



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Covid 19 Pandemic and Child Sexual Abuse in Tamilnadu

Dr. G. Sheela Edward
Asst. Professor, Dept. of history,
TBML College, porayar,
Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

Pandemic has generated a feeling of anxiety, fear and exasperation among children due to school closure, isolation and lack of support. Child abuse, exploitation and violence have also increased substantially during the lockdown (Child line & UNICEF, 2020). The situation of children living under institutional care is highly disconcerting. A World Health Organization report on global child abuse noted that schools were closed to 1.5 billion children worldwide because of the pandemic, and their parents face heightened stress and anxiety from lost income, social isolation, and potential crowding in the home. Additionally, more time online may expose children to a bigger nuisance of online sexual exploitation.

Preface

The impact of child abuse and neglect is often discussed in terms of physical, psychological, behavioral, or societal consequences; in reality, however, it is impossible to separate them completely. Physical consequences such as damage to a child's growing brain can have psychological implications such as cognitive delays or emotional difficulties. Psychological problems often manifest as high-risk behavior. Depression and anxiety may make a person more likely to smoke, abuse drugs or alcohol, or overeat. High-risk behaviors, in turn, can lead to long-term physical health problems such as sexually transmitted infections, cancer, or obesity. Furthermore, children who are abused are at increased risk of abusing their own children (CWIG, 2013).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been acknowledged as a severe public health distress. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as a coercive act with a child who is not capable of understanding or affording authority, leading to severe physical or mental damage. CSA includes Sexual exploitation is not rape alone. There can be many forms of sexual exploitation like clicking indecent photographs of children, making children watch pornographic content, physically teasing them, etc

Prevalence rates of CSA range from 8% to 31% for females and 3% to 17% for males. The highest rates have been reported for boys less than 18 years in Africa, i.e., 19.3% and for girls, in Australia, i.e., 21.5%. Asia has the lowest rates both 11.2% for girls and 4.1% for boys.

CSA is connected with an inauspicious impact on the child's usual progress and maturation. It too affects neurobiological systems and endocrinological profiles. Such interruption knowledgeable at some stage in the abuse has a lifespan convertible. . The CSA survivors are at a bigger hazard of increasing mental disorders. With reference to 37% of India's population encompassing children under 18, with a great percentage of them deficient in essential nourishment, education, and admittance to physical condition, approximately 53% of Indian children reported experiencing diverse kinds of maltreatment.

India leads the world as a country with maximum cases of child sexual exploitation. Statistics show that in India, every 155 minutes, a child under 16 years of age is raped. Parents of sexually abused children are scared to tell anyone due to fear of being shamed in society. It is not true that only strangers commit this crime. It can also be committed by members of the family, relatives and even neighbors. According to a survey, 90% of people sexually exploiting children are known to the children or are people whom the children trust. There have been many instances where the father himself, cousin brothers, uncle or neighbors have sexually exploited children. This shows that children need protection even while at home. They are afraid to mention this to anyone when it happens, probably out of fear of not knowing what has occurred. Sexual exploitation is not rape alone.

However, evidence shows that millions of children in India have been living under extreme poverty leading to poor nutrition, poor hygiene, cramped spaces for living and limited access to healthcare services. The susceptibility of children to COVID-19 is higher if they have limited access to healthcare for pre-existing co morbidities (Thompson & Rasmussen, 2020). Consequently, these factors put poor or vulnerable children at direr risk of experiencing consequences of COVID-19 than children in stable families. The economic crisis at the family level and loss of parents' income due to COVID-19 could push 117 million more children into poverty, amounting to 700 million children living in poor households by the end of the year in the absence of mitigating policies (UNICEF, 2020). Poverty has serious implications in terms of increasing child trafficking, forced labor and exploitation.

