



## Prevalence of Child Abuse and its Related Factors in Iran: A Systematic Review

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Child abuse is a global problem that is deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and economic performance of society. It is a behavior that occurs in various forms of physical, mental, emotional, or sexual, which can cause harm to the health, welfare, and education of the child. The present study was conducted to estimate the prevalence of child abuse and its related factors in Iran.

**Methods:** In the present systematic review study, to find articles related to the prevalence of child abuse in Iran, valid databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Cochrane, SID, Magiran, IranDoc, and Google Scholar were searched using the keywords of "child abuse", "physical abuse", "emotional abuse", "neglect", "prevalence" and "Iran".

**Results:** In this study, 22 articles were analyzed. Based on this review about 4.5%-58.2% of children reported physical abuse, 7.3%-91.6% emotional abuse, and 5.5%-85.3% neglect. Factors associated with child abuse were hyperactivity anxiety and mental status disorder. All studies showed a significant relationship of abuses with education, occupation, addiction, and divorce of parents. Moreover, depression and anxiety of parents and poor parental relationships were related to abuse of children.

**Conclusion:** Child abuse has many negative effects on childish and adolescent health. It seems that child abuse in Iran is in critical condition; therefore, policymakers must take action to solve this problem and prevent it by designing special programs and effective policies in Iran.

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### Introduction

Abuse of children and misbehavior are considered as some topics that directly and indirectly affect the physical and mental health of a child as well as a community (1-4). However, there are some different ideas and differences to define and categorize the abuse of children, which are four forms of child abuse usually stated in former researches, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and child neglect.

Physical abuse means the manners causing any kind of to a child, such as hair-pulling and hitting (5).

Emotional abuse consists of actions making children feel dislike, worthlessness, and unwanted sense, such as offending and screaming (6). In sexual abuse, as a form of abuse, children must do some sexual activities, such as genital or oral sex, self-display, and child

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pornography (7, 8), and neglect includes needy attention to the physical and emotional needs of children (5). There are some personal and environmental factors leading to an increase in the risk of child abuse, such as family members (size), uneducated parents, low age of mother, poverty, parental style, parenthood addiction, constraints on support and social network, child sex, age of the child, physical and mental disabilities of children, and homeless children (9-15).

The results of some recent researches show that child abuse has instant and continuing (short-term and long-term) impacts on children that may persist during their life (1,16).

Carr in a systematic review showed that there were significant associations between the experience of child abuse in long-term care and adjustment across the life span in the domains of mental health, physical health, and psychosocial adjustment. In addition, child abuse in adulthood may result in post-traumatic stress (stress after trauma), depression, low self-esteem, social function disorder, interpersonal matters, high-risk actions, suicide, and aggression (1,2, 17-20). Some studies seek to recognize and detect the outbreak prevalence of child abuse in various countries. For instance, Euser et al.

Tried to study this subject in the Netherlands from 2005 to 2010. As their study showed, 27.37% of children had some experiences regarding a type of child abuse (0.8%, 5.06%, 5.50%, 10.22%, and 19.80% for sexual, physical, emotional, physical abuse, and emotional neglect, respectively) (21). In Brazil, Curitiba, 17,082 child abuse cases were happened during 5 years. Child neglect was a very common form of abuse (57%), followed by physical (7.9%), sexual (7.7%), and psychological abuse (3.4%) (22).

In Saudi Arabia, 188 cases were informed regarding child abuse from 2000 to 2008. The most common abuse forms were physical (48.9%) and emotional abuse (32.3%), then sexual abuse (15%) and neglect (8.3%) (23).

According to a meta-analysis about the outbreak of sexual abuse on children in the world (55 pieces of research in 24 countries), girls and boys had various forms of it (8%-31% and 3%-17%, respectively) (8). There are more than 75 million people in Iran, where 31% of the population are young and under the age of 19.

Recently, a number of researches have been performed about this topic in various places in Iran; however, a total estimate of child abuse in all cities is not available. The majority of them focused on its other forms rather than the sexual one due to cultural matters (24). For in-

stance, a study in Tehran, Iran, reported physical, emotional neglect, and abuse break out as 17.5%, 36.4%, and 49.46%, respectively (25).

Another research in Zanjan clarified that emotional and physical abuse and neglect were 78%, 56%, and 39% frequent, respectively (26).

