

# CONCEPTUALIZING CHILD MALTREATMENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT USING THE HUMAN CAPABILITY APPROACH

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## Abstract

Child maltreatment is a human rights issue and social problem for the global society. Given the scientific discourses about the Human Capability Approach as a normative and evaluative framework to measure human development that captures the quality of life, human dignity, and flourishing, this article attempts to conceptualize child maltreatment as a capability impediment. The authors contend that the Capability Approach can be explored to map out those human capabilities deprived in children who experience child maltreatment. Case studies are used to explore the correlates between child maltreatment and human development using Nussbaum's 10 Central Human Capabilities. The article concludes that child maltreatment constitutes a human development deprivation, advocates designing a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index, and valorizes child maltreatment as an indicator for human development. Implications for social work education are highlighted, and further research is recommended.

*Keywords:* child maltreatment, human development, Human Capability Approach.

## Introduction

Children have rights that must be protected, and should be provided the capability space to flourish, enjoy wellbeing, and "lead lives that they have reason to value" (Sen, 1999; Robeyn, 2016). How can this be achieved when abuse ravages their innocence?

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, and dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Exposure to intimate partner violence is also a form of child maltreatment (World Health Organization [WHO], 2016, para 1)

This article discusses child maltreatment effects on human development using the Human Capability Approach (HCA). This approach was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and draws from the disciplines of Economics and Philosophy (Robeyns & Byskov, 2020). The HCA promotes human dignity and quality of life (Nussbaum, 2008), ideals of what children need to flourish after traumatic experiences of child maltreatment. Over time, the HCA has been at the vanguard of empirical research in the social sciences. Nonetheless, its application to child maltreatment is underdeveloped. Nussbaum and Dixon (2012) addressed the relationship between children and the HCA, arguing that it can be used as a theoretical justification for prioritizing children's rights. They did not, however, identify child maltreatment as a particular issue. This article utilizes Nussbaum's HCA to argue that children who experience maltreatment suffer a cruel form of human development deprivation. This deprivation may compromise children's quality of life, more particularly the children who are not resilient. The article uses the authors' reflections on past social work practice and clinical experiences exploring the HCA as a conceptual framework to valorize child maltreatment as a human development impediment. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the clients.

### **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified and signed by 195 countries, including all islands in the Caribbean (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC] & United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2018). The CRC was written in the hope of providing children with protection from abuse by establishing their rights to survival, development, protection, and participation. While all articles of the CRC provide protection for the child, articles 6 and 19 deserve special mention:

- "State Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life and shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child" (CRC, 1989, Article 6).
- "State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child" (CRC, 1989, Article 19).

Countries that are signatories to the CRC are required to make a pilgrimage to the United Nations' Committee on the CRC to present their accomplishments and challenges. They depart the United Nations with an inventory of concluding observations and recommendations, and the cyclical pilgrimage gets repeated every four years. However, because of the complexities of child maltreatment, children continue to suffer the adversities of abuse.

### **Complexities of Child Maltreatment**

#### ***Effects of Child Maltreatment***

A litany of research has chronicled the effects of child maltreatment on adverse mental, social, and physical health outcomes across the lifespan. Maltreated infants experience insecure attachment; impairments in their emotional understanding, expression and regulation; and display symptoms of

posttraumatic stress (Harden et al., 2016). Effects on young children include cognitive and language delays; and, compromised executive functioning, memory and problem-solving skills (Harden et al., 2016). A study amongst urban primary school children in Jamaica found exposure to aggression among peers at school, physical punishment at school, and exposure to community violence were associated with poor school achievement (Baker-Henningham et al., 2009). Effects on adolescents that linger into adulthood include aggression, crime, violence, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, sexual problems, alcohol and substance abuse, disrupted sleep, obesity, cancer, and cardiovascular disease (Cicchetti & Handley, 2019; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Gomez et al., 2017; Jaffee et al., 2018; Roopnarine & Jin, 2016; Roopnarine et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2018). Child maltreatment has economic costs such as direct medical expenses, and indirect costs as a result of loss of productivity, disability, decreased quality of life, premature death as well as costs borne by the justice system, social services, places of safety, foster care and adoption (Currie & Widom, 2010; Krug et al., 2002; Peterson et al., 2018; WHO et al., 2008; WHO et al., 2014). The authors' interest is to determine to what extent the above effects of child maltreatment interfere in children's evolving capabilities and national human development.

### ***Child Maltreatment and Resilience***

A plethora of research associates child maltreatment with adverse emotional and behavioral outcomes (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020). Interestingly enough, the studies of Afifi and MacMillan (2014) and Edwards et al. (2014), found that children who experience child maltreatment can be resilient. Contributing factors to resilience include a stable family environment and supportive relationships, referred to as family-level factors, whereas children's personality traits are individual-level factors that also contribute to resilience (Afifi & MacMillan, 2014; Yoon et al., 2019). Other contributory factors to resilience at the relational level include positive peer relationships and caring adults. At the societal or community level, factors that contribute to resilience include a positive school climate, a close-knit community, and safe neighbourhoods (Perkins & Jones, 2004). While there is a need to control the moderating role of resilience in unpacking the correlates of child maltreatment and its impact on human development, it is crucial to appreciate that victims may vacillate from resiliency to thriving and back to victimhood, as the traumatic memories may untangle at any time during adulthood and cause psychosocial impairment (Eugene, 2012).