Integrated overview of statistics on the child rape cases in India has recorded 2113 cases registered in 2001 and 7112 cases in 2011. It is evident that there is increase of 336% of child rape cases from 2001 to 2018. In 2012, total number of child rape cases in India increased and was 8541 with Tamil Nadu contributing 3.42% and within Tamil Nadu, Tiruchirappalli district's contribution was 0.2%⁹ respectively. In 2013 total number of rape cases registered against children had a significant jump and it was 12,363 and Tamil Nadu's contribution was 3.39% and likewise Tiruchirappalli accounted for 0.4%¹⁰. The above statistics revealed in NCRB is only the tip of an enormous ice-berg called abuse against children. Since there was an alarming uptrend of human failure as

a secure society to protect its child from fellow humans, in 2012, to protect the rights of child victim from sexual offences during process of trial the legislation “The Protection of Child from sexual offences Act, 2012” was enacted adhering to the principles enunciated in CRC. Promisingly the National Crime Rate Bureau, a statistical listing unit of the crime rates in India had listed the POCSO Act, 2012, in its compendium 2014 for the first time. Cases registered under POCSO Act 2012 in the whole of India records around 8904 cases, with Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu accounting for the majority of such cases with 3637, 1058, 1055 cases respectively. Likewise in 2015 cases there was an uptrend in the number of cases filed under this act i.e., 14762 cases, with Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu again accounting for 3078, 1687, 1544 cases respectively¹¹. The most horrifying report is that 94.8% of rape cases involving children are by someone they knew, not strangers. These acquaintances include neighbors (3,149 cases) who were the biggest abusers (35.8%). 10% of cases saw children being raped by their own direct family members and relatives. Nearly half of all crimes against children in Tamil Nadu are sexual offences and their number has also gone up by 18% in 2017-18, according an analysis by Child Rights and You (CRY) of the 2018 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

In the last five years Crimes against children in Tamil Nadu rose 25%, revealed the investigation. And, 49% of all the crimes came under The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act. The 18% rise in the number of sexual offences is almost double the national average of 9.9%. Christuraj Savarinayagam, advocate and child rights activist pointed out that this could be because of better reporting, “But the rate of crime is also worrying”. Perpetrators are getting smarter, tactful and finding new ways to abuse children. The state needs to be strong. Child protection systems in every village, town and city to combat such crimes,” Savarinayagam said.

A total of 4,155 crimes were reported against children in Tamil Nadu during the past one year, which accounts for 3% of the crimes against children reported across the country. Tamil Nadu is also one of five states that reported the most cases of procuring of minor girls. There has been a 95% increase in the number of cases reported in the state over a period of one year — 76 cases reported in 2017 and 148 cases in 2018. During this time, the national average declined by 10 %

It is really worrying to see Tamil Nadu recording so many crimes against children, especially under the Pocso Act. While education, awareness and community vigilance are key factors, more money flowing into child protection will be crucial to arrest this trend,” said Karthik Narayanan, regional director, CRY south.

The lockdown has seen a spear in the instances of domestic violence as women are trapped indoors with their abusers. And many children too are at high risk of facing abuse within their homes, say activists. Considering the severely underreported category of crimes that constitute child sexual abuse (CSA) inside families, they fear the lockdown has made both reporting and intervention next to impossible. “When we get a case of a child facing abuse from a family member, we first move them to a safe space, which is not possible now,” says Sherin Bosko, founder of rape crisis centre and NGO Nakshatra.

“With lockdown, the scope for incest crimes has gone up because both the perpetrator and the victim are forced to stay indoors.” Also, the usual allies that the child may find in friends or teachers at school are now inaccessible. Activists say often sexual crimes inside homes reach the police only after they’ve become medical emergencies.

Sakshi, an NGO educating youth to prevent CSA in their families and communities, has trained around 10,000 National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers across the country and 1,249 in Tamil Nadu since the lockdown began. The 18 to 22 year olds are educated to identify symptoms of abuse in children within their families and neighborhoods. “The programme offers resolution mechanisms to the students to converse about this with two family or community members – one younger, one older. The older member becomes their ally to identify symptoms of CSA, break the silence, and call out the perpetrator,” says Smita Bharti, president and executive director, Sakshi. The signs to look out for include sudden behavioral changes in children if they have become unusually quiet, become scared of the dark, or started having nightmares. While these may seem innocuous, they do reveal that the child is troubled,” says Dr Aditi Kishore, south India head, Sakshi.

