
Child Sexual Abuses: Causes and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is one of the most serious, traumatic, and shameful crimes against children. It not only ruins their childhood but also destroys their self-confidence. Children lose their true identity and may develop a distorted sense of self. There are many reasons and factors that increase the risk of child sexual abuse, which are often unknown to the general public, such as poverty, lack of sex education, Westernization, and substance abuse. The consequences of sexual abuse are devastating and have profound and long-lasting effects on the physical and mental health of the victims. The aftermath of abuse is deeply painful because it damages the victim's self-esteem, as well as their physical and mental well-being. In this research paper, we will discuss the causes of child sexual abuse and the extent to which it affects the victim and their life. We will also discuss the steps that parents and society should take to protect children from such abuse.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse has become a very serious and dangerous problem not only in India but in the whole world. According to World Health Organization Definition, Child Sexual abuse means, “ It includes a child who is unable to give consent , under compulsion, fear, incapable due to minority or any other circumstances, not prepared physically, mentally or emotionally for sexual activity which not relates with the moral values of the society, child trafficking, child prostitution, child pornography and many other



similar acts, which are done against the will of the child in it.” Child Sexual abuse not only offence against the children even it is violence and contravention of the right to life and personal liberty (Article 21) and also violence of human rights.

“Articles 15(3) and 39 of the Constitution of India empower the Parliament and state legislature to make special laws regarding the children and women. By using this power, parliament made a law for the protection of children, i.e., the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. Apart from this, we also have other provisions of law that deal with the protection of children, like the Bhartiya Naya Sanhita, 2023; the Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008; the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015; the Immoral (Traffic) Prevention Act, 2008; etc., which have a main focus on the protection of the rights of the children and providing punishment to the offender of the child sexual abuse.”

Types of Sexual Abuse

There are many types of sexual abuse which are given under below:-

Sexual Assault: In general terms it means when a person feels uncomfortable, frightened, or threatened by using force, coercion, or manipulation on a child. According to sec 7 of POCSO Act 2012, “Whenever any person (including man, woman, and child) touches the vagina, breast, penis, or anus of a child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus, or breasts of such person and does any other act with sexual intention but here does not include the physical contact with penetration, is said to commit the offense of sexual assault.”

Sexual Exploitation: Sexual exploitation is an offence not only against the body of the victim but also against the mind of the victim. It is the violence of article 2. Sexual exploitation means when a person commit penetrative sexual assault (rape) without the will or consent of the victim or by committing fraud or impose him/her on threat (Sec 3). Kidnaping and abduction, Immoral Trafficking, buying or selling for the purpose of prostitution or illicit intercourse are also cover under sexual exploitation.

Sexual Grooming : Sexual grooming is a deceptive and manipulating technique in which an adult establishes an emotional bond with a kid or other vulnerable individual in order to entice her, decrease their hesitations, win their trust, and ultimately take advantage of them. Unlike a sudden physical attack, grooming is a calculated, intentional long term designed to make victim feel special, isolated and dependent on the groomer. The main motive of the groomer sexually exploit the child and also take sexual favour.

**Causes of Child sexual Abuse:-**

Poverty : One major contributing factor to child sexual abuse is poverty. It is very easy to target the economically weaker children, because offenders have the opinion that parents of such children are not financially strong, are powerless, and are also unable to afford the cost of legal remedies. In some cases parents sell the child for their daily needs, due to hunger for money and poverty. In some areas of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, UP, and Bihar, poor parents marry off their minor daughters to any man for money, and then these minor girls become subjects of sexual exploitation.

Exploitation: Exploitation is a very wide term. It includes the physical, mental and sexual exploitation. When accused used the children in commercial or domestic work is called child labour. Child labour sometimes takes the form of sexual exploitation, as the child is at the mercy of their employer and separated from their family, a vulnerability that the employer or other individuals exploit. This exploitation is not limited to just abuse or forced labour; it also negatively impacts the child's physical and mental health, education, moral values, and social development. Apart from this human trafficking of children is another type of exploitation. The offender of human trafficking kidnapped the children for the purpose of sale, purchase, or sexual exploitation; due to this, their lives became miserable, and they also became subjects of physical and sexual exploitation.

Lack of Sex Education: In India sex education is taboo. No one wants to talk about sex education. Parents consider discussing sex education with their children to be a shameful topic. "Sex education" means teaching students about sexuality, sex, good touch, bad touch, protection, and also what to do when anyone attempts to commit sexual offenses so that they can understand the importance of sexuality for themselves and others and make informed decisions. Due to a lack of sex education, children often don't realize that something wrong has happened to them and that a bad person is taking advantage of them, or they get caught in situations that change their entire lives.

High Life Style: Due to the influence of westernization, many children want a fancy, luxurious, and high-standard life, which can only be achieved by accumulating a great deal of wealth. But in India most of the people are middle class, and they cannot fulfill their children's wishes. So due to the influence of high life style and peer group pressure, young girls engage in prostitution, and they become subjects of child sexual abuse.

