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Child Abuse in India

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Abstract

Child abuse can be defined as causing or permitting any harmful or offensive contact on a child's body; and any communication or transaction of any kind which humiliates shames or frightens the child. Some child development experts go a bit further, and define child abuse as any act or omission, which fails to nurture or in the upbringing of the children. There are many factors that may contribute to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. Parents may be more likely to maltreat their children if they abuse drugs or alcohol. Some parents may not be able to cope with the stress resulting from the changes and may experience difficulty in caring for their children.

Child abuse is defined as endangerment to a child inflicted by another person, usually by the care giver. It is recognized as a major social problem. There are a number of forms of child abuse as 'physical', 'sexual' 'emotional' 'substance' and 'neglect'. Physical and sexual abuses are extremely dangerous to the child and it may cause permanent disabilities. A study shows that more than 53 per cent of Indian children were sexually abused and majority of victims did not dare to report the abuse.

Keywords: Child, Abuse, harmful.

1. Introduction

Child abuse can be defined as causing or permitting any harmful or offensive contact on a child's body; and any communication or transaction of any kind which humiliates shames or frightens the child. Some child development experts go a bit further, and define child abuse as any act or omission, which fails to nurture or in the upbringing of the children. There are many factors that may contribute to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. Parents may be more likely to maltreat their children if they abuse drugs or alcohol. Some parents may not be able to cope with the stress resulting from the changes and may experience difficulty in caring for their children.

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'Emotional' abuse is seriously detrimental to or impairs the child's psychological and physical health. The study shows that 32.1 per cent children have tested one or the other alcoholic substance. 'Neglect' is also thought of as a dangerous kind of abuse. Girl child neglect is found to be quite prevalent. The consequences of child abuse and neglect may be devastating. The psychological and physical effects may last a life time.

Child abuse is prevalent in almost every culture across the world and has been a problem for as long as there has been recorded history. The term 'Child Abuse' is known as child maltreatment. Although the extent of child abuse is difficult to measure, it is recognized as a major social problem. It is present in all income, racial, religious and ethnic groups whether in urban or rural areas. It is however, more common in some groups, especially those below the poverty line.

Physical abuse can be classified as any attempt to harm a child where the caregiver was conscious of the risk unexplained bruises, broken bones or burn marks on a child may be sign of physical abuse. In a study, nearly one half of the children (48.7 percent) in India were reported to have been beaten up by family members. While interpreting data on physical

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Abuse, one needs to keep in view the Indian scenario in which beating, mostly slapping is generally resorted to for disciplining children. A large number of children are of school going age who reported receiving corporal punishment in schools. This physical punishment whether at home or in school does not work effective. It is much better to choose a punishment that fits the action, for example, if a child has fight over television take away the television privileges.

Sexual abuse refers to any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult or an older, bigger, or more powerful person, for that person's sexual gratification. Sexual abuse ranges from unwanted kisses, to inappropriate touching to sexual intercourse. A survey carried out by 'Prayas' one of the biggest NGOs in the country, in association with UNICEF, depicted that more than 53 percent of children in India were sexually abused. Children are forced and threatened not to tell anyone of the encounters because of the social humiliation of being involved in sexual abuse. A shocking report that three out of every ten young adults admit that sexual abuse has been inflicted on them by close relative. (eg. Kovai incident weeks before). Boys are as much sexually abused as girls are.

Emotional abuse refers to a chronic attitude or behaviour dissected towards a child, or the creation of an emotional environment which is seriously detrimental to or impairs the child's psychological and physical development. This type of abusive behaviour can bring down an individual's feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. It leaves victims feeling inadequately helpless or worthless. The result of emotional abuse is often that the child either runs away or withdraws socially.

Substance abuse in children is also shown to be alarmingly high. The study shows that 32.1 percent children have tasted any one of the substances like alcohol, bhang, ganja, charas, heroin, smack, brown sugar, etc. the prevalence of substance abuse is distinctly lower among females than among males.

Neglect is often thought of as the most dangerous kind of abuse. Neglect refers to any serious omission or commission by a person which jeopardizes or impairs the child's psychological, intellectual or physical development. Neglect includes anything from leaving children alone for long periods of time, not giving them proper health care and not giving them enough to eat. This type of neglect is directly related to poverty. This is because poverty is a stressor due to the fact that those in poverty have to work hard to get basic commodities. So, parents or guardians cannot always spend time with their children. Not giving them enough time to children is also present in modern life style where both parents are working and they do not have the time to spend with their children. Girl child neglect is found to be quite prevalent. Out of those girls with brothers, 48.4 per cent cases reported that their parents gave more love and attention to their brothers. The consequences of child abuse and neglect may be devastating and far reaching.

The psychological effects of abuse and neglect may last a lifetime and it may include a lowered sense of self-worth. Study shows that abusing directly affects the child's performance in schools. In severe cases, abuse may result in psychiatric disorders like depression, excessive anxiety or dissociative identity disorder as well as increased risk of suicide. Behaviour problems often develop after abuse, including violence and juvenile crimes.

Commercial or other exploitation of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others.

This includes child labour and child prostitution. There activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social – emotional development.

