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## Child maltreatment and protection in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries: A scoping review

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### Abstract

**Background:** Research on child maltreatment and protection in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—is limited but growing, as is child protection as a sector.

**Objectives:** We aimed to identify themes and gaps in existing research on child maltreatment and protection, identify opportunities for building capacity in research and practice.

**Participants and setting:** N/A.

**Methods:** We conducted a scoping review of empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English and Arabic and reported methods and findings according to the PRISMA-ScR reporting protocol. Articles were coded by country, topic of research, and type of abuse studied, if any.

**Results:** Our database search returned 6109 articles and 160 articles were included in our review. Themes included (1) prevalence, incidence, and characteristics of maltreatment, (2) outcomes associated with maltreatment, (3) attitudes, awareness, and reporting, (4) accidental injury and death potentially associated with neglect, (5) policy and practice. Eighty-seven articles studied Saudi Arabia, while 28 studied the UAE, 21 Kuwait, 13 Qatar, 12 Oman, and 11 Bahrain. Physical abuse was studied in 77 articles, followed by sexual abuse in 54 articles and emotional abuse in 54.

**Conclusion:** Although the medical community produces an encouraging volume of child maltreatment research, gaps remain. Intervention research is lacking, and further inquiry into family dynamics, culture, and spirituality could inform the development of effective interventions. Cross-sectoral collaboration among education, social work, law enforcement, and healthcare is also needed to safeguard children's rights in the GCC.

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Declarations of competing interest

The authors have no declarations of interest to report.

## Keywords

Abuse; Neglect; Accidents; Child protection; Arab Gulf; Gulf Cooperation Council

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## 1. Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have been undergoing rapid social change and development in recent decades, including in the social work and child welfare sectors. Globally, child maltreatment, which encompasses the abuse and neglect of children, has become recognized as a public health problem that impacts children's overall health and well-being (World Health Organization, 2020), but this topic has been historically taboo in the Gulf, where the privacy of family life is upheld in traditional customs and many countries have sought to maintain a positive image nationally and globally.

However, as Al-Mahroos (2007) explored in her seminal article "*Child Abuse and Neglect in the Arab Peninsula*," there has been increasing acknowledgment that the phenomenon does exist in the Arab Gulf states. Child protection systems have continued to develop even since her publication. Literature indicates system transformation is taking place at varying degrees in the GCC, with a relatively new inquiry into child maltreatment prevention readiness in the region (Al Eissa et al., 2019). The proliferation of prevention readiness studies is an indicator that child protection systems are developing not only to respond to the crisis of abuse and neglect, but to also consider them at their early stages of manifestation by focusing on primary and secondary prevention. There has also been a long-term commitment to workforce development in the Gulf region, particularly related to social work education that is sensitive to providing training in child protection (Sloan et al., 2017). For example, a trained and ready workforce has been discussed in Saudi Arabia (Jalal et al., 2019). Additionally, the UAE, in order to support their 2016 child rights law (Federal Law No. 3, 2016), is rolling out large-scale training to qualify government workers to serve as child protection specialists within local police departments' Family Support Centers (Emirates News Agency, 2020). The strength of child rights laws in the region has been acknowledged (Al Eissa et al., 2019) and mandated reporting is a crucial area for advancements, including teachers and medical providers as critical in legal implementation (Alazri et al., 2021). To support mandated reporting, child abuse hotlines have also been established throughout the region (Child Helpline International, n.d.).

Gulf countries have also set forth child protection priorities in national plans. For example, Qatar includes child protection in the National Development Strategy (Adra & Jambart, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, the National Family Safety Program has taken steps to raise awareness of child maltreatment, provide training, engage in advocacy, and develop programs to care for victims (UNDP Saudi Arabia, 2021). In Oman, priorities are set forth in the Vision 2040 plan, and the protection of children is identified as a priority with oversight by the Ministry of Social Development (Times News Service, 2021). Other initiatives in the region are underway to support and strengthen child protection systems, including awareness

raising, as evidenced by the UAE Ministry of Interiors' annual campaign to protect children from child abuse and neglect (Rizvi, 2021).

Research on child maltreatment and protection in the GCC countries has been growing in parallel, although it has been acknowledged that it remains relatively scarce (Al Eissa et al., 2019). This study aims to compile the extant literature on child maltreatment and protection in the Arab Gulf and review its scope and foci. For the purposes of this study, our working definition of child maltreatment includes physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and neglect, while noting that since neglect is the absence of care and attention, its investigation is inherently difficult.

## 2. Methods

This study consists of a scoping review of the body of literature on child maltreatment and protection in the Gulf Cooperation Council states. A scoping review, defined as a “systematic approach to map evidence on a topic,” identifies common themes in a body of literature, examines the size and characteristics of research evidence, and pinpoints gaps in knowledge for the purposes of suggesting further research and practice (Tricco et al., 2018, p. 6). We did not register a protocol for this study.

### 2.1. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for inclusion, articles must have been empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English or Arabic about child protection and child maltreatment in the Gulf States. Case reports and small case series were excluded. Child maltreatment comprised of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect, perpetrated against a minor (under 18 years of age) by a parent or caregiver. Our conceptualization encompassed corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, and medical neglect, but not war trauma, bullying, child labor, or secondhand smoke exposure. Studies of child injury that could potentially be a result of neglect or poor supervision were also considered as child neglect.

### 2.2. Information sources

We conducted our searches in the ProQuest interface for APA PsycINFO, IBSS, PTSDpubs (formerly PILOTS), and ERIC databases. EBSCO-provided databases included Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies, Education Source, and CINAHL Plus. We also searched Elsevier EMBASE and TRID databases (see Appendix A). Selected databases covered an international or regionally appropriate literature base for the topic and sources of scholarship likely to interact with child neglect problems, such as education disciplines or allied health professions. Additionally, we conducted hand searches in consultation with experts in the field for English and Arabic language sources.

The inclusion of TRID (Transport Research International Documentation) provided coverage for unique issues within the countries of focus around child safety in automobiles. We specifically included search terms around child vehicle restraints in our search strategy, as our preliminary literature review indicated that the non-use of seatbelts and car seats is a prominent child protection issue in the region. We searched and pulled the results between

September 10–11, 2020. The final search results were exported to Mendeley, Zotero and Rayyan and deduplicated using those softwares before screening.

