

LET'S PROTECT OUR CHILDREN, OUR FUTURE



Where do you think your children are most exposed to danger?

Nowadays, children are not at risk of harm outside by a stranger, instead the dangers are lurking in the comfort of their homes, and in the security of their schools.



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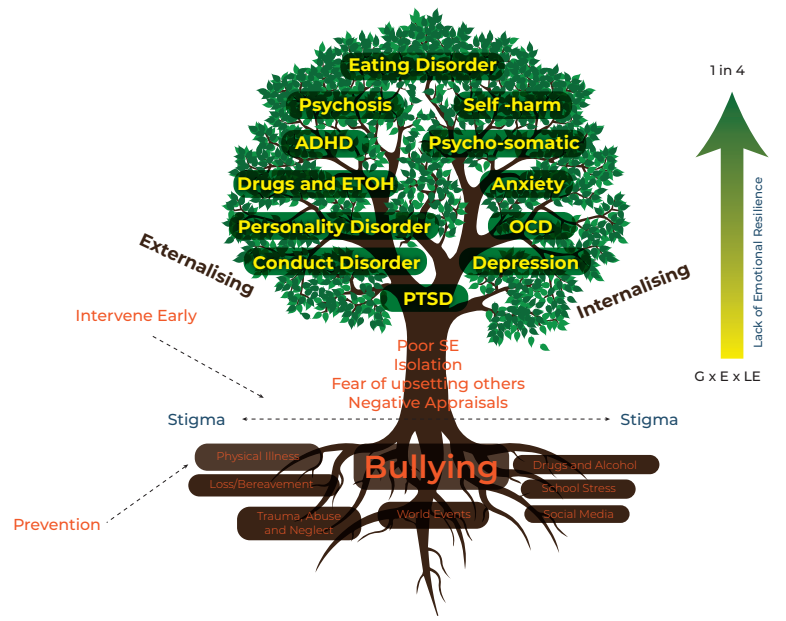
Having worked with children and young people for many years in the UK before coming to UAE, I have seen time and again that the root causes of most mental health problems lie within the family, friends and school. If we want to move towards a world with no major mental health problems, our aim should be to prevent those root causes from occurring in the first place. The

individual pathway to a mental or behavioural disorder varies, and the triggers influencing that can be divided into Genetic (G) and Environmental (E) influences; the former we are born with and cannot be controlled for; the latter though can be changed, and include stressors where a child is victim of trauma (Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE). One of the common yet often unrecognized adverse childhood experience is Bullying.

Bullying is any deliberate repeated mistreatment, where there is imbalance of power and the victim is exposed to negative actions causing distress. Yes, it happened to all of us at one time or another, but it does not make it acceptable. The fact is that bullying, verbal or physical, or even more subtle psychological forms, can have serious long-lasting adverse impact on developing personality. Sometimes it may not be direct, in the form of relational bullying e.g., making someone feel excluded, or spreading rumors, which can equally damage the sense of self-esteem and confidence for the rest of life.

The positive benefits of secure attachment and positive parenting are heavily offset if there is simultaneous bullying going on at the school, and vice versa, excellent schooling is not enough if there is bullying within the family. Strict parenting with high expressed emotions or physical abuse is akin to bullying effects on growing self-esteem.

Often minimized by teachers at the school, bullying remains a major problem not only affecting children's emotional health, but also their academic performance and social functioning. It can lead to anger and aggression on part of



the victim; did you know majority of school shooters have been victims of bullying. The enduring impact on the developing personality of the one bullied is well known, it is also important to note that the bully also suffers from personality and behavioral problems, with high risk of delinquency and criminality.

It carries on for some people at home in their bedrooms in the form of Cyber-bullying, which has resulted in dire consequences in the form of suicide in parts of the world. Number of children suffering from cyber-bullying is on the increase as the world becomes smaller with accessible digital technology. It often leads to depression as the victim feels helpless and unable to escape, with comments that stays online 'forever'. It makes them anxious as they feel unsafe in their own home. It is associated with school avoidance, academic decline, self-harm and even suicide.

Good news is that we can do something about it. It's time to dispel the myths and take action to curb this menace affecting our next generation. Schools must do more to raise awareness about it by changing the culture to one of respect and responsibility, where there is zero tolerance for any kind of bullying. Just focusing on the individual bullies often does not work, and can make things worse for the victims, Whole school approach matters where everybody gets together with the same vision to protect each child. Children need to be emphasized not to be a bystander, instead support the victim and report the bully. Let's focus on enhancing their assertiveness and problem-solving skills, and develop empathy by teaching "don't do to other what you wouldn't want them to do to you".

Best outcomes for children are always achieved when parents work in close collaboration with the school. Parents must do more to truly listen to and understand their children, to develop trustful relationship, before supervising their use of social media and online activities. Vulnerable children i.e., those with special needs are much more likely to be victim of bullying and abuse. It is important to nip it in the bud, to intervene early before bullying starts effecting academic performance or emotional health.

WARM WELCOME



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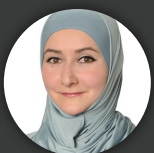
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