

Annales Nestlé

Volume 62/Number 1

Child abuse and neglect



© 2004. Nestec Ltd., avenue Nestlé 55, CH-1800 Vevey, Switzerland.
Printed by Les Presses de la Venoge S.A., CH-1026 Denges, Switzerland.

All rights reserved. Unless special permission in writing is obtained, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or be transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise.

The material contained in this issue was submitted as previously unpublished material, except in the instances in which credit has been given to the source from which some of the illustrative material was derived. Nestec Ltd. cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions, or for any consequences arising from the use of the information contained herein.

Indexed and abstracted in EMBASE/Excerpta-Medica database.

ISSN 0527-8606

Journal edited by
an international committee of paediatricians
and published by NESTEC LTD.

All correspondence should be sent to:

Nestec Ltd.
NSBD/MSS, Nestlé Research Centre
P.O. Box 44, Vers-chez-les-Blanc, 1000 Lausanne 26, Switzerland
e-mail: annales.nutrition@nestle.com

Contents

Editorial

Original articles

International perspectives on the epidemiology of child neglect and abuse	1
DESMOND K. RUNYAN, JOHN ECKENRODE	
A primer on the diagnosis of child abuse and neglect.	13
CINDY W. CHRISTIAN, MATTHEW COX	
The treatment of child abuse and violence	25
STEPHEN LUDWIG	
The prevention of child abuse and neglect	32
JOHN ECKENRODE, DESMOND K. RUNYAN	

Editorial

Child abuse is among the least understood aberrations of human behaviour. The same is true of its sequelae. Child abuse is defined by the WHO as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”¹ It is this issue’s focus of the *Nestlé Annales*. This topic’s selection was motivated by the increasing recognition that child abuse exists in all countries and settings, the growing awareness of child abuse’s toll on its victims, the steadily improving understanding of approaches for its prevention, identification and treatment, and the important roles that health providers play as professionals, community leaders and bearers of special responsibility to children. Although the complexities that underlie child abuse require more than the attention of traditional health care providers for its successful prevention, identification and treatment, no others are better positioned to address each of those important areas successfully.

The issue presents four reviews that focus on each of these concerns. Two of these four articles are co-authored by Professors Desmond K. Runyan of the University of North Carolina and John Eckenrode of Cornell University, NY, both in the United States of America (USA). The first provides an international perspective on the epidemiology of child neglect and abuse. This introduction provides a brief view of the staggering extent of this problem: “each year, 40 million children under age 15 years around the world suffer from abuse or neglect that requires health and social care.” It is startling to learn that child abuse is more common than are many infectious diseases given much more attention. Yet, health authorities only recently recognized its extent. The authors build a convincing case for enhancing awareness of child abuse, particularly among health professionals, and clinical skills to recognize and treat its various forms. A case also is made for working at all levels of professional education, i.e. during the formation of young professionals through continued education activities to achieve these goals.

The second article by Drs. Cindy W. Christian and Matthew Cox, from the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, USA, focuses on the diagnosis of child abuse and neglect. It addresses the various types of abuse, diagnostic approaches to inflicted injuries and key features of medical histories in diagnostic evaluations, especially factors that place children at risk to abuse. This article’s major attention is on the child’s physical examination. The authors take a systematic approach in their review of this important component of diagnostic evaluations to provide much useful information for enhancing diagnostic skills to increase recognition of abuse and the utilization of diagnostic tests to aid the clinician.

¹ World Health Organization. Injuries and violence prevention: child abuse and neglect. Available at: http://www.who.int/health_topics/child_abuse. Accessed May 22, 2003.

The third article focuses on the treatment of child abuse and violence. Its author is Dr. Stephen Ludwig, also of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. It addresses the challenges presented by the complex behaviours represented by abuse and its varied etiologies. The author outlines core concepts needed to address successfully the different dynamics that result in abusive and violent acts against children. Among the most salient aspects of successful treatment is the necessity for multidisciplinary approaches and the realization that, in some instances, treatment may be a lifelong process. The author's review briefly outlines examples of specific treatment modalities and stresses the need for additional research to improve the effectiveness of available therapies.

The final article, co-authored by John Eckenrode and Desmond K. Runyan (see above), focuses on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. It reviews hallmarks of successful programmes. Among this review's principal lessons are recognition that child abuse's toll extends beyond the affected child and the need for comprehensive approaches. The authors describe two principal models used to design effective prevention strategies and the importance of public awareness campaigns. These models focus on family support and school- and medical-based approaches, and well designed monitoring systems that track the prevalence of various forms of abuse, its resulting burdens and outcomes related to specific programmes designed for its prevention or treatment.

In reading this issue, one is grateful for the increasing recognition of children's rights. In the past few years, the *Annales* has championed various aspects of this ideal by highlighting issues that have been relatively ignored by the paediatric community, e.g. *Pain Management in Childhood*, *Prevention of Undernutrition*, and *Learning in Childhood*. No one should be more concerned about the well-being of children than those of us charged with helping them and their families achieve the best health attainable. This means more than the "absence of disease." It means helping them achieve their full human potential.

Annales Nestlé
Editorial Committee