

Child Abuse – Break the Silence, Stop the violence

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse has been identified as a serious public health concern. This issue has been a global challenge. Child abuse, in its various forms can be found everywhere in India – in rural and urban cities, in the homes of the rich and the poor, and in the streets and schools. India is a country of strong cultural beliefs where care of children is considered the purview of the family predominantly and child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is an issue surrounded by a conspiracy of muteness. Child abuse is a significant problem that requires an effective means of prevention. Abused children often suffer with physical injuries, stress and post-traumatic stress disorders that may disrupt the normal pattern of growth and development.

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse as a coercive act with a child who is unable to comprehend or provide consent, leading to serious physical or psychological damage. Child abuse brings about circumstances causing harm to a child's health, welfare, and safety. Child abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The world health organization (WHO) and international society for prevention of child abuse and neglect reported that child abuse and neglect are

important contributors to death, injuries and illness in young children. The world health organization reported approximately 31,000 deaths attributed to homicide among children less than 15 years of age.



Each year more than 40 million children around the world abused below the age of 15 suffer from abuse and neglect and require health and social care.

Type of Child Abuse

There are four major types of child abuse

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Child Neglect



Impact of Child Abuse

In case of both physical and emotional trauma, the immediate impact is immediately felt. However, it can also result in lasting lifelong physical and psychological trauma. Other children, families, and society also experience this trauma in the way the afflicted child communicates with them. Research has indicated direct neural impact from abuse – as seen in the emotional lobe, memory centre, decision-making centre and other brain functioning areas. Along with that Sexually transmitted diseases, Pregnancy ,abortion and other serious threats to general health and well being.

Child Abuse the Indian Scenario

According to a 2007 study conducted by India's ministry of women and child development, 53% of children surveyed said they had been subjected to some form of abuse especially sexual abuse. In India, a child is sexually abused every 15 minutes, According to National Crime Records Bureau report, released on 2017, shows a steady rise in incidents of offences against children. The crime rate registered per lakh children population is 28.9 in 2020 in comparison with 33.2 in 2019. India is said to have reported over

many instances of child sexual abuse during three year period between 2017-20 with 80 per cent of the victims being girls below the age of 14 years.

including fondling, inappropriate touching, intercourse, child trafficking and pornography or cyber abuse by online perpetrators.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is serious problem among other type of abuses. CSA is a serious problem of considerable magnitude throughout the world .it causes profound consequences to the child. It is known to interfere with normal growth and development .CSA has also been linked to numerous maladaptive health behaviors, and poor social, mental and physical health outcomes throughout the lifespan of the victim.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as “The involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, and unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society According to CHILDLINE, India has the largest number of CSA reported cases. A child below 16 is raped every 155th minute and below 10 years of age is raped every 13 hours .

Although the magnitude is high, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse (CSA) in India .CSA has largely been ignored in public discourse and not often taken seriously by the criminal justice system. Nearly 19% of the world's children find home in India. While children belonging to all genders are highly susceptible to CSA, it is often the girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Identifying Child Abuse

The effect of abuse is different for every child as it depends on the kind of abuse, frequency, duration and severity of the maltreatment, as well as the relationship between the abused and the perpetrator the most common behavior manifestation as follows.

- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Aggression, hostility and/or hyperactivity
- Depression, anxiety and unusual fears, or a loss of self-confidence
- Apparent lack of supervision
- Frequent absences from school
- Reluctance to leave school activities as if he/she does not want to go home
- Attempts of running away from home
- Self-harm or attempts of suicide
- ◆ Negativism

A child who has been sexually abused shows signs of the same which need to be identified.

They usually involve:

- Having pain, itching bleeding, or bruises in or around the genital area
- Have difficulty walking or sitting, possibly because of genital or anal pain
- Suffer from frequent urinary tract infections
- Be reluctant to take off his/her coat or sweater, even on a hot day, or insist wearing multiple undergarments
- Demonstrate sexual knowledge, curiosity, or behavior beyond his/her age (obsessive curiosity about sexual matters, for example, or seductive behavior towards peers or adults)
- They may go back to younger behaviors like soiling their pants or wetting the bed etc.

Effects of child sexual abuse

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Phobias
- Nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating in academic activities
- Flashbacks of the events
- Fear of confronting the offender
- Loss of self esteem and confidence
- Feelings of guilt

If childhood sexual abuse is not treated, long-term symptoms can go on through adulthood. These may include:

- PTSD and anxiety
- Depression and thoughts of suicide
- Sexual anxiety and disorders, including having too many or unsafe sexual partners
- Difficulty setting safe limits with others (e.g., saying no to people) and relationship problems
- Poor body image and low self-esteem
- Unhealthy behaviors, such as alcohol, drugs, self-harm, or eating problems.
- Issues in maintaining relationships

India's legal stance on child abuse and prevention

India's Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO) and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act have been recently strengthened in their aim of fighting child rights violation. There has also been a corresponding increase in the number of child abuse cases filed, due to awareness about legal recourse, translating to an increase in a number of convictions. In 2016, the National Crime Records Bureau also spoke about the relationship of victims and accused in rape cases

and accused in rape cases. This act does not have a clear distinction for cases which are consented by minors. Under its provisions, any sexual activity committed by a minor with an adult, even though it is with consent, will be booked under this act, thus leading to false arbitration and misuse of act. Many instances have shown the difficulty in proving the age of the child; any document beyond those referred by the act will not hold validity, creating a disparity and often segregation of the child victims. While reporting and investigating the case, hostility and inefficiency of the police and hospitals also leads to error in judgment and embarrassment to the victims.

Preventive strategies of Child Abuse

Behavior Change of society

- Immediate efforts should be made to make young adults aware and sensitized about Child abuse in all its dimensions.
- Awareness has to shift towards deeper knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of what is Child abuse, and what can be done to prevent it.
- The use of local government bodies for spreading awareness needs to be explored and used to a much greater extent than it is now.

Sensitization of care takers and children

- Mandatory inclusion of legal rights/child rights/education related to child abuse in all curriculums of schools and college.
- Mandatory training and sensitization of teachers engaged in Primary, Secondary and Senior secondary education on the issue of CSA with refresher courses at regular intervals
- Inclusion of CSA in the National Education Policy
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Support Systems and Services

- Directives to popularize Child line 1098 mention at the back of every textbook with a message on 'How to report the incidence of child abuse'
- It should be mandatory for every school to have a 'Drop-box' where students can drop their complaints related to abuse.
- Ensure availability of psychologists and counselors to make children aware and sensitized about CSA.

Conclusion

It is the high time to push for an explicitly transformative agenda to reduce and eliminate the incidence, prevalence and danger of CSA. This change agenda hinges very heavily on the power of knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, behavioral and attitudinal changes among all sections of society against all forms of child abuse. Such awareness will emerge the ability to act, the courage to speak up and the creation of an environment where each child is totally safe. This can be achieved through behavior change and the empowered and enlightened usage of all instruments, systems and services for the control and prevention of this crime against children.

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