

## Patient Talk!



The International Council of Nurses  
Informed Patient Project

## Prevention of Child Abuse

- Some 600 million children live in poverty and go to bed hungry.
- About one million children, mainly girls, are forced into the multi-billion dollar commercial sex trade every year.
- An estimated 1.4 million children under age of 15 years are living with HIV/AIDS.
- 8,000 to 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines each year.
- Approximately 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are in the labour market.
- As many as 250,000 children - some as young as seven – are serving in government armed forces or armed opposition groups as soldiers, spies, messengers, and porters.
- One third of all births in the world go unrecorded, and 40 million babies every year join those who will spend the rest of their lives without an official identity or citizenship<sup>1 2</sup>.

**T**he Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stresses respect for and protection of children's rights as a starting point for the full development of every child's potential in an atmosphere of freedom, dignity and justice.<sup>i</sup> Yet the statistics of violation of the rights of children are disturbing.<sup>ii</sup>

Children are a highly vulnerable group, requiring care and protection from abuse. ICN has endorsed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, believing children are entitled to protection and to an acceptable standard of rearing. ICN further believes that health professionals and others involved in the care of children have the duty to help ensure that children grow up in healthy environments with dignity, and free from abuse.

### What is child abuse?

Children can suffer a single type of abuse or a combination of several forms such that physically abused children are also often neglected and emotionally abused. Abuse includes physical injury, emotional abuse, child labour, child soldiers and sexual abuse, including use of children for pornography. All abuse is damaging to children's physical and emotional development.

**Physical Abuse:** The common form of abuse is battering, in which physical injury is inflicted on children. A child with physical abuse presents with bruises, slap marks, burns or scalds, lacerations, fractures and internal injuries. It is important to assess the child fully and distinguish accidental from intentional injury. In child abuse there may be:<sup>iii</sup>

- A history not consistent with the injury.
- Delay in reporting the injury.
- Inconsistent histories from caregivers.
- Inappropriate reaction of parents or care recurrent injuries.
- Injuries inconsistent with the child's stage of development.

**Child labour:** There are approximately 250 million economically active children between the ages of 5 and 14 worldwide, with 120 million of these children working on a full-time basis.<sup>iv</sup> Children are often physically weaker, mentally more vulnerable and their immaturity may leave them incapable of assessing occupational risks or the need for protective measures. Negative effects of child labour on children's health include:



- Delayed or stunted growth.
- Hearing and/or sight loss.
- Malnutrition and eating disorders.
- Depression, sleeping disorders.
- Bone malformation,
- Skin infections and allergies,
- Respiratory infections, chemical poisoning,
- Abortion/teenage child birth

**Child soldiers.** In war torn countries children are often forcibly conscripted as soldiers. An estimated 250,000 children under 18 years of age – some as young as seven – are serving in government armed forces or armed opposition groups as soldiers, spies, messengers, and porters. Often the most dangerous missions - such as advance troops in mined areas- are assigned to child soldiers<sup>v</sup>. These children are denied education and normal family life and forced to fight, with serious impact on their social, physical and mental development.

**Sexual exploitation and child pornography:** UNICEF estimates that one million children, mainly girls, are forced into the multi-billion dollar commercial sex trade every year. These children are often lured with promises of an education or a "good job. The exploitation of children through prostitution, pornography and "sex tourism" is a growing form of commercialised violence, with girls as main victims.

### **How to campaign for prevention of child abuse**

Sustained advocacy and activity is required in order to build societal commitments for child safety and protection. Some campaign activities for nurses, their national nurses associations, and others include:

- Develop local expertise and alternative opportunities for vulnerable children.
- Create a platform for information sharing and awareness raising about prevention, protection and rehabilitation programmes in your community.
- Develop broad based partnerships for the prevention of child abuse.
- Lobby your government and other authorities for ratification and implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- Lobby your government to proclaim the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse as a national day for children.

Reach out to the media and other groups to disseminate information on child protection and prevention of child abuse.

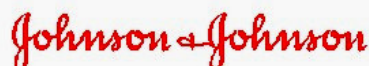
<sup>i</sup> United Nations: The Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations, adopted November 20, 1989.

<sup>ii</sup> Compiled from State of the World's Children 2001. New York: UNICEF

<sup>iii</sup> Lissauer, T and Clayden G. (2001), Illustrated Textbook of Paediatrics. Second edition. Edinburgh: Mosby International.

<sup>iv</sup> Grootaert, C. and Kanbur, R. (1995), Child Labour: An Economic Perspective. International Labour Review. P187-203.

<sup>v</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (1998). Stop Using Child Soldiers.



supports this initiative