

The Impact Of Maniacal Child Rearing Practices In Dave Pelzer's *My Story*

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Abstract

This paper focused on the critical issue of inadequate parenting skills and the adverse effects of ineffective child-rearing practices. The maniacal practices harm individual children and disrupt the transmission of positive values and behaviors from one generation to the next. Neglect and malnutrition can lead to behavioral issues in children, resulting in isolation and engaging in unethical conduct. The detrimental impact of child abuse severely hinders emotional development, fostering traits such as aggression, lack of affection, and social withdrawal. Furthermore, harsh disciplinary measures for minor infractions can drive children towards illegal activities, posing a significant challenge to societal stability. It is essential to recognize that every child, born with inherent resilience and uniqueness, should not be subjected to comparison or judgment. Adults play a vital role in nurturing and encouraging children to pursue their passions and achieve their goals, ensuring they do not feel abandoned or overlooked.

Keywords: Ferity, Derelict, Noxious, Menace, Crestfallen.

Child abuse is both a moral transgression and a criminal act, involving the unacceptable treatment of minors. It manifests in various forms of mistreatment, such as physical, emotional, psychological, sexual abuse, and neglect. Child abuse encompasses any action or inaction that violates a child's rights and jeopardizes their health, survival, and development (Kacker, 2015). This grave issue takes on many forms, including child maltreatment, child labor, child trafficking, homicide, filicide, infanticide, child slavery, child marriage, child exploitation, child oppression, child suppression, child repression, and corporal punishment. Recognized categories of child abuse include Child Physical Abuse, Child Mental Abuse, Child Psychological Abuse, Child Sexual Abuse, Child Verbal Abuse, and Child Neglect. Children often look to their parents as trusted guardians who genuinely wish for their well-being. However, a lack of parental engagement and awareness can lead to detrimental consequences. When children feel neglected or pressured, they may lose faith and hope, leading to undesirable behaviors.

Children perceive their parents as trusted adults who wish for their well-being. When an adult is silent and goes unnoticed, the child may feel neglected. Later, if they are pressured or forced, it will not be effective. When neglect and indifference emerge, children can experience significant emotional turmoil. In their quest for attention, children may engage in harmful behaviors. Parents must embrace their responsibility for nurturing their children. If a child faces critical issues, it is up to the parents to address these problems and guide their children in navigating potential future challenges. If these situations are left unaddressed, various forms of abuse can occur. Adults are expected to protect children from harm and assist them in coping with any difficulties they encounter (Herring, 2023). While children do not explicitly ask for protective rights within a family, it is the responsibility of adults to ensure their safety.

In today's world, children deserve to have rights within their families. Unfortunately, many children face defeat and suppression at home, often from their parents and siblings, even before they encounter strangers. While society has established rules regarding children's rights, these solutions are not being effectively implemented. The time to take action is now; waiting until tomorrow achieves nothing. In the name of discipline, parents and adults sometimes torment their children in hopes of encouraging better behavior. While children need to be disciplined, parents must be careful in how they address their children's mistakes. Instead of forcing children to conform to adult expectations, parents should inspire them to pursue better choices of their own accord. When children are encouraged to make their own decisions, they are more likely to develop a genuine passion for their interests. However, if they are pressured into certain behaviors, they may become stuck and fail to progress. Although the world is gradually recognizing that children have rights, a significant portion of society, particularly in India, still believes that parents are the best judges of how to raise their children. They feel that there is no need for state intervention or outside assistance in child-rearing practices (Kacker, 2015). This issue is not limited to India; globally, many parents adopt a similar stance, often disregarding the need for change.

Children often face confusion due to the conflicting messages from adults about what is right and wrong, and what actions should be taken or avoided. Adults frequently impose their views on children through harsh words and actions, leaving the children feeling frightened and overshadowed by their parents. In this dynamic, the parent appears big, powerful, and always right, while the child feels small, dependent, and vulnerable (Kacker, 2015).

As parents, it is crucial to encourage children to make their own decisions instead of overriding their choices. Adults should provide children with the space to think independently, grant them respect for their actions, and offer thoughtful suggestions. A good parent is a deep listener and observer, engaging in conversations with care and consideration rather

than speaking impulsively. Reasoning plays a vital role in a child's growth. This process enables children to learn how to make decisions and understand how to correct them when necessary. Ultimately, a parent's responsibility is to educate their children on the difference between right and wrong and guide them on the best paths to take. However, parents should not make decisions for their children. No one has the right to live another person's life; we are each born to pursue our paths, and individual rights should never be infringed upon by anyone.