It should be added that the generation of reliable data on the prevalence and characteristics of child maltreatment in nationwide populations is essential to plan and evaluate public health interventions to reduce maltreatment (27). Considering the child abuse importance and the shortage of a general estimate in this country, this research aimed to investigate the prevalence of child abuse and its related factors in Iran.

## Methods

This review study was conducted to investigate the prevalence of child abuse in the country. For this purpose, Persian and English articles published and indexed in valid internal and external databases, such as PubMed, Scopus, SID, Iranmedx, Magiran, and Google Scholar were investigated without time limitation using the following keywords: "Child or adolescent", "Child abuse", "Neglect of the child", "Physical abuse", "Emotional abuse", "Sexual abuse", and "Iran".

The flowchart of the search for articles is shown in Fig. 1. The criteria for entry of the articles to the study included all descriptive-analytical articles in Persian and English having the keywords above in the title and keywords section and related to the purpose of the study and the population studied were Iranian children or adolescents. Articles with incomplete, irrelevant, abstracts of articles at conferences, and dissertations were removed from the study.

The extraction of data related to the study (year and area), sample characteristics (total sample, percentage of boys, percentage of girls, and age), and the prevalence of abuses (physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect) from articles was conducted by two researchers using the extract form of data.

## Results

In search of databases, 549 articles were obtained and reviewed leading to the selection of 22 studies (Fig. 1). All studies were descriptive-analytic (Table 1). Zahrabi Moghadam et al (2010) in a descriptive-analytic study on 956 children aged 2-5 years in Ahwazi, Iran, found that the prevalence of emotional and physical abuse were 70% and 67.6%, respectively, and the highest prevalence of child abuse was reported in illiterate women (28).

**Table 1:** Characteristics of literature review related to Prevalence of child abuse and its related factors in Iran

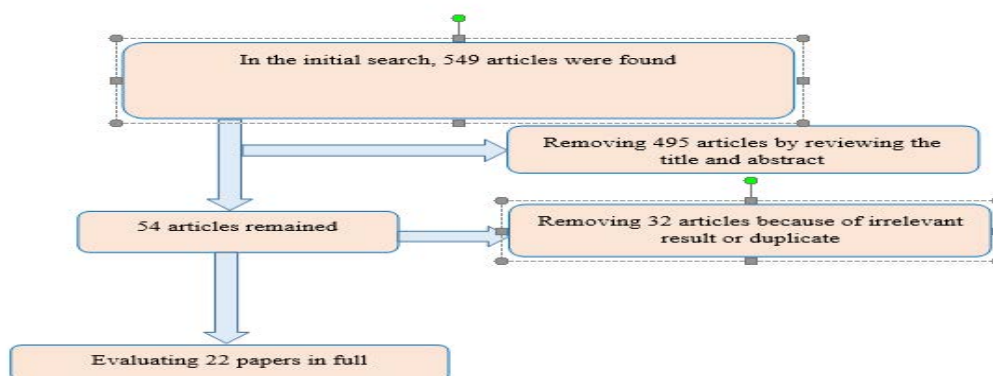
Author and year of research	Method of study	Objective	Main findings
Zahrabi Moghaddam et al (2010)	Descriptive-analytical	Determining the Prevalence of Child Abuse and its Related Factors in Children 2-5 Years Old	<p>*The prevalence of emotional abuse was reported 70% and the prevalence of physical abuse reported 67.6%.</p> <p>*The highest prevalence of child abuse is in illiterate women.</p>
Derakhshanpour et al (2015)	Descriptive-analytical	Investigating frequency and factors related to child abuse	<p>* Among the children referred to the healthcare centers, 85.3% cases of negligence and 14.7 % cases of physical abuse were recognized.</p> <p>* Factors related to child abuse in children include hyperactivity and anxiety, factors related to mothers including: Illiteracy and depression and factors related to fathers: illiteracy, addiction and unemployment.</p> <p>* Neglect was more likely to occur in girls and children under the age of two and children with young fathers</p> <p>* Physical abuse is reported more in boys and children over the age of four or less among children with mother with academic education and young fathers.</p>
Sabbagh et al (2002)	Descriptive-analytical	Investigating frequency and factors related to child abuse	<p>*Frowning, anger and neglect by caregivers (52.2 %), deprivation of the necessities and interests of life ( 11%) and physical abuse (28.9 %) are reported</p> <p>*The greatest amount of abuse was done by mothers.</p>
Rahimi Movagher et al (1996)	Cross-sectional	Determining the prevalence of ill-treatment with child in child and teenager under the age of 18	<p>*The prevalence of physical ill-treatment with children in two educational regions of 20 and 3 Tehran was 46% and 16 to 24%, respectively.</p> <p>*Unemployed fathers with a high school diploma and less recognized as child abuser.</p> <p>*The perpetrators of ill-treatment were more mothers or mothers and fathers in an equal ratio.</p> <p>* There was no meaningful relationship between gender and physical abuse.</p> <p>* As age increases, the likelihood of ill-treatment has increased.</p>
Miri et al (2003)	Descriptive-cross sectional	Determining the prevalence of some forms of misconduct in high school students	<p>*20.02% of the subjects experienced physical abuse, 24.59% neglect and 33.61% emotional abuse.</p> <p>* Physical abuse in students with housewife mothers, addicted fathers and parents with divorce history was significantly higher than other groups.</p> <p>*Ill-treatment of fathers has been reported in the form of physical and neglect and ill-treatment in mothers reported from emotional and neglect.</p>
Wize et al (2009)	Survey	Prevalence of child abuse among high school students	<p>The types of child abuse include physical (17.5 %), emotional (46.49 %) and neglect (36.4 %) in which emotional abuse is higher than others.</p> <p>* There was a significant difference between emotional abuse and girl gender, parent divorce and higher educational level. There was no significant difference between physical abuse and neglect of children with the mentioned factors.,</p>

