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Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries

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Summary

Child maltreatment remains a major public-health and social-welfare problem in high-income countries. Every year, about 4–16% of children are physically abused and one in ten is neglected or psychologically abused. During childhood, between 5% and 10% of girls and up to 5% of boys are exposed to penetrative sexual abuse, and up to three times this number are exposed to any type of sexual abuse. However, official rates for substantiated child maltreatment indicate less than a tenth of this burden. Exposure to multiple types and repeated episodes of maltreatment is associated with increased risks of severe maltreatment and psychological consequences. Child maltreatment substantially contributes to child mortality and morbidity and has longlasting effects on mental health, drug and alcohol misuse (especially in girls), risky sexual behaviour, obesity, and criminal behaviour, which persist into adulthood. Neglect is at least as

damaging as physical or sexual abuse in the long term but has received the least scientific and public attention. The high burden and serious and long-term consequences of child maltreatment warrant increased investment in preventive and therapeutic strategies from early childhood.



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