### ***The Etiology of Child Maltreatment***

In Caribbean societies, the genesis of abuse has been framed as a learned behavior from the institution of slavery (Arnold & Phil, 1982; Barrow, 1998) and colonial penal policies that legalized punishment (Antoine, 2008). Studies by Gardner et al. (2008) from 16 Caribbean islands reveal the underlying causes of violence against children as “politically-based arming of civilians, the rise of narco-trafficking, poverty and wealth disparity, migration leading to family instability and inadequate educational systems” (pp 3–4). According to World Vision (2012), which studied 10 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, the root causes of child maltreatment include the following:

- high levels of poverty and unemployment;
- attitudes of machismo and aggression against women and girls;

- lack of parent education and knowledge;
- drug and alcohol consumption;
- death or absence of a parent or both parents;
- high levels of migration, family separation or dissolution;
- discrimination based on gender and ethnicity and against rural populations;
- violent contexts, existence of organized crime and influence of gangs;
- lack of opportunities for children and youth; and
- lack of spaces for recreation cultural and artistic expressions, sports etc. to discover talents, grow and develop, and open new possibilities for the future. (p. 7)

In addition to the above root causes of child maltreatment, a 2008 study from ECLAC and UNICEF points the finger to the normalization of abuse in Latin America and the Caribbean. This study asserts “another aspect of the problem that must be addressed is the risk that violent acts can come to be seen as a natural part of daily life and behaviour” (ECLAC & UNICEF, 2018, as cited in Berthelon et al., 2018). Meanwhile, international studies also support the claim of normalization of abuse, as children who grow up in abusive home environments, somehow become convinced that they deserved to be treated in that manner (Pears & Capaldi, 2001; Renner & Slack, 2006; Wert et al., 2019; Wilson, 2016). Normalization of abuse has implications for perpetuating a multigenerational transmission process of acceptance of abuse, and this can be further compounded where the abused becomes a perpetrator.

### ***Prevalence of Child Maltreatment***

It is difficult to provide a global overview of child maltreatment since studies use a variety of methodologies (Graafsma, 2015). However, the Global Status Report on Violence Prevention (WHO et al., 2014) collected data from 133 countries, covering 6.1 billion people, representing 88% of the world’s population. The report revealed that nearly a quarter of adults (22.6%) worldwide suffered physical abuse as a child, 36.3% experienced emotional abuse and 16.3% physical neglect, with no significant differences between boys and girls. The report also revealed that the lifelong prevalence of childhood sexual abuse indicates marked differences by gender, i.e., 18% for girls and 7.6% for boys. However, the WHO et al. (2014) report found that the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Africa to be much higher than global rates. Meanwhile, the prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname is 36.8% (Van der Kooij, 2017) and 43% in Curacao (Klein et al., 2013).

In the Caribbean and Latin America, 58% of children 0–17 years—more than 99 million—experienced abuse annually (Hills et al., 2016). None of the eight million children living in the Caribbean are legally protected from corporal punishment in the home; 32.9% of the child population in schools; 14% of children in penal institutions; 31.9% in alternative care settings; and 12.2% of those facing a sentence of the courts are not protected from corporal punishment. (Global initiative to end all corporal punishment of children, 2012). This suggests that protection of Caribbean children remains a challenging endeavor.

### **The Human Capability Approach**

The Human Capability Approach (HCA) was introduced as an alternative to growth-based models of development that equate improvement in the quality of life in a nation with increased Gross Domestic Product. Sen (1999) argues that the growth-based model for measuring a country's development is deficient, insofar as it neglects distribution of wealth, and fails to disaggregate those distinct aspects of human life such as health, education, and political rights and liberties, which are not well correlated with Gross Domestic Product (Nussbaum & Dixon, 2012). According to Sen (2000) and Haq (1990), the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. Sen (1999) further contends that instead of focusing on a country's economic growth to measure development, one should pay attention to people's real opportunities. Thus, HCA begs the question: What are people really able to do and to be? (Sen, 1999, 2000). Nussbaum and Dixon (2012) posits that every person matters and asks how every person is doing, with empowerment as the goal for each one. Children are no exception to be valorized as deserving of leading a life, able to do and be, by virtue of their right to "full and harmonious development of their personality, to grow up in a family environment, an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding and entitled to special care and assistance" (CRC, 1989, p.1). Given the effects of child maltreatment over the course of a person's life, HCA is explored as a new lens to focus on children as human beings placed at the centre of development.

