

Role of a Dentist in the Diagnosis of Child Abuse and Neglect: A Literature and Narrative

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ABSTRACT

Child Abuse (CA) is defined as any physical or psychological harm inflicted upon children. The most commonly affected anatomical region in these cases is the orofacial complex, thereby placing dentists in a dominant position for detecting CA. The statistical figures referred to CA are high, and many cases go unreported.

Objective:

To determine the level of knowledge, the aptitudes and capacity of dentists in reporting cases of CA; the barriers facing the reporting of cases; and the key clinical characteristics for the detection of CA.

Methodology:

A search was made of the PubMed (MEDLINE), ScienceDirect, LILACS and SciELO databases for articles published up until March 2019, involving analytical observational and descriptive studies relevant to the objectives of our study. All articles were independently reviewed by two authors.

Results:

Injuries caused by CA are largely located in the orofacial region – the most prevalent being caries, burns and fractures. The most frequently identified risk factor is behavioral alterations on the part of the parents or caregivers. The reviewed studies reflect a discrepancy between suspected and reported cases of CA.

Conclusion:

Although dentists are able to detect injuries, there is a great lack of knowledge about how to report cases of CA to the authorities. It is interesting to establish guidelines for the detection and reporting of suspicious cases. Improved training in forensic and legal dentistry is needed, together with the establishment of detection and reporting protocols. The clinical signs detected in the case of CA and neglect includes untreated caries, poor oral hygiene, traumatism, burns, lacerations and biting. The recognition of such signs and correct case history compilation are essential for the detection of CA.

Biography:

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