

**IDENTIFYING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PARENTS AND
CAREGIVERS TO COMMIT CHILD MALTREATMENT: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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Declaration

I, Mamdlalose Dipholo, hereby declare that this submission is a result of my own work and that to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been given in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

ABSTRACT

Child maltreatment, encompassing various forms of abuse and neglect, poses a significant global public health concern. This study provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted dimensions of child maltreatment, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect. The impact of maltreatment on the developing child is profound, resulting in a range of adverse physical and mental health outcomes, developmental delays, behavioural challenges, and social difficulties. The aim of this study was to comprehensively review and synthesise peer-reviewed research on the factors influencing parents and caregivers in committing child maltreatment.

This systematic review identified the multifaceted factors influencing parents and caregivers to engage in child maltreatment. Using a social ecological framework, ten key themes emerged, namely poverty and lack of access to services, intergenerational transmission of abuse, childhood trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, neighbourhood violence, cultural practices, social factors, children's individual factors, and caregivers' mental health concerns. Personal history, caregiver's mental health, substance abuse, poor awareness of self-protection, and gender emerged as significant individual-level contributors. Non biological caregivers and domestic violence were identified as relationship-level factors. At the community level, poverty, lack of access to services, unemployment, and neighbourhood violence were found to impact child maltreatment. Cultural values and the intergenerational transmission of abuse were reported as influential societal-level factors. The study underscores the complex interplay of personal, environmental, and cultural influences in child maltreatment, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address this critical issue.

KEYWORDS

Child, Caregivers, Factors, Maltreatment, Parents

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Identifying factors that influence parents and/or caregivers to commit child maltreatment: Systematic review.

1 Context

Child maltreatment is an ongoing global public health concern that has been linked to numerous negative outcomes for the developing child, including physical and mental health problems, developmental delays for the child, behavioural difficulties, and social problems (Hailes et al., 2019; Rivara et al., 2019). According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is defined as any individual below the age of 18 years, unless national laws recognise adulthood earlier (United Nations, 1989). This definition was applied to this study because it is widely accepted and used by several international organisations and governments to guide policies and practices concerning children's rights, welfare, and protection. Child maltreatment, usually referred to as child abuse or neglect, includes different forms of harm inflicted upon children by parents or caregivers or individuals in positions of authority (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2012). This encompasses physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, including neglect, which involves failing to provide children's basic needs like food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and supervision (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2012). Child maltreatment is a terrible occurrence that manifests and resides in many communities across the globe (Katz et al., 2019). Different forms of child abuse occur at different levels and the consequences vary in magnitude and nature. Child abuse is often perpetrated by individuals who are closely related to the child as an act of commission or omission which inhibit a child's development (Chng et al., 2018). Apart from home, child abuse can also occur in different forms at institutional level, which includes places such as schools, day care centres, healthcare facilities, welfare departments among other places (Orte et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2020; Burke et al., 2021; Laskey et al., 2022). The common forms of child abuse reported in literature are physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect (Moody et al., 2018). These forms of child abuses will be discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

Physical abuse is one of the most common forms of child abuse (Berkowitz, 2017). It occurs when a parent or caregiver commits an act that results in physical injury to a child or adolescent, for example, cuts, bruises, muscle sprains, or broken bones, even if the injury was unintentional (Berkowitz, 2017). Fayaz (2019) defined child physical abuse as any intentional act causing injury, trauma, bodily harm, or other physical suffering to a child. Fang et al. (2015) endeavoured to estimate the prevalence of all forms of abuse (neglect and physical abuse, emotional and sexual abuse). Fang et al. (2015) used data from the 2010 global burden

of disease estimates to calculate disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs)¹ lost because of child abuse. The study reported that 26.6% of children below the age 18 years had suffered physical abuse which accounted for 12.2% of DALYs lost. In the context of child physical abuse, the DALYs lost are a result of the immediate and long-term effects of abuse on the child's physical and mental health (Fang et al., 2015).

According to Nanda et al. (2018) child physical abuse is a critical public health problem across the globe, leading to significant disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) lost. For instance, several studies (Bapat et al., 2017; Mathur et al., 2018; Pandey et al., 2020) have been conducted in India alone to estimate the extent of child physical abuse and the associated burden of disease. Singh et al. (2019) reported that approximately 50% of children in India experience some form of physical abuse, with the highest rates of abuse reported among children aged 5-12 years. Child physical abuse can sometimes lead to sexual abuse in several complex and interconnected ways (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2019). The perpetrators of physical abuse may also engage in sexual abuse, exploiting their power and control over the child. Furthermore, the trauma from physical abuse can disrupt healthy boundaries, making it difficult for the child to recognise and resist sexual advances.

Mathews and Collin-Vézina (2019) define child sexual abuse as any sexual activity that involves a child and an adult, including touching, penetration, and non-contact abuse. Child sexual abuse is a global issue (Russell et al., 2021), with alarming prevalence and impact worldwide. However, within the African context, the magnitude and impact of child sexual abuse are difficult to estimate due to under-reporting and inadequate data (Badoe, 2017). Walker-Descartes et al. (2021) explored the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Africa and found that one in three girls and one in six boys in Africa experience sexual violence before the age of 18. These statistics are likely to be underestimated due to cultural and social stigma surrounding sexual abuse (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022), indicating a broader global concern beyond the African region.

Similar to any other form of child abuse; the effects of child sexual abuse on a child can be devastating and have long term consequences. Children who experience sexual abuse are at a heightened risk of mental health problems for instance, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Gardner et al., 2019; Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2019; Villalta et al.,

¹DALYs is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death.

2020). When a child experiences sexual abuse, they often endure not only the pain of the actual harm but also the emotional trauma that accompanies it.

Rees (2010) defined emotional abuse, as a form of abuse characterized by a pattern of behaviour that is intended to control, intimidate, manipulate, or humiliate the victim. It can take many forms, including verbal abuse (such as belittling, threatening, or name-calling), isolating the victim from friends and family, controlling their access to resources and information, or making the victim feel guilty or ashamed (Maguire et al., 2015). Child emotional abuse is a pervasive global problem, affecting children of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, in Brazil alone the prevalence of emotional abuse is high, with over 40% of children experiencing emotional maltreatment at some point in their childhood (Diehl et al., 2018). Furthermore, in South Africa, one in six children (16,1%) reported to experience emotional abuse (Hsiao et al., 2018). The negative consequences of emotional abuse on a child's development have been reported and they include among others low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders (Norman et al., 2012; Reyome, 2019; Banducci et al., 2019).

According to Riggs (2019), emotional abuse can be as damaging to the victim as physical abuse and the victims can find it challenging to recognize and escape the occurrence. This form of abuse can therefore be a precursor to or occur alongside other forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual abuse or neglect (Karakur & Silver, 2013). Child neglect is when a parent or other person responsible for taking care of the child fails to provide the child with the necessary food, clothes, shelter, medical treatment, or supervision to the point where the child's safety, health, or well-being are in danger (Avdibegović & Brkić, 2020). Theron and van Breda (2021) estimated that one out of every five children and adolescents are victims of neglect in Sub-Saharan Africa. The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions added stress to vulnerable families, isolated at-risk children, and limited access to protective services for those that are at heightened risk (Erhabor, 2021; Katz et al., 2021). As a result, it is possible that neglect rates increased throughout this time, making it even more urgent for researchers and healthcare professionals to recognize the effects and other risk factors of this type of child abuse (Caron et al., 2020). Failure to heed this advice could have significant financial and societal consequences, exacerbating the already dire situation for vulnerable children and families. Sserwanja et al. (2021) reported that the stringent lockdown rules heightened risk of different forms of child abuse including neglect by greatly disturbing the living conditions of

children, reducing their access to basic needs (food and health care) and created lack of social services (Sserwanja et al., 2021).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) estimated that 1 billion children worldwide have experienced some form of child maltreatment, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, as well as neglect. According to a report published by the African Partnership to End Violence Against Children [APEVAC] (2021), more than half of all children in Africa experience physical abuse. Additionally, several studies (Jewkes et al., 2011; Shankar et al., 2018; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2019) have reported high levels of child physical abuse globally. For instance, a study conducted in Kenya found that approximately 70% of participants reported being physically abused as children (Moses et al., 2016). Moreover, physical child abuse is a significant issue in South Africa (Mchunu et al., 2019). This form of abuse includes an act by an adult causing injury, trauma, bodily harm, or other physical suffering to a child (Fayaz, 2019). Swart et al. (2018) explored the prevalence of child abuse in South Africa and found that physical abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse among South African children, with 63% reporting having been physically abused.

The prevalence of child maltreatment varies by region and country (Jud, 2018). For example, in low- and middle-income countries, the prevalence of child maltreatment is generally higher than in high-income countries (Moody et al., 2018). For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, up to 60% of children experience some form of violence (Badoe, 2017). According to recent statistics from the WHO (2022), the prevalence of child maltreatment in Sub-Saharan Africa is among the highest in the world. An estimated 60% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa have experienced some form of violence, abuse, or neglect (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (2019) child maltreatment rates are also high in the Sub-Saharan region, with an estimated 18.5 children per 100,000 population being victims of maltreatment.

Within the Sub-Saharan region South Africa has the highest prevalence of child maltreatment (UNICEF, 2020). Jamieson et al. (2017) tracked child abuse cases in South Africa and found that out of 158 reported child maltreatment cases, 62% of victims reported sexual abuse, 30% reported deliberate neglect and 8% to physical abuse. The study revealed that 45% of the incidences happened at home (Jamieson et al. (2017). In August 2020, during the lockdown, ChildLine reported a call increase of more than 36.8 for children needing

assistance (Fouche et al., 2020). This data corresponds with reports from health care facilities in SA on the incidents of severe injuries amongst child abuse referrals (UNICEF, 2020).

According to these reports it can be inferred that child maltreatment worsened during the lockdown restrictions since an increased risk of victimisation of children at home was recorded. The pandemic has increased the likelihood of child abuse and neglect because of various psychological factors associated with COVID-19 restrictions. These include worries about physical and mental health, financial strain, difficulties in homeschooling, conflicts within marriages and domestic violence, and more intense interactions between children and their parents (Wu & Xu, 2020; Pereda & Díaz-Faes, 2020). UNICEF (2012) report on child abuse explained that violence at home is not limited to one form but includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, corporal punishment, emotional abuse, and neglect. Children below the age of 9 years show vulnerability as they cannot report when being abused by their parents as they depend on them for nurturing and care, which leaves some cases of child violence hidden and unreported (Jamieson, et al., 2017).

Abuse in early childhood has been associated with the increased risk of developing adverse psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, aggression or cognitive impairments in adolescence and adulthood (Fang et al., 2016; Meinck et al., 2013; WHO, 2020). Mental health or physical health problems arising from abuse affect children's capacity to succeed at school and to maintain positive peer, social, and romantic relationships later in life (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). It was also reported that victims of abuse might become abusers themselves and as such, there is a continuous cycle of victim and abuser (Shields et al., 2020), therefore it was imperative to investigate the factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

Hsiao et al. (2018) investigated child maltreatment in SA and the cost of inaction to society. This study revealed that the prevention of witnessing and experiencing child violence could reduce mental and physical health outcomes in the population (Hsiao et al., 2018). The prevention of sexual violence against children could have reduced up to 14% of drug abuse in the entire population (Hsiao et al., 2018). Depression in women could have been decreased by 6% and anxiety by 6% in the whole population (Hsiao et al., 2018). The estimation of 10% reduction in alcohol abuse in women and 7% in men could have been possible (Hsiao et al., 2018).

In summary, considering the psychological impact of child maltreatment provided insight into the immediate and long-term consequences experienced by victims of child maltreatment. Understanding the mental health disorders that can arise from maltreatment is essential in informing future studies for the development of targeted interventions and support systems. Moreover, acknowledging the societal impact is equally vital as it highlights the broader societal repercussions. Recognizing these psycho-social implications is critical in terms of making recommendations for future studies. In addition, this study gained a more holistic perspective and a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between individual well-being and broader societal dynamics. It was against this background that this study identified the factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

1.2 Significance of the study

Identifying the factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment is important for several reasons which among others include providing invaluable insights into the underlying determinants of abusive behaviour among parents or caregivers. Understanding these factors can empower professionals in different fields like psychology, social work, and law enforcement to identify at-risk families early on and provide them with the required support. In addition, this study sheds light on societal and systemic influences that may contribute to child maltreatment, potentially leading to policy reforms and community-based initiatives aimed at creating safer environments for children. Ultimately, information generated by this study can serve as benchmark for follow-up studies to investigate on approaches that can be used to protect vulnerable children from abuse, break the cycle of abuse and foster healthier, more nurturing family dynamics for future generations.