### **Why Nussbaum's Perspective of the Capability Approach?**

One of Nussbaum's distinguishing contributions to the HCA is her claim that it is a method to assess quality of life and social justice. According to Eugene and Graafsma (2020),

Nussbaum's contributions to HCA that set her apart as a better fit for the evaluative space to examine the relationship between child maltreatment and human development when compared with Sen are etched on her principles of vulnerability and cost-effectiveness; openness to applying the HCA to children as regards the notion of freedom and recognizing child's rights as a distinct species of human rights (p. 60)

Another unique feature of Nussbaum that Eugene and Graafsma (2020) identified in their previous writing, which appeals to this conceptual article, is her normative list of 10 central human capabilities designed to bestow dignity to each human life, whether as children or adults. Moreover, the list is universal and reflects common human values and experiences (Nussbaum, 2000). According to Robeyns (2003), Sen and Nussbaum have some differences in their views about the HCA. However, they converge on two core concepts that form the approach's anatomy, i.e., *functionings* and *capabilities*. These two concepts are valuable for this article. Sen (1987) defined these concepts as follows:

a functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead. (p. 36)

In the case of children, they have the right to value functionings such as being healthy, being nourished, and having adequate shelter. Nevertheless, they may not have the capability or the freedom to enjoy these functionings due to individual, social, and environmental circumstances.

### **Freedom for Children**

Saito (2003, as cited in Eugene & Graafsma, 2020), recognize that Sen (1999) does not support the application of the HCA to children, given his conceptualization of “capability as freedom,” citing that children are not mature enough to make decisions by themselves and will enjoy their capability only when they become adults. According to Saito (2003, as cited in Eugene & Graafsma, 2020), Sen (1999) argues that what is noteworthy is not the freedom a child has now, but the freedom the child will have in the future choices made for them by their parents and those in authority. Similarly, Eugene and Graafsma, (2020), cited the work of Ballet et al. (2011), who agreed that the "Capability Approach implies the individual's capacity for self-determination which may not apply to children" (p. 60).

The position of Sen (1999) and Ballet et al. (2011), is instructive within the context of child maltreatment as it presupposes that parents, guardians, and others in authority have skills, knowledge, attitudes, and wisdom to make the right choices in the nurturing of children to secure a flourishing future with opportunities and the freedom to lead lives that they have reason to value. (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020, p. 60). Incidence of child abuse and neglect cases in the Caribbean and worldwide discredits this proposition. Thus, Eugene and Graafsma, (2020), asserted that “to subscribe to the notion that children are safe under the omnipotent mantle of persons in authority” (p. 60), is to concur with Solomon (2008) when writing about the deconstruction of developmental psychology that having faith in parents for children’s optimum development is to create a specific image of childhood that ultimately enables adults to colonize children and control their lives. It is this colonization of children by adults that produces abuse and thus prohibits children’s freedom to live flourishing lives. Eugene and Graafsma (2020), further stated that unlike Sen (1999) and Ballet et al. (2011), Nussbaum and Dixon (2012) conclude that the HCA can be used as a theoretical justification for prioritizing children’s rights. Peleg (2013) heralds the idea that,

reconceptualizing a child’s right using the HCA can accommodate simultaneously care for the child's future and the child's life at present; promote respect for a child's agency and active participation in her growth and lay the foundations for developing concrete measures of implementation. (p. 523)

### **The Vulnerability and Cost-effectiveness Principles**

According to Nussbaum and Dixon (2012), the cost-effectiveness principle is demonstrated,

where the marginal cost of protecting children’s rights is either so low that denying such a right would be a direct affront to their dignity, or where it is far more cost-effective to protect that right than an equivalent right for adults. (p. 554)

With this in mind, Eugene and Graafsma, (2020) located the vulnerability principle as being evident in children due to their legal and economic dependence on adults, as well as their physical and emotional vulnerability. Eugene and Graafsma, (2020), agree that both principles are associated with child maltreatment, although this is implied, and not explicitly mentioned by Nussbaum and Dixon

(2012). For example, “the CRC is based on the premise that children are vulnerable and from conception depend wholly on their parents for their psychosocial developmental needs” (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020, p. 61). Like Matthews (2019), Eugene and Graafsma (2020) observed that these children end up suffering the consequences of their parents’ choices as the ones legally and morally responsible for their children’s care.

The vulnerability of children is exacerbated through abuse either within or outside the family home. Moreover, some children are too young to have the vocabulary to disclose their abusive experiences, let alone protect themselves. On the other hand, others may harbour feelings of fear, shame, guilt, and a sense of obligation to keep the abuse a secret under a pretense of keeping the family together” (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020, p. 61)

To situate child maltreatment within the principle of cost-effectiveness, Eugene and Graafsma (2020), cite World Vision, Latin America, and the Caribbean (2012), which postulated a lack of public spending for personnel and services in child protection. Eugene and Graafsma (2020) acknowledged a similar view from ILO (2015), which highlighted that fiscal consolidation and adjustment measures are lamented to be the principal weakness in childcare and protection systems and social investments, including education, health, and recreational spaces.