If children's rights conflict with their parents' wishes, it does not mean that children are opposing their parents. Instead, they are seeking acceptance at home. They are advocating for their rights and desire to be acknowledged in their family environment. They wish to experience life fully—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Children want to be respected and treated as human beings, not as slaves or animals. Childhood is a memory of innocence; it should be cherished and brought up to healthy Adulthood.

Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors, including their right to association with parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for food, state-paid universal education, health care, and criminal laws (Panda, B. K., and Sukanta Sarkar, 2015)

Many children learn violent behavior from their parents and, as a result, grow up to abuse their children. Consequently, abusive behavior often gets transmitted across generations (Kacker, 2015). This cycle poses a significant threat to society, perpetuating harm from one generation to the next. A poignant example is Amarjeet Sada, known as the world's youngest serial killer, who was an 8-year-old boy from India who murdered three children (Goswami, 2023). Sadly, the term "World's Youngest" in this context highlights a disturbing reality rather than an achievement. Reports indicate that Sada exhibited "contact disorders" and derived pleasure from injuring others. This behavior suggests a deep-seated psychopathy, as he found enjoyment in causing harm. This situation calls for reflection on the support systems available for children, especially those in distress. Parenting is not just a skill; it is a profound responsibility to model positive behavior and nurture growth. In our fast-paced world, let us not forget the importance of fostering environments where children feel safe, loved, and guided in the right direction. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter future for our children.

The impact of good child-rearing practices resembles foolproof, congenial, intense, diligence, and Headstrong. On the other hand, the impact of bad child-rearing practices resembles frantic, deficient, faithless, scheming, and threatful. Both the practices illustrate the growth of children concerning child-rearing practices. Positive child-rearing practices nurture well-adjusted adults, while negative practices can lead to damaging outcomes. This paper shares the inspiring real-life story of a child who endured tremendous abuse from his mother. Fortunately, he was rescued by dedicated social workers and placed in foster care; however, the psychological scars from his trauma remain. The trilogy titled *My Story* highlights the pain and resilience of the victim. Throughout his journey from childhood to adulthood, he held onto hope and fought for his survival. He not only sought to heal himself but also dedicated his life to advocating for other abused children. This trilogy is a testament to the strength of the human spirit, capturing the essence of pain, hope, and success.

Dave Pelzer's trilogy, published as *My Story* in 2004, encompasses three powerful memoirs: *A Child Called 'It'*, *The Lost Boy*, and *A Man Named Dave*. This trilogy illustrates the three pivotal stages of the author's life: his biological home, his experiences in foster care, and his journey into adulthood, showcasing his extraordinary ability to overcome immense challenges. The first memoir, depicting ages 4 to 12, highlights a child's incredible courage to survive. The second, covering ages 12 to 18, narrates a foster child's quest for love and belonging. The last memoir, focusing on life after age 18, tells a compelling story of triumph and forgiveness. Dave emerges as a beacon of hope and inspiration for those who have suffered abuse and felt voiceless. He is not only a torchbearer who carried the flame during the Centennial Olympic Games but also a guiding force for many children grappling with their traumas (Pelzer, 2004, p.490). Throughout this trilogy, Dave embodies numerous roles, including protagonist, child, victim, husband, father, firefighter, motivator, author, and advocate, reminding us all of the resilience of the human spirit.

Dave faced significant hardships, experiencing physical, mental, verbal, and psychological mistreatment from his mother, who took pleasure in starving him. He endured cruel beatings and learned to cover up his bruises, wearing the same clothes for two years. Despite these challenges impacting his academic performance and causing him to give up on various aspects of his life, there was a time when his mother showed him kindness. Her descent into cruelty began under the guise of discipline, reminding us that while discipline is important, it should never cross into abuse. Understanding the vital distinction between healthy discipline and harmful treatment is essential for nurturing a child's well-being. "My relationship with Mom drastically changed from discipline that developed into a kind of lifestyle that grew out of control. It became so bad at times, I had no strength to crawl away – even if it meant saving my life" (Pelzer, 2004, p.20).

