Violence against a child is physical, sexual, or psychological harm that violates the child’s right to personal inviolability, carried out against the child’s will or by taking advantage of the child’s vulnerable situation. According to this definition, physical, sexual, and psychological forms of violence are distinguished”. Negligent treatment of a child is the failure or improper performance by parents or persons substituting for them, as well as other individuals, of their obligations to provide care, upbringing, healthy living conditions, access to full education, and similar needs.

Types of inappropriate treatment of children[2]:

Physical violence – cruelty and other actions directed toward causing pain to a child and harming their health and development, which are inhumane in nature:

- ✓ any bodily injury or infliction of pain on a child (beating, pinching, biting, burning, strangling, or drowning)
- ✓ failure to prevent bodily harm to a child
- ✓ any physical punishment of a child – slapping, beating, humiliation
- ✓ poisoning a child using drugs or other chemical substances

Sexual violence – the use of children for the sexual gratification of adults. It includes the use of threats, force, deception, or trust to involve a child in sexual activity:

- ✓ any sexual contact or relationship with a child (with or without the use of force)
- ✓ any behavior that involves or leads a child into sexual activity

Emotional (psychological) violence – the lack of proper attention, care, support, and emotional closeness toward a child. The child constantly experiences a lack of attention and affection, is exposed to threats and humiliation, which leads to low self-esteem and increased insecurity. These include:

- lying, threats, intimidation, humiliation, insults, and verbal abuse;
- rejection of the child and isolation;
- involvement and coercion into antisocial behavior;
- unreasonable demands to perform tasks beyond the child’s ability;

- excessive overprotection that hinders the child's normal development;
- adults failing to keep promises, leading to a breakdown of the child's sense of trust.

Negligent treatment (indifference) – the failure to meet a child's basic life needs, which leads to negative effects on their physical, psychological, intellectual, and social development:

- neglecting, leaving the child without supervision, or placing them in dangerous situations;
- indifference to the child's needs (failure to meet needs related to nutrition, medical care, education, communication, and development);
- lack of emotional closeness (rejection of the child);
- inability or unwillingness to protect the child from existing threats.

Exploitation – using a child for one's own benefit, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, and trafficking (removing or selling children for the purpose of exploitation).

Four types of child abuse are identified:

- physical abuse
- sexual violence
- neglect of a child's needs
- psychological abuse.

Sexual violence against children – the use of a child or adolescent for personal sexual gratification.

Neglect of a child's needs – the chronic inability of parents or caregivers to meet the basic needs of a child under the age of 18.

“At first, the cause of violence against children was considered to be the psychological deviation of parents. Later, attention shifted to the social context, leading to the conclusion that the risk factor lies in the value system that shapes violent parental behavior toward children, as well as in social isolation. Subsequently, violence was explained through a distorted interactive social model of relationships between parents and children”[4]. This approach shows that violence against children should be viewed not only as an individual psychological problem, but also as a result of a broader social system and relationships. From this perspective, alongside the personal characteristics of parents, the social environment in which the family lives, economic conditions, and cultural values also play an important role.

In social work practice, this integrated approach is crucial for early identification of problems and for developing effective intervention measures. Since the factors contributing to violence are interconnected, they must be analyzed systemically rather than in isolation. Therefore, social workers should not only address individual cases but also engage with the family's social support system, the community environment, and available resources. At the same time, preventive work should not be limited only to families already facing problems. Developing early warning systems, raising public awareness, and strengthening

parents' psychological and pedagogical skills are also important. A collaborative approach in social work practice – namely close cooperation between educational institutions, healthcare systems, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations – increases effectiveness. This ensures comprehensive results in preventing violence against children and reducing its consequences.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the main risk factors contributing to the occurrence of inappropriate treatment of children in social work practice. The analysis shows that this issue does not arise from a single factor, but rather from the interaction of several factors, such as socio-economic difficulties, family conflicts, psychological problems, and the lack of a social support system. It was also found that inappropriate treatment of children should be considered not only at the individual level, but also within a broader social context. Social work practice plays an important role in preventing this problem and serves as a key tool for early identification of at-risk families, providing them with comprehensive support, and implementing preventive measures.

In general, in order to prevent inappropriate treatment of children, it is important to develop the social work system, strengthen family support mechanisms, and increase public awareness of children's rights and safety. This contributes to creating a healthy social environment and ensuring the full development of children.

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