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NATURE, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The problem of child abuse is profoundly embedded in our olden times. It is an olden civilization in itself. Parental factors (abuse history of parents, mental health problem, domestic violence), tradition and cultural practices, illiteracy and ignorance, and Poor economy have contributed to this menace in the society. Child abuse affects the overall improvement of the child whether it is done physically, emotionally, sexually and socially. This paper examined the history of child abuse, nature of child abuse. This paper also discusses the possible causes and physical ,behavioural , psychological Consequences of child abuse.

KEYWORDS : Child Abuse, Causes, Consequences

We must protect families , we must protect children, who have inalienable rights and should be loved, should be taken care of physically and mentally and should not be brought into the world only to suffer.

..... Indira Gandhiⁱ

INTRODUCTION

Childhood in India is not homogeneous. Many childhood co-exist in India. The degree of vulnerability of Indian children is determined by social status, economic status, physical or mental ability. Thus, all children face some violation because of their status as a child in India.ⁱⁱ

Child abuse is exist in society from centuries. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect which have become part and parcel of the different forms of maltreatment to children. Child sexual abuse has been highlighted more distasteful form of child victimization. Child sexual abuse form of abuse which was once a hidden type of abuse. It is complicated form of abuse where its layers of shame and guiltⁱⁱⁱ. Millions of children have been deprived of their rights every year due to poverty, inequality, discrimination. All races, ethnicities and socioeconomic groups are affected by child abuse.

Children are a priceless reward of God. They are thriving flowers of the garden. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every member of the society to protect those flowers, from which all kinds of harmful effects of children will end. The energy, talent and mental faculties of every child should be properly arranged, trained and educated for the socio-economic and politico-cultural development of all the countries of the world. It is also a proven right of every child to be born^{iv}.

CHILD ABUSE IN HISTORICAL PERIODS

Child abuse is a phenomenon as old as the history of humanity. In ancient times, children were subjected to various types of abuse. Child abuse included forced child slavery, infanticide, enslavement of children, sacrificial killing of children etc (Kozcu, 1991). Throwing newborn babies into rivers was a common ritual of sacrifice in countries like India, China, Peru. In the second century AD, a doctor living in Ephesus recommended in his manuscript "Gynecology" that babies born prematurely or born with malformations were killed^v.

The Ancient Babylonian law known as the " Code of Hammurabi" allowed a man to sell his child in payment of a debt or in exchange for goods. In most societies, children are harassed on the pretext of discipline and training. The Jewish society beat their children to discipline and hence the proverb , " Those who spare the rod hate their children , but those who love them are diligent to discipline them". Children who disobey their parents and caregivers are disciplined with hitting, slapping, kicking, food deprivation, etc. Such acts are not considered abusive but are accepted as normal practices of discipline and training.^{vi}.

Child sexual abuse is not a new thing. Historians of the family have found that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, adults in aristocratic households in Europe sometimes treated young children as sexual playthings. A notable example includes the future king of France, Louis XIII. The youth who were sexually abused were well known to nineteenth-century Americans. In New York City, between 1790 and 1876, a third of rape victims were under the age of 19 and during the 1820, this figure was 76 percent. Historian Lynn Sacco found more

than 500 published newspaper reports of father-daughter incest between 1817 and 1899. An 1894 textbook, *A System of Legal Medicine*, reported that "the rape of children is the most common form of sexual offence." In his landmark study of female sexual behavior published in 1953, Alfred Kinsey reported that a quarter of all girls under the age of 14 reported that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse including fondling, exhibitionism and incest^{vii}.

Child sexual abuse has grabbed public attention over the past few decades and has become one of the most high-profile offences. Since the 1970, child sexual abuse has been considered highly harmful to children and thus improper to society as a whole^{viii}.