Dave's mother changed from a nurturing mother to a wicked witch. His mother cruelly abused him physically and psychologically to prevail at wits' end. She had done this abuse as a sort of game to enjoy his suffering like corner treatment, mirror treatment, quest game, bar soap, Stove game, eating soiled diapers (defecation), a bowl of vomited food from the toilet, ammonia, Clorox, etc. Dave was forced to say the statement in front of the mirror repeatedly, which is "I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy!" (Pelzer, 2004, p.21). Because of this statement, Dave was not only physically tarnished but also mentally. His mother put him in first grade again because he was a bad boy. She always blamed him for being a shame to his family. She banned Dave from watching television and eating dinner. His mother plays an abusive game by reading various articles. She blames Dave for making her life hell and seeks revenge. It is unusual for a biological

mother to be interested in destroying her son. “You’ve made my life a living hell!’ she sneered. Now it’s time I showed you what hell is like!” (Pelzer, 2004, p.26). The starvation makes Dave untrammelled. He fantasizes about eating food and starts to think only about the food. “I had become Mother’s slave” (Pelzer, 2004, p.29). Then he was forced to eat his brother’s soiled diapers. His mother forcefully applied the defecation to his entire face. This could not be diagnosed as child abuse and even more. He felt lower than the dog in his home. Whatever the circumstances, Dave stood against the pain and suffering. His starvation coerced his stealing habit. Because of her mother’s maniacal child-rearing, he tends to steal food at home, school, and in stores. Here, this paper examined that if parenting is in bad practice, it distracts the child to proceed in an unethical way. His mother tortured him with cold water in the bathtub and forced him to play skating in cold weather. “I hated Mother most and wished that she were dead. But before she died, I wanted her to feel the magnitude of my pain and my loneliness for all these years” (Pelzer, 2004, p.67). He hated his father more than his mother. He watched the abuse silently and didn’t come to rescue his child. His father played the role of a bystander. Here, the silence killed the child. In child abuse, the massive pitfall is “silencing” the situation. Dave mentioned that one in five children was abused physically, emotionally, or sexually in the United States. “Most abuse happens as parents exert their ‘right’ to discipline their children and let it get a little out of hand. These same people may believe that over-discipline is not likely to follow the child into adulthood. They are tragically misinformed” (Pelzer, 2004, p.80).

Many child abuse victims hid their past deep inside, so deep that the possibility of becoming an abuser themselves is unthinkable. They live normal lives, becoming husbands and wives, raising families, and building careers. But the ordinary problems of everyday life often force the former abuse victim to behave as they were taught as children. Spouses and children then become the object of their frustration, and they unknowingly come full circle, completing the never-ending cycle of rage. (Pelzer, 2004, 80, 81)

Dave argues that negative influences can ruin families and have a rambling impact on society. He believes that harmful child-rearing practices pose a greater threat than natural disasters, as individuals deeply affect their families and communities. “Some child abuse victims stay quietly locked in their shells” (Pelzer, 2004, p.81). Dave is exceptional from this stage; he fights back and becomes the source of inspiration to all. “This is more than a story of survival. It is a story of victory and celebration. Even in its darkest passages, the heart is unconquerable. It is important that the body survives, but it is more meaningful that the human spirit prevails” (Pelzer, 2004, p.81, 82). Dave gets a good impact from his mother’s maniacal behavior. Her notorious confession is about what not to do, at the same time how to overcome any critical situations and hold for his survival. This maniacal practice creates both good and bad impacts on child-rearing.

On March 5, 1973, social workers rescued him from a troubling environment. Despite being placed in foster care, his mother continued to threaten him, expressing her disappointment with his freedom. This led Dave to steal food not out of necessity, but in search of social acceptance, influenced by society’s negative views of foster children. In Catanze’s foster home, he faced physical and verbal abuse from another foster child. He was wrongfully accused of arson and placed in juvenile detention, where his mother sought to have him committed to a mental asylum. “Your mother is claiming that your past behavior at her house warranted her to discipline you because you were so incorrigible. She’s trying to have you put away in a mental institution!” (Pelzer, 2004, p.185). The second memoir, *The Lost Boy*, notes that society often looks down on foster children, holding prejudices that keep them marginalized.