Conversely, officials at Child Line Tamil Nadu as well as the Chennai police say they haven't seen an increase in the number of CSA cases during the lockdown. A Child Line India data revealed that more than 6 lakh calls were received between March 20 and April 20, of which 18,217 calls required on ground intervention and 19% of these accounted for cases requiring protection from abuse, including sexual abuse, trafficking, abandonment and neglect. “While lockdown has limited the opportunities for the child to disclose the abuse should they choose to we must remember that all family members are constantly around now, so chances of getting abused could become slim,” says Vidya Reddy, founder of Tulir - Centre for the Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse.

Conclusion

Child abuse and maltreatment or neglect is serious problems that affect people from all walks of life all across the country. During the lockdown time there are evidences that children are fatalities of sexual abuse. They suffer several physical and mental injuries which could last a lifetime. In presence of law, the child sexual abuse will not end till the people is aware enough for the child emotional and physical healthiness need. Responsibility of care lies not only on parents but also on everyone. Mass wakefulness program beside with behavior change communication could be better solution during the Covid-19 pandemic. Preventive measures designed to ward off strangers (installing CCTV cameras and providing self-defence training) will be ineffective, as children do not know how to ward off unwanted sexual advances from their known relatives, acquaintances or workplace seniors, who they trust.

In addition UNICEF should suggest a suitable flow of information and services existing for defense of children from aggression, abuse, and ignorance during COVID-19 via text messages, educational platforms, and social media. Positive and nonviolent parenting guides are required to be provided to parents. Also UNICEF should more recommend child and family courts and juvenile justice boards to remain functional as an essential service. The require of the hour is to concern approach to assorted establishment for self-protective children from violence and abuse, which is inflicted upon them by their own family members, relatives, care takers, taking measures to make sure that counseling is set available to them. The NGOs Organizations which work in the field of child welfare need to be mobilized.

1) References

- 2) Rohan Premkumar, During pandemic, child marriages and sexual abuse cases rise in the Nilgiris,
- 3) The Hindu, April.29, 2021
- 4) Priya Menon, Tamil Nadu's child brides trapped in cycle of poverty, patriarchy, The Times of India March, 2021
- 5) How Covid-19 pandemic has put India's children at risk of abuse, exploitation and marriage, Shreya khaitan, India spend.com, June 2021.
- 6) Violence against children on the rise during lockdown, Deccan Chronicle, Apr 12, 2020,
- 7) Neelambaran. A, Tamil Nadu: Online Campaign Highlights Suffering of Women during COVID-19, News Click, Aug, 2020
- 8) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 13 September 2005. 17. Covid19 and Impact On Women - Breakthrough Available at: <https://inbreakthrough.org/covid19-and-impact-on-women/>. Accessed 30 April 2020
- 9) Violence against children Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-children>. Accessed 1 May 2020.
- 10) National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 INDIA. 2017. 8. National Commission for Women. Available at: <http://ncw.nic.in/>. Accessed 3 April 2020
- 11) Roy, Lachmi Deb (7 April 2020). "Domestic Violence Cases Across India Swell Since Coronavirus Lockdown". Outlook India. Retrieved 11 April 2020.
- 12) Jump up to: a b c S, Rukmini (18 April 2020). "Locked down with their abusers: India's domestic violence surge". Al Jazeera. Retrieved 18 April 2020.
- 13) Govt helpline receives 92,000 calls on abuse and violence in 11 days". The Economic Times. PTI. 8 April 2020. Retrieved 20 April 2020.
- 14) Brent, Harry (30 March 2020). "Domestic violence figures on the rise amid lockdown in Ireland with corona virus being used as 'weapon'". The Irish Post. Retrieved 17 April 2020.
- 15) Noor Anans Chawla and Ayesha singh, The Covid generation: India's children stare at a grim and desperate future, The Indian Express April 2021.