### **Child Maltreatment and Social Justice**

Child maltreatment is a criminal offense and synonymous with social justice notions, where justice is one of the determinants of human development. The triumph of justice in cases of sexual abuse is only achieved when wrongdoing is acknowledged, the wrongdoers are identified and face the consequences of their actions, and when reparation is made to society and the person who has suffered harm (Green, 2006). Where the perpetrator denies allegations of sexual abuse, the child’s safety and security are adversely affected, and specifically, the child’s ability to recover is submerged with guilt and self-blame. In the authors’ social work experiences with child victims of sexual abuse, children often reiterated their thoughts and feelings, such as “if only he would admit that he interfered with me, I would feel so much better.” Where the alleged perpetrator was brought to justice, the children with whom the authors worked, felt vindicated and this supported their healing and building of resiliency, thereby giving them greater chances and freedom to enhance life opportunities. In a more practical sense, where the perpetrator is incarcerated, the children feel a real sense that their world is much safer and justice has been served (Eugene, 2012). While in other cases, this same child may become vulnerable to future abuse within the family, thereby continuously endangering their safety. In a therapy session with an adolescent girl, she confessed, “I was abused by an uncle who is now in prison; I felt safer when he was no longer in my sight. But then my brother began having sex with me...so I said, I prefer to have sex with any other man but not my brother, so I asked the old man to be my friend, and this is how he raped me...I did not want the matter to go to court because I asked him to be my friend.”

Caribbean societies face social justice challenges relating to child maltreatment, evidenced by street protests and expressions of disappointments at the judicial system’s sentencing patterns both in print and social media platforms. Additionally, close family ties and household proximity create toxic family dynamics that negatively affect reporting. The notion of “what happens in the family stays in the

family” gives rise to a distorted sense of family loyalty compounded with complicity, silence, and denial of abuse. This translates to an ethical dilemma within the family of deciding who is most deserving of protection: should it be the adult abuser or the child? (Eugene, 2012). Due to poverty and some women's economic reliance on men in the Caribbean, the abuse report may affect the primary breadwinner and is often undermined by the women themselves (Jones & Jemmott, 2009). The abuser is protected through non-reporting, leaving the child to cope with the unresolved traumatic experiences threatening both their capabilities and functionings. In some cases, the perpetrator may be in a position of power or knows someone in authority who can influence the report's outcome in the judicial system (Jones & Jemmott, 2009). By so doing, children are made to be the sacrificial lambs taking responsibility for the false honour of the adults in the family (Jones & Jemmott, 2009).

### Nussbaum's 10 Central Human Capabilities

Nussbaum (2008, 2011) employs a list of 10 central human capabilities that she posits are constitutional guarantees for the quality of life and social justice in a society. These are life, bodily health, bodily integrity and safety, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment. Eugene and Graafsma (2020) cited Nussbaum (2011), who noted, “my claim is that a life that lacks any one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life” (p.62). “Child maltreatment represents grueling experiences that can interfere with functional capabilities...what would a good life look like for children who are victims?” (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020, p. 62). Emerging from this context, the authors reiterate their argument that “Nussbaum's list of capabilities can be integrated with the CRC as they are both open, normative and evaluative frameworks that can be used to assess the extent to which children can achieve their capabilities and functionings and predict the potential impact of child maltreatment on human development” (Eugene & Graafsma, 2020, p. 62).

Table 1 illustrates the definitions of capabilities from Nussbaum's (2008) theoretical constructs combined with the CRC. The entitlements to these capabilities and rights arguably cannot be challenged as they have universal acceptance for realizing children's development (Peleg, 2013). Every child is entitled to achieve a certain threshold in all these 10 capabilities and failing to do so constitutes a social injustice (Schweiger & Gunter, 2015).

**Table 1**

*Definitions of capabilities from Nussbaum's (2008) theoretical constructs combined with the CRC*

<b>10 Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Definitions of Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Convention on the Rights of the Child</b> (adapted from Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011)
1. Life	Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.	- Art. 6: Life, survival and development - Art. 7: Birth, registration, name, nationality and care



<b>10 Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Definitions of Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Convention on the Rights of the Child</b> (adapted from Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011)
2. Bodily health	Being able to have good health, including reproductive health to be adequately nourished and have adequate shelter.	- Art. 24: Health
3. Bodily integrity and safety	Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Art. 19: Protection from violence, abuse and neglect</li> <li>- Art. 34: Sexual exploitation</li> <li>- Art. 35: Abduction, sale and trafficking</li> <li>- Art. 36: Exploitation</li> <li>- Art. 37: Inhumane treatment and detention</li> </ul>
4. Senses, imagination and thought	Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason and to do these things in a truly humane way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education...being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical...being able to search for meaning of life in one's own way and being able to have pleasurable experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Art. 28 &amp; 29: Education</li> <li>- Art. 12: Respect the views of the child</li> <li>- Art. 13: Freedom of expression</li> <li>- Art. 14: Freedom of thought, belief and religion</li> </ul>
5. Emotions	Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence, to experience longing, gratitude and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Art. 10: Family reunification</li> <li>- Art. 18: Parental responsibilities and state assistance</li> </ul>
6. Practical reason	Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.	- Art. 5: parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities

10 Central Capabilities Nussbaum (2008)	Definitions of Central Capabilities Nussbaum (2008)	Convention on the Rights of the Child (adapted from Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011)
7. Affiliation	Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings; to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship...having the social bases of self-respect and to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of the others.	- Art. 15: Freedom of association
8. Other species	Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature.	
9. Play	Being able to laugh, play to enjoy recreational activities.	- Art. 31: Leisure, play and culture
10. Control over one's environment	Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right to political participation, protection from free speech and association...and having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others.	- Art. 12: Respect the views of the child - Art. 13: freedom of expression

### Applying Nussbaum's Human Capabilities to Child Maltreatment

To illustrate Nussbaum's HCA's application to child maltreatment, the authors used their reflective social work and therapeutic practice experiences. Functionings, capabilities, and agency are punctuated as transversal lines in the case studies. The goal is to situate an appreciation of the HCA with child maltreatment, encourage empathy, compassion, and stimulate reflective dialogue to work towards the conceptualization of child maltreatment using HCA.

#### Figure 1

##### Case of Aafia

**Case of Aafia**

Aafia was placed in foster care at the age of five due to child neglect. At 11 years, she visited the Social Worker accompanied by her Foster Carer, Kadie. They were referred by the Doctor from the Health Centre with '*suicidal*' written on a note. Kadie informed that Aafia is always saying she wants to kill herself. She has heard Aafia stating that she wants

to kill herself about five times. Aafia has been thinking of killing herself from the age of five. The last suicidal thoughts were expressed during the same week of the visit to the doctor. Kadie stated that Aafia has also informed her about the songs she would like sang at her funeral. When asked about her plan, Aafia described a plan she had seen on television. Aafia explained the reason she wishes to terminate her life *“when I was small, my mother would put my two older sisters and myself outside the house all day and night. I remembered drinking dirty water from the river because I was hungry and thirsty and I did not like it. At that time, I felt like killing myself. Every time I remember that, it is painful and that feeling does not go away”*. Aafia’s mother is a patient at the mental health institution and she has never visited her. Her two siblings are also in foster care and are barely thriving. Aafia has no contact with them. One is reported to be engaging in behaviours destined to her own self-destruction. No information is available about the other sibling. Aafia enjoys school, gets good grades, except for Maths. She looks forward to passing the Common Entrance Examination to attend the most prestigious secondary school on the island. Aafia appeared shy, gave little eye contact and she is well developed physically for her age. She was pensive throughout the session, providing exaggerated silence before responding to questions.

### Reflections on Aafia

The case of Aafia and her siblings are examples of child neglect due to their mother’s mental illness, Aafia may not have been socialized in a healthy and safe home environment. At the age of 11, she appears destined to follow the footsteps of her mother with mental illness, given her suicidal thoughts over a period of five years. This has a consequence on her ability to “live a normal length of life.” Given the circumstances of her foster care arrangements, she also appears to be unable to freely visit her mother and her siblings.

Aafia is traumatized by her childhood experiences of neglect and appears to have low self-worth, given her inability to make eye contact, coupled with her suicidal thoughts. She demonstrates *practical reason*, i.e., having the capability to reflect and plan or imagine her life in the future—such as attending a prestigious secondary school—nonetheless, Aafia still wants to end her life. This incongruence is characteristic of the usual ambivalence accompanying suicidal ideation, as in general, there is a wish to die and a wish to live.

Although foster care provides Aafia with an alternative home environment, the absence of a secure emotional attachment with her parents and separation from her siblings have had an adverse impact on her wellbeing. This case demonstrates what can happen when a child is a victim of neglect; their functioning of beings and doings are deprived. Meanwhile, their constitutional guarantee for *life, bodily health and bodily integrity and safety, practical reason, and emotions* are similarly compromised. This means that children like Aafia who experience neglect may not have the capabilities to feel happy, worthy, enjoy good mental health, receive love and care from parents as well as from their siblings. What is noteworthy is that even while Aafia has the capability set of resources such as an education and alternative home environment, her functioning remains diminished.

**Figure 2***The case of Taahir***Case of Taahir**

*“I cannot cope with my grandson Taahir. I want the judge to take him away.”* So said Latifa about her 8-year-old grandson for whom she has a Care and Protection Order. Taahir exhibits behavioural problems at home, at school and in the neighbourhood. Latifa saw a video in which Taahir was engaging in sexualized behaviours, during which time she heard voices of children laughing in the background and the promise of a sweet to be given to him as a reward. She described Taahir as having a bad attitude at school, as the teacher informed her that he curses, touches the private parts of girls, and steals the lunches of children. She felt embarrassed when neighbours informed her that Taahir was once seen with a knife and smoking marijuana. According to Latifa, this behavior started when Taahir was five years old, whilst living with an older man. In her own words *“this is where he picked up these bad manners as they told me the old man has little boys living with him”*. Latifa said that Taahir’s mother has 12 children and that her son might not be the putative father. According to Latifa, both parents are unemployed and they give their children away to anyone like ripe mangos. Latifa is fed up and described parenting Taahir as overwhelming, resulting in neck pains and high blood pressure. She copes by praying, talking with him, as well as having friends and her husband speak with him. Latifa admitted to beating and locking Taahir in a room on time out. According to her, nothing works.

