

The Role of the Dentist in Recognizing the Signs of Violence

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Why?

Domestic abuse is a global problem affecting:

Children

Intimate partners

Elderly

Why dentists?

75% of violent acts involve the head, face and neck

Dentists are most knowledgeable in this region

Dentists see patients on a recurrent basis

Dentists have established trusted patient relationships

Our professional obligations

Dentists are “healthcare” professionals-
not only “oral healthcare” professionals

Dentists are committed to comprehensive patient care and
overall well-being

Our ethical duty

ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Conduct

“Dentists shall be obligated to become familiar with the signs of abuse and to report suspected cases to the proper authorities, consistent with state laws.”

FDI - No specific ethics statement exists currently in governance documents

Our legal requirements

**Reporting mandated for children and elders
(US and many other nations)**

**Variable reporting requirements for reporting abuse to adults
age 15 - 49**

Immunity is provided for mandatory reporters

**Failure to report is construed as professional negligence in
some jurisdictions and carries penalties**

How do our FDI Policy Statements guide us?

Basic Responsibilities and Rights of Dentists

Recognize, promote and uphold fundamental human rights and the rights of their patients.

Represent, defend and advocate for both the oral health and the best interests of patients and the public.

Continuing Medical Education in Dentistry

Oral health is an integral component of general health, and the role of dental practitioners is not only limited to maintaining the oral health of their patients but also includes promoted their overall health

Our role as a dental professional??

**Fulfill our professional, ethical, legal
and association obligations**

**Provide all necessary care or resources
to our patients**

**What does the dental professional
need to know?**



Definitions

“Domestic violence refers the exertion of power by one individual over another within a relationship, aiming to establish a sense of fear, control, and authority”.

WHO Definition – “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”.

Common terms –
Intimate partner violence, Family violence,
Child abuse and neglect, Elder abuse



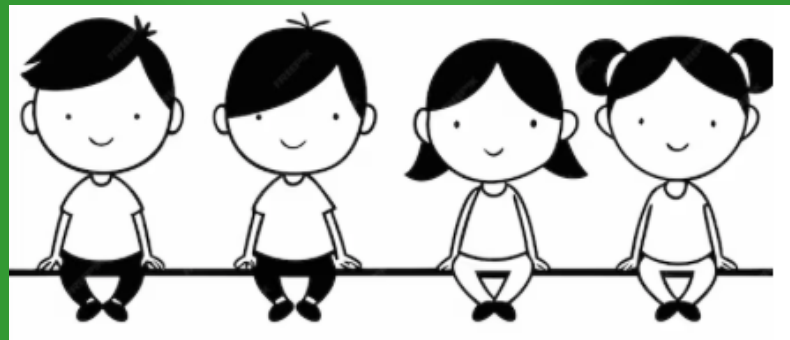
Children

1 in 4 children experience abuse in their lifetime

Physical injury

Dental neglect

(10 times more frequent than physical abuse)



Elderly

4% – 10% incidence

Physical injury

Dental neglect

Emotional abuse

Financial abuse



Domestic (intimate) partners

Range 10% – 60% reported in studies across the globe

Approx. 80% of victims are women (1 in 3 lifetime risk)



Physical Abuse
Sexual Abuse
Threats
Emotional Abuse

What is the Clinical Process?

Awareness and Observation

Collection of history, data, and clinical observations

Development of differential diagnosis

Intervention as indicated

Physical findings (Head & Neck very common)

Bruising (extraoral and intraoral)

Lacerations (face, mucosa, frenums, palate)

Fractured, subluxed or discolored teeth

Fractured facial bones

Burns

Pathology not consistent with self reported cause

Chronic – bruxism, TMD, orofacial pain

Evidence of “neglect”

Behavioral findings

Anxiety, fear, non-communicative or withdrawn

Clothing choices – cover-up

Non-compliance with recommendations / appointments

Family observations –

Guardian, parent or escort dynamics

How is dentistry performing?

Dentists and dental hygienists are the least likely of all clinicians to suspect child, spouse, or elder abuse.

In one study only 13% of women with injuries to the head and face who visited a dentist for unrelated dental work were asked about the reason for the injuries.

Barriers for participation identified include lack of knowledge, fear of angering patients or parents, and opinions that this is not our professional role.

Conclusions

Be an observant dental professional

Recognize signs and symptoms of abuse

Then:

Ask

Validate

Document

Refer

West J Med 2000. 172(5): 329-331

ADA American Dental Association®

Moving forward as a profession

**Enhance educational opportunities –
Many studies show lack of knowledge about indicators of domestic violence, documentation, and knowledge about helping victims.**

Provide resources for reporting and referral

National and local dental associations can assist

Consider...

P Prevent
A Abuse &
N Neglect through
D Dental
A Awareness

Thank You

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