Khoshabi et al (2008)	Descriptive	The Prevalence of Child Abuse in Secondary Students	<p>* The prevalence of mild physical abuse was 38.8%, severe physical abuse was 35.9%, disregard and emotional abuse were 5.5% and 62.6%, respectively.</p> <p>*Child abuse has been reported physically and emotionally</p> <p>* The prevalence of physical abuse among male students was significantly higher than girls</p> <p>* The incidence of child abuse was significantly higher among parents with lower education levels.</p> <p>* There was a significant relationship between the student's gender, place of residence, education, occupation and parental divorce with the prevalence of child abuse.</p> <p>* There was a significant relationship between child abuse physically and parental divorce.</p>
Mahram et al (2012)	Cross-sectional	Prevalence of child abuse in three areas of physical, emotional and neglect among elementary students	<p>*The prevalence of child abuse was reported 66%.</p> <p>*No significant relationship was found in any of the dimensions and general prevalence of child abuse with gender or living area.</p>
Malekshahi et al (2011)	Descriptive-cross sectional	Determining the prevalence of Child Abuse in Secondary School children	<p>* 4.5% of the samples were always physically abused and the most physical abuse was slapping.</p> <p>*7.3% were emotionally abused and 5.5% had experienced neglect commonly</p> <p>* There is a significant relationship between the prevalence of child abuse and father's occupation, lower education, and parents' addiction.</p>
Mekaeili et al (2013)	Survey	Determining prevalence of child abuse and determining prediction variables	<p>*14.85% of the people were abused and emotional abuse was the most common (52.09%).</p> <p>*Child abuse can be predicted through the variables of depression and anxiety of parents, attachment styles and mental health of children.</p>
Namdari (2003)	Descriptive-cross sectional	The Prevalence of Misconduct in Secondary Students	<p>*The highest frequency of ill-treatment is related to emotional ill-treatment toward the individual and has been reported by father, mother, sister and brother in both groups of boys and girls respectively (91.6%).</p> <p>*Physical abuse was reported 58.2% in girls and boys, which was reported by parents and brother</p> <p>*Sexual abuse of girls and physical abuse in girls and boys is reported by parents and brothers.</p> <p>* There was a significant relationship between financial status of the family, birth order, mental illness and addiction of family members, family relationship and physical and emotional abuse.</p>
Nastizaie (2007)	Survey	Comparison of Child Abuse (Physical, Emotional, Neglect, and Interest) among High-School Girls and Boys' student	<p>* The most common type of physical child abuse among boys is flogging with 11.11% and among girls slapping with 10%.</p> <p>*The most common type of child abuse in both boys and girls has been reported emotionally.</p> <p>*. The most common type of child abuse arising from neglect in boys has been lack of attention to the health status and in girls has been the lack of attention to the child's feelings.</p> <p>* There was no significant difference between physical child abuse and neglect among boys and girls, but girls more than boys suffer from emotional abuse and boys more than girls suffer from economic exploitation.</p>