### 2.3. Search

The search strategy consisted of a combination of keyword searches in the abstract, author-supplied keywords, title, and subject heading fields. Each database required some adaptation of terminology and syntax to make the searches as consistent as possible across the different interfaces and controlled vocabulary. ERIC uses different subject headings for similar concepts from PsycINFO or the other databases, for example. Disciplinary experts, in collaboration with the contributing librarian, generated relevant concepts and terms which included three broad areas: region and state names, age range, and forms of neglect. We pilot tested search queries in APA PsycINFO and Elsevier Embase with known, relevant articles and examined scope notes for ideal subject headings.

As an example, the EMBASE search contained the following terms and syntax for each of the three main concepts of our topic (see Appendix A):

((middleeast\* OR 'middle east\*' OR 'gulf state' OR 'gulf states' OR mideast\* OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*):ti,ab,kw,de)

AND

('child abuse'/exp OR 'child neglect'/exp OR 'child welfare'/exp OR 'infant welfare'/de OR 'child restraint system'/exp OR 'sexual assault'/exp OR 'sexual violence'/exp OR 'female genital mutilation'/exp OR assault/de OR 'family violence'/de OR 'human trafficking'/exp OR homicide/de OR 'verbal hostility'/de OR 'physical violence'/de OR 'gender based violence'/de OR infanticide/de OR torture/de OR (carseat\* OR 'car seat\*' OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR 'sexual crime' OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*):ti,ab,kw)

AND

((adolescent/exp/mj OR child/exp/mj OR 'young adult'/mj OR 'disabled student'/mj OR 'middle school student'/mj OR 'high school student'/mj OR ("school age\*" OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR 'new born\*'):ti,ab,kw))

### 2.4. Selection of sources of evidence

The first author screened 6109 records. The title, abstract and inclusion/exclusion screening process reduced the number of results to 160 (see Fig. 1).

### 2.5. Data charting and synthesis

To chart the research topics, the first author reviewed the included articles to see what themes or categories emerged. The first author assigned categories to each article in

Microsoft Excel and iteratively renamed, combined, or split themes until the authorship team finalized the themes. The first author coded each study's country of focus, the theme of the research, and types of child abuse studied (if any) in Microsoft Excel. The second author coded the articles that were written in Arabic.

### 3. Results

The research themes identified included (1) prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment, (2) outcomes associated with maltreatment, (3) attitudes, awareness, and reporting, (4) accidents potentially associated with neglect, and (5) policy and practice. The frequencies of each theme are included in Table 1.

Out of the 160 articles, 87 (54.4 %) studied Saudi Arabia, followed by 28 (17.5 %) studying the UAE (Table 1). Relative to the populations of each country (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019), Oman had the highest rate of articles, at 0.43 articles per million residents, followed by Saudi Arabia (0.43 per million), the UAE (0.35 per million), Qatar (0.22 per million), Kuwait (0.20 per million), and finally Bahrain (0.15 per million) (Table 1).

#### 3.1. Prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment

We identified 43 studies that examined national or regional estimates of maltreatment prevalence or described maltreatment types, contexts of maltreatment, or characteristics of maltreatment victims or perpetrators. Almost half (20) of these articles studied Saudi Arabia.

Many of these studies used hospital settings or retrospective analyses of medical records, for example of physically abused children in Kuwait (El-Hait et al., 1987), sexually abused children in Bahrain (Al-Mahroos & Al-Amer, 2011), and child abuse cases presented in a Saudi emergency room (Al Ayed et al., 1998). Other studies described medical circumstances, such as the surgical aspects of child sexual abuse (Raboei, 2009), patterns of skeletal injuries, fractures, or head trauma in physically abused children (Al-Anazi, 2013; Al-Mahroos et al., 2011; Al-Mahroos, Al-Amer, Al-Hashimi, et al., 2011; Jawadi et al., 2019), and medical aspects of female genital mutilation (Chibber et al., 2011; Milaat et al., 2018).

There was less research that assessed population maltreatment prevalence using more representative sampling techniques. A survey of 4467 Kuwaiti high school students found that 17 % had experienced unwanted sexual touching, about 60 % had experienced psychological abuse, and about 15 % physical abuse (Al-Fayez et al., 2012; Ohaeri & Al-Fayez, 2013). One study also used a random sample of households to determine that 80 % of girls under the age of 18 in the city of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia, were circumcised (Milaat et al., 2018).

Some studies of maltreatment prevalence used the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect Child Abuse and Neglect Screening Tool (ICAST), which measures neglect; exposure to violence; and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. A series of studies by Al-Eissa et al. (2015, 2016, 2018, 2020) used ICAST with a sample of over

16,000 Saudi secondary school students to examine rates of child abuse, finding 16 % had experienced sexual abuse in their lifetimes, 65 % had experienced psychological abuse in the past year, and 50 % physical abuse in the past year. The ICAST was also used in Qatar, where a comparative study found that maltreatment was more prevalent in Qatar than Palestine, and a cross-sectional study found that Qatari boys experienced more physical, but not sexual or emotional, abuse than girls (Eldeeb et al., 2016; Kamal et al., 2018; Salem et al., 2020). Finally, the ICAST was used in the UAE to assess abuse and neglect at home and school, as well as to determine perpetrators of abuse, finding that children were more often abused at home than school, and boys were abused more than girls (Al-Gharaibeh et al., 2020).

One study in Bahrain focused specifically on the characteristics of abuse perpetrators; this study found that 86 % of child sexual offenders were male, 81 % were well known to the child, and 20 % had had a prior criminal record (Al-Mahroos et al., 2011).

