

AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
Promoting the Rights and Welfare of African Children

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series 8
- 1st Edition



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1 About AFRUCA

AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse was established in May 2001 as a platform for promoting the rights and welfare of African Children in the UK. AFRUCA has developed a national profile as an organisation rooted in the African community bringing specialist knowledge and expertise to the work of practitioners and policy makers to safeguard African children.

AFRUCA works in five key areas to help promote the rights and welfare of African children in the UK:

Awareness Raising and Sensitisation: With African communities and among young Africans about the children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and UK legislation promoting the rights and welfare of children.

Information, Education, and Advisory Services: To raise the profile of African children in the UK, increase awareness of their needs, improve policies and practices, and develop the leadership potential of young Africans. Activities include research and publishing reports; media work; conferences, seminars, workshops and training programmes for parents, policy makers, service providers, community leaders and young people; community meetings; advice and consultancy services.

Advocacy and Policy Development: Working closely with policy makers to shape the development of policy and regulatory action to promote the welfare of children.

Community and International Development: In partnership with others, putting in place programmes and projects that help relieve some of the suffering and hardship that African children experience.

Support for Children, Young People and Families: Working to support children, young people and African families in crisis or at the point of breakdown through effective early intervention services.

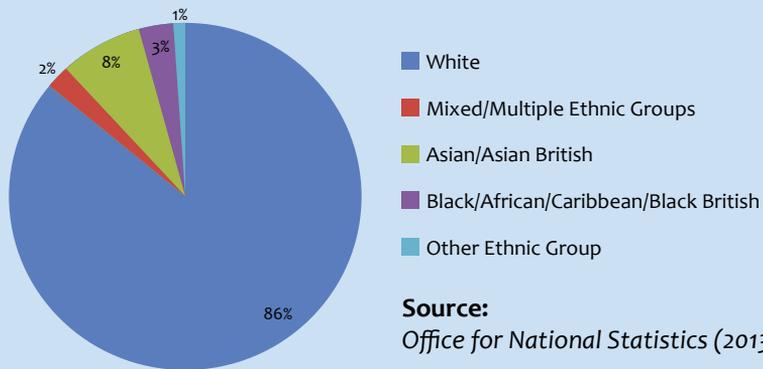
For further information about our work please visit our website at:
www.afruca.org

2 Africans in the UK

The UK, through its historical links with a number of English speaking African countries, and also due to its reputation as the most multicultural country in Europe, has become home to many African people.

The 2011 UK census indicated that there are over 1.8 million Africans in the UK, an increase of 1.1 million from the 2001 census making up 3.3% of the overall UK population.

Ethnic Groups: London and Wales 2011



Africans are generally well integrated into the British society and are economically and academically driven, making vast contributions within the health and social care system and in business. Children from African backgrounds are achieving particularly well above other groups within the British education system, and continue to strive.

Social Issues affecting Africans in the UK

Africans like many other immigrant groups in the UK tend to migrate with their values, beliefs and work ethos. While we acknowledge some cultural practices, beliefs and values are beneficial, others are particularly harmful to certain sections of the community such as to children and women. Increasingly, Local Authorities across the country are reporting a rise in cases of African families coming to the attention of Children's Services mainly due to differences in approaches to child rearing, physical discipline and religious or cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and witchcraft branding.

These are practices seen as normal by many Africans but could be considered as posing significant harm to children according to UK laws. Moreover, many African parents, faith and community leaders themselves are unaware of the UK laws and practices that safeguard children. As a result, many African children are being

removed from their families and placed into the care system, leading to more African families being broken up, with significant psychological impact.

There are high levels of unemployment as new arrivals face difficulties in accessing jobs that match their qualifications or experience. African communities, particularly new immigrants also find themselves without decent housing and a high proportion of Africans live on the poorest and most neglected estates in the UK's largest cities. Finally, many Africans have difficulty accessing social and health care, some due to their immigration status, but also, sometimes, because they are unaware of the local support services available to them. Children can also be exposed to some form of emotional abuse because of the level of stress and reality of life experienced by their parents or others looking after them.

AFRUCA has produced the **“Safeguarding African Children in the UK”** series of publications to highlight different safeguarding issues and to assist members of the African community in the UK to know more about different forms of child abuse and how to identify the signs so children can be safe and be better protected. The **“What is Emotional Abuse?”** booklet is the eighth in the series.