1.3 Research question

What are the individual, societal and environmental factors that have been found in the literature that contribute to child abuse and neglect by parents and caregivers?

1.4 Research aim

The aim of the study was to review and synthesize peer-reviewed research on individual and social factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

1.5 Dissertation layout

Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing the context, stating the study's aim, presenting the study's objectives.

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review, which involved identifying the factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, indicating that the researcher will employ qualitative data analysis techniques.

In Chapter 4, the data collected through qualitative methods was analysed to assess the attainment of the research objectives.

Finally, Chapter 5 encompasses the conclusion and recommendations, encompassing observations, connections between findings, theories, and practical applications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth and thorough exploration of the multifaceted factors reported/ theorised in the literature that contribute to parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. The chapter synthesised a wide range of scholarly sources, with the aim of portraying a comprehensive picture of the various factors that contribute to this complex issue. It delved into individual, societal, and environmental factors, exploring aspects such as parental stress, mental health challenges, substance abuse, socioeconomic circumstances, and social support networks. Additionally, it examined cultural norms, societal attitudes towards parenting, and the influence of historical or contextual factors. Through this extensive examination, the chapter aimed to shed light on the interplay of these factors, provided a nuanced understanding of why parent or caregivers may commit child maltreatment.

2.1 The importance of a holistic approach to understanding factors that contribute to child maltreatment.

Recent studies (Toth & Manly, 2019; Roygardner et al.; 2020; Katz et al., 2021) have highlighted the importance of adopting a holistic approach in understanding child maltreatment. A holistic approach recognizes that child maltreatment is a complex problem that cannot be explained by a single factor (Espelage & Swearer, 2009). Rather, it requires understanding of the interplay between individual, familial, community, and societal factors. For example, Austin et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of addressing societal factors, such as social policies and the availability of resources, in preventing child maltreatment. While Korbin et al. (2017) underscore the importance of how the understanding of cultural factors contributes to child maltreatment is crucial in developing effective interventions that are sensitive to cultural diversity. Integrating all the factors from individual, familial, community, and societal factors is indispensable when it comes to addressing child maltreatment.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks in understanding child maltreatment

While different theoretical frameworks may be considered in the study's investigation of factors influencing parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment, the study ultimately adopted the socio-ecological framework to discuss its findings comprehensively.

Child maltreatment is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been explored from various theoretical perspectives. This section will present some of the most prominent

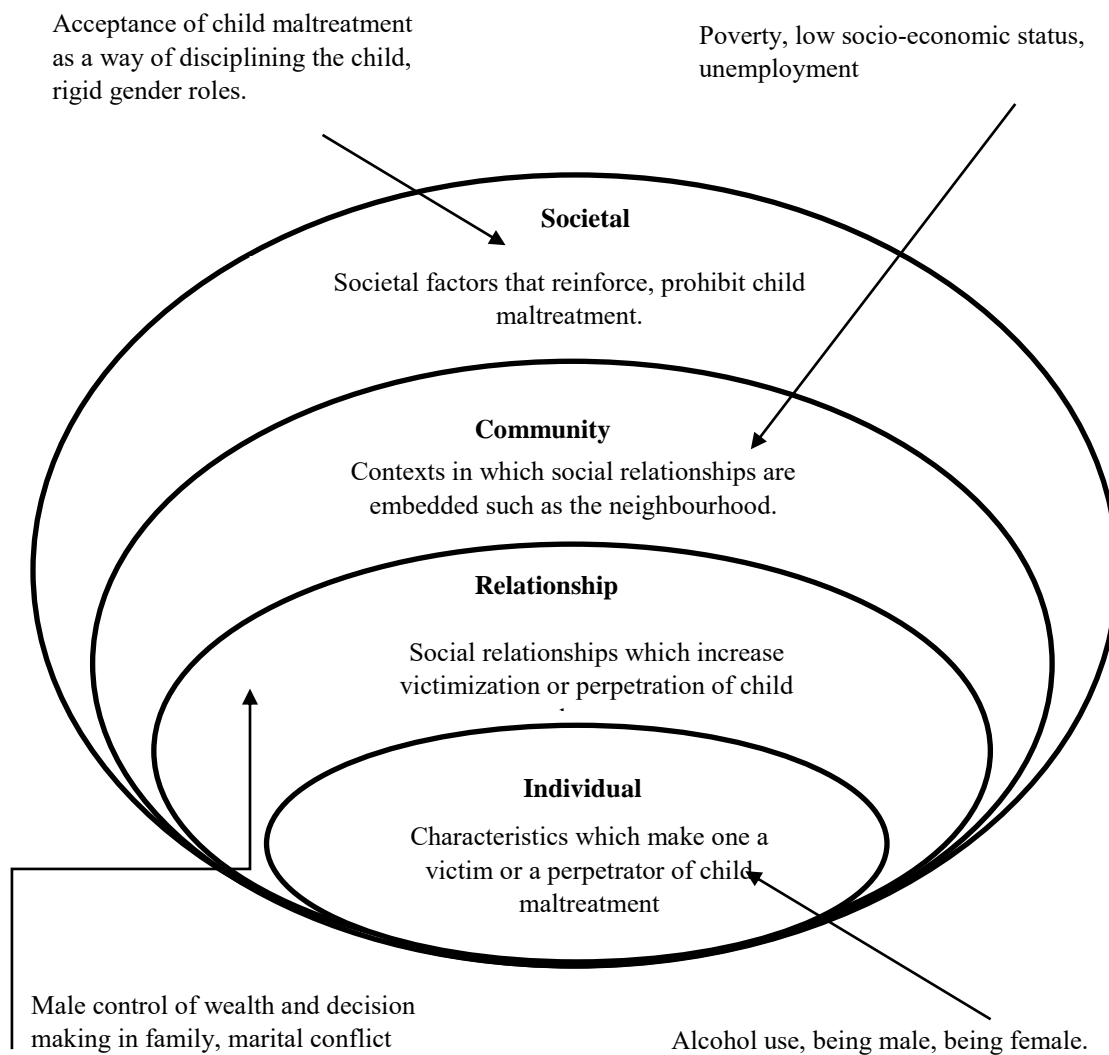
theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand the factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Overall, the theoretical frameworks presented in this section highlight the importance of understanding the complex interplay of personal, environmental, and cultural factors that contribute to child maltreatment.

2.2.1 Socio-ecological model to map the complexities of child maltreatment in communities.

While systematic reviews are rigorous summaries of existing empirical evidence, they do not typically require theoretical underpinning (Siddaway et al., 2019). However, applying the socio-ecological model was crucial to interpret and contextualise the findings. Theory provided the framework through which the researchers made sense of the empirical data, offered explanations for observed patterns and assisted in identify underlying factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment (McCloskey, 2017).

The use of the social ecological model can provide a better comprehension on the factors that increase the likelihood of adults to commit child abuse (Mulder, Kuiper, van der Put, Stems & Assink, 2018). According to Espelage and Swearer (2009), the social ecological model which was developed by Bronfenbrenner (2009) [Figure 2.1] has been widely used to design interventions to prevent child abuse. This model examines child maltreatment as the outcome of different levels of influence on behaviour which include individual, community, relationship and societal level and it also explores the relationship between individual and contextual factors (Atilola, 2017). According to Yoon et al. (2021), the complex interaction of personal, interpersonal, social, cultural, and environmental factors can lead to child maltreatment. Davidson et al. (2019) adds that when it comes to identifying factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment, a multi-sectoral approach and recognition of various factors relating to child maltreatments is indispensable. According to Wendel et al. (2015) the social ecological model offers an approach for identifying and comprehending the complexities involved in the paths leading to child maltreatment. It is a conceptual framework that considers the societal and individual pathways that result in child maltreatment in a bigger, more varied setting (Atilola, 2017).

Figure 2.1: Social ecological model applied to child maltreatment (adapted from the WHO, 2012)



The model has four separate but connected levels, and each level contains factors that have an impact on how an individual is shaped (Abbas & Jabeen, 2023). The first level focuses on character factors that increase a person's likelihood of being a victim or a perpetrator of child maltreatment (Kelly et al., 2022). This covers distinctive circumstances like consuming alcohol, growing up with abuse, or being a man or woman. The second level shows how deep social ties, such as those with close friends, intimate partners, and family members, increase the risk of a child being maltreated. (Maternowska & Fry, 2018).

The third level examines the community contexts in which social relationships are embedded in such workplaces and neighbourhoods (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). It also seeks to identify how the characteristics of these settings such as high levels of residential mobility

and high population density are associated with child maltreatment (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The final level of the social ecological model examines societal factors that influence rates of child abuse (Cardinali et al., 2020). These include cultural norms that support child maltreatment as an acceptable way of disciplining a child (Davidson et al., 2019). The social ecological model illustrated the ways in which factors on multiple levels (individual, community, relationship and societal) influence child maltreatment (Davidson et al., 2019). Additionally, this model can offer a comprehensive framework for merging several ideas, related to the environment and policy (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Psychological theories

According to psychological theories, individual factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment are related to the parents or caregivers, such as their mental health, personality traits, and emotional regulation (Kim & Maguire-Jack, 2015; McCrory & Viding, 2015; West et al., 2020). These theories suggest that parents who have experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect during their own childhood are more likely to abuse or neglect their own children. Ogbonna et al. (2019) adds that, parents who struggle with mental health issues, substance abuse, or anger management problems may be more likely to engage in abusive behaviour.

2.2.3 Social learning theory

Social learning theory is a psychological theory that explains how people learn new behaviours through observation and imitation Bandura and Walters (1977). According to this theory, children learn from their parents and other caregivers through modelling, reinforcement, and punishment. According to Ferrara et al. (2019) children who are exposed to aggressive behaviour from their caregivers may be more likely to develop aggressive behaviour themselves. For example, Forke et al. (2018) explored the associations between childhood witnessing of adult violence at home and subsequent adolescent relationship violence outcomes. It was reported that children who witness violence or experience physical abuse from their caregivers may be more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour themselves. In addition, children who are exposed to negative reinforcement, such as punishment or neglect, may be more likely to exhibit behaviour problems later in life (Ferrara et al., 2019).

2.2.4 Attachment Theory

According to Cherniak et al. (2021), the attachment theory is a psychological theory that explains the importance of the emotional bond between a child and their caregiver. According to this theory, children who experience secure attachment with their caregivers

have a greater ability to form healthy relationships and develop appropriate social skills (Gross et al., 2017). In contrast, children who experience insecure attachment with their caregivers may be more likely to develop psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and behaviour problems (Cooke et al., 2019). For example, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the strength of the association between parent–child experiences and adult insecure attachments by synthesizing the existing literature. The results revealed that children who experience abuse or neglect from their caregivers may be more likely to develop insecure attachment styles. Hughes et al. (2016) adds that children who experience maltreatment may be less likely to trust others and form healthy relationships later in life.

2.2.5 Cognitive theory

Cognitive theory is a psychological theory that explains how people process and interpret information (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). According to this theory, children who experience abuse or neglect may develop negative schemas, or patterns of thinking, about themselves, others, and the world around them (Zeynel & Uzer, 2020). These negative schemas may lead to psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Zeynel & Uzer, 2020). For example, children who experience abuse or neglect may develop negative self-schemas, such as feeling unlovable or worthless. According to Dye (2018), children who are exposed to maltreatment may be more likely to develop negative beliefs about the world and other people.

2.2.6 Socio-economic theories

Socio-economic theories view child maltreatment as a result of poverty and other forms of social disadvantage (Avdibegović & Brkić, 2020). According to Berliana et al. (2019) socio-economic theories suggest that parents who live in poverty or face other socio-economic challenges may be more likely to experience stress and financial strain, which can lead to maltreatment. In addition, parents who lack access to resources and support may be more isolated and unable to manage the demands of parenthood (Zaidman-Zait et al., 2017).