### 3.2. Outcomes associated with maltreatment

There were 38 studies that focused on examining correlations or linkages between maltreatment and its hypothesized effects or antecedents. Many of these looked at how childhood maltreatment was related to adolescent or adult mental health problems, particularly depression, usually through retrospective surveys. Physical abuse in childhood and adolescence was associated with depression among Omani adolescents (Afifi, 2006a, 2006b; Afifi et al., 2006), as was corporal punishment in Saudi children (Al-Zaben & Sehlo, 2015) and emotional abuse in Saudi girls (Raheel, 2015). In Kuwaiti young adults and adolescents, childhood abuse was linked to depression, anxiety, and other problems (Al-Fayez et al., 2012; Almazeedi et al., 2020; Badr et al., 2018). In Saudi Arabia, child abuse was also linked to obesity and chronic pain in adult women (Alhalal et al., 2018), to cancer, asthma, and cardiac disease in men and women (Hyland et al., 2013), and poor educational performance and suicidality in female university students (Ibrahim et al., 2008).

Intimate partner violence was also examined in several studies. For example, studies throughout Saudi Arabia found correlations between women experiencing abuse in childhood and experiencing intimate partner violence (Abolfotouh & Almuneef, 2020; Al-Faris et al., 2013; Alhalal et al., 2018; Alzahrani et al., 2016). Some of these found, according to the wives' reports, that men who had experienced child abuse were more likely to perpetrate abuse against their wives (Abolfotouh & Almuneef, 2020; Al-Faris et al., 2013). In Saudi Arabia, adolescents who witnessed intimate partner violence were more likely to experience abuse (Al-Eissa et al., 2020).

In Saudi Arabia, some researchers used the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework, in which experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, count as an "ACE." Studies using the framework found that emotional abuse and physical abuse were linked with poor school performance (Altamimi et al., 2017) and that sexual abuse was linked to physical and mental health issues and health risk behaviors (Almuneef, 2019). ACE scores were also associated with various chronic diseases, risky behaviors, mental health problems, low educational attainment, marital problems (Almuneef et al., 2014b, 2016b, 2017, 2018; Altamimi et al., 2017).

### 3.3. Attitudes, awareness, and reporting

This review identified 24 studies that examined knowledge and attitudes towards child protection and maltreatment issues, including knowledge of maltreatment and practices around reporting suspected maltreatment.

A large number of articles studied this topic in dentists and dental students, including in Saudi Arabia (Al-Dabaan et al., 2014, 2016; Mogaddam et al., 2016) and the UAE (Al Hajeri et al., 2018; Al-Amad et al., 2016; Hashim & Al-Ani, 2013; Hashim & Al-Dallal, 2018). More dentists had encountered suspicions of child abuse in their patients than had reported their suspicion (Al Hajeri et al., 2018; Al-Amad et al., 2016; Hashim & Al-Dallal, 2018; Mogaddam et al., 2016). An intervention for dentists also was able to improve Saudi dentists' attitudes towards and awareness of child protection issues (Al-Dabaan et al., 2016).

Child abuse reporting was also studied in Saudi nurses (Elarousy & Abed, 2019; Salami & Alhalal, 2020). In Kuwait, the research looked at physicians' willingness to assess abuse victimization (Nayak, 2000). Pediatricians' knowledge, attitudes, and practices around maltreatment have been studied in both Kuwait (Al-Moosa et al., 2003) and Saudi Arabia (Alnasser et al., 2017; Habib, 2012), finding that female physicians were more likely to suspect and report abuse than male physicians.

Other studies, fewer in number, looked at child maltreatment attitudes and awareness in other populations. With regards to parents, there were high rates of parental acceptance of corporal punishment in Kuwait (Qasem et al., 1998), while mothers in the city of Taif, Saudi Arabia, regarded child abuse as a serious problem (Helmy et al., 2017). In Eastern Saudi Arabia, poverty and low education levels were associated with poor understanding of child sexual abuse (AlRammah et al., 2018).

Only two articles examined the issue with regards to schools; one of these was an intervention to prevent sexual abuse for kindergarteners in Kuwait (Al-Rasheed, 2017) and one assessed Saudi school professionals' knowledge of child maltreatment issues (AlBuhairan et al., 2011).

### 3.4. Accidents potentially associated with neglect

Within the identified studies, 52 were about child accidents, injuries, and deaths that could potentially be linked to caregiver neglect.

Nearly half (22) of these were related to vehicles and the non-use of child restraints, car seats, and seatbelts. For example, a study of Kuwaiti parents found that only a quarter use infant car seats and about 40 % seat their child in their lap while driving (Raman et al., 2013). An observational study in the UAE found that only 17 % of parents were using restraints for children in their vehicles (Bendak & Alkhaledi, 2017). Child restraint use was further studied in Saudi Arabia (Alsanea et al., 2018; Fildes et al., 2016; Jan et al., 2000; Nelson et al., 2014, 2015), the UAE (Barss et al., 2008; Bromfield & Mahmoud, 2017), and Oman (McIlvenny et al., 2004). In Qatar, a market survey determined car seats were available and affordable, despite their non-use (Consunji et al., 2019). Some research on this topic, often conducted in the medical field, used data of child injury and death from

vehicle accidents, and included information on restraint use (Alani et al., 2012; Bayoumi, 1981; Consunji et al., 2020; Crankson, 2006; Grivna, Barss, et al., 2013; Grivna, Eid, & Abu-Zidan, 2013; Shanks et al., 1994; Suliman & Aizaz, 2008).

Two studies also described how lack of parental supervision could potentially be responsible for child drownings in Saudi Arabia (Al-Qurashi et al., 2017; Hijazi et al., 2007), two described child burns in Saudi Arabia (Al-Qattan, 2009; Al-Shlash et al., 1996) and one did so in the UAE (Grivna et al., 2014), and seven examined other home-related accidents such as falls from windows (Al Rumhi et al., 2020; Al Ruwaili et al., 2014; Al-Khameesa, 2006; Al-Saleh et al., 1999; Grivna et al., 2015, 2017; Jan et al., 2000).

Finally, four large population studies looked at child fatalities or excess mortality, including in Kuwait (Al-Waheeb & Al-Kandary, 2013), Saudi Arabia (Almuneef et al., 2020; Alsaif et al., 2018), and the Middle East as a whole (Yount, 2001), suggesting maltreatment could account for some of these deaths.