3 What is Emotional Abuse?

The UK government has identified four main categories of child abuse. At AFRUCA we know from experience that these forms of abuse can occur in different ways – especially in places where people are not aware of child protection rules and regulations or do not understand how to ensure children are safeguarded.

The four categories of child abuse are:

- Physical Abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse

Although there are other categories, most forms of abuse will fall under one or more of these. You can read more about Child Abuse and the different categories in our publication: [“What is Child Abuse?”](#)

The UK Department of Health defines Emotional Abuse as follows:

“Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued in so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capacity, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying causing children frequently to be frightened or in danger, or exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.”

(Source: ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (DoH, 2013))

To summarise, emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. It can include anything from verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle forms, such as repeated disapproval or even the refusal to ever be pleased. The negative message of emotional abuse causes inner damage that either destroys or impairs the development of a positive sense of self. Emotional abuse is by definition “constant negative messaging”, but even a single message of rejection can have long-lasting negative effects on the child.

Thus, emotional abuse is closely linked to all other forms of abuse because it is always present during physical abuse, child neglect, and sexual abuse. Emotional abuse represents a constant attack on a child that negatively affects the child’s self-worth. It is important to note here the word ‘constant’. With emotional abuse, the child constantly receives only negative messages, nothing positive.

4 Types of Emotional Abuse Within African Communities

Our experience working with a diverse range of communities shows that emotional abuse does occur and it largely takes the following forms or patterns:

1 Cultural and Religious Practices:

“It is in our culture; that is how we bring up our children”. This is a cultural smokescreen many people use to justify how they treat children. However, often the cultural norms and values which parents bring with them can set them on a collision course with UK law and the safeguarding policies. There are some cultural and religious practices which can cause untold harm to children and which constitute emotional abuse in the UK:

a Child Marriage

In some communities, young girls are married off early because it is believed it will bring honour to them and their families. Child brides often suffer emotional pressure from their own families and once married, their husbands or in-laws can limit their ability to make decisions about their own lives and bodies. Forced sexual initiation and early pregnancy often have long lasting effects on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of child brides for years afterwards. Child marriage is therefore emotionally abusive as it prevents girls from living their life as they may wish and forces them to engage in activities which are not appropriate for their age. Although Forced Marriage is illegal in the UK, it is a practice which occurs in some African communities.

b Female Genital Mutilation

This is a practice in which girls are mutilated in the belief that it will stop them from being promiscuous, thereby making them more marriageable. Female genital mutilation is a common practice across many African countries. Although it is illegal in the UK, this practice causes significant emotional distress to victims. In addition to the physical pain and ongoing health difficulties which girls and women can experience for many years after undergoing this practice, the emotional effect can be lifelong. For women who have spoken out about this practice, they have described long-term emotional difficulties including feeling anxious, feeling depressed, experiencing other mental health difficulties and having a feeling of great anger and sense of betrayal towards other family members who allowed it to happen. You can read more about FGM in our booklet: [“What is FGM?”](#) available to download on our website.

c Physical Chastisement

This is an issue which disproportionately impacts African families in the UK and many children have been removed from their families as a result of physical abuse. Many parents believe in the ‘Spare the rod, Spoil the child’ approach to raising their children, but do not realise that there are more

positive means of managing their children's behaviour and instilling discipline. Many parents are also not aware of the ongoing emotional abuse that children can experience as a result of physical punishment in the home. Research has shown that in addition to the physical abuse suffered, children who are physically punished demonstrate signs of low self-esteem; depression and anxiety; attachment difficulties; eating disorders; poor peer relations; and difficulty in expressing emotions and understanding the emotions of others. The emotional impact of physical abuse is often overlooked by parents but it can have very profound consequences for children. You can read more about Physical Abuse in our booklet **"What is Physical Abuse?"** available to download on our website.

d Branding Children as Witches

This form of emotional abuse occurs in most instances when a child or young person is suspected or accused of witchcraft - that is being possessed or taken over by an evil spirit, demons or having super natural powers. The assumption is that the branded person is responsible for all bad things happening to individuals, families or to the larger community and therefore he or she must be excluded and isolated from the rest of the group.