Low Conviction Rate: POCSO Act, 2012 is one of the most stringent act in the India. Despite that conviction rate under this act is very low. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) 2022 data showed



that conviction in POCSO cases happened only 29.6% of cases and according to NCRB 2024, only 4% conviction rate is increased i.e 34% which is very miserable. So low conviction rate embolden criminals and also contribute to higher crime rates.

Non Reporting of Case: In India, when a sexual offense is committed against a woman or a child, parents often worry about public opinion, societal reactions, and the potential loss of reputation if the offense becomes known. Under the influence of society and reputation, most of the parents do not file the report, and due to this, criminals are not afraid to commit crimes again, so the crime rate increases day by day.

Influence of Intoxicants: Alcohol, drugs, and other narcotic substances provide a higher level of pleasure to the person for a small period, and after consumption, they affect the nervous system of the person and provoke the person to commit an offense, which becomes a major cause of offense. In many cases, it has been observed that people commit crimes unintentionally after consuming alcohol or drugs, and when questioned about it, they don't remember what they did.

Social Media: Social media has become a normal part of everyone's life, whether young or old. The use of social media has led to a significant increase in cybercrime. Children are particularly vulnerable to such crimes because they lack experience and knowledge about people. When someone speaks to them kindly, they assume the person is trustworthy and easily fall into their trap. As a result, these criminals begin to exploit the children. Prioritizing children's online safety is crucial, and parents need to be made aware of the resources available to them.

Homelessness: Homeless children are at a much higher risk of sexual abuse because they have no one to protect them. Some of them are very young and, unfortunately, fall victim to sexual exploitation. They are often unable to file a police report, which emboldens the offenders and makes them unafraid to commit the crime again. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of interpersonal cruelty are very common among these homeless children.

Mental Health Problem: Mentally ill, depressed, or psychologically disturbed children are easy targets for criminals. A mentally vulnerable child may not understand that something bad has happened to them, and therefore cannot report it to anyone. In this way, criminals easily take advantage of such children and leave them traumatized.

Lack of Policy Implementation: For the protection of children govt made many policies but these policies are made only on papers and most of them are not implemented effectively. Perpetrators of crime



take the benefits of these gaps and they easily escape from the punishment after committing crimes. Apart of this, police's insensitive attitude in reporting cases, delays in trials, lenient sentences, and tampering with evidence often result in criminals escaping punishment.

Child Marriage: Child marriage is one of the main causes of child sexual abuse. While child marriage is considered a valid marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1956, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, states that if a man has sexual relations with his wife when she is under 18 years of age, he will be considered guilty of rape. Child marriage robs children of their childhood and puts them at a higher risk of violence, exploitation, child sexual abuse, and especially teenage pregnancy, which increases the risk of death .

Consequences:-

Sexual Transmitted Disease: The danger of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) has been rising rapidly over the last few decades. Because abusers does not take the precautions to stop the spread of infection so a child who is sexually abused is constantly at risk of acquiring an STD, such as HIV. Treatment of children is very expensive, and sometimes it brutally affected the private parts of the victim and also his/her mental health.

Unintended Pregnancy: Unintended pregnancy is one of the worst physical effects of sexual abuse of teenage girls because it affects the girl not only physically but also mentally. Research found that between 11 and 20 percent of teenage pregnancies are caused by young females being sexually abused. It can be lethal in many situations and results in bad health consequences for the sufferer as well as other medical difficulties during childbirth. Among the detrimental health issues linked to adolescent pregnancies are maternal death, systemic infections, and unsafe abortions. Apart from this, sexually abused pregnant girls are forced by the families and society to terminate the pregnancy. Most such pregnancies are terminated without a doctor's prescription; due to this, many girls lose their lives or suffer mental and physical trauma.

Depression: Child sexual abuse severely damages a child's psychological and mental health. It completely destroyed the child's innocence and childhood, the time when he/she dreams beautiful dreams. The emotional wounds that he gets from the sexual abuse do not heal easily and have a profound impact on the victim's behaviour and social life. Depression, low self-esteem, difficulty forming relationships, distrust of others, lack of confidence, loneliness, lack of interest in life, and fear are some



common behavioural consequences. Crimes against children and the resulting trauma have detrimental effects on a child's developing brain

Self Mutilation: Self-harm is a type of psychological disorder in which a person develops a hatred for their own body. Child abuse is a major cause of self-harm in teenagers. When a child is sexually abused, they feel that their body has become impure, that their life is ruined, and that there is nothing left to live for. However, both the victim and our society often forget that the fault lies with the abuser, not the victim. Therefore, we should always treat the abused child like any other child.