Sayyari et al (2001)	Cross-sectional	Examination of physical exertion of children in patients referred to the emergency medical emergency clinic in Tehran	<p>*The prevalence of physical abuse has been reported to be 12.2%, and parents have been identified as the cause of physical child abuse.</p> <p>* Factors related to physical child abuse in the family include many children, addictions of one of the family members and severe stress.</p> <p>* There was a significant relationship between physical child abuse with age (1-5 years), gender (son), place of residence (rental), separation of parents and a positive history of physical abuse in the childhood of parents.</p>
Torkashvand et al (2013)	Cross-sectional	Investigating the Prevalence of Child Abuse and Some Demographic Factors Affecting It in Secondary Students	<p>*Results showed that about 78% of students reported emotional abuse, 56% physical abuse and 39% neglect.</p> <p>* Emotional abuse showed a direct relationship with the number of children in the family and the mother's age, and an inverse relationship with the birth rank and father's education.</p> <p>* Physical abuse showed a direct relationship with death of one of the parents and the number of children in the family and showed an inverse relationship with the mother's age.</p> <p>*The direct relationship between neglect with gender (girls), number of children in the family, and birth rate were observed.</p>
Zargari et al (2006)	Descriptive	Investigation of Demographic and Familial Factors Affecting Child Abuse	<p>*The most common type of emotional abuse was 35.9% and physical abuse was 29.9%.</p> <p>* The age group of 5-10 years old had the most frequency of child abuse.</p> <p>*Parents' low education has been effective in the incidence of child abuse</p> <p>*The frequency of child abuse in illiterate and low-literate parents was significantly higher than educated parents.</p>
Azar Pirdehghan et al (2016)	Cross-sectional	Child Abuse and Mental Disorders in Iranian Adolescents	<p>*93.5% of the adolescents in Yazd, Iran have experienced at least one mild type of child abuse and neglect.</p> <p>*There was a statically significant correlation between mental disorder and child abuse score (Spearman rho: 0.2; P-value &lt; 0.001).</p> <p>* The highest correlations between mental disorders and child abuse were found in psychological domain, Spearman's rho coefficients were 0.46, 0.41 and 0.36 for depression, anxiety and stress respectively (P-value &lt; 0.001)</p> <p>* Items such as: females, last born adolescents and subjects with parental drug or alcohol abuse had mental disorder odds of 3, 0.4 and 1.9 times compared to others.</p>
Esmaili Douki et al (2013)	Cross-sectional	Maternal Child Abuse and its Association with Maternal Anxiety in the Socio-Cultural Context of Iran	<p>*The prevalence of mother-to-child corporal punishment, severe physical abuse and very severe physical abuse were 436 (78%), 260 (46%) and 180 (32%), respectively.</p> <p>* Verbal emotional abuse was reported by 506 (90%) participants and nonverbal emotional abuse was reported in 374 (67%) cases.</p> <p>*A correlation was observed between child abuse and mothers age (p=0.02), as well as with the number of children in the family (p=0.03), and the mothers trait anxiety (p&lt;0.001).</p>