Accusing a child of having harmful supernatural powers definitely falls under the category of emotional abuse. It dehumanises a child as evil and in our view is a malicious, false accusation that leads to a process of moral exclusion. The child is henceforth viewed as less human, evil and a criminal not deserving of any consideration. The accusation leaves a lifelong stigma on the victim because once branded as a witch, no one will ever believe that the harmful powers have gone. The feeling of rejection and ever present fear of being harmed can lead to trauma, mental health problems, suicidal tendencies and antisocial behaviours. You can read more about "Witchcraft Abuse" in our booklet: **"What is Witchcraft Abuse?"** available to download on our website.

2 Newly Arrived Children and Emotional Trauma

Children newly arrived into the UK are most likely to suffer from emotional harm and trauma. Some children experience bullying at school from their peers due to their different accent or inability to speak English. Such bullying can include verbal abuse, taunting and even physical harm. Such children might also feel ostracised from their peers and find it difficult to socialise with others. Parents or guardians might not be able to intervene successfully on their child's behalf which means such negative behaviours continue to leave children traumatised and depressed, even harmed.

Some children coming to join their families from abroad might feel as if they are treated differently in the home where there are other children in the family who are born and already settled in the UK. Such children for example might be subjected to harsher parenting or care because they are "African", while

other children in the same home might be treated more leniently because they are “British”. At AFRUCA, we have seen instances of such discrimination within some families we have worked with. Such children might also end up feeling emotionally hurt due to their negative experiences at the hands of their own parents or guardians. This can lead to resentment among children leading to conflicts in the home.

3 Excessive Focus on Educational Attainment

While the desire for excellence and the ability to excel is a positive attribute parents can instil in their children, in some instances, parents can put excessive pressure on their children to succeed. Such pressure can involve forcing them to study for very long hours with little or no time for play. Some children are compelled to study difficult courses because this is what the parents desire. Children who do not perform well are punished or stigmatised within the family and can be compared to their more successful siblings – leading to rivalry and undue competition among them.

4 Verbal Abuse and Breaking down a Child’s Self Confidence

Another common type of emotional abuse that affects children, including African children, is in the form of rebuttal or rejection by undermining a child’s worth. This happens in many different ways, including: through verbal abuse; cursing; constant criticism; name-calling; telling the child he/she is ugly; yelling or swearing at the child; frequent belittling and use of labels such as “stupid” or “idiot”; constant demeaning jokes and verbal humiliation about the child’s body type and/or weight; comparing the child to siblings; and refusing hugs and loving gestures.

The intensity of this type of emotional abuse may vary from one community to another. However, it exists across all communities and cultures of African descent and in some instances, can be seen as normal.

5 Expressing Regret or Unhappiness about a Child’s Gender

In a culture where boys are more valued than girls, expressing regret the child wasn’t born the opposite sex can lead to emotional abuse for the children involved when they are constantly being given the message that they are worthless because of their gender. This can have long-lasting effects on children, especially girls, and it can particularly affect their future relationships and their ability to fully participate in society, for instance in relation to education or employment.

It not only affects the individual child while they are growing up, it can also have long-term consequences for society more generally as it perpetuates domestic violence and violence against women because girls have learnt from a young age that they are less valued than boys and should accept any kind of poor treatment from the more dominant gender.

6 Firstborn Syndrome

In many African cultures, the first child in a family is usually considered as a role model to the other children in the home with the expectation that they should always lead by example in every situation. Such children might experience a much harsher upbringing than their siblings. First born children are expected to be on their best behaviour at all times, excel educationally and even play an adult role in relation to their younger siblings. This means that at a young age, such children are expected to play a role which is beyond their age and maturity.

7 Absent Parenting

With a traumatised past and heading to an unknown future, settling down and leading a normal life in the UK is very tough for many African families and individuals. This has its own bearing on the emotional wellbeing of African children as it can lead to parents failing to give adequate emotional response to their children.

Children can be ignored and emotionally neglected, having no response to their spontaneous social behaviours, having no-one to discuss their activities and interests with and having no-one paying attention to significant events in their life. In some cases, children experience emotional abuse when their parents separate or divorce and they are forced to live with one parent while having little or no contact with the other. Some fathers in particular may not accept that a child has been born to them, which can cause the child to experience rejection and feelings of worthlessness.