From the 1970s point of view, foster care was not accepted. For a child to go to foster care meant there was something wrong – a complete failure in parenting. The viewpoint even went so far as to believe that foster children had done something bad – unlike an orphan who was an innocent victim. (Pelzer, 2004, p. 244)

In foster care, Dave lacked a permanent home, moving through over five different families. This instability harmed his education. As a foster child, he often found himself in the spotlight whenever something negative happened around him. “You’re a filthy little hooligan! I don’t know what you children do to become ... fostered children” (Pelzer, 2004, p.220). In Dave Pelzer’s “Perspectives on Foster Care”, the author reveals, “There is not a doubt in my mind that had I stayed with my biological mother much longer, I would have definitely been killed. Foster care was not only an escape, but literally a whole new world. At times it was extremely difficult to adjust, for I never quite knew what to expect” (Pelzer, 2004, p.236). Dave attributes his growth and achievements to his foster parents, whom he believes play a critical role in nurturing children. They treated him with the love and acceptance he lacked from his biological parents, fostering his personal development and success. “Don’t get me wrong; harming a child is absolutely wrong and should never be tolerated!” (Pelzer, 2004, p.238).

Dave staunchly opposes any form of harm to children. He firmly asserts that in the mission to protect and save children, teachers play an essential role, alongside parents and legal guardians. Recognizing the critical needs of children, the TNTEU (Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University) has successfully implemented a comprehensive syllabus on *Child Rights and Protection* in 2023 for teachers. This initiative equips educators with vital knowledge about child rights, the laws and policies surrounding child protection, and the impact of violence against children (Bajpai, Asha, et al., 2017). While numerous social workers dedicate their careers to rescuing children from difficult situations, teachers possess a unique advantage in identifying victims who need immediate assistance. This was clearly illustrated when Dave intervened to safeguard a child in distress.

Dave confronts many struggles in the foster home and the biological home, which propelled him to join the Air Force. His mother said why she didn’t kill him, because she wanted to torture him to get happiness from his pain. “You are only

alive because it pleases me. You are nothing more than..." (Pelzer, 2004, p.266). Dave had no dignity and no self-worth in his biological home. This reminded him more when he was out of home. He was fed up with living his life. "In the deepest part of my soul, I feel at peace. I am no longer afraid. I am ready to die" (Pelzer, 2004, p.277). When he got rescued from his biological home, he felt free and sensed the freedom of hollow victory from his long-time sufferings. His past maniacal life experience gives him long pain but what is to learn is, that he does not stop and mends to move further.

Dave's Aunt Jane advised him to be vice in making decisions. At least he is blessed with a good aunt concerned about his welfare. The author depicts Aunt Jane as a facsimile of good child-rearing practices.

A lot of us had high hopes that situations we dealt with or how we were raised wouldn't be passed on to our children. It was hard on all of us. If you children can break the cycle, that's all any of us as adults can ever wish for. There are no guarantees in life, so learn from other's mistakes. Enjoy what you can, while you can. Don't let it consume you like ... well, just let go and let life happen. (Pelzer, 2004, 344, 345)

Aunt Jane insists Dave remember his father's last words before his death. "Do what you have to. Don't end up like me" (Pelzer, 2004, p.345). So, Dave is strongly confined to being a good father to his son. Dave doesn't want to become like his mother. The bad child-rearing practice of his mother creates a good impact which is he does not want to be like his mother. He committed himself to many volunteering services to be a better person and a perfect father. Dave did many programs, contests, and donations for child abuse awareness, he felt it was worth it. Dave's primary concern is to protect his son from troubling society. "As a parent, I always had felt my first obligation was to protect my son from the atrocities of the world, especially the horrors from my past" (Pelzer, 2004, p.470).

The impacts of maniacal child-rearing practices create good and bad effects. People may question how maniacal child-rearing creates a good effect. Children will learn not to do the acts of harm which abduct others. Dave himself set an example for the impact of the trilogy. He was maniacally treated by his mother, but he turned out to be a good father to his son rather than become an abuser. This is what the author aimed to achieve; victims should not turn to abusers. His soul lies in abuse that should not take place. If it already happens, it should not be passed on to generations. As Pam Leo says, "Let's raise children who won't have to recover from their childhoods".

Likewise, this original unpublished manuscript explores the issue of child abuse and its profound consequences. It elucidates how detrimental parenting practices can jeopardize the welfare of a child and emphasizes the importance of nurturing children within a framework of safety and care.

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