2.2.7 Environmental and cultural theories

According to Nadan et al. (2015), environmental and cultural theories, view child maltreatment because of broader social and cultural factors that influence parenting practices. Environmental and cultural theories suggest that parents may be more likely to engage in abusive behaviour if they are exposed to violence in their community or have experienced domestic violence in their own relationships (Timshel et al., 2017). Cultural norms and

beliefs about child-rearing and discipline may influence parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their children (Dalikeni, 2021).

2.3 Factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

In reviewing the extensive body of literature on child maltreatment, a critical area of focus is premised on understanding the different factors influencing parents and caregivers to engage to commit child maltreatment. The following sections provide a comprehensive examination of the myriad factors that contribute to the occurrence of child maltreatment within different contexts. From exploring the impact of socio-economic stressors, mental health issues, and substance abuse to delving into the intricate dynamics of family relationships and intergenerational patterns of abuse, the literature review will shed light on the different and interconnected factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment in different environments.

2.3.1 Personal factors

Personal factors refer to individual characteristics of the parents or caregivers that may influence their propensity to engage in child maltreatment. These factors include parental mental health and substance abuse, parental childhood experiences of abuse and neglect, parental stress, and lack of social support, and becoming a parent at a young age (Thompson, 2015; Zeanah & Humphreys, 2018; Mulder et al., 2018; Ayers et al., 2019; Lawson et al., 2020). The following sections provide a description of how individual factors influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

2.3.2 Parental mental health and substance abuse

Parents with mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are more likely to engage in child maltreatment compared to parents without such disorders (Maercker et al., 2022). Conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder bipolar disorder, and personality disorders can affect a parent's emotional state, cognitive functioning, and ability to provide consistent and nurturing care (Ayers et al., 2019). A meta-analysis that reviewed evidence on perinatal mental health and risk of child maltreatment found that parental depression was associated with an increased risk of child maltreatment, including physical abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse (Ayers et al., 2019). Parents with untreated or poorly managed mental health issues may struggle with regulating their emotions, responding appropriately to their children's needs, and maintaining a safe and stable home environment (England et al., 2009). Moreover, certain mental health conditions, such as borderline personality disorder or conduct disorder,

can be associated with impulsive and aggressive behaviours that may contribute to child maltreatment (Krause-Utzet et al., 2019).

Substance abuse is another personal factor that is associated with child maltreatment. Parents who abuse drugs or alcohol are more likely to engage in abusive or neglectful behaviour, as their substance use can impair their ability to parent effectively (Lawson et al., 2020). Some of the ways in which substance abuse can affect parenting abilities include impaired judgment and decision-making. Substance abuse can impair a parent's ability to make rational decisions and exercise good judgment (Hasson III et al., 2022). When under the influence of substances, individuals may engage in risky behaviours, prioritize their substance use over their children's needs, or fail to recognize and respond appropriately to potential dangers or hazards in the environment (Hasson III et al., 2022). Parental neglect: substance-abusing parents may struggle to provide consistent and adequate care for their children (Sharley et al., 2019). Neglect can manifest in various ways, including failing to provide essential physical care (such as nutrition, hygiene, and medical attention), emotional support, and supervision (Avdibegović & Brkić, 2020). The focus on obtaining and using substances can consume a significant amount of time and energy, leading to neglectful parenting practices (Sharley et al., 2019).

Exposure to unsafe environments; substance abuse can create an unstable and unsafe living environment for children (Van Hout et al., 2020). Parents who abuse substances may engage in risky behaviours, such as drug dealing or associating with individuals involved in criminal activities, which can expose children to dangerous situations and increase the likelihood of physical or emotional harm (Lipari & Van Horn, 2017). Increased aggression and violence; substance abuse, particularly substances with intoxicating or disinhibiting effects, can increase the likelihood of aggressive or violent behaviour (Lamsma et al., 2020). This can put children at a higher risk of physical abuse or witnessing domestic violence, further compromising their safety and emotional well-being (Jose & Cherayi 2020). Interference with parental bonding and attachment; substance abuse can interfere with the parent-child bonding process and the development of secure attachment relationships (Bickelhaupt et al., 2021). According to Segura-Garcia et al. (2016) parents struggling with substance abuse may have difficulty responding consistently and sensitively to their children's emotional and physical needs, leading to disruptions in the attachment process critical for healthy child development.

2.3.3 Parental childhood abuse and neglect

Parents who were abused or neglected during their own childhood are more likely to engage in maltreatment of their own children (Leve et al., 2015). This phenomenon is often referred to as intergenerational transmission of violence or abuse (Pasalich et al., 2019). McKenzie et al. (2022) did a longitudinal examination of the association between maltreatment victimization experiences and the likelihood of intergenerational (dis)continuity of maltreatment in Australia. The study involved a sample of 2906 participants who were registered as parents via birth records and who experienced system contacts for maltreatment victimization in their childhood. It was found that individuals who experienced abuse or neglect during childhood were more likely to engage or continue with various forms of maltreatment as adults, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect (McKenzie et al., 2022).

The intergenerational transmission cycle of child maltreatment shows that individuals who were victims of abuse or neglect in their own childhood are more likely to repeat similar patterns of behaviour in their parenting roles (Assink et al., 2018). Some of the key factors that contribute to this intergenerational transmission include learned behaviour. Children who grow up in abusive or neglectful environments may internalize these behaviours as normal or acceptable parenting practices (Forke et al., 2018). They may lack positive role models or alternative parenting strategies, leading to the perpetuation of harmful behaviours they experienced themselves (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Parenting beliefs and attitudes; according to Michl-Petzing (2019), parents who experienced abused or neglected may develop distorted beliefs and attitudes about parenting. They may believe that harsh discipline, physical punishment, or emotional abuse is necessary or effective methods of child rearing (Michl-Petzing, 2019). These beliefs can influence their parenting style and increase the likelihood of engaging in abusive behaviours (Michl-Petzing, 2019).

Emotional and psychological impacts; individuals who experienced abuse or neglect during their childhood may carry unresolved emotional trauma and psychological distress into their adult lives (Toth & Manly, 2019). According to Greene et al. (2020) unaddressed trauma can affect their emotional regulation, empathy, and ability to form healthy parent-child attachments, leading to an increased risk of perpetrating maltreatment. Lack of supportive relationships; parenting can be challenging, and having a strong support system is crucial, especially for adolescent mothers (Anglely et al., 2015). However, individuals who experienced abuse or neglect in their own childhood often lack positive and supportive

relationships (Johnson & James, 2016). They may have strained or severed ties with their own families, limiting their access to emotional support, guidance, and positive parenting role models (Johnson & James, 2016).

2.3.4 Parental stress and lack of social support

Parents who experience high levels of stress, such as financial strain or relationship problems, are more likely to engage in maltreatment (Wu & Xu, 2020). Stressful life events can lead to frustration, anger, and a decreased ability to cope effectively with the demands of parenting (Cronin et al., 2015). Guided by family stress theory, Wu, and Xu (2020) identified risk and protective factors associated with increased risk of child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study reported an increased risk of child maltreatment during the pandemic due to multiple COVID-19 related stressors, for example physical and mental health issues, economic stress, challenges in home-schooling, marital conflicts and intimate partner violence, and intensified child–parent relationships (Wu & Xu, 2020). Exhaustion resulting from chronic stress, lack of sleep, or overwhelming responsibilities can impact a parent's ability to provide adequate supervision, attention, and care for their children. Fatigue can impair judgment and lead to unintentional neglect or increase the risk of accidents (Sprang et al., 2005), therefore social support is indispensable for such parents.

Hancock et al. (2023) also reported that parents who lack social support, such as help with childcare or emotional support, may also be more likely to commit child maltreatment. Social support plays a critical role in buffering the impact of stress and preventing child maltreatment. When parents lack a strong support network or feel socially isolated, several factors can contribute to an increased risk of child maltreatment (Hancock et al., 2023). Parenting can be emotionally challenging, and having a supportive network of family, friends, or community members can provide emotional validation, empathy, and encouragement. A lack of parent emotional support may contribute to increased feelings of frustration, helplessness, and isolation, which can strain parenting abilities (Hancock et al., 2023).

2.3.5 Being a parent at a young age.

Slack et al. (2004) explored individual characteristics that influence child maltreatment in the United States of America. The study revealed that young parents, particularly those under the age of 20, are more likely to engage in child maltreatment compared to older parents. This may be due to a lack of experience, financial strain, or social isolation that young parents often face (Slack et al., 2004). Several studies have reported

being a parent at young age as a risk of child maltreatment (Thompson & Neilson, 2014; King et al., 2019; Lang et al., 2022). Being a young parent may influence child maltreatment in several ways. Young parents, particularly teenagers, may have limited experience and knowledge about child development, parenting practices, and child-rearing responsibilities (Lang et al., 2022). Parenting skills are typically developed over time through exposure to child-rearing situations, guidance, and support (Breiner et al., 2016). The lack of experience and knowledge can make it challenging for young parents to provide appropriate care and meet the complex needs of their children, increasing the risk of maltreatment (Breiner et al., 2016).

Young parents often face financial limitations, inadequate housing, and limited access to healthcare and support services (Mangeli et al., 2017). These socio-economic factors can contribute to increased stress levels and difficulties in meeting the basic needs of their children (Mangeli et al., 2017). The lack of support networks, such as family or social connections, can further exacerbate the challenges faced by young parents, making it more difficult to cope with the demands of parenting (Datta et al., 2017; Hancock et al., 2023).

According to Govender et al. (2020) young parents may still be pursuing their education or establishing their careers, which can create additional stress and competing demands on their time and energy. Balancing the responsibilities of parenting with educational or career goals can be overwhelming and may lead to neglect or insufficient supervision of children, increasing the risk of maltreatment (Govender et al., 2020). Young parents often face challenges in maintaining stable and healthy relationships. The instability encountered in their intimate partnerships or co-parenting relationships can contribute to heightened stress, conflicts, and disruptions in the care giving environment (Govender et al., 2020). The consistency and quality of their parenting can be impacted by the unstable relationships which potentially increases the risk of maltreatment (Govender et al., 2020).

According to Van Zyl et al. (2015) young parents, especially teenage parents, may experience social isolation and stigma, which can contribute to increased stress and feelings of inadequacy. Negative societal attitudes or lack of acceptance can make it harder for young parents to seek support, guidance, or resources, further limiting their ability to provide adequate care and increasing the risk of maltreatment (Van Zyl et al., 2015).

2.4 Environmental factors

Environmental factors refer to the broader social and economic conditions that may influence the likelihood of child maltreatment. These factors include poverty, unemployment, housing instability, and neighbourhood violence (Cardinali et al., 2020).

2.4.1 Poverty

Poverty is a significant risk factor for child maltreatment (Maguire-Jack et al., 2022). Children living in poverty are also more likely to experience neglect and physical abuse (Bunting et al., 2022). Wangamati et al. (2018) explored using 28 focus group discussions (FDGs) the communities' perceptions of factors contributing to child sexual abuse vulnerability in Kenya. The FDGs were conducted with school-enrolled and unenrolled minors, teachers, community leaders and community members. The study revealed that minors from poor families engaged in transactional sex for survival and social status.

Parents who live in poverty are more likely to experience financial strain, lack access to adequate healthcare and education, and face limited job opportunities, all of which can increase the risk of child maltreatment (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Poverty places significant financial strain on families, making it difficult to meet their basic needs (Roskam et al., 2022). Families living in poverty may struggle to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare for their children (Drake et al., 2022). Financial stressors can increase parental stress levels and diminish their capacity to cope effectively, increasing the risk of maltreatment. Families living in poverty often have limited access to essential support services (Monahan, 2020). They may face barriers in accessing healthcare, mental health services, parenting support programs, and educational resources (Conrad-Hiebner & Byram, 2020; Cai, 2022). The lack of support systems and resources can contribute to feelings of isolation, frustration, and an increased risk of maltreatment (Austin et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Unemployment

Parents who experience unemployment are at a higher risk of engaging in child maltreatment. Kim (2022) examined the association between child maltreatment and unemployment rate in the Republic of Korea. This research utilized nationally representative data, specifically at the provincial level. It aimed to estimate the monthly increase in hotline calls concerning child maltreatment for each province. The results show that unemployed parents were more likely to engage in physical abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse. Unemployment can lead to financial strain, decreased self-esteem, and increased stress levels, all of which can affect parenting behaviour (Achdut & Refaeli, 2020). Moreover,

unemployment can also lead to social isolation and reduced social support networks, further exacerbating the risk of child maltreatment (Lee et al., 2021). The lack of social connections and resources can make it difficult for parents to seek help or access necessary support services (Curry & Holter, 2019).