Absent parenting can also include the issue of 'leaving children alone at home'. To some extent, this is normal in the African context, reinforced by the fact that in Africa, a community raises a child. However there is a limited sense of community in the UK and African parents often run into serious problems with the authorities when they leave children alone in the house, often with good intentions, whilst they attend to other errands. Leaving children home alone can be a frightening and lonely experience for children and can lead to emotional abuse as it sends a message to the child that they are not as important as other day-to-day matters in their parents' lives.

8 Exploitation of Children

In some instances, children and young people have been deliberately used or encouraged to do things that are illegal or harmful to them. One classic example of this is children being trafficked to the UK and encouraged or facilitated to engage themselves in sexual activities and prostitution at an early age.

In situations where children experience constant stress and live in environments where they experience emotional distress on a daily basis, children are damaged and can experience lifelong problems. For instance, children exposed to such

exploitation are more likely to go on to develop drug or alcohol problems or mental health problems and are more likely to self harm or experience flashbacks or long-term physical health problems.

In the African community, typical examples of this type of exploitation and emotional abuse include:

- expecting a child to support a family financially
- inappropriate reinforcement of sexual activity
- rewarding children for lying and stealing
- rewarding children for substance abuse and sexual activity
- supplying children with drugs, alcohol and other illegal substances
- promoting illegal activities such as selling drugs
- in families where children are expected to be ‘caregiver’ to the parent
- expecting young children to take care of younger siblings for unreasonable length of time and frequency
- unreasonable responsibilities for jobs around the house

9 Domestic Slavery

Many parents may not be able to provide adequately for their children and therefore give their children away to strangers or other community members in the belief that they will work to earn some money. However many of these children are terribly abused by their employers because there is no-one to protect them and the children can be exposed to danger, exploitation and abuse. Living away from their parents and in exploitative arrangements, such children experience terrible emotional abuse. Some children who have been orphaned can be passed around to live with other families. This can leave them vulnerable to further abuse.

10 Living in Aggressive or Hostile Environments and Domestic Violence

Children who live in aggressive or hostile environments are terrified by the constant use of threats and/or intimidating behaviour and experience emotional abuse. This not only includes when the child directly experiences this behaviour towards them but also when they witness violence or abuse against others in the home, such as in domestic violence situations between parents.

Specific examples of this type of behaviour or environment include:

- excessive teasing, yelling and scaring of young children or infants
- unpredictable and extreme responses to a child’s behaviour
- unpredictable behaviour such as aggressive and extreme verbal threats alternating with periods of artificial warmth
- threatening abandonment

- branding children as witches or calling them evil, especially in the presence of others
- any form of domestic violence which the child hears or witnesses
- threatening to destroy a favourite object or threatening to harm a beloved pet
- forcing a child to watch inhumane acts against animals
- inconsistent demands on the child and displaying inconsistent emotions
- stating that the child is adopted and doesn't belong
- ridiculing the child in public and threats to reveal intensely embarrassing traits to peers
- threatening to kick adolescent out of the house



5 Signs of Emotional Abuse

The following could be warning signs of emotional abuse in children:

- Excessively withdrawn, fearful or anxious about doing something wrong.
- Shows extremes in behaviour (extremely compliant and polite or extremely demanding; extremely passive or extremely aggressive).
- Doesn't seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver.
- Takes on adult behaviours or characteristics (taking care of other children) or takes on infantile behaviours or characteristics (rocking, thumb-sucking, tantrums).

However, signs of emotional abuse differ not only according to age, but in many cases, according to gender. Contrasting signs are in part due to styles of parenting boys vs. parenting girls. Boys are still taught that crying is not masculine and that displaying anger and other physical behaviours is acceptable. Girls are taught that anger is not ladylike and that showing emotion is part of being female. Differing social expectations contribute to the way boys and girls display signs of emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse signs for boys include aggression and temper tantrums, fights with peers and siblings, bullying tactics and becoming easily frustrated. They can also include withdrawn behaviour, disobedience, lying and cheating, destructive behaviours, impulsive behaviours, being argumentative and being loud or worrying excessively.

On the part of girls, emotional abuse signs can include becoming withdrawn and passive, approval-seeking, compliant, becoming frustrated easily, infinite patience, clinging to adults, overly dependent and stubborn, teasing excessively, worrying excessively and bodily complaints. (For further information, please read AFRUCA's *'What is Child Abuse?'* booklet)

6 Effects of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse has devastating consequences on children. Depending on its form(s), duration and severity, emotional abuse may affect every aspect of a child's life: it may have consequences that are psychological, physical, behavioural, academic, sexual, interpersonal, self-perceptual or spiritual. The effects of emotional abuse may appear right away or surface only in adolescence or adulthood.