Impaired Brain Development: Childhood is the most beautiful and memorable time in every person's life. But when this precious time is ruined, it becomes the worst time of their life. Child sexual abuse not only destroys a child's childhood but also ruins their entire life, as this is the time when a child's brain develops socially and they learn to connect with others. Sexual abuse slows down brain development and increases the risk of mental health problems such as depression and cognitive difficulties like memory impairment later in life.

Abusive Behaviour: The trauma of sexual abuse can make victims violent. They become unable to trust anyone, sometimes not even their own parents. This trauma wounds them deeply and can lead to violent behaviour. This violence is a manifestation of their inner frustration, fear, anger, and pain. It's a way for them to express the suffering they are experiencing.

Intimate Relationship: The effects of childhood sexual abuse can have a lasting impact on a person's psyche. This can make it difficult to form close and trusting relationships, as certain situations may trigger memories of the abuse. The fear and pain associated with these memories can prevent survivors from discussing the abuse with their partners.

Self Harm: Victim of sexual abuse often believe it was their fault, that they were to blame. This leads to a growing anger within them, and eventually, they feel their entire lives have been ruined and that there is nothing left for them. This mindset can lead to self-harm, and in many cases, they attempt suicide.

Social Stigma: The most powerful consequence of stigma is shame. Instead of the perpetrators, the victims face social disgrace and shame. They are blamed for the abuse they have suffered. This stigma is particularly severe and painful for child victims. This stigma persists in the victimized child's future life, often even in non-violent close relationships. A significant percentage of parents of abused children do not seek medical help for their children's health problems due to social stigma.



Recommendation for Parents and Society:-

Parents are their children's most trusted confidantes and well-wishers. Therefore, it is the primary duty of parents to protect their children from all forms of exploitation, especially sexual abuse. Parents should talk to their children about child sexual abuse and explain what it is, what constitutes good touch and bad touch, what to do if someone tries to touch their private parts, and assure them that "We are your parents, and we won't be angry with you, so you can tell us anything."

Parents must directly and indirectly monitor the activities of their child and how much time is spent with whom, who his friends are, and what the nature of his friends is, and whether they are involved in any illegal activities, especially when they are teenagers. At the teenage stage, teenagers' behaviour changes; they become arrogant. Many changes occur in his/her body due to hormonal changes, so parents should treat the children sweetly and give him/her comfort and space. Also, give him sex education in an appropriate manner so that he/she is protected from any type of sexual abuse and danger.

If a child discloses that they have been sexually abused, parents should assure them of their support and not blame the child for the abuse and also file a FIR against the offender. Parental support can help the victim heal from the emotional trauma more easily and quickly also help him/her to live their life like a normal person. Parents should reassure the child that their relationship will remain the same even after they have told the truth and assure him that no matter what happens, they will always stand by him/her.

Minors are the future of our country, therefore protecting children from all forms of abuse is not only the responsibility of parents but also of society as a whole. The POCSO Act of 2012 mandates that anyone who becomes aware of a child being subjected to sexual abuse must report it to the police. This law thus places a responsibility on the entire society. Article 51(A) of the Indian Constitution also places a responsibility on the citizens of India to educate their children and protect them from all forms of harm.

Society views the victim not as a loser or a helpless person, but as a fighter. They support the victim and try to make them feel comfortable so that they can easily overcome the situation and become strong enough to face the legal proceedings.

The government, NGOs, schools, and universities should organize workshops for children, adolescents, and adults on child sexual abuse. These workshops should teach participants how to prevent child sexual abuse, how to protect themselves from potential abusers, and what steps to take if they find themselves in danger. Parents and teachers should also participate in these workshops so they can learn how to support children in such situations. Such awareness campaigns ought to be started by local governments, civil



society organizations, the media, and law enforcement. The agenda should include teaching children how to protect themselves from perpetrators and recognize their intentions.

For the safety of children, teenagers should be taught self-defence, and this should be a part of their education. The state government should integrate self-defence into the education system and formulate guidelines and regulations for it. If the government or authorities fail to implement such programs and regulations, then society and non-governmental organizations should initiate such programs at their own level and ensure that every child learns self-defence.

The government should strictly enforce the law and enact stringent rules to safeguard the future of our country. The police should perform their duties honestly and, upon receiving such information, immediately initiate investigations with utmost caution and vigilance. More special fast-track courts should be established for speedy trials, and the courts and police should treat the victimized child with sensitivity and compassion. If the accused are found guilty, the courts should impose harsher punishments to set an example for society.

Conclusion:-

Concerted efforts are needed to curb the growing menace of child sexual abuse. Relying solely on government machinery and policy implementation is insufficient to protect our children from the monsters and predators of childhood. Families and parents must take proactive steps at the grassroots level to create a fearless and safe environment for children in society. These initial efforts, combined with strict rules, policies, and laws, can prove to be a satisfactory way to achieve the goal of child protection worldwide. Adults in society must assume positive responsibilities to protect children from sexual violence, and understanding its causes and the subsequent traumatic consequences is the first step in this direction.

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