There has been open abuse of children in a number of ways in India. Children continue to be vulnerable to abuse in a country where mothers are not always able to arrange effective child care while they work. *Front Line* issues a file photograph in June 2012 issue that a toddler in Kochi is left on the roadside while the mother works as a labourer. Girls in early teens in Hyderabad are married to Sheikhs from Arab countries. The abuse of girls on the border of Maharashtra and Karnataka where child is offered to the temple of goddess Yellamma as Devadasi is nothing less than throwing her to the flesh market. The harassment of both male and female child in the bonded market is well known. Both sexually assaulted by the employer and the contractor. Same is the story of girls in the tribal belt where the child is a prey for the forest employers, contractors and even government servants.

The condition of children both male and female is worst in city slums, foot path dwellings and Indian jails. They are sexually exploited by the slum, dadas – even neighbors in the slums and on foot path in metropolitan cities. Since there are not on any juvenile jails in India most of the child convicts are kept in regular jails. Sexual abuse is a regular feature. Hard core convicts and jail staff satisfy their sexual lust on these children.

Eighties saw a new type of child abuse. There was a spree of child adoption by foreigners from developed – countries on humanitarian grounds. In due – course it was found that in many cases these children had to work as house hold servants. In some case it was also found that the children became sexual targets of their adopters. Children become cheap commodity. Government of India and the Mission of charity had to put many restrictions on this adopting business.

Nineties began with the most ignoble type of abuse. Even child abuse has taken a sophisticated turn in this age of sophistication. That is the meanest enjoyment of child pornography. There is a network of paedophiles in the underdeveloped countries. They would take the photographs or films of children who have been forced to indulge in sex with other children or even with adults. These are transmitted to the bulletin files. This abuse was formerly arranged with small children in Sri Lanka. The same has been done by these mean people in Thailand and Phillipines. Now it is the turn of India on a very large scale. The paedophiles child molester has inserted two files on India named 'family' and 'India'. The poor Indian children are easy pray to the evil designs of the paedophiles. The government too does not seem inclined to do anything in this respect in the modern atmosphere of liberalization.

The highest member of complaint related to child abuse may have come from schools in Tamil Nadu, but this indicates high awareness against evil and not necessarily its high prevalence in the state, activists have emphasized.

Every cause has an effect, and the effects on a child who has been abused are harmful and lasting. To prevent child abuse, the main causes need to be identified. Alcohol is a big cause of abuse. Drug use is another cause of child abuse, as well as stress. A lot of the time, stress is caused by caring for a child with a disability or one has special needs. Many times a guardian snaps under the stress and does something that

could be considered abuse. Often times a naïve parent could be trying to discipline a child and could accidentally hurt them. Lastly, some parents cannot handle raising a child on top of everything else in their life so they snap. Some even gradually develop mental illness, anger management problems or depression under the pressure.

It is a matter of great shame that an evil like child abuse does have an existence in our society. The study reveals the growth of child abuse in the society and calls for immediate action on the part of the government coupled with a social awakening through a proactive partnership between the government and NGOs and the masses at large. People also must take responsibility of their actions within the society in order to prevent the future of the country being exploited at the hands of small group of miscreants that bring disrespect to the entire society.

Local governments, social and health agencies and schools must work together to find an effective way to solve the growing problem of child maltreatment. The first step to finding a solution to child abuse is recognizing the signs. Some signs of child neglect are a child wearing clothes that are ill-fitting, ragged or dirty and having an unwashed appearance. Sign of children who are being neglected food are asking for or stealing food or searching through trash for food. Many common signs of a sexually abused child are in appropriate knowledge of sexual behaviour, seductive conduct, extra aggression or extra compliance and the fear of a particular person or family member. Warning signs of a child who is being psychologically abused are mainly apathy, depression and hostility. Some emotional signals that a child is being abused in anyway are low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, anger management problems, relationship difficulties, withdrawal, personality disorders, clinginess, neediness, flash backs and night mares. More behavioral effects of child abuse are problems in school, prostitution, teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, criminal behaviour, anti-social behaviour, alcohol or drug use or eating disorders. All of these behaviour and actions are ways to help citizens to detect children who are being abused and help them.

Thus, a critical step toward solving the child abuse epidemic is public awareness. If people are able to recognize the signs of child abuse, then they could be able to read the signals an abused child is sending out, and act on their behalf. Many more children would be rescued and it would contribute greatly to the solution and prevention of child abuse.

The process of drawing up a separate Bill to deal with sexual offences against children started in 2005 with the drafting of the "Offences against Children" Bill. It was approved by the National Commission for Women (NCW) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development and introduced on March 23, 2011. The Committee also recommended that the NCPCR may be considered for a monitoring role under the Bill. It suggested that it was incumbent on the state to create an environment or a culture where children felt secure. A module on sex education in the school education system was desirable, it said. The standing Committee averred that most laws took a child to mean a person below 18 and therefore this should be the age of consent. The Bill provides that where such penetrative sexual assault is committed against a child between 16 and 18 years of age, it shall be considered whether the consent for such an act has been obtained against the will of the child or the consent has been obtained by use of violence, force, intoxicants, drugs, impersonation, fraud, deceit, coercion, undue influence, threats when the child is

sleeping or unconscious or where the child does not have the capacity to understand the nature of the actor to resist it.

Anyhow, the safer environment for a child is one in which the biological parents are married and the family has always been intact where the child abuse root is lesser. The safety of the child lies in the perfect parental care.

2. References

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