The effects may also differ according to the nature of the response to the abuse, and whether the abuse was disclosed or reported. In some cases, the consequences are fatal. Girls and boys are affected differently by emotional abuse.

Compared to boys, girls are more likely to internalize their response to emotional abuse and may experience suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, low self-esteem or psychological disorders. Boys are more likely to externalize their response to emotional abuse, displaying for example, increased aggression, delinquency and spousal abuse. Boys who have been exposed to violence in their homes whilst growing up are more likely to be violent in their adolescent and adult relationships than boys not exposed to violence.

The effects of emotional abuse are directly connected to the relationship between the victim and abuser. The closer the relationship, the more devastating the effects of emotional abuse will be on the child. As the intensity, frequency and duration of abuse increase, so does the effect on the psyche of that child.

Emotional abuse is like brain washing in that it systematically wears away at the child's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in his/her own perceptions, and self-concept. Whether it is done by constant berating and belittling, by intimidation or under the guise of "guidance," "teaching" or "advice," the results are similar.

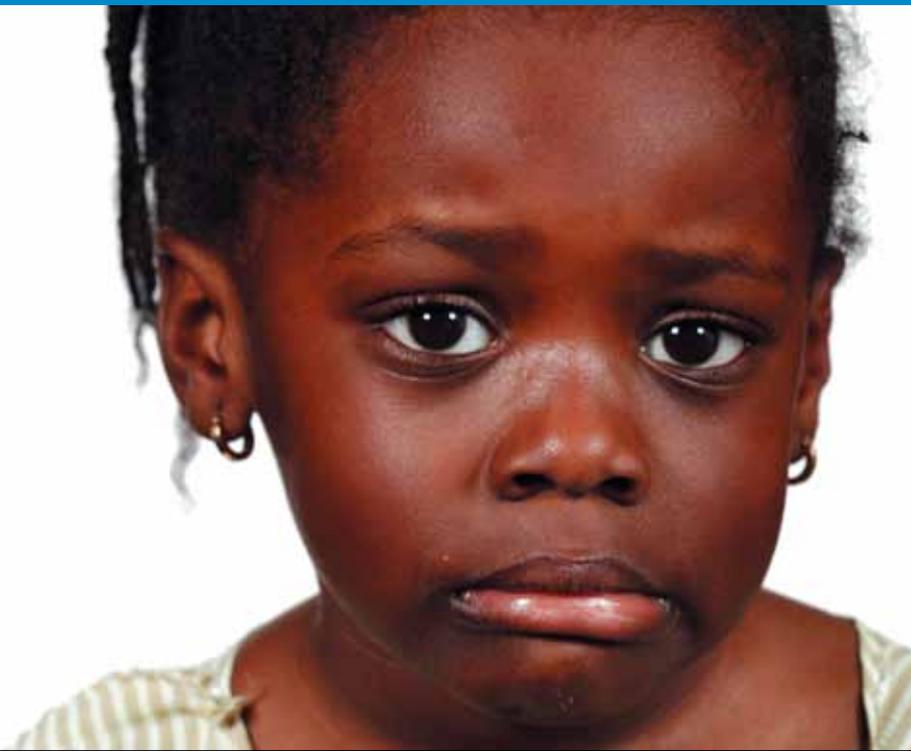
Eventually, the child loses all sense of self and remnants of personal value because emotional abuse cuts to the very core of a person, creating scars that may be far deeper and more lasting than physical ones.

With emotional abuse, the insults, insinuations, criticism and accusations slowly eat away at the child's self-esteem until he/she is incapable of judging any situation realistically. Children become so beaten down emotionally that they blame themselves for the abuse. The child's self-esteem is so low that they may cling to the abuser.

Victims of emotional abuse can become so convinced that they are worthless that they believe that no one else would want them. They stay in abusive situations because they believe they have nowhere else to go. Their ultimate fear is being all alone.

All children need acceptance, love, encouragement, discipline, consistency and positive attention from their parents. Children who are denied these things often grow up thinking they are deficient in some way and that they somehow deserve to be treated badly. This can lead to serious behavioural, learning, emotional or mental disorders, all of which affect the child's chances of developing into a healthy, well-adjusted adult. Sadly, when they become parents themselves they may also emotionally deprive their own children because they don't have positive experiences and role models to draw on.

