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After the Abuse: Long Term Effects and Potential Solutions

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Abstract

Child abuse is a significant problem in the lives of many children today. Even after the abuse has taken place, these children have to live their lives with the long term effects that result from the abuse in which they were involved. The severity of these effects may differ depending on the type of abuse and the time span during which it occurred. Many types of child abuse are considered when looking at the long term effects for victims. For example, the long term effects of child abuse from a mother can differ from the long term effects from other abusers. Other focuses of this project will involve how long term effects of child abuse will affect future interpersonal relationships, as well as the long term effects of sexual abuse from both within and outside of the child's family. It will also focus on the positive and negative effects of the foster care system and how it can either support or fail to support children as they undergo the physical, psychological, and emotional transitions. Finally, this presentation aims to capture how the effects of child abuse in the United States parallels that of different countries, namely child soldiers in Africa.

We have concluded that the long term effect of child abuse can be decreased by better training professionals and parents on the signs of child abuse to promote early detection as well as improving the supports to children in the foster care system to better serve the children's unique needs.

Why are Children Abused?

- Parents may abuse their children for a variety of reasons including depression, stress, family conflict, the inability to recognize a child's emotions, and their own history of abuse.
- Mothers and fathers may abuse for different reasons:
 - Abuse from mothers mainly revolves around relationship problems including adjusting poorly to marriage, having low satisfaction with their social support, and having low family cohesion or togetherness.
 - Fatherly abuse is often known to be an effect of poor social or familial status. One of the main reasons that fathers abuse their children is because they have low family expressiveness, or are unsatisfied with his position in the family.
- Non-parents can also be contributors of child abuse.

Long Term Effects

Behavioral

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- High aggression and hostility
- Withdrawn and submissive
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Desperate for attention

Psychological

- Nightmares and flashbacks
- Triggers
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Issues with trusting others

Revictimization

- Sixty-five percent revictimized
- Repeat repressed material
- Go back to abuser for economic stability, emotional attachment

Moving Forward

- High rates of survivors going into mental health professions
- Use their first hand knowledge to connect with clients
- Have greater empathy and understanding for clients
- Heal from their own past through helping clients

Child Soldiers (Extreme Cases of Abuse)