2.4.3 Housing instability

Families who experience housing instability, such as frequent moves or homelessness, are at a higher risk of child maltreatment (Warren & Font, 2015; Chandler et al., 2022). Schreier et al. (2018) conducted a study in the United States of America to identify how Early Head Start home visitors understand maltreatment, it was found that children who experienced homelessness were more likely to experience neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse (Schreier et al., 2018). The frequent moves caused by home instability or homelessness can result in the loss of social ties, including neighbours, friends, and community resources (Marcal, 2022). Housing instability can also disrupt social connections and support networks for families (Warren & Font, 2015). Therefore, the lack of social support makes it more challenging for parents to seek help or access essential resources when needed, increasing the vulnerability of children to maltreatment (Bullinger & Fong, 2021). Unstable housing situations often involve substandard living conditions, including unsafe or unsanitary environments (Warren & Font, 2015). Children growing up in such conditions face a higher risk of physical injury, exposure to toxins, and infectious diseases (Marcal, 2018). These unhealthy and unsafe living conditions can contribute to neglectful or abusive behaviours by parents or caregivers (Bullinger & Fong, 2021).

2.4.4 Neighbourhood violence

Children who grow up in violent neighbourhoods are at a higher risk of experiencing child maltreatment (Bullinger et al., 2022). Exposure to violence can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression in children which can later affect parenting behaviour (Kamis, 2021). Jespersen (2021) examined how perceptions of neighbourhood violent crime and its relationship to self-reported child-rearing practices vary by level of neighbourhood violence. Jespersen (2021) found caregivers residing in neighbourhoods with higher levels of violent crime were more prone to using firsthand accounts to describe how such crime posed a threat to their children's well-being, compared to caregivers living in neighbourhoods with lower levels of violent crime. According to Davidson et al. (2019) environmental factors play an important role in the occurrence of child maltreatment. These factors are often interconnected and can create a challenging environment for families (Abbas & Jabeen, 2023).

Understanding the role of these factors can help policymakers and practitioners develop effective interventions to prevent child maltreatment and promote child safety and well-being (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019).

2.5 Cultural factors

Cultural factors refer to the beliefs, attitudes, and values that may influence the likelihood of child maltreatment (Choudhry et al., 2018). These factors can vary significantly across cultures and may affect the way parents view child-rearing practices. Maul et al. (2019) explored social and cultural factors in Pakistani society that may affect the way in which children who have been abused present and how this affects their treatment. It was reported that some cultural practices influence child maltreatment as well as treatment outcomes. For instance, Pakistan is as a culturally conservative society with traditional gender roles and practices physical disciplinary methods. In Pakistan females are more likely to be perceived as providing less socioeconomic security to a family, leading to a higher risk of neglect or other forms of abuse instance (Maul et al., 2019). In contrast, boys are more prone to experiencing elevated levels of physical violence, particularly in relation to education or work-related matters (Maul et al., 2019). This situation can create an environment conducive to physical abuse, as the distinction between strict disciplinary practices and abusive behaviour becomes blurred (Maul et al., 2019). Melton et al. (2014) found that cultural factors can even affect the way professionals respond to cases of child maltreatment, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions. Understanding the cultural factors that contribute to child maltreatment is crucial in developing effective interventions that are sensitive to cultural diversity (Korbin et al., 217).

2.5.1 Attitudes and beliefs towards child-rearing practices

Cultural attitudes towards child-rearing practices can also influence the likelihood of child maltreatment (Camilo et al., 2022). For example, some cultures may emphasize obedience and conformity in children, which can lead to harsh parenting practices (Lansford et al., 2014). Linares et al. (2013) found that Hispanic mothers who valued obedience and conformity were more likely to engage in psychological aggression towards their children.

Different cultural groups have varying beliefs about discipline, which can affect the way parents discipline their children. For example, some cultural groups may view physical discipline as an acceptable form of punishment, while others may not (Gwenzi et al., 2021). Gershoff (2010) found that African American parents who believed in the use of corporal punishment were more likely to engage in physical abuse (Gershoff, 2010). African

Americans have a complex history in the United States, including experiences of slavery, systemic racism, and socio-economic disadvantages (Gershoff, 2010). These historical factors may contribute to a higher prevalence of stressors, such as poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources (Gershoff, 2010). These stressors can increase the likelihood of negative coping mechanisms, including the use of corporal punishment that may escalate into physical abuse (Gershoff, 2010).

2.6 How personal, environmental, and cultural factors interact

Child maltreatment is rarely the result of a single factor, but rather a complex interplay between personal, environmental, and cultural factors (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015). For example, a parent who has a history of substance abuse may be more likely to abuse their child if they are experiencing financial stress or social isolation (Chen et al., 2021). Similarly, cultural beliefs about the importance of maintaining family honour may contribute to a reluctance to report abuse or seek help, even in cases where abuse is severe (Gul et al., 2021). Several studies (Toth & Manly, 2019; Roygardner et al., 2020; Katz et al., 2021) have highlighted the importance of understanding the interactions between personal, environmental, and cultural factors in order to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies. For example, Klevens and Metzler (2019), in their book indicated that a community-based program that addressed both individual and environmental factors was effective in reducing the incidence of child maltreatment. While Ettinger (2022) emphasized the importance of cultural competence in child welfare services, suggesting that interventions that are sensitive to cultural beliefs and practices may be more effective in preventing and addressing child abuse.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has undertaken a comprehensive examination of existing literature to meticulously identify the factors influencing parents or caregivers to engage in child maltreatment. Through a systematic analysis, the chapter identified a diverse array of factors, ranging from individual-level challenges such as mental health struggles, substance abuse, and personal histories of trauma, to larger systemic issues including socio-economic stressors, cultural norms, and accessibility to support services. Moreover, the interplay and intersectionality of these factors have been underscored, demonstrating that child maltreatment often occurs from a complex interplay of circumstances. The next chapter will describe the research methods that were applied in data gathering and analysis.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a clear and comprehensive understanding of how the research was conducted, as well as to justify the chosen methods and procedures. Outlining the methodology, enabled the researcher to demonstrate their competence in the research process, and to establish the credibility of the findings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research question and a description of the research design, which outlines the overall approach taken to address the research problem. The chapter then goes on to describe the data extraction methods used, including the selection of literature sources, data sources, search strategies and the data analysis strategy used.

3.1 Research approach

This study followed a systematic review to synthesize peer-reviewed research on factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment. A systematic review is a comprehensive and structured approach to reviewing literature that involves a detailed search for relevant studies, critical appraisal of the quality of included studies, and synthesis of the findings (Munn et al., 2018). For this study, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for systematic reviews (appendix A) was an appropriate quality appraisal tool because this checklist was specifically designed to assess the quality and methodological rigor of systematic reviews. It covers key aspects such as the clarity of research questions, the comprehensiveness of search strategies, the appropriateness of inclusion/exclusion criteria, and the rigor of data synthesis methods. Reviewing a wide range of studies, provided the researcher with comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to child maltreatment. These included individual, family, community, and societal-level variables (Xiao & Watson, 2019). A systematic review on this topic contributes to the body of scientific knowledge related to the factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. This knowledge can be valuable not only for professionals working directly with children and families but also for researchers and academics seeking to understand the factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Systematic reviews can also help to identify research priorities by highlighting gaps in the evidence base or areas where conflicting results exist (Tawfik et al., 2019). This can inform the development of new research questions or guide the allocation of research funding. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of involving stakeholders, such as patients, clinicians, and policymakers, in the process of identifying research priorities to ensure that

systematic reviews address the most relevant and pressing issues (Chen, 2017; Cumpston et al., 2019).

A systematic review can either be qualitative or quantitative (Mays et al., 2005). A quantitative approach is focused on aggregating and synthesising numerical data from multiple studies to draw statistically significant conclusions (Hong et al., 2017). This approach is commonly used when dealing with empirical studies that produce measurable data (Stern et al., 2021). Whereas qualitative systematic review focuses on synthesizing and interpreting non-numerical data from various studies, such as textual information, observations, and narratives (Hong et al., 2017). This approach is commonly used to understand complex phenomena and indirectly explore people's experiences and perspectives (Lockwood et al., 2017). For the purpose of this study the researcher made use of qualitative methods of analysis because through the synthesis of qualitative data, common patterns, and recurring themes can be identified (Jones, 2004). This helps to uncover underlying reasons and motivations that may drive parents and caregivers to engage in maltreatment behaviours, shedding light on the root causes of the problem.

3.2 Data search and selection

The search strategy was designed to identify all relevant studies while minimizing the risk of bias. According to Winchester and Salji (2016) the search strategy should be comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent. The following are the key elements of an effective search strategy that was applied in this study:

Identification of relevant databases

The first step in developing a search strategy is identifying relevant databases to search. Depending on the research question, different databases may be appropriate, such as MEDLINE, Embase, Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Scopus. It is important to search electronic sources to ensure that all relevant studies are included. For this study the following electronic databases were used to identify relevant studies: EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, MedLine, Pubmed, Science Direct, Scopus Web of Science, The Cochrane Central register of Controlled Trials

3.2.2 Selection of search terms

The selection of search terms is crucial for retrieving relevant articles. A combination of Medical Subject Headings (MeSH terms) and keywords (factors, parents, caregivers, child maltreatment, child abuse) were used to increase the sensitivity of the search. The search

terms were relevant to the research question and covered all aspects of the study, including population, experiences, and outcome (PEO).

Development of search strategy

The search strategy was developed using the Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and parentheses to ensure that the search is both specific and sensitive. The search strategy was tested using a sample of articles to ensure that it retrieves relevant articles and is not too broad or too narrow.

3.2.4 Search language

Searches were conducted focusing on studies that used English as the primary language. Articles published in other languages were excluded in the analysis because reviewing articles in multiple languages can be resource-intensive, requiring translation services or experts fluent in those languages. This was going to be costly and time-consuming, potentially exceeding the available resources for this study.