Ghasemi et al (2014)	Cross-sectional	The Study of Child Maltreatment in Family and Its Impact on Behavioral Problems in High School Students in Kermanshah	<p>*Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant correlation between child maltreatment and behavioral problems and its subscales (Depression, Anxiety, Physical Complaint, Attention disorders, Breaking law, Aggression,..)(<math>P &lt; 0.001</math>).</p> <p>*There was no significant relationship between gender and child maltreatment (<math>P &gt; 0.269</math>). But, significant difference was seen in neglect subscale and gender (<math>P &lt; 0.046</math>).</p> <p>*Regression analysis showed that 38.1% of the changes related to behavioral problems in students could be explained via a linear combination of emotional and sexual abuse.</p>
Fakhari et al (2012)	Cross-sectional	Family violence influences mental health of school girls in Iran: Results of a preliminary study	<p>*The sub-threshold score in GHQ-28 (under 23) was observed in 44.1% of students which indicates considerable problems in mental health status.</p> <p>*The type of reported violence (Psychological, Sexual and physical abuse and neglect) was not significantly associated with an abnormal score of GHQ.</p> <p>*The depression scale was related to humility, neglect and discrimination at home.</p> <p>*The educational level of the mother plays an important role in the mental health of school girls.</p>
Stephenson et al (2006)	Cross-sectional	Child maltreatment among school children in the Kurdistan Province, Iran	<p>*38.5% (477) and 43.3% (537) of the students reported physical maltreatment at home and school.</p> <p>*Male children were more likely to report experiencing any kind of child maltreatment than girls.</p> <p>*Residency in a rural area, poor parental relationships and the use of addictive substances by household members were associated with increased odds of reporting child maltreatment.</p> <p>*Poor school performance was associated with the reporting of experiencing maltreatment at school.</p>
Eslami-Shahrbabaki et al (2013)	Cross-sectional	Association between Parental Addiction and Types of Child Abuse in High-School Students of Kerman, Iran	<p>*Average child abuse among the study subjects was 27.6%.</p> <p>*Physical behavior, negligence, and emotional abuse were seen in 9.7%, 23.6%, and 17.9% of the subjects, respectively.</p> <p>*Parental addiction had a significant association (<math>P = 0.001</math>) with incidence of all the child abuse domains.</p>
Farnia et al (2020)	cross-sectional	investigate the prevalence of child abuse among the families with addicted parents in the west of Iran taking into account family risk factors.	<p>*The prevalence of physical and psychological abuse was equal to 43.2%.</p> <p>*Being a homemaker mother increased the chance of child abuse by 0.62 times, and</p> <p>*The occurrence of psychological problems in the family increased the chance of child abuse by 2.56 times.</p> <p>*The chance of child abuse among the parents who were both addicted was 2.66 times more than the families where the father alone was addicted.</p>





**Figure 1:** PRISMA flowchart of present study

In a study carried out by Derakhshanspour et al. (2014), 110 (85.3%) cases of neglect and 21 (14.7%) cases of physical abuse among children in Bandar Abbas, Iran, were identified, and factors related to child abuse included hyperactivity and anxiety; maternal factors (e.g., illiteracy, addiction, and unemployment).

Neglect more likely occurred in girls, children under the age of two, and children with young fathers, and physical abuse was more reported in boys and children over the age of four and less reported among children with mothers with academic education and young fathers (29). Sabbagh et al. (2002) in a descriptive-analytic study on children in Khorasan Province, Iran, found that 52.2% of the cases suffered from ill-treated and angry caregivers and were neglected by them; moreover, 11% of children were deprived of necessities and interests of life. Accordingly, 28.9% were punished by their caregivers and the highest amount of abuse was done by the mothers of children (30).

Rahimi Movaghar et al. (1996), in a cross-sectional study on 840 children and adolescents under the age of 18 years found that the prevalence rates of physical ill-treatment with children in two educational regions of 20 and 3 Tehran, Iran, were 46% and 24%, respectively. The perpetrators of maltreatment were more mothers or mothers and fathers in an equal ratio. In the region of 20, 73.3% of children had a history of physical punishment, while in the region 3, this rate was 59.7%. In both regions, boys were more likely subjected to physical punishment than girls.

The highest source of physical punishment for each child in both regions was father, mother, and others in descending order. In both regions, the types of injuries caused by physical ill-treatment included bruises, injuries, and inflammation. The findings of this study showed that there was no significant relationship between gender and physical ill-treatment in both regions ( $P > 0.05$ ). Nonetheless, there was a relationship between the age and the prevalence of physical ill-treatment, so

that by increasing age, the risk of ill-treatment increased (31).

In a cross-sectional study on 652 students in Bam, Iran, Miri et al. (2003) found that 20.02% of the subjects experienced physical abuse, 24.59% neglect, and 33.61% emotional abuse. Physical abuse was significantly higher among students with housewife mothers, addicted fathers, and divorce history ( $P < 0.05$ ). The perpetrators were fathers in the field of physical abuse and neglect and mothers in the emotional domain (32).

Weizhe et al. (2008), in a survey, examined the prevalence of child abuse among high school students in the cities of Tehran. The results showed that the prevalence rates of physical abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse were 17.5%, 36.4%, and 46.4%, respectively. The most common abuses in the field of physical abuse were slapping and kicking; in the area of neglecting the child were not taking to the clinic and disregarding the child's interests; and in the area of emotional abuse included screaming and insulting.