### 3.5. Policy and practice

The review identified 21 studies that centered around policy and practice. Seven of these examined the readiness of governments to implement child maltreatment prevention programs, including Bahrain (Al-Mahroos et al., 2020), Kuwait (Alkhawari et al., 2020), Oman (Al Saadoon et al., 2020), Saudi Arabia (Almuneef et al., 2019; Almuneef et al., 2014; Mikton et al., 2013), and the UAE (Al Midfa et al., 2019), though not Qatar.

Three studies focused on the views of practitioners; researchers interviewed Omani early education students about their expectations of a new child law (Tekin, 2015), surveyed medical professionals in the region about trauma-informed care (Osman et al., 2017), and interviewed Saudi child protection workers about policies and practice (Al Faryan et al., 2019). One study looked at service use; specifically, a study found about half of Saudi adolescents was willing to disclose abuse via a child helpline (Al-Eissa, 2019).

### 3.6. Types of abuse

Within studies in which a type of child abuse was explicitly mentioned, 77 studied physical abuse, 54 included sexual abuse, and 54 included emotional abuse.

### 3.7. Distribution of themes by country

A large number of articles about Bahrain studied prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment (63.6 % of the articles that studied Bahrain), while none studied accidents or attitudes (Tables 2 and 3). Few articles about Oman were about prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment, while more were about policy and practice. Over half of studies on the UAE focused on accidents.

## 4. Discussion

Through a systematic search of the literature, this study identified 160 articles about child maltreatment and protection in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. This is the first study, to our knowledge, to conduct a systematic literature review on child maltreatment



or protection in the Arab world. The most prominent topics in the identified articles were accidents potentially associated with neglect, followed by the prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment. Other themes included outcomes of maltreatment; attitudes, awareness, and reporting of maltreatment; and child protection policy and practice.

Among articles that explicitly studied one or more types of child abuse, physical abuse was the most studied, followed by sexual and emotional abuse. It is promising that a topic as sensitive as sexual abuse, which is quite taboo in these societies, has received such attention in the literature, even amidst strong cultural stigmas against its discussion or acknowledgement. This may have been aided by the relatively wide usage of standardized tools that measure child abuse, especially the ICAST and ACES, which include sexual abuse as a standard domain of assessment.

Although the GCC contains six nations, over half of the identified studies were about Saudi Arabia, which might be due to the Saudi medical field's development of a policy response to child maltreatment in 2004 (Al Faryan et al., 2019). A large part of this momentum is due to the leadership by Dr. Maha Al Muneef, founder and executive director of the National Family Safety Program. Dr. Al Muneef has been recognized as a Woman of Courage by the US Department of State (US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2014); as a pediatrician, her human rights defense and advocacy work has been memorialized in her many publications, numbering 25 in this review alone. These efforts, in addition to the early advocacy work of Dr. Al-Eissa in 1994, drew attention to how doctors can report child abuse and neglect cases in medical facilities. As a result, the King Faisal Hospital and Research Centre established the first Child Protection Centre (CPC) and set the stage for investigating child abuse and neglect situations in hospitals. These efforts, though, focus primarily on individual health impacts of abuse, and not prevention or intervention programming for at-risk children (Al-Zahrani, 2003; Al Faryan et al., 2019). On the other hand, it should be noted that the population of Saudi Arabia is larger than the rest of the GCC combined, so it is natural that this nation produced a high volume of research.

The other GCC countries' child maltreatment research is conducted mainly by the medical community as well, who are the first responders assessing severe physical abuse injuries. However, multi-disciplinary lenses are currently lacking, and further engagement of the social work sector will be critical. While this paper cannot definitively say why medical professionals are contributing so significantly to the literature, the productivity in researching this area may be related to the fact that medical providers not only have access to research samples, but are well-established and respected professionals in the region. Their high stature in society may allow them to do the relatively risky work of drawing attention to child maltreatment in the unique context of the Arab Gulf. This is particularly true as compared to social workers in the region; the lack of literature from this particular professional base is likely related to the profession being less respected, or even known, in society. However, as the social work profession continues to rise in prominence and in sheer numbers of practitioners and social science scholars (i.e., Arab Gulf citizens with PhDs in social work, sociology, and psychology), there will likely be more social science research produced on child maltreatment in the future.

In recent years, the GCC countries have tried to develop strategic plans for social welfare programs and services, including child welfare systems, that reflect each country's identity in providing child protection practices, but some barriers hinder their endeavors. Among those barriers is gender role as well as local families' mistrust of social workers, who see them as outsiders of Islamic and cultural norms (Hutchinson et al., 2015). Although women's role in the GCC countries has increased in all aspects of life in the Gulf region, gender bias is still a significant barrier to providing effective child protection services, as males have the ultimate authority over women and mothers in most families (Al Faryan et al., 2019). Additionally, female social workers might face difficulty building working relationships or even investigating abuse and neglect cases if men (fathers, uncles, etc.) refuse to interact with female social workers (Irani & Lebanon, 1999). Cultural norms can create mistrustful atmospheres that prevent caseworkers from participating in family-related matters (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001). While there is little research on police intersection with child abuse and neglect, law enforcement, as a male dominated field, has a critical role in engaging fathers in making behavioral changes. The UAE model of child protection is closely aligned to law enforcement, with family support centers most often co-located with police stations. This particular model of social services is an area that should receive further inquiry as research evidence about effectiveness of social workers in family support centers and their active collaboration with police officers could further develop policy and practice related to a social services model in action. Gender dynamics related to female social workers collaborating with male police officers is also an important area for further inquiry.

Collaboration across disciplines will be essential as the region moves forward to better respond to child abuse and neglect (Johansson et al., 2017). Doing so will raise awareness among professionals from all disciplines, including social work, and ultimately provide empirical data from which to establish programs and services that are culturally responsive to each GCC country. The GCC countries have mandated reporting laws of suspected maltreatment (AlMatrooshi et al., 2021), but there is still a lack of collaboration of professionals across disciplines (e.g., medical, education, law enforcement, and human services) to share cases of suspected abuse and neglect (Cleek et al., 2019). There is a need to develop a formal maltreatment investigation processes within each discipline that include the collaboration of multi-disciplinary teams (Johansson et al., 2017), and to create national child abuse registries shared between governmental and non-governmental organizations on local, state, and regional levels. There is a promising number of studies investigating maltreatment prevalence and incidence in the region, and hopefully national governments will take up efforts to track maltreatment occurrence in a systematic, longitudinal manner. This could occur with continued use of tools such as the ICAST and ACES, or by turning to methodologies used in other areas of the world, such as the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Violence Against Children Surveys (Nguyen et al., 2019).