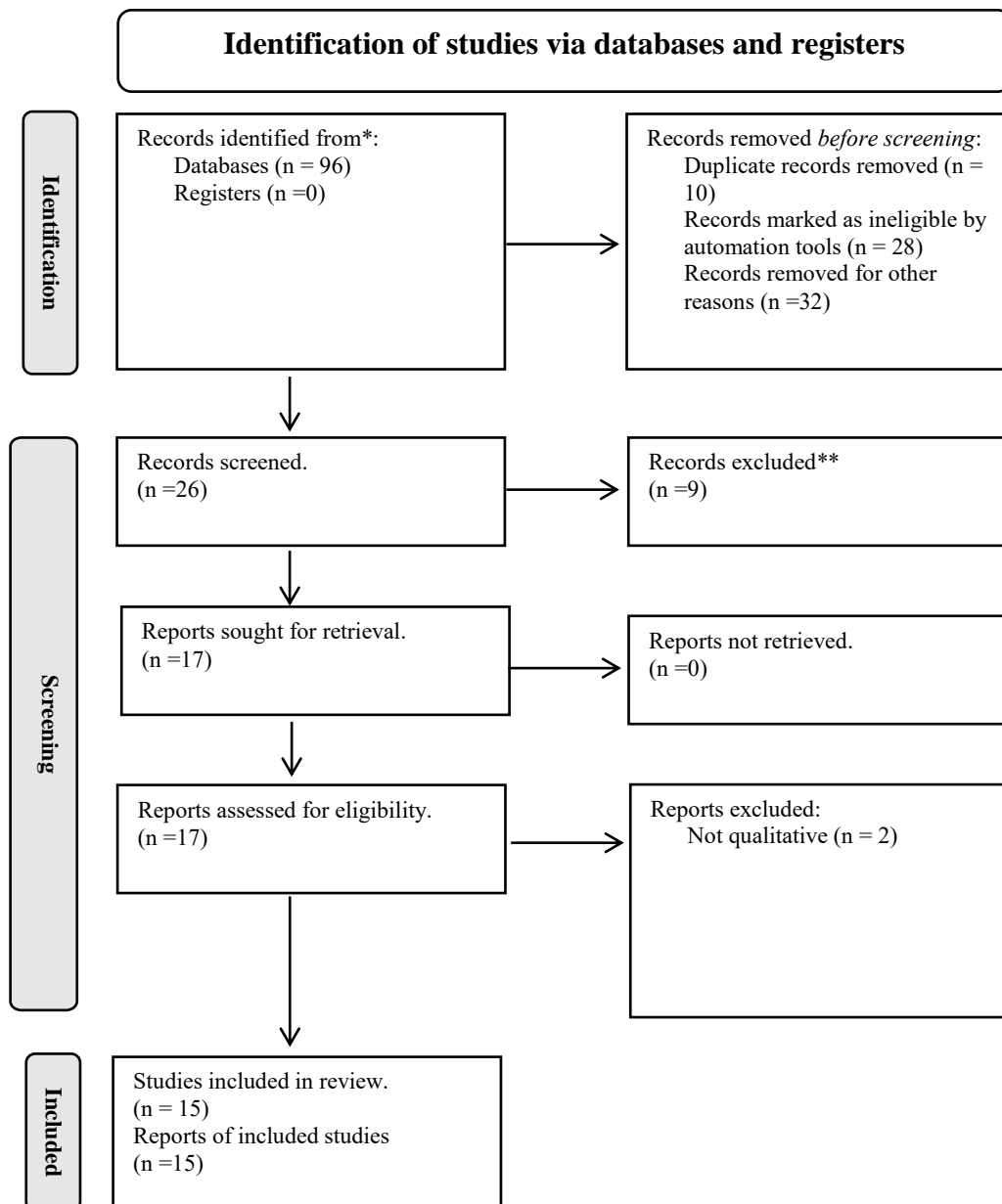
Updating searches

Searches were updated regularly to ensure that the review includes the most up-to-date literature.

3.3 Selection of studies

A total of seven electronic databases were searched in order to identify published literature and the same search strategy was applied to all databases. In order to determine appropriate search terms, MeSH terms were identified and used. As a measure to include a larger number of studies, all fields were searched for articles published between the year 2005 and 2023. Searches were not limited to only English articles; however, only English and human studies were analysed. The titles and abstracts of the citations retrieved by the searches were assessed for relevance. The researcher applied a pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine if a study addresses the research question. After this initial assessment, the researcher obtained full text copies of all studies which were potentially relevant. The student researcher together with the study supervisor independently checked the full papers for eligibility; disagreements were resolved during feedback.

Figure 3.1 *Flow diagram illustrating the process for selecting articles to include in the systematic review.*



Ninety-six (96) published study citations from seven databases were identified. Out of the 96 articles identified the number of duplicates was 10, records marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 28) and records removed for other reasons for example, quantitative studies, or focus was not on children (n =32). Twenty-six (26) abstracts were therefore screened for initial eligibility to identify studies done on factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Fifteen (15) relevant abstracts which were qualitative studies that reported on factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment were identified. Eleven (11) studies included either parents / caregivers or children as study participants (Cluver & Gardner, 2007; Nilchian et al., 2012; Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013; Wangamati et al., 2018; Schreier et al., 2018; Maul et al., 2019; Wu and Xu, 2020; Patel et al., 2021;Jespersen, 2021; He et al., 2022), two articles included health professionals as study participants (Peng et al., 2015;Xu et al., 2019) and two qualitatively analysed existing literature (Liao et al., 2011; Morantz et al., 2013). No further screening was done for studies reporting on factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Thus, we reviewed 15 full-text papers and identified 15 eligible for inclusion in the review. The main reason for exclusion of other papers was that they were not qualitative in nature and or the focus was not on factors influencing parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment (Figure 3.1). These 15 eligible studies (Table 3.1) reported on factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment (Cluver & Gardner, 2007; Nilchian et al., 2012; Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013; Peng et al., 2015; Wangamati et al., 2018; Schreier et al.,2018; Maul et al., 2019; Wu and Xu, 2020; Patel et al., 2021;Jespersen, 2021; He et al., 2022). Countries in which the studies were conducted are China (n=2), Iran (n = 1), Sub-Saharan Africa (n = 1), United States of America (n = 5), Kenya (n=1), Pakistan (n= 1), South Korea (n=1), South Africa (n=1) and Zimbabwe (n=1).

3.4 Data extraction and management

The student researcher made use of a data extraction form (appendix B) to collect the following information from each eligible article: (i) country; (ii) year the study was conducted; (iii) year of publication; (iv) study population (the general population, parents, caregivers, child maltreatment; (v) sample size; (vi) definition of child abuse; (vii) factors influencing parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. A descriptive quality assessment of the final papers included in the qualitative analysis was conducted using triangulation. Triangulation is a method of using multiple sources of data to ensure the validity of the findings. In the context of a qualitative systematic review, triangulation

involves using multiple studies that use different research designs, data collection methods, and data analysis methods (Aguilar Solano, 2020). This helps to ensure that the findings are consistent across different studies and are not simply a result of bias or error in one study (Aguilar Solano, 2020).

3.4.1 Trustworthiness in included studies.

Qualitative systematic reviews require a rigorous and systematic approach to ensure trustworthiness. The use of established frameworks, such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), helps to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and the inclusion of all relevant studies (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

A comprehensive search strategy (see section 3.2.3) was applied to ensure that all relevant studies were identified and included in the review. A systematic and thorough search of multiple databases, reference lists, and grey literature sources were not included in the analysis to reduce the risk of publication bias and increase the trustworthiness of the review.

Triangulation approach where the study leader and the student researcher independently reviewed the studies and compare their findings, using multiple data sources, or the use of multiple methods for analysing the data was applied.

Reflexivity which involves the critical reflection of the student researcher's own biases and assumptions throughout the research process was applied. This involved acknowledging and accounting for the researcher's perspective, to ensure the review is more trustworthy and less prone to researcher bias. The researcher acknowledged their own background, experiences, and beliefs, and how they might have impacted the interpretation of the data. This awareness guided the researcher in approaching the analysis with an open mind, recognizing that different perspectives may exist. The researcher also actively engaged in a process of reflection throughout the analysis, continuously questioning their interpretations and considering alternative explanations for the findings. The researcher documented any personal insights or realisations that arose during the analysis process. Additionally, the student researcher would receive input and feedback from the study leader who is an expert in the field to challenge and refine their interpretations.

3.5 Data analysis

The collected data was analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke (2017) thematic analysis which is a qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying and analysing patterns and themes in textual data without the use of pre-existing categories or codes

(Kyngäs, 2020). This approach is particularly useful in qualitative systematic reviews, where the goal was to synthesize and interpret findings from a broad range of studies on a specific topic (Kibiswa, 2019). Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the data from each individual study, as well as to synthesize findings across the studies (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). To do this, the researcher first read through all the included studies and identifies key concepts and themes that emerged (Kyngäs, 2020). These themes were related to the research question or were unexpected findings that emerge from the data (Kyngäs, 2020). Once the themes were identified, the researcher then began to code the data, assigning each piece of data to one or more themes. This process was done manually but could also be done using software tools designed for qualitative data analysis (Kyngäs, 2020). Conducting the analysis manually, enabled the student researcher to develop a nuanced understanding of the study data, allowing for the identification of subtle themes and patterns that could have been missed by automated processes.

After coding the data, the researcher analysed the patterns and relationships between the themes, looking for similarities and differences across the studies (Kyngäs, 2020). This process assisted to identify the overarching themes and concepts that emerge from the data, as well as to identify areas where more research may be needed (Kyngäs, 2020). One advantage of inductive content analysis is that it allows for a flexible and open-ended approach to data analysis, which can be particularly useful when working with a large and diverse set of studies (Selvi, 2019). However, this approach also requires careful attention to the quality and consistency of the data, as well as the researcher's own biases and assumptions (Selvi, 2019).

This study followed the thematic analysis approach. Braun and Clarke (2017) thematic analysis is a widely used approach in qualitative research for analysing data. It involves identifying patterns of meaning or themes within qualitative data. The following section describes the main steps in Braun and Clarke (2017)'s thematic analysis approach.

- Familiarising yourself with the data. The researcher reads and re-reads the data to become familiar with it and to gain an initial understanding of its content.
- Generating initial codes. The researcher then generates a set of initial codes, which are labels or tags assigned to specific parts of the data that represent potential themes or patterns of meaning.

- Searching for themes. The researcher then searches for themes by grouping together similar codes into potential themes, looking for patterns and connections between them.
- Reviewing themes. The researcher reviews and refines the potential themes, checking to ensure that each theme is distinct and coherent, and that it accurately reflects the data.
- Defining and naming themes. The researcher defines and names the final themes, writing a detailed description of each theme and how it relates to the data.
- Producing the report. Finally, the researcher produces a report that presents the themes and their supporting evidence, providing a rich and detailed account of the data.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology adopted for this study. The research design, data extraction methods used, including the selection of literature sources, data sources, search strategies and data analysis techniques have been discussed in detail, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each approach. By carefully selecting and justifying each method, the researcher endeavoured to increase the study's trustworthiness, and that the findings will provide meaningful insights into the research question. The next chapter will present the results of the study, which were analysed and discussed considering the research objectives and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4 Introduction

The previous chapter provided pertinent details of the research methodology; it is therefore the prerogative of this chapter to provide a presentation of findings for this study based on the research questions or objectives. The main objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence caregiver or parents to commit child maltreatment. In this chapter, the researcher presents the key themes, concepts, and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the primary qualitative research studies. The researcher uses a structured approach to present the results, which typically includes a summary of the included studies, a thematic synthesis of the results. The chapter also provides a discussion of the research results based on the social ecological framework that was presented in chapter 2.

4.1 Studies included in the analysis.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the researcher only included qualitative studies in the data analysis (Table 4.1). The studies are listed in a chronological order.

While conducting the thematic analysis for this study, as described in the preceding chapter, the student researcher adopted a methodological approach guided by Braun and Clarke's (2017) six-phase framework. Initially, the data were thoroughly familiarised through repeated readings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the content. Following this, initial codes were generated (Table 4.2), capturing meaningful segments of the data related to the research objectives. Through an iterative process, these codes were organised into potential themes, identifying patterns and connections within the dataset.

The student researcher encountered several challenges while doing this analysis, primarily related to the complexity and richness of the data. One notable challenge was the identification of overlapping themes and ambiguous data segments, which required careful consideration and interpretation. To address this, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted, involving discussions with the study supervisor to refine and clarify the emerging themes. Additionally, maintaining reflexivity throughout the analysis process was crucial in mitigating potential biases and ensuring trustworthiness of the findings.

Table 4.2 Studies that were included in the review.

