

Child abuse: Awareness is the first step to action

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editorial

Identification and reporting of injuries, violence, abuses or negligence is one of healthcare professionals' responsibility towards patients, especially when it comes to children.

Even if infants' rights are protected by universal agreements, child abuse remains a shocking global reality, engaging all social, economic and cultural classes.

Most of the physical injuries that children are subjected to affect the head and neck region; approximately 50% of injuries due to child abuse occur in the orofacial region and almost 15% of these injuries are confined to the head region (Cairns A.M.).

For this reason, the dental team has a key role in identifying and detecting child abuse.

In addition, having paediatric dentists an ongoing relationship with their young patients and families give them the opportunity to observe and assess not only the physical and psychological condition of the children, but also the family environment (the majority of abuse cases toward children are from the caregiver or the parents).

These types of lesions could be confused with occasional children traumatic injuries, and this is why dentist should be trained to detect the signs of child abuse, as well be informed on how these cases should be reported to authorities.

In a recent research about child abuse in the United Arab Emirates-UAE (H. Al Hajeri et al. Assessment of the knowledge of United Arab Emirates dentists of child maltreatment, protection and safeguarding) more than half of the respondents (54.6%) were not aware of such guidelines/procedures. According to the authors, the main factors affecting the decision of reporting were the lack of knowledge on the appropriate reporting procedure (60%), and the fear of family retaliation toward the child (59%). The Arab colleagues rightly concluded: "diagnosis is a shared responsibility of the child protection team and no matter what obstacles and fears the dentist may have; the main priority is the child".

More efforts should be made to improve knowledge, attitude and practice of dentists in this social problem in order to decrease child abuse worldwide.



The Letter to the Editor should be **no longer than 300 words** and submitted to: ***luigipaglia@hotmail.com*** along with a head-and-shoulder photo of the author.