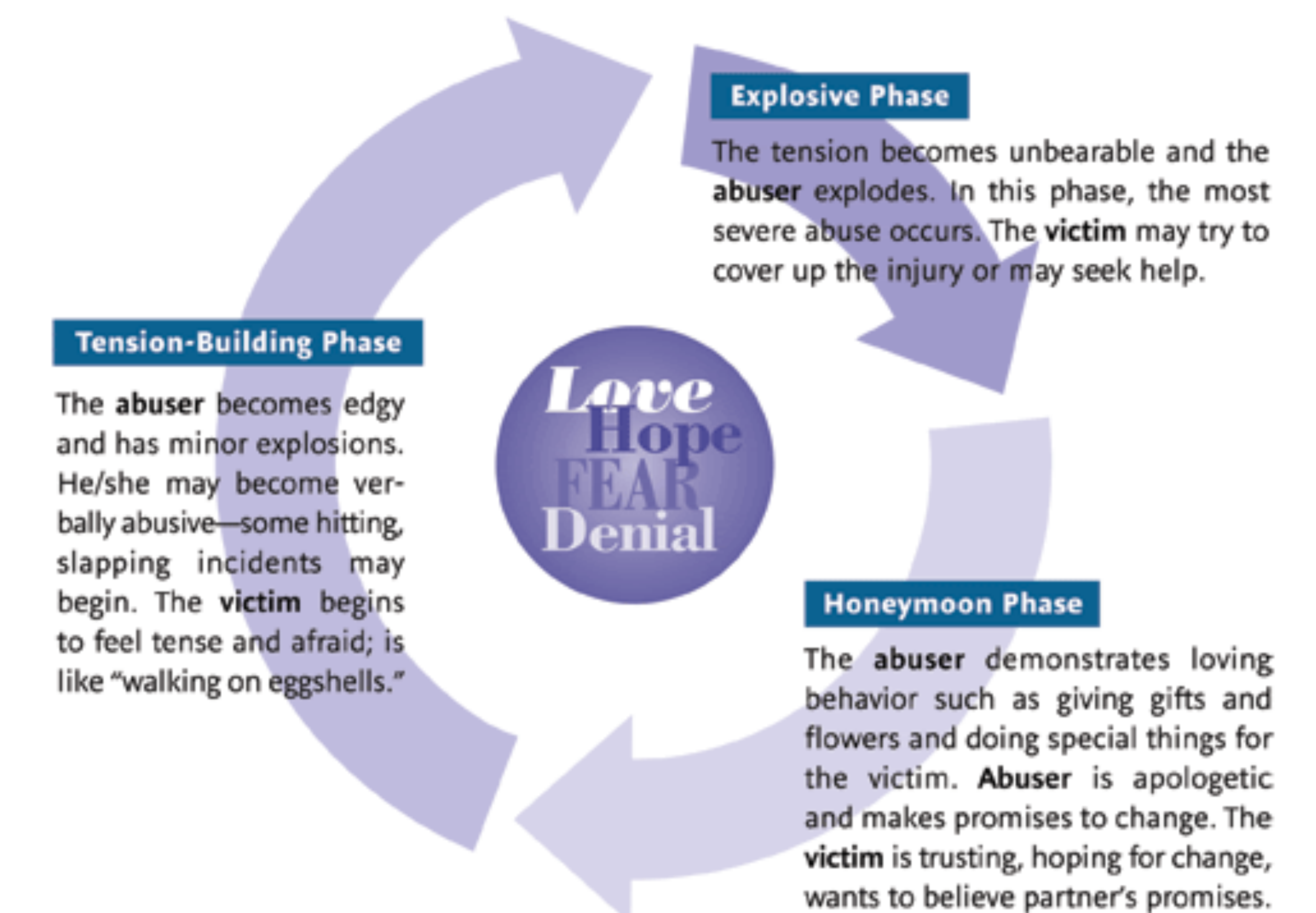
A child soldier is defined as, "any person less than 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity other than purely as a family member." This refers to those carrying arms, cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, including girls recruited as concubines or for forced marriage.

Study of 504 children, boys and girls:

- 51% had been physically abused or tortured.
- 64% had been abducted from their families.
- 28% of the abducted children (all boys) were trained for combat.
- most of the children had witnessed murder, torture, or rape.
- 39% think the traumatic event is happening again
- 45% have recurrent nightmares
- 50% have sudden emotional or physical reaction when reminded of the event

Rehabilitation

- Education and vocational schools
- Integration in the community and family
- Medical assistance
- Taking care of children with special needs



Solutions

There are a number of programs in place to protect children from abuse and neglect. Some initiatives, such as mandated reporter laws, were created for the early detection of child maltreatment, whereas others were started as a reaction to child maltreatment, such as foster care.

Certain professionals who work closely with children are mandated by law to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect. In particular, teachers play a large role in this, but they unfortunately highly underreport. This underreporting may be caused by a number of factors, including lack of education, personal conflict, or lack of time. In order to improve the effectiveness of mandated reporting laws for teachers, education should begin during licensing. Annual workshops at every school should be held for the entire faculty to review the laws and signs of maltreatment and to inform teachers about any changes. Furthermore, improving the relationship between teachers and Child Protective Services would be beneficial. Finally, teachers should be provided basic guidelines on when to report and how as a quick reference if needed.

Foster care is defined as "24 hour substitute care for children outside of their own homes" (Child Welfare Information Gateway). The preferred goal for children in foster care is to give them a permanent living environment with caring parents. The majority of children in foster care are placed in loving homes and provided with the support that they need to cope with and overcome the maltreatment. There are, however, some disadvantages to the foster care system: there are unfit foster parents, children are at a higher risk for developing an attachment disorder, and children are not always provided the services that they need. To correct these problems, there needs to be more intensive foster parent screening and training, children need to be kept in the same place as long as possible, and more funding is needed to support the necessary services that the children might need.