First Author	Country	Study population	Sample size	Contributing factors
Cluver & Gardner (2007).	South Africa	Orphaned children, caregivers of orphaned children and social care professionals	Orphaned children (n-/60), caregivers of orphaned children (n-/42) and social care professionals (n-/20) completed semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Poverty and access to services Physical safety and crime Stigma and gossip Contact with extended family
Liao et al. (2011)	China	Not specified	Existing literature	Gender Age Socioeconomic status Disability status Parent–child relationships Intergenerational transmission of abuse

				Parents' work-related stress Rural-to-urban labour migration Public awareness Filial piety (Cultural values in China)
Nilchian et al. (2012)	Iran	Children and parents/guardians	25	Psychological disorder Separation in Family Poverty
Morantz et al. (2013)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Existing literature		Poverty Non-biological caregivers Stigma Alcohol abuse
Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013)	USA	parents and child welfare workers	13 parents and 12 child welfare workers	Childhood trauma Mental illness Substances use

Peng et al. (2015)	China	Emergency department physicians and nurses	Not specified	<p>Confucianism (an ancient Chinese belief system, which focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality)</p> <p>Socioeconomic Changes</p> <p>Lack of Public Awareness</p> <p>Changes in Family Structure</p> <p>Lack of Workable</p> <p>Legislations/Laws</p> <p>Lack of Social and Support Services</p>
Wangamati et al. (2018)	Kenya	School-enrolled and unenrolled minors, teachers, community leaders and members	28 focus group discussions (FGDs) with school-enrolled and unenrolled minors, teachers, community leaders and members	<p>Personal characteristics</p> <p>Orphanhood</p> <p>Adolescence</p> <p>Poverty</p> <p>Parenting</p> <p>Misinformation</p>

				HIV-related myths Domestic violence Social norms Entitlement Culture
Schreier et al (2018)	USA	All home visitors and supervisors employed by the EHS home-based program during a three-month recruitment period were invited to participate in this study.	17	Home instability
Xu et al. (2019)	China	Health professionals	102	The first factor that influences the situation is cultural, which encompasses practices such as parents' complete control over their children and a preference for male children. The second

				factor is social, which encompasses a hectic and stressful lifestyle, the phenomenon of children being left behind by migrant worker parents, and a lack of quality childcare and education. The third factor is related to the family, which includes economic status, family structure, parents' incapacity to provide care, experiences of abuse, and parents' illnesses. Lastly, the fourth factor pertains to the children themselves, including their gender, temperament, disabilities, and poor awareness of self-protection
Maul et al. (2019)	Pakistani	doctors, nurses, and security staff in the emergency department of a large private hospital in Pakistan	15	Conservative cultural beliefs Lack of expertise and underfunding in child protection at a national and institutional level
Wu and Xu (2020)	USA	Concept paper	Concept paper	Stress

Ryu & Yang (2021).	South Korea	Parents in refugee camps	5	The Weakness of Family Functionality Cultural Adaptation Stress in a Strange Society Degraded Parenting Effectiveness
Patel et al. (2021)	Zimbabwe	Parents/caregivers and with their children (ages 10-14)	A total of eight focus groups were conducted, four with parents/caregivers (N = 40) and four with their children ages 10–14 (N = 40)	Not being a biological parent Gender of the child
Jespersen (2021)	USA	The sample included adult residents who cared for at least one child under the age of 18 years in 20 Cleveland neighbourhoods (i.e., census tracts)	400	Neighbourhood crime

He et al. (2022)	USA	10-18 years children	50	Stress Caregivers' physical health concerns. Caregivers' mental health concerns. Caregivers' personality characteristics.
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Table 4.1 Factors identified.

Author	Study population & Sample size	Study findings	Contributing factors				Code
			Individual level factors	Relationship level factors	Community level factors	Societal level factors	
Cluver & Gardner (2007).	Orphaned children (n-/60), caregivers of orphaned children (n-/42) and social care professionals (n-/20) completed semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Poverty and access to services Physical safety and crime Stigma and gossip Contact with extended family		✓	✓		Poverty, contact with extended family

Liao et al. (2011)	Existing literature	Gender Age Socioeconomic status Disability status Parent–child relationships Intergenerational transmission of abuse Parents' work-related stress Rural-to-urban labour migration Public awareness Filial piety (Cultural values in China)	✓	✓	✓	✓	Poverty, parent’s child relationship, intergenerational transmission of abuse, cultural practices
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Nilchian et al. (2012)	25 Children and parents/guardians	Psychological disorder Separation in Family Poverty	✓	✓	✓		Caregiver's mental health, poverty, and parent to child relationship
Morantz et al. (2013)	Existing literature	Poverty Non-biological caregivers Stigma Alcohol abuse	✓	✓	✓		Poverty, parent- child relationship, substance abuse
Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013)	13 parents and 12 child welfare workers	Childhood trauma Mental illness Substances use	✓	✓	✓	✓	Caregiver's mental health, substance abuse
Peng et al. (2015)	Emergency department physicians and	Confucianism (an ancient Chinese belief system,			✓	✓	Cultural practices, access to services

	nurses	<p>which focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality)</p> <p>Socioeconomic Changes</p> <p>Lack of Public Awareness</p> <p>Changes in Family Structure</p> <p>Lack of Workable Legislations/Laws</p> <p>Lack of Social and Support Services</p>					
Wangamati et al. (2018)	28 focus group discussions (FGDs) with school-enrolled and unenrolled	<p>Personal characteristics</p> <p>Orphanhood</p> <p>Adolescence</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	Poverty, domestic violence, cultural practices

	minors, teachers, community leaders and members	Poverty Parenting Misinformation HIV-related myths Domestic violence Social norms Entitlement Culture					
Schreier et al (2018)	17 home visitors and supervisors employed by the EHS home-based program during a three-month recruitment period were invited to participate in this	Home instability			✓		Neighbourhood violence

	study.						
Xu et al. (2019)	102 Health professionals	The first factor that influences the situation is cultural, which encompasses practices such as parents' complete control over their children and a preference for male children. The second factor is social, which encompasses a hectic and stressful lifestyle, the phenomenon of children being left behind by migrant	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intergenerational transmission of abuse, cultural practices, poor awareness of self-protection

		<p>worker parents, and a lack of quality childcare and education. The third factor is related to the family, which includes economic status, family structure, parents' incapacity to provide care, experiences of abuse, and parents' illnesses. Lastly, the fourth factor pertains to the children themselves, including their gender,</p>					
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		temperament, disabilities, and poor awareness of self-protection					
Maul et al. (2019)	15 doctors, nurses, and security staff in the emergency department of a large private hospital in Pakistan	Conservative cultural beliefs Lack of expertise and underfunding in child protection at a national and institutional level			✓	✓	Cultural beliefs
Wu and Xu (2020)	Concept paper	Stress	✓				
Ryu & Yang (2021).	5 Parents in refugee camps	The Weakness of Family Functionality Cultural Adaptation Stress		✓	✓	✓	Culture, Parent child relationship

		in a Strange Society Degraded Parenting Effectiveness					
Patel et al. (2021)	A total of eight focus groups were conducted, four with parents/caregivers (N = 40) and four with their children ages 10–14 (N = 40)	Not being a biological parent Gender of the child		✓			Non-biological caregiver
Jespersen (2021)	400	Neighbourhood crime			✓		Neighbourhood violence
He et al. (2022)	50	Stress Caregivers' physical health	✓				Caregiver's mental health

		concerns. Caregivers' mental health concerns. Caregivers' personality characteristics.					
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4.2 Coding during data analysis

The researcher analysed data from the articles listed in Table 4.1 to identify the multifaceted factors influencing parents and caregivers in committing acts of child maltreatment. Through a comprehensive synthesis of empirical studies and qualitative insights, prominent themes emerged and are described in the following sections.

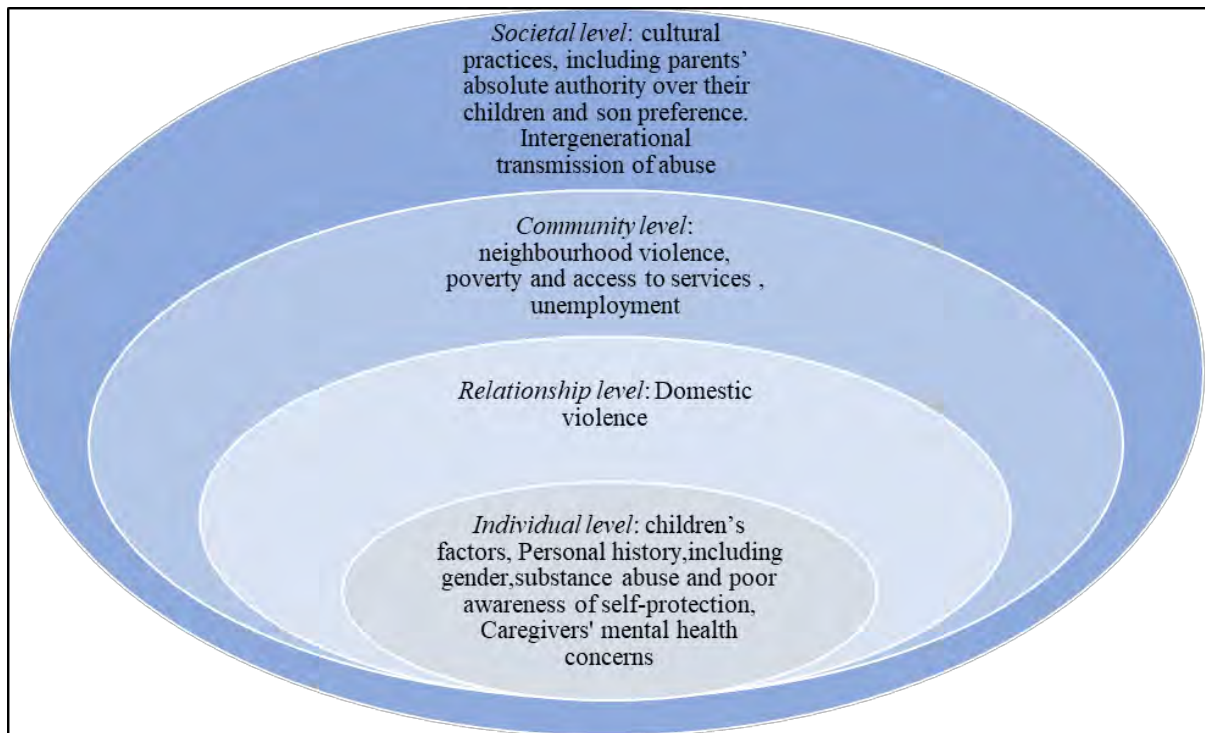
4.3 Structure and overview of themes

The following section discusses the empirical findings, in themes, that emerged during data analysis. The empirical findings are presented concurrently with the literature integration, to answer the research question of the study. This chapter contains the results that relate to the following question:

1. What are the factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment?

The eight main themes are, (i) *Poverty and lack of access to services* (ii), *Intergenerational transmission of abuse*, (iii) *Childhood trauma, substance abuse* (iv) *Domestic violence, neighbourhood violence* (v) *Cultural practices*; (vi) *social factors, including a stressful lifestyle, unemployment* (vii) *children's individual factors including gender, temper, disabilities, and poor awareness of self-protection*; (viii) *Caregivers' mental health concerns*. Figure 4-1 illustrates the themes that emerged and how they are connected to each other.

Figure 4.1: An illustration of emerging themes and their interconnectedness through the social ecological model.



4.4 Individual level factors influencing child maltreatment among parents or caregivers.

Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological systems theory proposes that an individual's development and behaviour are influenced by various nested systems, ranging from the individual's immediate surroundings to the larger societal and cultural contexts. Within this framework, Bronfenbrenner (1975) identified several individual characteristics that contribute to an individual's likelihood of being a perpetrator or victim of child maltreatment. In this study several individual-level factors have been identified as contributing to the risk of committing child maltreatment, which are: personal history, caregiver's mental health concerns, substance abuse, poor awareness of self-protection measures and gender.

4.4.1. Personal history

Several studies included in the analysis reported on individual factors that influence child maltreatment (Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2019; Ru et al., 2021). Individuals who have experienced abuse or neglect themselves may be more likely to perpetrate abuse as adults (Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013). Similarly, individuals who have experienced abuse may be more vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse. For instance, Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013) revealed that mothers who had experienced abuse and trauma from their childhood had their parenting style affected. The mother participants shared stories associated with painful and

traumatic memories. For example, one of the participants spoke of surviving incest and domestic violence and, as an adult, how the relationship with her parents affects her current coping abilities.

“It’s more emotional. Me and my mom never had a real good relationship and then there was sexual abuse with my dad, and my mom was verbally and physically abusive, and these scars that I have they got kicked up recently. The pain just got resurfaced.” (Parent, G).

Other examples of how individual factors influence child maltreatment are reported by Xu et al. (2019) and Ru et al. (2021). Xu et al. (2019) revealed that parents who had experienced maltreatment themselves when they were young were more likely to commit child maltreat. For instance, one of the participants in the study by Xu et al. (2019) had the following to say:

“As he [the father] was often physically punished at school age, he copies this behaviour to his child now.”

Ru et al. (2021) revealed that refugee mothers in South Korea had experienced incidents of abuse and trauma during their escape from North-Korea and this had negatively affected their parenting practices. The participants shared stories associated with painful and traumatic memories.