**Reflections on Taahir**

The case of Taahir demonstrates the complexities of child maltreatment with Taahir as a victim of child abandonment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse. At the age of eight, he is already engaging in delinquent behaviours and, if systemic interventions are not provided, he runs the risk of spiraling downwards, becoming a danger to himself, his family and his neighbourhood. This appears to be as a result of maternal and paternal deprivation, poverty, poor parenting, and early socialization to inappropriate sexual activities. Taahir appears to have a destructive sense of personal identity, morality and judgement. This can be related to not having the capability to “imagine, think, reason and use his senses.” The probability of Taahir completing elementary school, engaging in law-abiding economic activities and contributing to his own flourishing are uncertain. This makes it a daunting task for him to exercise practical reason and acquire the capability to “reflect, plan or imagine his life in the future.” This may be exacerbated by the absence of a secure attachment with his parents and paternal grandmother which may foreclose his capability to secure attachments with teachers, friends, and siblings. The adverse childhood experiences of Taahir, justify the need to consider valorizing child maltreatment as a deprivation to human development since these experiences undoubtedly contribute to a foreclosing of children’s life choices, agency, ability to flourish, and live a happier and more valuable life.

**Figure 3***Case of Aadina, Badia and Cairo***Case of Aadina, Badia and Cairo**

*"I know of a man who is having sex with three girls, I saw the police passing and told him about it...he told me to go to Human Services and make a report".* So said the informant who reported that for over one year she has been noticing three 14-year-old girls, namely Aadina, Badia and Cairo in their school uniforms visiting the office of a businessman. She is employed in a nearby office and out of curiosity she has looked through a peep hole and has seen the man engaging in sexual activities with the girls, individually and as a group. She described the room as having thick curtains, a mattress, towels, and a basin. The informant has reported the matter to the police, the school that the girls attend, and relatives of the girls, but the situation continues. She stumbled on the cellphone belonging to one of the girls and read messages of receiving sums of money between US\$100 to US\$400 at different intervals in exchange for sex and payment for abortions. The mother of one of the girls is known to also be frequenting the office of the businessman.

**Reflections on Aadina, Badia and Cairo**

The case of Aadina, Badia, and Cairo describes what Jones and Jemmott (2009) refer to as "transactional sex or opportunistic sex where children have sex with adults in exchange for money and, or material goods, it is an open secret, parents and community have full knowledge of it but take no action" (p. 11). This case presents adolescent girls using their agency at the exploitation of a pedophile. Their capability set of *affiliation* characterized by living for and in positive relationships with others is based on a businessman's exploitation. The relationship is disrespectful, abusive, and criminal, simply because of the children's vulnerabilities compounded with the additional layer as being girls.

While these girls should be doing homework, playing sports, and participating in leisure activities that promote a healthy lifestyle, they are instead being sexually exploited. They appear to have control over their environment, having enough time to do what they like, albeit engaging in behaviours tending towards self-destruction, compromising their capability set of "life, bodily health, bodily integrity, and safety." This translates to diminishing their self-worth and human dignity and increased personal vulnerability, leading to further capability deprivation in their later years. The study of Currie and Widom (2010) shows that women with histories of child sexual abuse have lower levels of education, employment, earnings, and fewer assets as adults. This study also found that women victims of child sexual abuse often suffer the consequences of reduced economic productivity due to dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and an inability to learn due to the negative mental health impacts. Dropping out of school means that girls cannot reach their full academic potential, and as adults, they run the risk of becoming economically dependent on others or the state welfare system (Eugene, 2012). Women without education can be trapped in low-paid jobs characterized by the absence of upward mobility and other opportunities, under the phenomenon that Lopez-Carlos and Zahidi (2005) refer to as "ghettoization of female labour."

The reporting of the case of Aadina, Badia, and Cairo may render them revictimized having to

recount their ordeal multiple times while interfacing with the medical, police, legal justice systems, and social services. They may be stereotyped, stigmatized as liars, reconstructed as asexual, spoiled goods, and no longer children within the community (Eugene, 2012). Children like Aadina, Badia, and Cairo may not receive the community support needed in maximizing their capabilities for optimum human functioning and flourishing into adulthood.

### Conceptualizing Child Maltreatment Using the Capability Approach

The HCA advocates removing hindrances that people face, which prohibit their capabilities to lead lives that they have reason to value (Sen, 1999; Robeyn, 2016). Given the case studies, it seems reasonable to assume a nexus between child maltreatment and Nussbaum's 10 central human capabilities that needs to be empirically tested. Meanwhile, Table 2 illustrates a mapping of a capability set that Eugene and Graafsma, 2020 pilot tested in a study that may be used to measure this relationship more rigorously.