There was a significant difference in the prevalence of child abuse in physical, neglect, and emotional areas in terms of the student's gender, parents' educational, history of divorce, in the family (25). Khoshabi et al. (2008), in a descriptive study on 1,530 male and female students in Tehran, showed that the prevalence of mild physical abuse was 38.3%, severe physical abuse was 35.9%, neglect was 20.5, and emotional abuse was 62.5%. There was a significant relationship between the student's gender, place of residence, parent's sex, education and job and parental divorce with the prevalence of child abuse (33).

In a descriptive-analytic study conducted on 1,028 elementary students, Mehram et al. (2012) reported at least one type of abuse in 66.05% of cases. The number of positive cases for each dimension, including emotional, physical, and neglect dimensions, were 618 (60.1%), 360 (35%), and 394 (38.3%), respectively. In each of the general dimensions and prevalence, there was no sig-

nificant relationship between gender and living area (34). Malekshahi and Farhadi (2011), in a cross-sectional descriptive study on 907 secondary-school students, showed that 4.5% of the samples were always physically abused and the most common physical abuse was slapping. Accordingly, 7.3% of the cases were emotionally abused and 5.5% had experienced neglect commonly. The results of the Chi-square test showed a significant relationship of abuses with education, occupation, addiction, and divorce of parents ( $P<0.005$ ) (35).

In a survey study, Michaeli et al. (2013) surveyed 2,100 12-14-year students in terms of abuse and found that 14.85% of the subjects were abused and emotional abuse was the most common (52.09%). Furthermore, such variables as depression and anxiety of parents, anxiety, aggression, and attachment styles of children can help identify abused children (36). In a descriptive cross-sectional study on 240 secondary school students in Khorramabad, Iran, Namdari (2003) found that the highest frequency of abuse in boys and girls groups was related to emotional abuse (91.6%), caused by the fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers. Physical abuse was found to be 58.2% among girls and boys, which was reported by parents and brothers. Sexual abuse was reported in 38 cases only in girls (32.5%).

Additionally, family financial status, birth order, mental illness, addiction of family members, and sociability of family members had a significant relationship with physical and emotional abuse; however, there was no significant correlation between parents' age and physical and emotional abuse and educational level, parent's job and emotional abuse (37).

Nastizaie (2007) in a descriptive-comparative study on 360 male and female students in Zahedan, Iran, found that the most common types of physical child abuse were flogging (11.11%) and slapping (10%) among boys and girls, respectively. The most common type of emotional child abuse in both boys and girls was the comparison of the child with other children with 20.55% and 33.88%, respectively.

The most common type of child abuse caused by neglect in boys was the lack of attention to the health status of the child with 47.77% and in girls was the lack of attention to the child's feelings with 30%. There was no significant difference between physical child abuse and neglect in girls and boys; However, girls suffered from emotional child abuse more than boys, while, boys suffered from economic exploitation more than girls (38).

Sayari et al. (2001), in a cross-sectional study on 3,019 children under the age of 18 in Tehran, found that 12.2% of them suffered from physical

abuse, the severity of the injury was 12.8% severe and 87.2% modest, and parents were more than the others the cause of physical child abuse. Factors of physical child abuse in the family were many children, parents' addiction, and acute and severe stress. There was a significant relationship of physical child abuse with age, gender, place of residence, separation of parents, and history of physical abuse in the childhood of parents ( $P<0.001$ ) (39).

The results of a cross-sectional study by Tor-kashvand et al. (2013) on 410 students showed that about 78% of students reported emotional abuse, 56% physical abuse, and 39% neglect. Emotional abuse had a direct relation with the number of children and maternal age and it had an inverse relationship with birth order and father's education ( $P\leq 0.05$ ). Physical abuse had a direct relationship with the death of one of the parents and the number of children in the family and it had an inverse relationship with the mother's age ( $P<0.05$ ). Moreover, neglect had a direct relationship with gender, the number of children in the family, and birth order ( $P<0.05$ ) (26).

In a descriptive study done by Zargar et al. (2006) on all children under 18 years old in Isfahan, Iran, the most common types of abuse were emotional and physical with 35.9% and 29.9% frequencies, respectively. In addition, the results indicated that the frequency of child abuse in boys and girls was not significantly different. The frequency of emotional-mental child abuse was significantly more than the other types of abuse ( $P<0.05$ ). The age group of 5-10 years old had the highest frequency of child abuse ( $P<0.05$ ). Parents' low education was effective in the child abuse. The frequency of child abuse was significantly in illiterate and low-literate parents higher than in educated parents ( $P<0.05$ ) (40).