There is great potential to enhance child protection efforts in the Gulf States by integrating faith-based approaches. The legal and political structures of all the GCC countries are heavily influenced by the religion of Islam; in the case of Saudi Arabia, the laws are not only influenced by Islam but strictly mirror Sharia Law from the Quran. Islamic and cultural values promote the health and safety of all children, with children seen as

“gifts from God” (Al-Faris et al., 2013; Al Faryan et al., 2019). The Quran mandates the care of children’s health and safety as a religious duty (Omran, 1990), and according to some interpretations of Sharia, children require special protection due to their vulnerability. However, GCC governments have on the whole not recognized the promotion of child rights as an Islamic obligation (Hutchinson et al., 2015). Spirituality may also have the potential to serve as a protective factor; while child abuse and neglect can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and low quality of life among children (Al-Fayez et al., 2012), research has shown that for Muslims, spiritual beliefs can have a direct and positive effect on depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and health outcomes and ultimately improve quality of life (Hodge et al., 2015). Culturally- and religiously-responsive child maltreatment prevention interventions could be designed using Islamic tenants to educate families and professionals about child rights and safety (Hutchinson et al., 2015).

Child maltreatment prevention interventions for children and families are understudied in the region, with some exception (Al Eissa et al., 2019). Progress in this area will be essential to developing a comprehensive approach to child abuse and neglect response; intervention research, inclusive of prevention, is key to informing social work practice and practical support strategies for affected families (Fortson et al., 2016). At a governmental level, however, the World Health Organization’s Readiness Assessment for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment is exceptionally well-utilized throughout the Gulf. This ten-dimensional model of readiness, which evaluates the level of preparation to implement evidence-based practices for preventing child abuse and neglect, includes assessments of availability of relevant data in the country or community studied, attitudes and awareness of child maltreatment among key actors, and the community’s available resources for preventing maltreatment, among other dimensions of readiness (Mikton et al., 2013). It should be noted that a large proportion of this review’s articles categorized as studying policy and practice were studies that implemented this assessment.

Very few studies explicitly research neglect, despite the fact that negligence-related injuries and death are a known problem. Such injuries have been traditionally an area of discourse in the region as evidenced by media stories (e.g., Al Amir, 2021; Nereim, 2012). Though not necessarily framed as child maltreatment, a large volume of research examines non-use of seatbelts and car seats with children, as well as accidental falls, poisonings, and burns. The comfort with this area of discourse in both the media and the research literature is a strength that should be built upon to better develop public health interventions that target problems such as child car safety and other problems like children falling from windows. At the same time, this review did not identify research on public policies and particularly legal frameworks and implementation related to unintentional injuries, including direct law enforcement for problems like protecting children as car passengers. For example, though research in car seat usage exists in the UAE (Bromfield & Mahmoud, 2017), Saudi Arabia (Alsanea et al., 2018) and Qatar (Consunji et al., 2019), comprehensive study of actual practices of social marketing for prevention, rigorous law enforcement, and even potentially access to car seats as a resource remains elusive. Considering the rate of vehicular mortality in the region, this is an urgent area for more research which may not only affect policy planning, but also shift social norms within family groups, law enforcement, and society as a whole.

There was also a clear lack of literature on the area of parenting, including harmful cultural practices (e.g., female genital mutilation). Furthermore, there is a lack of research literature exploring how parenting and roles in the family are socially constructed, including gender dynamics and intergenerational family systems. It is important to point out that multi-generational homes are common in these countries, with large family groups living together under collectivist social norms. Therotective factors of living in large family groups, as well as some of the potential challenges (e.g., intergenerational differences of opinion about child rights and parenting approaches), should be explored and inform practice with families in the region. With these aspects of society in mind, the development of parenting skills education interventions and other related social service support programming is a particularly critical and urgent area for social development, innovation, programming and policy development.

Unfortunately, there also is a notable lack of literature about guest workers and their families. They represent well over 50 % of the population, working an array of jobs in the region, and have unique dynamics related to family stress, given long work hours, separation from extended family life in home countries like India and the Philippines, and other unique experiences of living as non-citizens with limited rights and access to social services. For example, a parent that is a guest worker in the Arab Gulf may be less likely to reach out to social services for parenting information and support, such as family counseling. However, it is impossible to state this assertion empirically; the lack of research evidence in this area limits critical discourse, and ultimately the development of social service systems must be shaped to serve and protect all people.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the nature of monarchy-based countries and their unique structures of government make social progress complicated and challenging in terms of social development, the emergence of child rights, and the development of child protection systems. We wish to both acknowledge that these ideas of societal development and evolution are debatable and contentious subjects in the region, and encourage such discourse to proceed regardless of its controversial nature. Without open and honest acknowledgement of the challenges surrounding child safety and maltreatment, the rights and well-being of children in the Arab Gulf countries cannot be ensured.

#### 4.1. Limitations

Although this study has many strengths, it also has several important limitations. First, it was not possible to access research literature databases based in GCC countries as they were restricted only to affiliated universities and government officials. However, the second author was able to retrieve Arabic-language articles via other faculty in the region, from whom he requested articles that met the study's eligibility criteria. This study was also limited to peer-reviewed articles, so it did not include any gray literature, such as UNICEF reports. Furthermore, dissertation research is not included in the review, although a notably high number of Arab Gulf citizens are now receiving graduate education. Finally, although some conceptualizations of child maltreatment include not only child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse, but also child labor and commercial or economic

exploitation, our study is limited in that we considered this latter category outside of the scope of our study.

