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'Emotional abuse' affects one in three

Jamie Doward, home affairs editor
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One in three adults say they suffered regular acts of 'emotional abuse' as children, with many admitting they were terrified of their parents when growing up. The disturbing findings, to be revealed in a report published tomorrow, have led to claims that the issue of emotional abuse has been ignored by society - to the detriment of a generation which has grown up with low self-esteem and confidence.

'Too often emotional abuse is not taken seriously when enormous damage is being done to individuals and to society,' said Mary Marsh, chief executive of the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the charity publishing the report. 'We urgently need to address the scale and impact of emotional maltreatment on the current generation of children. Parents who emotionally abuse children systematically destroy their sense of worth and identity. Children can grow up in despair and loneliness, constantly on edge - like being trapped in a cage.'

The NSPCC interviewed almost 2,000 adults and found that of those who regularly suffered emotional abuse, 33 per cent said it went on through their childhood. Six in ten said the abuse gradually stopped only when they got older or left home.

More than half who claimed they were regularly abused said they had been habitually shouted or screamed at, while almost one in five said they were often left afraid of their father or mother. A similar number said they were often called stupid, lazy or worthless. One in 20 was regularly told: 'I wish you were dead.'

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Despite such prevalence, there is concern that abuse often goes ignored - the charity found those working with children intervened to stop it only in one per cent of cases.

As part of its Be The Full Stop campaign against child abuse, the NSPCC will tomorrow call on the government to encourage greater awareness of the problem.

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