**Table 2**

*Measuring human capabilities of children who experience child maltreatment*

<b>10 Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Children's Capabilities</b> Adapted from Biggeri & Mehrotra 2011; Biggeri & Libanora, 2011; Anich et al., 2011
1. Life	<i>Life and physical health</i>
2. Bodily health	<p><i>Mental health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling happy</li> <li>- Self-love and worthy</li> <li>- Inner peace and spirituality</li> </ul> <p><i>Shelter</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Living in a comfortable and safe home</li> </ul>
3. Bodily integrity and safety	<p><i>Mobility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moving freely and visiting relatives or friends</li> </ul> <p><i>Freedom from abuse and neglect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being free form of abuse and neglect</li> <li>- Being free from any form of discrimination</li> </ul>
4. Senses, imagination and thought	<p><i>Personal autonomy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being able to make sense of the most important things that are happening</li> <li>- Having a say in decisions about one's self</li> <li>- Communicating in a language of choice</li> <li>- Freely expressing oneself</li> </ul> <p><i>Participation and information</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to information</li> </ul> <p><i>Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attending school</li> </ul>

<b>10 Central Capabilities</b> Nussbaum (2008)	<b>Children's Capabilities</b> Adapted from Biggeri & Mehrotra 2011; Biggeri & Libanora, 2011; Anich et al., 2011
5. Emotions	<i>Love and care</i> - Love and care from parents - Love and care from brother(s) and sister(s) - Love and care from teacher(s) - Love and care from friend(s)
6. Practical reason	<i>Personal autonomy</i> - Being able to plan or imagine one's life in the future
7. Affiliation	<i>Social relations</i> - Participating in activities with family or neighbourhood - Attending social and cultural activities <i>Religion and identity</i> - Attending religious celebrations <i>Respect</i> - Receiving respect and consideration from everybody
8. Other species	<i>Environment</i> - Living in a clean environment - Spending time in nature - Being with animals and pets - Engaging in activities to protect the environment
9. Play	<i>Leisure activities</i> - Having enough time to play - Participating in leisure activities that matter
10. Control over one's environment	<i>Time autonomy and undertake projects</i> - Having enough time to do what one likes - Expressing personal opinions and ideas and be listened to - Participating in decisions regarding one's environment - Participating in the big political decisions regarding one's country

*Note.* Adapted from "Children's Human Capabilities and Child Maltreatment: A pilot study of one secondary school in Aruba," by C. Eugene and T.L.G. Graafsma, 2020, *Journal de Ciencias Sociales*, 8(15), pp.62–64. Copyright 2020 by the Universidad de Palermo.

The framework in Table 2 was used in studies of Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011); Biggeri and Libanora (2011), and Anich et al. (2011) to measure the capability of children with disabilities, children who live on the street, and children in poverty. The research designs they used were methodologically scrutinized to value and prioritize the studied children's capability sets, including the focalization procedure in considering children's narratives, their subjective experiences, and reflections (Biggeri & Libanora, 2011; Anich et al., 2011). Biggeri and Libanora (2011) posit that this approach gives children the knowledge about the informational space of capabilities that needs their active participation, contribution, and agency. The framework seems beneficial to assess the relationship between child maltreatment and human development.

Measuring the associations between child maltreatment and capabilities must be complemented with a qualitative research design in which children who experienced abuse are given a defining role in identifying and justifying a list of central capabilities instead of presenting to them a predetermined list in a quantitative design. This allows victims of child maltreatment to be active participants in the research process, producing their knowledge of capabilities and functionings towards a legitimate full set of capabilities.

The HCA inspired the first 1990 Human Development Report (Haq, 1995). Since then, subsequent reports have continued to put people at the center of development to address aspects of wellbeing beyond income, thus focusing on human lives rather than material wealth or income (United Nations Development Program, 2016). This development thinking has inspired the proliferation of innovative measurements to include the Poverty Index, Gender Development Index, Wellbeing index, Happiness Index, Quality of Life Index, and the Human Development Index. What these measurements have in common is the ethos of human development as the process of enlarging a person's choices by giving them the freedom and opportunities to lead long, healthy and flourishing lives; to be knowledgeable; to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living; to be able to participate in the life of the community and the upholding of equality amongst all human beings (United Nations Development Program, 1990; Sen, 1999).

Sen's work on human capabilities and functionings influenced the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI shifts the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centered policies (Haq, 1995). The HDI serves as a flagship for the human development approach (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). It is a comparative measure of three equally weighted components, namely, (a) a long and healthy life, measured by health and life expectancy; (b) literacy and knowledge, measured by education, literacy levels, and school enrollment; and (c) a decent standard of living measured by wealth, i.e., per capita income (Haq, 1995). All HDI indicators are directly affected by what happens in childhood. One can argue that it is impossible to think of present and future sustainable human development without addressing child maltreatment. We have already discussed the adverse impact of child maltreatment on children's social, mental, and physical health and how these interfere with the quality of their lives. More importantly, we explored how Nussbaum's 10 central human capabilities are compromised in a childhood interrupted by maltreatment. Think for a moment of the explosion of the "me too movement" where young and old, although well acclaimed in their professional careers, still agonize over the silent crime and cruelty they endured in their childhood. Such cruelty deprives them of living a flourishing life of wellbeing and renders them unable to live lives



that they have reason to value across their lifespan.