## 4.2. Conclusion

In recent years, the six GCC countries have prioritized the continued development of their child protection systems, promoting child protection training to the medical, social services, and law enforcement sectors, and including child maltreatment prevention and response in national strategic plans. The development of child protection systems, which are fine-tuned to respond to child maltreatment of all children living in the Arab Gulf, is at a critical turning point in the region. Though the research literature on child maltreatment and child protection is increasing promisingly, this scoping review identified a range of opportunities for growth, particularly in intervention development and prevention. Much research is conducted with a medical lens, and expansion of the research base to include other child protection professionals and especially social work is critical at this juncture. With greater understanding of family systems dynamics, above and beyond reports of prevalence and incidence, intervention strategies can be developed to work directly with families to prevent and respond to child maltreatment. Using tools such as case management hold promise at this time of urgency; practice models must be developed with sensitivity towards the unique cultures found in the Arab Gulf. Continued investment and investigation will strengthen social services, inform policymakers and practitioners of best practices, and ultimately promote the health and well-being of children and families across the Arab Gulf.

## Funding

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## Appendix A

### Transport Research International Documentation (TRID) - coverage 1960–present

(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*)

AND

(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born”\*)

AND

(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*)

## Proquest Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) - coverage

### 1966–present

(su,ab,ti(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE(“Children”) OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT(“Late Adolescents” OR “Early Adolescents” OR “Youth” OR “Adolescents”) OR ab,ti,if(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT(“Sexual Abuse” OR “Rape” OR “Child abuse” OR “Child Welfare” OR “Child Neglect” OR “Family Violence” OR “Homicide” OR “Antisocial Behavior” OR “Violence” OR “Child Safety” OR “Restraints (Vehicle Safety)” OR “Punishment”) OR ab,ti,if(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*))

### Proquest PTSDpubs (formerly PILOTS) - coverage 1871–present

(su,ab,ti(middleeast\* OR (“middle east” OR “middle eastern” OR “middle easterner” OR “middle easterners”) OR (“gulf state” OR “gulf states”) OR mideast\* OR (“mid east” OR “mid eastern”) OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE(“Children”) OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT(“Adolescents” OR “Orphans” OR “Junior High School Students” OR “Elementary School Students” OR “Preschool Age Children” OR “Preschool Students”) OR ab,ti,if(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE(“Interpersonal Violence”) OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT(“Paraphilias” OR “Incest” OR “Genital Mutilation” OR “Neglect” OR “Child Abuse” OR “Emotional Abuse” OR “Family Violence” OR “Prostitution” OR “Genital Mutilation”) OR ab,ti,if(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\*)

OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR  
infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*)

## **EBSCO Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) - coverage 1937–present**

(AB(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR  
arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

OR TI(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR  
arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

OR SU(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR  
arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(AB(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR  
adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR  
“new born\*”) OR TI(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\*  
OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR  
newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR SU(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth  
OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR  
neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”))

AND

((MM “Child abuse+”) OR (MM “Child Abuse, Sexual”) OR (MM “Child Abuse  
Survivors”) OR (MM “Child Passenger Safety”) OR (MM “Sexual Abuse+”) OR (MM  
“Verbal Abuse”) OR (MM “Child Safety+”) OR (MM “Child Welfare+”) OR (MM “Incest”)  
OR (MM “Rape”) OR (MM “Domestic Violence+”) OR (MM “Kidnapping”) OR (MM  
“Abduction”) OR (MM “Prostitution”) OR (MM “Infanticide”) OR (MM “Homicide+”) OR  
(MM “Circumcision, Female”) OR AB(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety  
OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\*  
OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide  
OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR TI(carseat\* OR  
“car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\*  
OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR  
abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR  
incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR  
murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR SU(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR  
corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR  
tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\*  
OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR  
kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\*  
OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*))

## EBSCO Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies - coverage 1874–present

(AB(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR TI(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR KW(middleeast\*OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR SU(middleeast\*OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(AB(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR TI(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR KW(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR SU(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”))

AND

(AB(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR TI(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR KW(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR SU(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*))



## EBSCO Education Source - coverage 1880–present

(AB(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR TI(middleeast\* OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR KW(middleeast\*OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*) OR SU(middleeast\*OR “middle east\*” OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR “mid east\*” OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(AB(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR TI(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR KW(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR SU(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”))

AND

(AB(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR TI(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR KW(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*) OR SU (carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*))

## Elsevier EMBASE - coverage 1947–present

((middleeast\* OR 'middle east\*' OR 'gulf state' OR 'gulf states' OR mideast\* OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*):ti,ab,kw,de)

AND

('child abuse'/exp OR 'child neglect'/exp OR 'child welfare'/exp OR 'infant welfare'/de OR 'child restraint system'/exp OR 'sexual assault'/exp OR 'sexual violence'/exp OR 'female genital mutilation'/exp OR assault/de OR 'family violence'/de OR 'human trafficking'/exp OR homicide/de OR 'verbal hostility'/de OR 'physical violence'/de OR 'gender based violence'/de OR infanticide/de OR torture/de OR (carseat\* OR 'car seat\*' OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR 'sexual crime' OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*):ti,ab,kw)

AND

((adolescent/exp/mj OR child/exp/mj OR 'young adult'/mj OR 'disabled student'/mj OR 'middle school student'/mj OR 'high school student'/mj OR ("school age\*" OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR 'new born\*'):ti,ab,kw))

## Proquest International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS) - coverage 1951–present

(su,ab,ti,loc("middle east\*" OR middleeast OR "gulf state\*" OR mideast\* OR "mid east\*" OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Children & youth" OR "At risk youth" OR "Babies" OR "Boys" OR "Girls" OR "Disabled children" OR "Exceptional children" OR "Gifted children" OR "Children of alcoholics" OR "Juvenile offenders" OR "native children & youth" OR "Orphans" OR "Preschool children" OR "Teenagers") OR ab,ti,if("school age\*" OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR "new born\*"))

AND

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Pedophilia" OR "Child abuse & neglect" OR "Child Welfare" OR "Incest" OR "Child restraints" OR "Emotional abuse" OR "Sex crimes" OR "Rape" OR "Statutory rape" OR "Date rape" OR "Domestic violence" OR "Kidnapping" OR "Prostitution" OR "Infanticide" OR "Murders & murder attempts" OR "Genital mutilation" OR "Circumcision" OR "Female circumcision") OR ab,ti,if(carseat\* OR "car seat\*" OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR

tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*)