“The previous memories repeatedly coming to my mind, I couldn’t do well in my daily life for several months. I felt depressed, sad, lonely . . . and I didn’t even want to see my child playing. So, I sometimes hurt him.”

“Since past trauma experiences, I’ve become angry and impulsive. So, I was more likely to be mad at my kid, hurting him by talking in a bad way.”

4.4.2 Caregiver’s mental health concerns

Adults who are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues may be more likely to engage in abusive behaviour towards children. Similarly, children who are experiencing mental health issues may be more vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse. Mothers who participated Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013), disclosed their family’s struggle with mental illness, whether it was their own struggle, an extended family member, or their child’s. One of the most common diagnoses shared by the participants was depression. One of the participants had the following to say.

“CPS came into my life because I got really depressed,” and “I hit rock bottom. If I wasn’t on medication, my attitude [snaps fingers] is just like flip-flop and instead of me realizing that someone is trying to help me I will always think that they are against me and trying to do something to harm me instead of helping me.”

4.4.3 Substance abuse

Substance abuse, including alcohol and drug use, was identified as a factor that may increase the likelihood of abusive behaviour. Individuals who are under the influence of substances may be more likely to engage in impulsive and aggressive behaviour (Morantz et al., 2013). The daily struggle of substance abuse and recovery emerged as a common theme across the studies included in the analysis. An example was given by Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013), where participants shared their stories of drug abuse and the process of recovery.

“I used it [crack] for like 17 years off and on and that was such a painful time in my life cause at that time I didn’t think I was worth anything; but you know, if I don’t feel like I’m not worth anything then I wasn’t capable of giving care to my children and that’s just the reality of it, you know? So, I went to a treatment facility and inpatient for 14 days and then went outpatient for 16 months and I have been clean ever since. Now I have three years and nine months, and I want to say like a couple weeks sobriety.”

4.4.4 Poor awareness of self-protection measures.

Poor awareness of self-protection measures emerged as a common theme among individual level factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. For example, Xu et al. (2019) revealed that children lack knowledge of basic safety rules, such as not talking to strangers, and are unable to recognize situations that put them at risk. This lack of awareness makes them more vulnerable to abuse and less likely to seek help when they needed it.

Sometimes it’s because the child is too naughty. They [the children] are also at risk of being maltreated if they have congenital defects. Another issue is the intelligence of children.

4.4.5 Gender

Gender-based child abuse can occur when a child is mistreated, neglected, or sexually abused because of their gender. Several studies (Liao et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2019; Patel et al., 2021) have identified gender as a significant factor particularly in child sexual abuse, with

girls being more likely to be victims than boys. For instance, Patel et al. (2021) found that girls were two times more likely to be sexually abused than boys. Another example given by Xu et al. (2019), was a participant who had the following to say:

I think girls are more likely to suffer from sexual abuse and neglect than boys... For children with congenital defects, the possibilities for boys and girls are more or less the same.” (Manager in community healthcare centre, female, aged 40).

4.5 Relationship level factors influencing child maltreatment among parents or caregivers.

Two themes emerged under relationship level factors influencing parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment and these are not being a biological parent of the child and domestic violence.

4.5.1 Non biological caregivers.

Overall, the literature suggests that relationship level factors play an important role in the occurrence of child maltreatment among parents or caregivers (Cluver & Gardner 2007; Liao et al., 2011; Maul et al., 2019; Ryu & Yang, 2021, Patel et al., 2021). Positive parent-child relationships and social support are identified as important protective factors against child maltreatment (Maul et al., 2019). On the other hand, negative parent-child relationships increase the risk of child maltreatment (Maul et al., 2019). For example, Patel et al. (2021), revealed that being an orphan or non-biological child made one susceptible to abuse. An example is illustrated in the following quote shared by a child:

“A child might be an orphan or might have lost her mother and then her father will marry someone else whom she will refer to as stepmother. If the child does something wrong, the stepmother may abuse the child by scolding her saying, ‘that is why your mother died of cancer.’

4.5.2 Domestic violence

It was evident from the analysis that conflict between parents and with neighbours increases children’s vulnerability to child abuse. Wangamati et al. (2018) revealed that most cases of domestic violence, the mother seeks refuge at her parents’ place and leaves the children with their father. Since it is mostly the duty of the mother to feed the children, the father may fail to prepare food for the family. Consequently, the children must fend for themselves; in most cases these children face the risk of being sexually exploited due to the transact sex for food or money (Wangamati et al., 2018).

“... sometimes the violence can make the mother to run away, and the children will remain behind. They will make their way of finding food [engage in transactional sex].”

4.6 Community level factors influencing child maltreatment among parents or caregivers.

Community-level factors refer to the social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics of the community in which the child and caregiver live (Timshel et al., 2017). These factors can influence the caregiver's ability to provide a safe and supportive environment for the child. In this study several community-level factors have been identified as contributing to the risk of child maltreatment, including poverty, social isolation, lack of access to resources, and cultural norms that support physical punishment.

4.6.1 Poverty

Poverty is a well-documented risk factor for child maltreatment. Families living in poverty often experience high levels of stress due to financial insecurity, which can lead to increased parental stress and lower levels of parental responsiveness to children's needs (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Bunting et al., 2022; Maguire-Jack et al., 2022). Nilchian et al. (2012), reported that poverty is a prevalent issue in the society which can make the parents neglect their children and may lead to a lot of problems. For example, one of the participants in this study had the following to say:

“My parents live in a desert. My mother begs for money, and her friends smack me and my brother. So, we decided to escape”.

Additionally, families living in poverty may lack access to basic resources, such as food, housing, and healthcare, which can exacerbate stress and increase the risk of child maltreatment. Poverty is a multifaceted problem that affects the well-being of families and their children in various ways (Bunting et al., 2022). The findings of this study are consistent with a growing body of literature suggests that families living in poverty face numerous challenges, including a lack of access to basic resources such as food, housing, and healthcare (Conrad-Hiebner & Byram, 2020; Monahan, 2020; Drake et al., 2022; Cai, 2022). These challenges can lead to increased stress, which can exacerbate the risk of child maltreatment (Conrad-Hiebner & Byram, 2020; Cai, 2022).

4.6.2 Access to services

Peng et al. (2015), Wangamati et al. (2018), Schreier et al (2018), and Xu et al. (2019) reported that lack of established social services and limited resources in addressing child

abuse. Other countries have formalised social services that offer various forms of support such as family preservation services, financial assistance, housing, child removal, and foster care. Without these social services in place, children who experience maltreatment may have nowhere to go if their parents' guardianship is taken away by a court.

4.6.3 Unemployment

Most studies included in the review (Liao et al., 2011; Peng et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2019) showed that unemployment is a significant risk factor for child maltreatment. Job loss and financial strain can lead to increased stress, mental health problems, and substance abuse, which can all contribute to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect.

4.6.5 Neighbourhood violence

Jespersen et al. (2021) reported neighbourhood violence as a risk factor for child maltreatment in the USA. Children who grow up in violent neighbourhoods are at increased risk of experiencing abuse and neglect from their caregivers or parents. This finding is consistent with what was reported by (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017; Morris et al., 2019). The stress of living in a violent environment can also lead to caregiver burnout, which can increase the likelihood of maltreatment. Jespersen et al. (2021) have shown that the risk of child maltreatment is highest in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty and violence.

[We have] gangs, jumping, racial [violence], I mean, we lay and listen to gunshots at night ... because of the combination of those [things] my children cannot go outside and play and be, have a normal childhood. They have to ... stay in or stay under my thumb or else ... you'll lose your kids to the badness of this. [African American female, age 23]

4.7. Societal level factors influencing child maltreatment among parents or caregivers.

Culture and intergenerational transmission of violence were reported as societal-level factors that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

4.7.1 Culture

The impact of culture and societal values on child maltreatment varies across different countries. According to Peng et al. (2015) to comprehend child maltreatment in China, it is crucial to acknowledge cultural values such as filial piety (Xiao) and Familism. These values, which stem from Confucianism (an ancient Chinese belief system, which focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality), prioritize hierarchical social structures, family reputation, patriarchal authority, obedience, and loyalty. Having been shaped by these values

for several millennia, Chinese childrearing practices have developed characteristics that may differ from those found in Western societies. For instance, Chinese culture places great emphasis on parental authority, children's compliance with their parents' wishes, and high expectations for children's academic achievements.

4.7.2 Intergenerational transmission of abuse

The inter-generational transmission of abuse was reported in some studies (Liao et al., 2011; Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013) and it is evident throughout all the studies included in this study abusive behaviours tend to be passed down from generation to generation. Adults who experienced abuse as children were more likely to become abusive parents themselves. For example, Bundy-Fazioli et al. (2013) gave an example of a mother who spoke of her anger toward her mother for the abuse she suffered as a child:

First of all, why in the fuck did they let me go home when my stepfather was a fucking drunk [who] beat the shit out of my mother? And my mother was with him, oh god, I think when I was in 3rd grade, 2nd or 3rd grade, maybe 4th grade, from 4th grade on up until I had my boys, I had to deal with seeing that shit.

Risk factors for inter-generational transmission of abuse have been discussed in the previous sections which include parental mental health problems, substance abuse and poverty.

4.8 Discussion

It is evident from the study findings that child maltreatment is not usually caused by just single factor, but rather by a complex combination of personal, environmental, and cultural factors. For instance, on personal characteristics; findings in this study have indicated that individuals who have experienced childhood abuse or neglect are more likely to perpetrate maltreatment on their own children. This cycle of violence is known as intergenerational transmission. Parents who have not healed from their own traumatic pasts may unintentionally repeat the same patterns of abuse or neglect they endured. This finding is consistent with other studies that have consistently observed a strong association between childhood maltreatment experiences and subsequent perpetration of abuse as parents or caregivers (Assink et al., 2018; Forke et al., 2018; McKenzie et al., 2022). Findings of this study also show that mental health problems of care givers, such as depression, anxiety, and personality disorders, have been linked to an increased likelihood of child maltreatment. Caregivers facing mental health challenges may struggle to cope with stressors, leading to abusive behaviours as a maladaptive response. The influence of caregiver's mental health

concerns on child maltreatment has been extensively explored in the literature. Numerous studies (Ayers et al., 2019; Krause-Utz et al., 2019; Maercker et al., 2022) have established that parental mental health can influence abusive behaviours towards children.

Substance abuse including alcohol and drug addiction, were reported in this study as a personal characteristic that influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Parents or caregivers who are under the influence of substances may exhibit impaired judgment, emotional instability, and reduced inhibition, leading to neglectful or abusive behaviours. The influence of substance abuse on child maltreatment is well-documented in previous research (Sharley et al., 2019; Lawson et al., 2020; Hasson III et al., 2022). Substance abuse has consistently emerged as a factor that influences parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment, highlighting the urgency of substance abuse prevention and intervention programs to protect children in high-risk environments.

Domestic violence and non-biological caregivers were found to be having an influence on child maltreatment under relationship factors. It was interesting that the households with non-biological caregivers may be at a higher risk of experiencing child maltreatment compared to those with only biological caregivers. The presence of a non-biological caregiver, especially a step-parent, can sometimes lead to tensions and conflicts, resulting in a hostile environment for both adults and children. A non-biological caregiver might have less emotional attachment to the children, which could affect their parenting style and disciplinary approaches, potentially leading to misunderstandings and conflicts (Patel et al., 2021). On the other hand, Maul et al. (2019) has shown that the presence of a non-biological caregiver does not necessarily increase the risk of child maltreatment. Maul et al. (2019) argues that other factors, such as the quality of relationships, communication patterns, and socioeconomic factors, play a more significant role in shaping family dynamics. In cases where non-biological caregivers are actively involved in the child's life and have a positive relationship with the biological parent, the risk of child maltreatment may not differ significantly from households with only biological caregivers REFs.

Domestic violence has been identified as a factor influencing child maltreatment (Jespersen, 2021; Bullinger et al., 2022). Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience direct abuse, and witnessing violence between their parents or caregivers can have profound psychological effects on them (Ferrara et al., 2019). Moreover, domestic violence can create an environment of fear, instability, and aggression, leading to an increased likelihood of child maltreatment within the community.