It is inadequate to use life expectancy as the singular measure of longevity if child maltreatment induces capability deprivation and affects wellbeing. Longevity is misleading as a person's life expectancy may not consider how healthy the life was lived, given experiences of child maltreatment. As such, this article makes a case for designing a Caribbean Child Maltreatment Index, as well as a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index (Mekonen, 2010) to add Caribbean situations to dimensions of long and healthy life in calculating HDI and measure the Caribbean's commitments to children's rights and human capabilities. Inasmuch as the HCA focusses on what people can do and be, and what they value and have reason to value (Sen, 1999), it seems sagacious, or at best urgent, to remove obstacles in the lives of children so that they have freedom to live valuable lives. Nutrition, poverty, and infant mortality are included in HDI measurement, but child maltreatment is not. Given the adverse emotional and behavioural outcomes of child maltreatment, one may argue that it does create barriers for human development.

### **Final Reflections**

Child maltreatment has the potential to threaten the evolving capabilities of children with implications for human development. If we want to predict what the Caribbean society would look like in the future, we must look at how children are treated today and place them at the center of human development. Children's lives matter, and for those like Aafia, Taahir, Aadina, Badia, and Cairo, child maltreatment can hinder their opportunities to live long, healthy and valuable lives. While the conceptualization of human development remains embedded in the Rights-Based Perspective, Sustainable Development Goals, and the HCA, they remain overloaded with concepts, frameworks, measurements, and indicators, none of which measure the child maltreatment experiences from the case studies. Can we begin to speculate that Nussbaum's HCA's conceptualization presents a normative and evaluative framework to measure child maltreatment's impact on human development?

It is proposed that child maltreatment be valorized as an indicator to the HDI and a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index be constructed as an evaluative framework for assessing the child-friendliness of governments. Africa in 2008 developed the first Child Friendliness Index (Mekonen, 2010; Bequele, 2010). Designing such an index for the Caribbean has the advantage of having one comprehensive empirical measurement of children's wellbeing embedded in Caribbean culture and contexts. Its findings can be used to monitor and analyze Caribbean governments' performance in ensuring the protection, survival, and evolving human capabilities of all children in the region. It can be useful in monitoring government's compliance to the CRC and writing its periodic reports instead of the regular scanning of voluminous information and reports (Bequele, 2010). Like the experiences in Africa, it is hoped that the index will put children at the centre of human development thinking on the political and public policy agenda at the regional level through the Caribbean Community and Common Market and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Furthermore, the findings can be used as scientific evidence for budgetary allocations to support strategic program planning with lucid indicators and be outcome-driven. This will augur well for sharing the best evidence-based practices in promoting the child's rights throughout the region. Having a singular harmonizing measurement for children's human development in the Caribbean will

also augur well for comparative analysis of the outcomes of children's wellbeing. Thus, instead of relying upon Euro-American standards to measure and rank Caribbean children's wellbeing and quality of life, we will design our regional measurement that pays cursory attention to our culture and contexts. For social workers, personnel from human service agencies, and members from civil societies who are at the vanguard of childcare and protection, the index can be a powerful tool for agency, legal, legislative, and community advocacy; calling governments and public officials to own up to their responsibilities and commitments with the statistical evidence to frame their advocacy message.

Research is imperative to measure the association between child maltreatment and human development using Nussbaum's conceptualization of human development while working towards a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index. Other indicators of children's wellbeing will also have to be included in constructing a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index. Nonetheless, while we wait for the scientific rigour of testing, we proffer a beginning definition of child maltreatment using the HCA: child maltreatment constitutes a deprivation of capabilities, i.e., opportunities and freedom for a child to be or to do that which will expand the enjoyment of their inalienable rights to survival, protection, participation, and optimum psychosocial development. Additionally, it hinders children's functionings towards achieving wellbeing and to live long, healthy and flourishing lives.

### **Implications for Social Work Education and Further Research**

The social work profession has a long tradition of working with children and their families, navigating complex social protection systems to meet children's needs under challenging circumstances, especially those who experience child maltreatment. As we begin to consider the correlates between child maltreatment and the CRC using the HCA as a new conceptual normative and evaluative framework to measure its impact on human development, this will have implications for social work education. Social work education in Caribbean institutions should therefore consider introducing the HCA in its curriculum. This will provide current and prospective social workers a new pair of lenses to envision the relevance and the impact of their practice with children and families on human development. Introducing the HCA in the curriculum of social work institutions in the Caribbean might further create opportunity and fortify social workers' confidence to take a seat at the local and regional Caribbean decision making tables when the sustainable development agendas and strategies are debated and mapped out, policies are decided, and resources are allocated. Social workers will have the scientific evidence to make a case for prioritizing social investments in matters related to childcare and protection and to work towards a Caribbean Child Friendliness Index. Before the above, Caribbean-specific research must be conducted methodically to measure the associations between child maltreatment and children's evolving human capabilities necessary for human development.

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