## Proquest APA PsycINFO - coverage 1887–present

su,ab,ti,loc(“middle east\*” OR middleeast\* OR “gulf state\*” OR mideast\* OR arab\* OR UAE OR emirat\* OR Oman\* OR Qatar\* OR Bahrain\* OR Kuwait\*)

AND

(su,ab,ti(“school age\*” OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\* OR youth OR teen\* OR student\* OR adolesc\* OR infan\* OR baby OR babies OR juvenile\* OR neonatal OR newborn\* OR “new born\*”) OR AGE(Childhood OR Neonatal OR Infancy OR “Preschool Age” OR “School Age” OR Adolescence))

AND

su,ab,ti(carseat\* OR “car seat\*” OR corporal OR safety OR protect\* OR abus\* OR neglect\* OR maltreat\* OR advers\* OR tortur\* OR punish\* OR violen\* OR incest OR rape OR kidnap\* OR abduct\* OR prostitut\* OR infanticide OR homicid\* OR murder\* OR assault\* OR mutilat\* OR circumcis\*)

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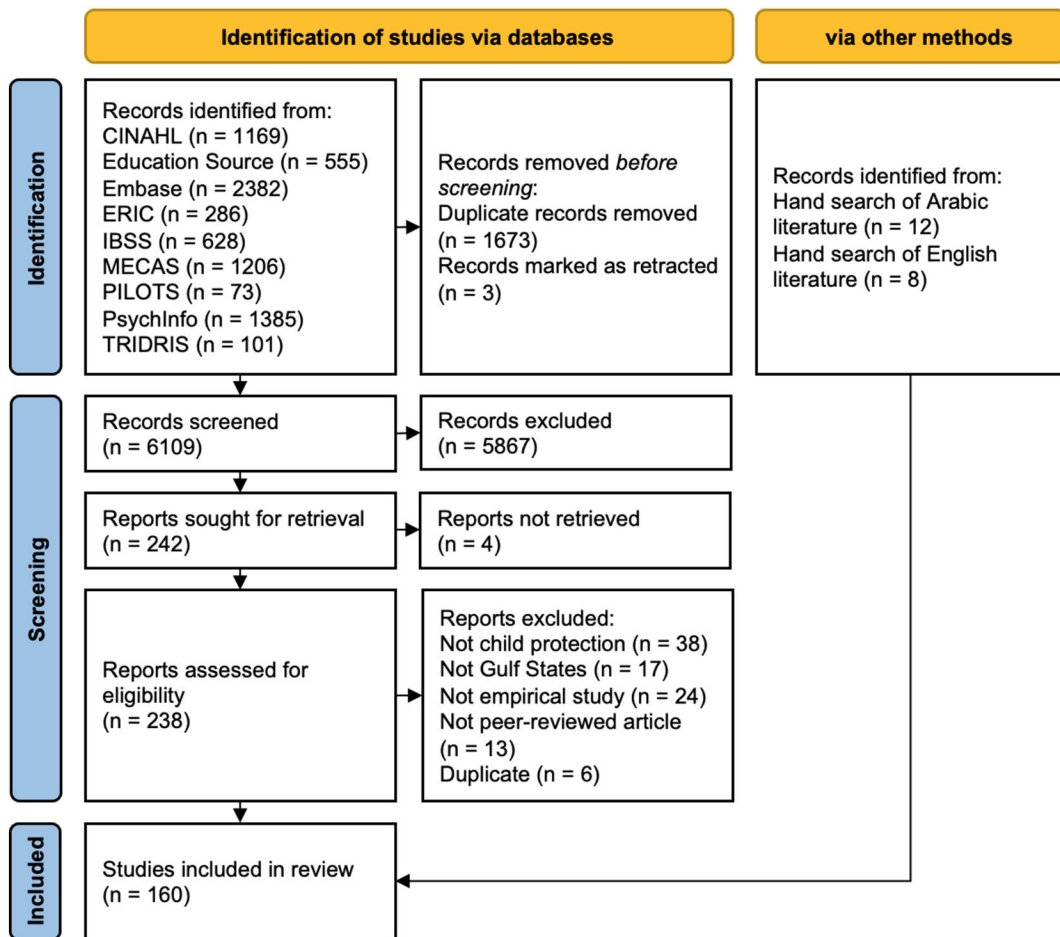
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**Fig. 1.**  
PRISMA flowchart.

**Table 1**

Number of articles studying each country, theme, and type of abuse ( $N= 160$  articles).

	n	%
Country		
Saudi Arabia	87	54.4
UAE	28	17.5
Kuwait	21	13.1
Qatar	13	8.1
Oman	12	7.5
Bahrain	11	6.9
Theme		
Accidents	52	32.5
Prevalence & characteristics	43	26.9
Outcomes	38	23.8
Attitudes	24	15.0
Policy & practice	21	13.1
Type of abuse		
Physical	77	48.1
Sexual	54	33.8
Emotional	54	33.8

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**Table 2**

List of articles by theme and country.

