

Battered Child? – A Case Report

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Abstract

A four year old Muslim female child came with alleged h/o fall in school with bluish discoloration around the left eye, neck, back and limbs. The paediatrician suspected this to be a case of bleeding disorder because of family history as her elder sister was suffering from platelet disorder. Finally it turned out to be a physical assault case with no any ill or evil intention.

Key words: Battered child, Contusion, Bleeding disorder.

Introduction:

A battered child is one who has received injuries as a result of non-accidental violence, produced by a parent or a guardian. In addition to physical injury, there may be non-accidental deprivation of nutrition, care and affection[1].

In the Eastern Culture, babies are considered as gifts from God and cases of battered baby syndrome are rare. However, instances of ill treatment of young children who work as domestic servants are on record where employers have beaten such children with sticks or branded with a pair of hot tongs. The crime comes to light only when such children complain to someone who knows their mother tongue[2]. However, the awareness in these aspects has recently caused concern among professionals and enlightened citizens, specially in the advanced countries where the problem has been reported to have increased to ten fold in the last decade[3]. In the third world countries with poorer societies, continuous socioeconomic stress induces the parents to abuse their children[4].

In India, references to child labour in earlier times and well regulated tolerance of child abuse by parents have been documented as an integral part of the cultural ethos of family units.

In USA, specially, "Ohio Revised Code" indicates that endangering a child includes violating duties of care, support or protection. Physical abuse in Indian situation includes torture, cruel abuse, excessive punishment and restraint that creates substantial risk of physical harm to the child. [5,

6] Most researchers and authorities agree on the basic issue of child abuse resulting from parental misuse or exploitation of the rights of parents or of other guardians to control and discipline children under their care, which is detrimental to the child's health and well being [7,8].

Case Report:

A four year old Muslim female child was brought to KLES Hospital with alleged h/o fall in school. Prior to fall the patient was alright. After that there was bluish discoloration (contusion) of skin around the left eye which alarmingly increased in size, panicking the parents and rushing the patient to hospital. Similar bluish discolorations (contusions) were present over neck, back and limbs. There were no bleeding manifestations in the past. Family history revealed that the eldest sister aged nine years suffered from bleeding disorder (Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura). There was no family h/o bleeding disorder in neither the father's nor the mother's family. The patient weighed 10 kgs. She was moderately built and nourished. On examination, all the vital parameters were within normal limits. The mother had normal delivery in the hospital. All the developmental milestones were normal. Possibility of bleeding diathesis was strongly suspected and the relevant investigations done by the paediatrician were within normal limits. Ophthalmic examination revealed the left black eye with subconjunctival haemorrhage. On fundoscopic examination there was no retinal detachment.

Psychiatric examination revealed that the mother was no more. The elder sister in the family aged nine years took care of all the day to day needs of the younger sister who was four years. Beating and pinching were the most common punishments given by the elder sister for all the mischievous done by the younger sister and for not studying. These incidents were frequent in nature but this time the intensity of beating was relatively severe resulting in contusions.

Thorough examination of the elder sister revealed no psychiatric illness but it was only her concern towards the welfare of the younger sister. She was a mother-like sister and may be when she failed to make her younger sister listen to her she might have got frustrated and angry, this might have resulted in beating her up severely unknowingly about what could happen.

Conclusion:

This case was initially misdiagnosed as Battered Baby Syndrome. Further probing and consultation with Forensic Experts revealed that this was purely an accident case and this was not done with any ill intention of harming the younger child. This case was concluded as an accident which happened unintentionally by an elder sister who took her mother's place in showing concern for her younger sister. She herself was a young child who needed concern and care from some caring guardian.

A recent WHO estimate shows that 40 million children in the world, aged 0 – 14 years are abused and neglected. These children require both health care and social care [9].

Recent times has witnessed cruelty on children at an alarming rate in India too. Very little is reported about this in our Indian literature. Latest Indian studies on physical abuse of children reveal that the problem of child abuse is more prevalent in metropolitan cities and urban sectors than in rural areas of the country.

Any case, before concluding it under Battered Baby Syndrome, should be thoroughly investigated and all the possibilities of accidental injuries should be ruled out so as to avoid unnecessary harassment of an innocent.

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