Poverty can induce stress and strain within families, leading to parental frustration and an increased likelihood of resorting to abusive behaviours. Most of the studies included in the analysis identified poverty as the outstanding community-level risk factor influencing parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment. Several studies (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Drake et al., 2022; Roskam et al., 2022) have consistently demonstrated a positive association between poverty and child maltreatment rates. Limited financial resources can hinder access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and mental health support, further exacerbating the risk of maltreatment (Drake et al., 2022).

The study findings highlight the pervasive influence of neighbourhood violence on child maltreatment, casting light on the critical role of a child's external environment. Children who grow up in areas associated by high levels of violence are at heightened risk of being maltreated or neglected. The pervasive atmosphere of fear, instability, and aggression can strongly impact the psychological well-being of both caregivers and children. Moreover, the stress induced by living in a violent environment can lead to caregiver burnout, further worsening the likelihood of child maltreatment. This finding emphasises the urgent need for targeted interventions in violent communities, targeting to not only address immediate safety concerns but also provide resources and support systems for families navigating these precarious environments. Efforts to reduce neighbourhood violence should be regarded a vital part in the broader strategy to stop child maltreatment and create safer neighbourhoods for children to thrive.

Amongst societal level factors influencing child maltreatment among parents or caregivers was culture and intergenerational transmission of violence. Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between cultural practices and child maltreatment across different societies. In most cases their findings highlight the ways in which cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions can influence parental behaviour towards their children (Linares et al., 2013; Lansford et al., 2014; Gwenzi et al., 2021).

It is evident from the study findings that child maltreatment rarely stems from a single cause; rather, it arises from a complex interplay of personal, environmental, and cultural influences. For instance, a parent with a history of substance abuse may be more inclined to mistreat their child when facing financial strain or social isolation. Similarly, cultural norms that prioritize family honour may discourage reporting or seeking help, even in cases of severe abuse. Several studies (Toth & Manly, 2019; Roygardner et al., 2020; Katz et al.,

2021) underscore the importance of comprehending how personal, environmental, and cultural factors interact to influence parents or caregivers to commit child maltreatment.

4.9 Conclusion

In this results chapter, the researcher presented the key themes that emerged from the analysis of the primary qualitative research studies. The researcher used a structured approach to present the results, which typically includes a summary of the included studies, a thematic synthesis of the results. The chapter also provides a discussion of the research results based on the social ecological framework. The following chapter will provide a conclusion of the study, implications of the study findings and limitations evidence-based recommendations are put forth to guide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in their efforts to combat child maltreatment and create a safer environment for all children and families.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5 Introduction

The research question driving this systematic review was to identify the factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment. This chapter serves as the culmination of the systematic review, synthesizing the key findings from various studies and drawing insightful conclusions. In addition, based on these conclusions, evidence-based recommendations are put forth to guide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in their efforts to combat child maltreatment and create a safer environment for all children and families. By addressing the root causes of child maltreatment, society can take significant strides towards breaking the cycle of violence and fostering nurturing and supportive family dynamics.

5.1 Summary of findings

The study identified several individual, relationship, community, and societal-level factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment. These findings can be summarized as follows:

5.1.1 Individual level factors

Personal history: Individuals who have experienced abuse or neglect themselves may be more likely to perpetrate abuse as adults, and those who have experienced abuse may be more vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse.

Caregiver's mental health concerns: Adults experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues may be more likely to engage in abusive behaviour towards children.

Substance abuse: Substance abuse, including alcohol and drug use, was identified as a factor that may increase the likelihood of abusive behaviour towards children.

Poor awareness of self-protection measures: Children's lack of knowledge of basic safety rules and their inability to recognize risky situations make them more vulnerable to abuse.

Gender of the child: Gender of the child was identified as a risk factor for child. There were some studies which reported that a child can be mistreated, neglected, or sexually abused due to their gender. Girls were found to be more likely to be victims of child sexual abuse than boys.

5.1.2 Relationship level factors

Non-biological caregivers: Negative parent-child relationships and the presence of non-biological caregivers, such as stepmothers, were identified as risk factors for child maltreatment.

Domestic violence: Conflict between parents and with neighbours increases children's vulnerability to child abuse. Children may be left with abusive caregivers when their mothers seek refuge elsewhere, putting them at risk of abuse.

5.1.3 Community level factors

Poverty: Families living in poverty experience high levels of stress due to financial insecurity, which can lead to increased parental stress and lower levels of parental responsiveness to children's needs.

Lack of access to services: Limited access to social services and resources can make it challenging for families to address child maltreatment effectively.

Unemployment: Job loss and financial strain can lead to increased stress, mental health problems, and substance abuse, contributing to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect.

Neighbourhood violence: Living in violent neighbourhoods increases children's vulnerability to child maltreatment and caregiver burnout.

5.1.4 Societal level factors

Culture: Cultural values, such as filial piety and Familism practiced in China, influence child-rearing practices and parental authority. These values may differ across different societies and influence child maltreatment.

Intergenerational transmission of abuse: Abusive behaviours can be passed down from generation to generation. Adults who experienced abuse as children are more likely to become abusive parents themselves.

5.2 Implications of the study findings

The systematic review on factors that influence parents and caregivers to commit child maltreatment has several theoretical implications for understanding the complex phenomenon of child maltreatment. The findings shed light on the interplay of various individual, relationship, community, and societal-level factors that contribute to the perpetration of child abuse by parents and caregivers. These theoretical implications are

crucial in advancing our knowledge and conceptual frameworks related to child maltreatment. Here are some key areas of theoretical implications.

5.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The study's findings align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which proposes that an individual's development and behaviour are influenced by multiple nested systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (microsystem) to the larger societal and cultural contexts (macrosystem). The review highlights how individual factors (e.g., personal history, mental health concerns), relationship factors (e.g., non-biological caregivers, domestic violence), community factors (e.g., poverty, access to services), and societal factors (e.g., culture, intergenerational transmission of abuse) interact and impact child maltreatment. This supports the notion that child maltreatment is a multifaceted issue influenced by various interconnected systems.

5.2.2 Social Learning Theory

The study's recognition of the role of cultural practices and social norms in influencing child maltreatment aligns with the Social Learning Theory. This theory proposes that people learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The review highlights how cultural norms around discipline and parenting practices can influence caregivers' behaviour towards children, emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity in interventions.

5.3 Limitations

While the systematic review provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge potential limitations that may affect the study's credibility and generalizability:

5.3.1 Language bias

The review's language restriction could have led to the exclusion of relevant studies published in languages other than English, potentially limiting the scope and comprehensiveness of the findings.

5.3.2 Geographic bias

Due to the qualitative nature of the study; the studies included were not from all regions across the globe, and this leads to a lack of representation of diverse cultural and societal contexts, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations.

5.3.3 Heterogeneity

The studies included in the review exhibited considerable heterogeneity in terms of sample characteristics, study designs, and outcome measures. This heterogeneity affected the comparability and synthesis of results.

5.3.4 Exclusion of grey literature

The review excluded grey literature (unpublished or non-peer-reviewed studies), leading to a potential omission of relevant data and findings.

5.3.5 Insufficient contextual information

Some studies lacked detailed contextual information about the participants, making it challenging to fully understand the factors contributing to child maltreatment.

5.3.6 Availability of data

Despite these potential limitations, the systematic review provides valuable insights into the factors influencing child maltreatment and offers a basis for further research and the development of effective intervention strategies.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following evidence-based recommendations are suggested:

5.4.1 Strengthen early intervention programs.

Develop and implement targeted early intervention programs that focus on identifying and supporting at-risk families. These programs should address individual-level factors such as personal history, caregiver's mental health concerns, and substance abuse. Early intervention can provide necessary support and resources to prevent child maltreatment before it escalates.

5.4.2 Promote mental health support for caregivers.

Enhance access to mental health services and support for caregivers. Providing counselling, therapy, and mental health resources can help caregivers manage stress, anxiety, and depression, reducing the likelihood of abusive behaviours towards children.

5.4.3 Implement substance abuse prevention and treatment.

Establish substance abuse prevention and treatment programs to address the link between substance abuse and child maltreatment. Offering support, rehabilitation, and

counselling to individuals struggling with substance abuse can mitigate the risk of maltreatment incidents.

5.4.4 Empower children with self-protection education.

Develop age-appropriate self-protection education programs for children to raise their awareness of personal safety, including knowledge about recognizing risky situations and seeking help when needed.

5.4.5 Strengthen social support systems.

Strengthen social support systems for vulnerable families, particularly those facing poverty and unemployment. Access to financial assistance, housing support, and other resources can reduce stressors that contribute to child maltreatment.

5.4.6 Enhance child protection services.

Improve and expand child protection services and social services to provide timely assistance and intervention to families at risk of child maltreatment. Investing in effective child protection systems can prevent maltreatment incidents and ensure child safety.

5.4.7 Raise awareness and education.

Launch public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to promote positive parenting practices and raise awareness about the consequences of child maltreatment. These campaigns should also challenge harmful cultural practices and gender norms that perpetuate child abuse.

5.4.8 Strengthen collaboration among stakeholders.

Facilitate collaboration and information sharing among various stakeholders, including government agencies, healthcare providers, social workers, educators, and community organizations. Integrated efforts can create a comprehensive and cohesive approach to prevent child maltreatment.

5.4.9 Research on intervention effectiveness

Conduct research to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs and policies aimed at preventing child maltreatment. Continuously assess and update strategies to ensure they align with the evolving needs of children and families.

5.5 Advocate for policy reforms

Advocate for policy reforms and legislation that prioritize child protection and family support. Ensure that laws align with the latest research and evidence-based practices to create a safe and nurturing environment for children.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings of this study have demonstrated that child maltreatment is not caused by a single factor but rather results from a complex interplay of personal, environmental, and cultural influences. The study identified several significant factors contributing to child maltreatment, including personal characteristics such as a history of childhood abuse, mental health problems, and substance abuse among parents or caregivers. Additionally, relationship factors such as domestic violence and the presence of non-biological caregivers were also found to influence the occurrence of child maltreatment. At the community level, poverty emerged as a prominent risk factor, while culture and intergenerational transmission of violence were identified as societal-level influences. These results highlight the necessity of understanding the multifaceted nature of child maltreatment to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies. Recognizing that child maltreatment is not a singular issue but arises from a combination of factors can guide targeted interventions to address the root causes and risk factors specific to each case. For instance, interventions focused on mental health support, substance abuse prevention, and domestic violence awareness can play crucial roles in reducing child maltreatment rates.

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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A



Paper for appraisal and reference:.....

Section A: Are the results of the review valid?

1. Did the review address a clearly focused question?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: An issue can be 'focused' in terms of

- the population studied
- the intervention given
- the outcome considered

Comments:

2. Did the authors look for the right type of papers?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: 'The best sort of studies' would

- Address the review's question
- Have an appropriate study design (usually RCTs for papers evaluating interventions)

Comments:

Is it worth continuing?

3. Do you think all the important, relevant studies were included?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Look for

- which bibliographic databases were used
- follow up from reference lists
- personal contact with experts
- unpublished as well as published studies
- non-English language studies

Comments:

4. Did the review's authors do enough to assess quality of the included studies?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: The authors need to consider the rigour of the studies they have identified. Lack of rigour may affect the studies' results ("All that glisters is not gold" Merchant of Venice – Act II Scene 7)

Comments:

5. If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider whether

- results were similar from study to study
- results of all the included studies are clearly displayed
- results of different studies are similar
- reasons for any variations in results are discussed

Comments:

Section B: What are the results?

6. What are the overall results of the review?

HINT: Consider

- If you are clear about the review's 'bottomline' results
- What these are (numerically if appropriate)
- How were the results expressed (NNT, odds ratio etc.)

Comments

7. How precise are the results?

HINT: Look at the confidence intervals if given

Comments

Section C: Will the results help locally?

8. Can the results be applied to the local population?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider whether

- the patients covered by the review could be sufficiently different to your population to cause concern
- your local setting is likely to differ much from that of the review

Comments:

9. Were all important outcomes considered?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider whether

- there is other information you would like to have seen

Comments:

10. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- even if this is not addressed by the review, what do **you** think?

Comments:

Appendix B: Data extraction tool

No	Authors/ year	Abstract				Author's conclusion	Competing interests
		Study design	Population characteristics	Metrics	Method of analysis		
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
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14.							