Theme	Country	Articles
Prevalence and characteristics of maltreatment	Bahrain	Al-Mahroos, 1997; Al-Mahroos et al., 2005, Al-Mahroos & Al-Amer, 2011, 2012; 2011; Al-Mahroos et al., 2011; Al-Mahroos et al., 2011
	Kuwait	Al-Ateeqi et al., 2002; Al-Fayez et al., 2012; Almazeedi et al., 2020; Asin et al., 1998; Chibber et al., 2011; El Felekawi, 2013; El-Hait et al., 1987; Nayak, 2000; Ohaeri & Al-Fayez, 2013
	Oman	N/A
	Qatar	Al-Ghanim, 2009; Eldeeb et al., 2016; Kamal et al., 2018; Salem et al., 2020
	Saudi Arabia	Al Ayed et al., 1998; Al-Eissa et al., 2015, 2016, 2018, 2018, 2019; Al-Ghareeb, 2009; Al-Harbi & Moawad, 2020; Al-Hariri, 2017; AlMotwa, 2008; Almuneef et al., 2016, 2016; Alotaibi, 2014; Al-Seugh, 2003; Al-Zayed et al., 2020; Bunyan, 2013; Dosari et al., 2017; Elarousy & Al-Jadaani, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2008; Jawadi et al., 2019; Milaat et al., 2018; Raboei, 2009
	UAE	Al Awar et al., 2020; Al-Gharaibeh et al., 2020
	Outcomes associated with maltreatment	Bahrain
Outcomes associated with maltreatment	Kuwait	Al-Fayez et al., 2012; Almazeedi et al., 2020; Asin et al., 1998; Badr et al., 2018; El Felekawi, 2013
	Oman	Afifi, 2006a, 2006b; Afifi et al., 2006; Al-Ghadani, 2020
	Qatar	Walton et al., 2020
	Saudi Arabia	Abolfotouh & Almuneef, 2020; Al-Eissa et al., 2020; Al-Faris et al., 2013; Alhalal, 2018; Alhalal et al., 2018; Al-Harbi & Moawad, 2020; AlMotwa, 2008; Almuneef, 2019; Almuneef et al., 2014, 2014, 2016, 2016, 2017, 2018; Alotaibi, 2014; Al-Seugh, 2003; Alsubaie, 2018; Altamimi et al., 2017; Al-Zaben & Sehlo, 2015; Alzahrani et al., 2016; Dosari et al., 2017; Elarousy & Al-Jadaani, 2013; Hyland et al., 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2008; Raheel, 2015; Rouzi et al., 2020; Shaikh et al., 2020
	UAE	Shah et al., 2020
	Attitudes, awareness, and reporting	Bahrain
Attitudes, awareness, and reporting	Kuwait	Al-Moosa et al., 2003; Al-Rasheed, 2017; Nayak, 2000; Qasem et al., 1998
	Oman	N/A
	Qatar	N/A
	Saudi Arabia	AlBuhairan et al., 2011; Al-Dabaan et al., 2014, 2016; Alnasser et al., 2017; AlRammah et al., 2018; Al-Saif et al., 2018; AlYousef et al., 2013; Elarousy & Abed, 2019; Habib, 2012; Helmy et al., 2017; Jalal et al., 2019; Mogaddam et al., 2016; Salami & Alhalal, 2020
	UAE	Al Awar et al., 2020; Al Hajeri et al., 2018; Al-Amad et al., 2016; Deeb et al., 2018; Hashim & Al-Ani, 2013; Hashim & Al-Dallal, 2018
Accidents potentially associated with neglect	Bahrain	N/A
	Kuwait	Al-Khameesa, 2006; Al-Waheeb & Al-Kandary, 2013; Bayoumi, 1981; Raman et al., 2013; Yount, 2001
	Oman	Al Rumhi et al., 2020; McIlvenny et al., 2004; Yount, 2001
	Qatar	Alani et al., 2012; Al-Mahdi et al., 2011; Consunji et al., 2019, 2020; El-Menyar et al., 2017
	Saudi Arabia	Al Ruwaili et al., 2014; Al-Anazi, 2013; Al-Habib et al., 2014; Al-Mohammadi, 2019; Almuneef et al., 2020; Al-Qattan, 2009; Al-Qurashi et al., 2017; AlSadhan & Al-Jobair, 2017; Alsaif et al., 2018; Al-Saleh et al., 1999; Alsanea et al., 2018; Alshammari et al., 2018; Al-Shlash et al., 1996; Alsubaie et al., 2019; Crankson, 2006; Elfawal & Awad, 1997; Fildes et al., 2016; Gad et al., 2011; Hijazi et al., 2007; Jan et al., 2000; Lawoyin et al., 2002; Mirdad, 2001; Nelson et al., 2014, 2015; Shanks et al., 1994; Suliman & Aizaz, 2008; Yount, 2001
	UAE	Abu-Zidan et al., 2012; Al-Ali et al., 2019; Barss et al., 2008; Bendak & Alkhaledi, 2017; Bromfield & Mahmoud, 2017; Dawson & Bener, 1999; Gardner et al., 2018; Grivna, Barss, et al., 2013; Grivna, Eid, & Abu-Zidan, 2013; Grivna et al., 2014, 2015, 2017; Hefny et al., 2012; Mukattash et al., 2019; Yount, 2001
Policy and practice	Bahrain	Al-Mahroos et al., 2020; Hammad, 2009; Osman et al., 2017

Theme	Country	Articles
	Kuwait	Alkhawari et al., 2020; Al-Rasheed, 2017; Hammad, 2009; Osman et al., 2017
	Oman	Al Abduwani et al., 2017; Al Saadoon et al., 2020; Hammad, 2009; Osman et al., 2017; Tekin, 2015
	Qatar	Hammad, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2015; Osman et al., 2017
	Saudi Arabia	Al Eissa & Almuneef, 2010; Al Faryan et al., 2019; Al-Eissa, 2019; Al-Eissa, ElChoueiry, et al., 2018; Almuneef et al., 2019; Almuneef et al., 2014; Alotaibi, 2014; Hammad, 2009; Mikton et al., 2013; Osman et al., 2017; Raboei, 2009
	UAE	Al Gharaibeh & Gibson, 2019; Al Midfa et al., 2019; Crabtree, 2006; Hammad, 2009; Osman et al., 2017

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**Table 3**

Distribution of themes by country (n and % of country's articles).

	<b>Prevalence &amp; characteristics</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Accidents</b>	<b>Policy &amp; practice</b>
Bahrain	7 (63.6 %)	1 (9.1 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (27.3 %)
Kuwait	9 (42.9 %)	5 (23.8 %)	4 (19.1 %)	5 (23.8 %)	4 (19.1 %)
Oman	0 (0 %)	4 (33.3 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (25.0 %)	5 (41.7 %)
Qatar	4 (30.8 %)	1 (7.7 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (38.5 %)	3 (23.1 %)
Saudi	20 (23.0 %)	25 (28.7 %)	13 (14.9 %)	27 (31.0 %)	11 (12.6 %)
UAE	2 (7.1 %)	1 (3.6 %)	6 (21.4 %)	15 (53.6 %)	5 (17.9 %)

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