

Challenges in Child Protection Against Child Abuse in The UAE (United Arab Emirates)

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Child abuse in the UAE is not very large, but number of reports of physical or sexual abuse of children has increased. There were 59 cases of sexual abuse of children in 2015 as compared with 47 in 2013. 40% of child abuse cases in UAE involve maids and around 45% of child harassment cases are committed by relatives. UAE nationals topped the number of victims. There are numerous challenges that the government is facing.

- **Many cases are not being reported:** Legal experts say that more than 90 % of child abuse cases are not being reported, especially those occurring in Arab families.
- **Lack of evidence in many cases:** Despite the fact that a number of criminals have been indicted for abuse against children, the lack of evidence has worked in their favour.
- **Any delay in starting investigations:** The culprit is lost forever as he might escape to his own country or any other.
- **Cultural clashes:** Touching may be interpreted differently in different cultures. "Someone may touch the child without bad intentions, but may be interpreted by parents differently.
- **Child's Testimony:** Authorities take into account the child's testimony, but it must be supported by conclusive evidence such as a forensic laboratory report to confirm the occurrence of crime.
- The UAE has taken a firm stand against child abuse by implementing several policies including:
- **The New Child Protection Law:** Took effect in June 2016. Often referred to as Wadeema's Law, it covers physical and sexual abuse, habitual maltreatment, neglect, and exploitation by groups that teach fanaticism, hatred, or violence. The child law also covers the role of a social worker in psychological counselling and rehabilitation. The law criminalises even the caretakers/parents who neglect children.

- **Dubai Foundation for Women and Children:** Since its inception 11 years ago, has handled more than 500 cases of physical, mental and sexual abuse of children. It is now launching its eighth annual "Protect My Childhood, it's Precious" campaign.
- **Child Support Centres:** These centres specifically deal and address issues related to family disputes, supporting victims of crimes, and protecting children from abuse.
- **The Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre:** Works with both national and international organisations to address the issues of risk to children on the internet.

Home safety of children is a large topic. Risks are presented of electrocution, drowning, falling, poisoning, and injury from normal household items. UAE law considers leaving children with Nannies and not breastfeeding the baby as child negligence.

Off late there have been a few incidents of children being found dead in school buses after being left by mistake in the school bus when other children got off. These incidents are more common in the scorching heat in summers.

There have been other incidents of children falling accidentally from high rise buildings. Since UAE living is much about living in high rise buildings, parents are advised repeatedly not to leave their children unattended and to keep at bay such incidents.

There are many educational and awareness programmes being carried out.

The 'Child Protection Dimensions' UAE government is working on are:

1. Child Abuse investigation
2. Prevention of Neglect, Physical, Emotional & Sexual Abuse
3. Child Protection on Roads and in Transport
4. Child Protection in Buildings

5. Child Protection in Public Venues
6. Child Protection in Disaster and Crisis
7. Child Protection from Technological Risks & Threats
8. Protection Against Known Dangerous Persons
9. Child protection in Schools
10. Protection against Peer Abuse
11. Child protection in Sports
12. Child protection in Troubled Families
13. Child protection from Human Trafficking
14. Child protection from Child Labour

Acts that are not allowed with a child

1. Hitting a child
2. Leaving a child alone in the house
3. Child seat/sitting in front
4. Shouting/calling him names: Calling a child names affects a child psychologically. Reprimanding a child in a calm manner is acceptable.
5. Child support

The law ensures that every child has the right to live, be in a safe environment, and have access to education and health services.

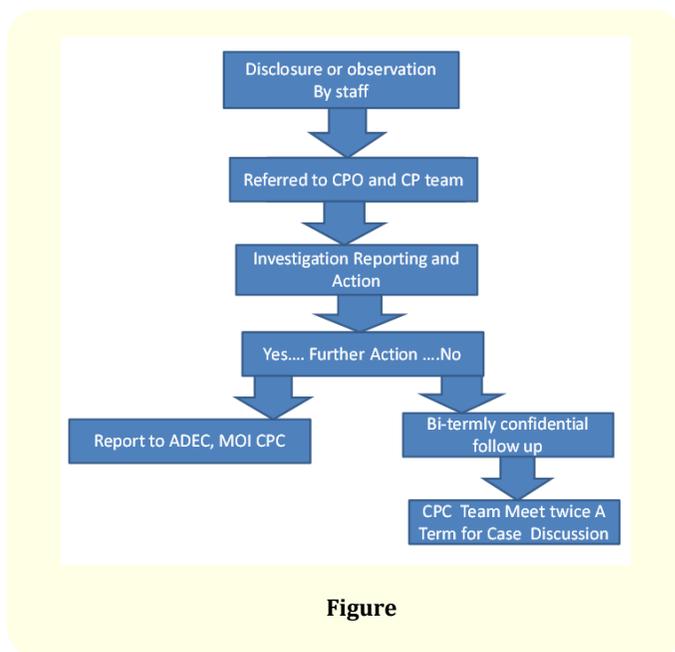
Helpful numbers

- Police: 999, Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre Hotline: 116-111
- Child Protection Centre (under CDA Dubai): 800 988
- Dubai Foundation for Women and Children: 800 111- FREE HOTLINE for any help needed abused child.
- Social Services Department (Sharjah): 800 700

The government is sensitive towards child protection and has taken many a steps of which Wadeema’s law is one of the topmost and most popular step against child abuse.

Below is the flow diagram as to how one can report child abuse:

People are legally obliged to report cases of suspected abuse. Despite the small number, the government and community need to work together on the issue. The Authorities can help people only if they cooperate. Families are encouraged to report cases whenever suspicious



Figure

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