The results of a study conducted by Azar Pirdelghan et al. (2016) showed that 93.5% of the adolescents in Yazd, Iran, experienced at least one mild type of child abuse and neglect. Based on this study, there was a statically significant correlation between mental disorder and child abuse score (Spearman rho: 0.2;  $P<0.001$ ) (42).

Esmaeili Douki et al. (2001), in a cross-sectional study, showed that the prevalence of mother-to-child corporal punishment was 32%-46%. Verbal emotional abuse was reported by 506 (90%) participants and nonverbal emotional abuse was reported in 374 (67%) cases. A correlation was observed between child abuse and maternal age ( $P=0.02$ ), the number of children in the family ( $P=0.03$ ), and the mothers' trait anxiety ( $P<0.001$ ) (43). In a cross-sectional study, Ghasemi et al. (2014) reported that a significant difference was



seen in neglect subscale and gender ( $P < 0.046$ ).

All aspects of behavioral problems were observed more in girls. Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant correlation between child maltreatment and behavioral problems and its subscales ( $P < 0.001$ ). Regression analysis showed that 38.1% of the changes related to behavioral problems in students could be explained via a linear combination of emotional and sexual abuse (44).

The results of a study conducted by Fakhari et al. (2012) showed that 44.1% of students indicated considerable problems in mental health status (45). Stephenson et al. (2006), in a cross-sectional study, showed that 477 (38.5%) and 537 (43.3%) of the students reported physical maltreatment at home and school, respectively. Residency in a rural area, poor parental relationships, and the use of addictive substances by household members were associated with increased odds of reporting child maltreatment (46). In a cross-sectional study, Eslami-Shahrbabaki et al. (2013) reported the prevalence of child abuse among the study subjects as 27.6%. Physical behavior, negligence, and emotional abuse were seen in 9.7%, 23.6%, and 17.9% of the subjects, respectively. Parental addiction had a significant association with the incidence of all the child abuse domains ( $P = 0.001$ ) (47).

Farnia et al. (2020) in a cross-sectional study, showed that the prevalence of physical and psychological abuse was equal to 43.2%. Being a housewife mother increased the chance of child abuse by 0.62 times, and the occurrence of psychological problems in the family increased the chance of child abuse by 2.56 times. The chance of child abuse among the parents who were both addicted was 2.66 times more than among the families where the father alone was addicted (48).

## Discussion

This review aimed to determine the prevalence of child abuse and its related factors in Iran. The results showed that the prevalence of child abuse in Iran was in critical condition, and both genders of children suffered from emotional abuse more than physical abuse and neglect. According to the findings of this study, the main source of abuse was from family members and children's parents, while families and parents were considered the most important emotional and support center.

Therefore, this issue shows the importance of raising the level of knowledge and awareness of families and community about cognition and attention to the emotional needs and the development of children, the proper methods of child-rearing, and the consequences caused by

physical and emotional punishment of the child on the spirit, psychology, and future of children more than ever. On the other hand, based on the evidence of the cultural, educational, and social backgrounds, family is effective on the severity of the abuses. Consequently, the formation of organized and targeted support centers for the identification of vulnerable families and children is necessary. These centers can be helpful in understanding the relevant factors and reducing and removing them, in coordination with school parents and family health centers. In general, educational and preventive programs are recommended to prevent the occurrence of child abuse.

Child maltreatment through physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence, causes substantial adverse health, educational, and behavioral consequences throughout the lifespan (20). Therefore, policymakers should pay special attention to this issue, follow specific policies, and design special plans to prevent child abuse in Iran. Most developed countries use the "mandatory report of child abuse and neglect" as a way to identify and prevent child abuse (41). According to this law, professionals working with children should report suspected cases of child abuse to authorities. This model is as practical and effective as it has been proved in developing countries, as a result, it can be recommended and used in our country.

Although it was tried to gather most of the relevant data for the current study, the focus on published articles alone was a limitation to this study, which could affect the results. Regarding this, to achieve a better estimate of child abuse in Iran, more investigation on unpublished data is required.

## Conclusion

Child abuse has many negative effects on childish and adolescent health. It seems that child abuse in Iran is in critical condition; therefore, policymakers should adopt measures to solve this problem and prevent it by designing special programs and effective policies in Iran.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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