

The Role of Dentists in Recognition of Child Abuse

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Violence against children and adolescents is a major public health issue worldwide that threatens physical and mental wellbeing and causes irreparable harm. This is a complex phenomenon that is triggered by multiple factors, including social, political, economic and cultural issues. Doctors of dental medicine are expected to act responsible with regards to the protection of children from violence.

In Sweden, the law states that no diagnosis of abuse or neglect is necessary for filing a report; a suspicion is enough. The obligation to report is unconditional and should be performed without undue delay. A report to social services initiates a child-protection process, so reporting suspicions of maltreatment is important for the welfare of children experiencing maltreatment and for the future of the families being reported [1]. While dentists have a moral and legal obligation to report child abuse and neglect, many fail to do so, citing lack of knowledge of their legal obligation to do so, insufficient training, or both [2]. Shapiro MC et al. introduced a novel, online interactive training module designed to positively engage dental students and teach them to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect. The results showed that the interactive online training module was more effective than the lecture-based method [3].

Pediatric dentists and oral and maxillofacial surgeons, whose advanced education programs include a mandated child abuse curriculum, can provide valuable information and assistance to physicians about oral and dental aspects of child abuse and neglect.

Neglect evidences regarding oral and general health in children, must be treated as soon as they appear. The reporting, by health professionals of suspected child abuse and neglect is mandated by law in various countries. However, in order to do so, the dentist's needs to understand what is dental neglect, as well as its risks factors and variables associated with it.

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