Generally, therefore, children who experience emotional abuse can live out a life of pain and suffering and they may live with their experiences for their entire life. They might suffer from speech problems, developmental delay, failure to thrive, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm, burning, cutting, attempts at suicide, low self-worth, withdrawal, profound sadness, sleep disorders, irritability, inability to trust others, depression and inappropriate behaviour for age, stealing, lying, prostitution, engaging in risky behaviours, inability to control emotions, and questioning of religious beliefs. (For further information, please read AFRUCA's *'What is Child Abuse?'* booklet)



7 Emotional Abuse and Religion

Emotional Abuse does not just take place in the home. Through faith or religious beliefs, children can be exposed to emotional abuse. This happens in the following ways:

- Use of religious teachings in an abusive manner that causes psychological trauma, harassment or humiliation to the victim.
- Misuse of a religion for selfish or ideological ends which takes advantage of children and manipulates their emotional vulnerabilities.
- Abuse of a clerical position to perpetrate non-religiously motivated abuse, such as in sex abuse cases.
- Any form of religious violence including human sacrifice and violent initiations or rites of passage.

As religion plays such an important part in people's lives and as members of a faith show such deference to their religious leaders, there are times when religious teaching or doctrines can be used to manipulate people or inflict psychological harm. Most often, such abuse is directed at children and emotionally vulnerable adults. The motivations behind such abuse vary, but can be either well-intentioned or malicious.

Case Study One

A pastor accuses a girl in an audience of being a witch. He verbally abused then slapped her across the face. No one intervened.

Well meaning instances of such abuse are often motivated by genuine concern that the targeted person will come to physical or spiritual harm should they engage in certain behaviour or question their beliefs. The perpetrator then uses exaggerated, distorted or even false versions of their teachings or their position of authority to instil intense fear and/or shame so that the victim will comply. Causing the victim to be intensely fearful can lead to a range of negative emotional responses and can lead children to develop long-lasting mental health problems.

Case Study Two

Kwame, a 6 year-old boy, suffers from a mild form of epilepsy. He doesn't fall down, froth or jerk about. His seizures are almost like him falling asleep for a minute or two, still upright, with his eyes open.

One day Kwame had one of these epileptic episodes at a church service. The pastor noticed and immediately turned to the congregation and said, "Here is a manifestation of the devil. This boy is possessed by evil spirits."

The consequences were immediate and very upsetting. The older children shunned Kwame and when he approached friends who were his own age, their parents called them to go away from him.

The parents were devastated and confronted the pastor but the damage had been done. Even though the parents explained the cause the pastor never retracted his accusations.

Such powerfully held beliefs lead children to experience emotional abuse because they are excluded from the community and ostracised from those around them. The message sent to such children is that there is something wrong with them and that they are not worthy of love and should be shunned. These messages have long-lasting effects on children.



8 Emotional Abuse and Social Issues

There are a number of social realities that can impact on a child's emotional well-being as follows:

Poverty

Although there is a growing middle class African community in the UK, levels of poverty particularly amongst refugee population remain fairly high, further compounded by Government cuts and "no recourse to public funds" policy for refugees. This can impact on stress and anxiety levels, and can affect parenting skills. In turn these factors can then contribute to children developing behavioural problems, criminal behaviours, and use of alcohol and drugs. Some children may be vulnerable to exploitation by others, can be groomed into gangs and prostitution and develop coping mechanisms which drive them further into crime or, exclusion from school or lead them to become radicalised.

The Caste System

The caste system within African communities is not well understood within the wider population in the UK. For example, the Osu people of the Igbo tribe in Nigeria are viewed as lower class and slaves and are discriminated against within their communities. There may also be preferences to marry within cultures which alienates other cultures. This discrimination may go hidden and impact on children as emotional abuse, which may be difficult to detect and disclose. Some cultures may use language that is offensive and curse others, often in discriminatory terms. This can be termed as verbal abuse and can lead to emotional abuse.

Immigration

The various facets of the process of immigration, family reunion and settlement and the challenges of adapting and integrating into a host community often cause varied levels of stress and emotional abuse both to parents and their children. The emotional trauma of past life and the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the lives of immigrant families mean that more children are likely to be emotionally abused which in some cases can lead to family breakdown or the involvement of other services such as Children's Social Care or the Police.

9 Emotional Abuse and Social Media

Social media has changed the way we communicate and access information. Young people, in particular, are more likely to use social media sites like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and this means that they are more likely to express their emotions and feelings for others to see. Unfortunately, this leaves them vulnerable to bullying and exploitation. When this happens, it is not always easy for children to ask for help and support and many children experience emotional distress as a result. In some cases, children have committed suicide due to online bullying and the emotional abuse that they have been exposed to.

10 Emotional Abuse and Sexuality

The issues of sexuality and self expression may be difficult to reconcile within African communities, particularly in families who hold strong cultural and religious beliefs. For example a young gay person living within an African family may be vulnerable to emotional abuse from within the family and wider African community where homosexuality has a huge stigma. They risk being physically attacked or ostracised by the wider community. They might be pressurized to behave within what is perceived as the norm within the African community and they might feel unable to express their feelings. In other instances, such young people might be forced to undertake harmful exorcism rites to “rid” them of what is perceived to be “evil” as a result of their sexuality.

11 Emotional Abuse and Gang Culture

There are complex reasons why young people get involved in gangs but research tells us that chaotic and aggressive family life, emotional abuse from a young age and the inability of parents to meet their children's emotional needs form a key part in what drives children and teenagers towards gang life. If children grow up in chaotic, hostile or violent homes and if children experience emotional abuse and do not have their emotional needs consistently met, they will be less able to learn alternatives to aggression and will be more naturally inclined to seek out opportunities to use aggression and violence on a regular basis. Equally, when children grow up in hostile and violent families and when they experience emotional abuse, the children will naturally begin to look elsewhere for belonging and love which will drive them towards gangs.

Unfortunately, once involved in gangs, children find that instead of having their emotional needs met, they are often exploited by other gang members and are made to get involved in increasingly risky behaviour such as street robberies, handling drugs or stolen goods or carrying weapons. When girls are involved in gang culture, they often find themselves exploited by male gang members for sex and can also be expected to carry drugs or weapons. The emotional impact of this exploitation can affect children and young people for their entire lives.



12 Why Children Don't Tell

There are many reasons why children keep the fact that they are victims of abuse to themselves. The most common of these reasons are:

1 Level of Understanding:

They might not understand that they are being emotionally abused. For many children the abuse they suffer is perceived by them as normal, especially if it is the only treatment they have ever known.

2 Blame or Shame

A child might feel that they are to blame for the abuse or feel ashamed. They might not have the ability or language to describe what is happening to them. This is even more serious in the case of children with disability who might not be capable of communicating what has happened to others who are in a position to help them.

3 Lack of Trust

They might feel they will not be believed, or that they cannot trust any adults to keep them safe.

4 Fear

Some children once they know they are experiencing emotional abuse might feel fearful of the consequences of disclosure. Sometimes children are threatened that someone close to them will be hurt if they disclose abuse.

5 Secrecy and Oath Rituals

Some children who were trafficked for sexual exploitation are made to swear oaths of allegiance to their traffickers. Once rescued, they are fearful of the repercussions of disclosing information due to the oaths sworn which could be seen as powerful. Many of these young people believe they might be harmed or killed if they break their oaths.

6 “Stockholm Syndrome”

Some children get so attached to their abusers they are able to justify the abuse. They will also refuse to disclose information about their abuser because they might either feel they are betraying them, or that they do not want to lose them.

13 Working as a Community to Protect Children from Emotional Abuse

Across the country, African children are disproportionately over-represented in Local Authorities child protection figures under the categories of physical abuse and neglect. This can lead to children being temporarily removed from their families and taken into care to prevent them from further harm. In other cases, those children are permanently lost to their families as they are given up for adoption. However, we do not have many children being protected from emotional abuse. Our view is that most people do not recognise the signs or do not see emotional abuse as harmful to children. However, many children's lives are ruined as a result of their experiences of different forms of emotional abuse.

Everyone in our community must be able to recognise the indicators of emotional abuse. They must be aware of the different ways children can be harmed and the impact. These issues have all been discussed above. In addition, they must know what to do to protect children from emotional abuse as follows:

At all times you should be able to:

- 1. Know the different Forms of Child Abuse**
 - Ensure you know the meaning of Child Abuse.
 - Know the difference between the different categories of child abuse such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.
- 2. Know the indicators of emotional abuse**
 - Ensure you can tell the different signs of emotional abuse
 - If you see a child who has the signs of emotional abuse, ensure you are able to identify them
 - Ensure you can tell if a child you know demonstrates the effects of emotional abuse
- 3. Know what to do if a child is at risk**
 - Know who to contact to report cases of child abuse.
 - Know how to contact your local authority children's services or the police on 999.
 - Know how to contact AFRUCA for help. Our contact details are at the back of this booklet.
- 4. Encourage others to speak out against child abuse**
 - Ensure you speak with your Pastor or Imam about child abuse so they can help to raise the issue and speak out against it in the community.

14 Reporting Emotional Abuse

If you see a child being abused, harmed or neglected in any way, you must report this to the authorities as follows:

Step One:

In the first instance, contact your local authority children's services department. You can reach them by calling the Local Authority switchboard number which is on your Council Tax bill or in Yellow Pages.

Step Two:

When you are put through to Children's Services, state that you want to make a Child Abuse "referral". This simply means you want to report a case of child abuse.

Step Three:

You will be asked to provide further details about the case you are reporting. Please note that you do not have to provide your personal details if you do not wish to.

Step Four:

The local authority is obliged to make an investigation. If you do not see any changes in the case you have reported, please follow up with another phone call.

Step Five:

You can also call the police on 999 to report a case of child abuse.

Step Six:

If nothing happens, you can contact AFRUCA and we will pursue the case until action is taken. Our contact details are at the back of this publication



15 Our Work on Emotional Abuse

AFRUCA Children's Champions

Many cultural practices like branding children as witches, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, using children as domestic slaves as well as the harsh treatment of girls and first born children need to be revisited. At AFRUCA, we are actively campaigning against these practices.

We run very regular community education events and activities across the country. In particular, our Children's Champions Project across London and the South of England, and our Anti-FGM Youth Project across Greater Manchester ensure we are able to regularly pass on the message that children must be protected and safeguarded from abuse and harm at all times.

You can learn more about how to protect children from emotional abuse and other forms of abuses by taking part in our range of community activities which are often well advertised on our website at www.afruca.org and on social media. You can also become an AFRUCA Champion and help to spread the child protection message. Further information is available on our website.



16 AFRUCA Resources on Child Safeguarding

We hope you found this booklet useful. There is a lot of information out there that can help you carry out the task of protecting and safeguarding children.

At AFRUCA we have produced a range of materials to help parents, carers, faith and community leaders and workers. Here is a list of publications where parents can get additional information.

AFRUCA Child Protection Manuals:

- Manual on Child Protection for African Parents in the UK (in English and French)
- Manual on Safeguarding Children for African Faith Organisations in the UK (in Arabic, English and French)

Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series:

- 1 What is Child Abuse?
- 2 What is Child Trafficking?
- 3 What is Private Fostering?
- 4 What is Female Genital Mutilation?
- 5 What is Witchcraft Abuse?
- 6 What is Physical Abuse?
- 7 What is Sexual Abuse?
- 8 What is Emotional Abuse?
- 9 What is Child Neglect?

Support our Work: Donate to AFRUCA

Your support will enable us to make plans for long term work to address the abuse and exploitation of African children in the UK and in Africa.

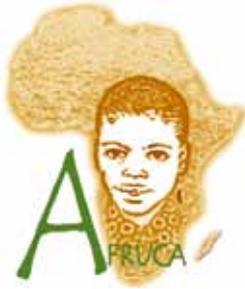
Donations are made securely online at
www.justgiving.com/afruca

You can also donate by text: just text our code **AFRU01** + the amount you wish to give to **70070**. It is Quick, Easy and Free on all networks in the UK!

Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, consisting of 20 rows of small blue dots.



AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse

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Tel: 0161 205 9274

Fax: 0161 205 2156

Email: info@afruca.org

Website: www.afruca.org

Our Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series of publications include:

1. What is Child Abuse?
2. What is Child Trafficking?
3. What is Private Fostering?
4. What is Female Genital Mutilation?
5. What is Witchcraft Abuse?
6. What is Physical Abuse?
7. What is Sexual Abuse?
8. What is Emotional Abuse?
9. What is Child Neglect?