NATURE OF CHILD ABUSE

Abuse is any behavior or act that is intentionally to take possession, threaten, intimidate, or cause injury to another. It is an abuse of power that the person being close to the victim, and dependence of the victim to make the victim defenseless. Abuse may vary from mental, sexual, emotional. Child abuse is any activity, conduct and gesture by an adult. Child abuse is any activity, behavior and gestures by someone who is grow-up. It tends to be physical, sexual and emotional^{ix}.

Child abuse is related to physical force and injury to a child. The amount of force and injury to a child is the characteristic that distinguishes child abuse from general discipline. Some studies limit the term "child abuse" to children who have received serious physical injury caused willful rather than by accident". This definition has not been accepted by social scientists. Acts of neglect and maltreatment of children which do not produce an injury but are equally harmful. No definition of child abuse can be considered valid unless it includes non-physical acts like mental injury and neglect and ill treatment of a child^x.

There are various signs of child abuse. Solan described the indicators of physical abuse as burns, fractures, human bite marks, wounds, abdominal injuries, etc. Behavioral indicators of physical abuse as children show aggression in behavior, being afraid to go home or crying when it is time to go home^{xi}.

The indicators of emotional abuse are Habit disorders (Sucking, biting, rocking etc.), Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, speech disorders, inhibition of play), Psychoneurotic reactions (hysteria, obsession, compulsion), Conduct disorders (antisocial, destructible, etc) and behavioral indicator as attempted suicide, complaint, passive^{xii}.

Sexual abuse indicators are divided in two parts as physical and behavioral indicators. Physical indicators include difficulty in walking or sitting, pain or itching in genital area, pregnancy, venereal disease, especially in pre-teens. Behavioral indicators include Poor peer relationships, bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior^{xiii}.

CAUSES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse depends on a large variety of specific factors ranging from the personality profiles of victims and perpetrators to their environment. According to the WHO, no single factor can explain why some individuals mistreat others or why abuse is more common in some situations than in others. It is considered as a complex interaction of factors related to individuals, human relationships and social, cultural and environmental factors^{xiv}. Child abuse can happen in a number of circumstances. Here are several cases where a child is victimized:

- **Parental factors**

Parental risk factors are responsible for child abuse. It includes abuse history of parents, mental health problem, domestic violence, criminal history, drug and alcohol problem. Parents who were abused as children are more likely to abuse their own children. Domestic violence can be a cause of child abuse. This includes all physical assault, periods of intimidation and harassment or threat between a parent and another adult in the home. A parent's alcohol and drug problems may be to blame for child abuse. The issue of parental intoxication and alcohol disrupts family function and marital relations. Thus, children are becoming victims of child abuse due to alcohol and drug problem of the parents^{xv}.

- **Structure and size of family**

Family structure and size are fundamental factors of child abuse. Children coming from large families are very vulnerable as parents do not find much time for each child. Children of single parents or divorced parents are particularly susceptible. Children from dysfunctional families or poor families are vulnerable of sexual abuse. Parental substance abuse or alcohol addiction is also associated with child abuse^{xvi}.

- **Lack of effective Implementation of legislation and policy**

Lack of implementation of legislation and policy is another reason for child abuse. There is a gap between law and implementation. This is the reason why criminals get full chance to gather courage to commit such heinous crime. Insensitive behavior by the police in reporting cases, delay in trial, conviction and tampering with evidence do not bring punishment to the offender.

- **Poverty**

Poverty is the single greatest threat to the well-being of children. It is major cause of child abuse and neglect. It may affect every area of a child's development. Several studies have found a strong link between poverty and child abuse. The studies lay down high levels of unemployment and poverty have higher rates of abuse. Further, studies provide communities with high level of poverty have poor physical and social infrastructure^{xvii}.

- **Illiteracy and Ignorance**

Illiteracy is another reason why most people abuse children. Today, numerous parents who abuse their children because due to lack of education, they do not have the necessary means to meet their children's needs. These parents could not find better paying jobs. Therefore, these parents were also forced to ferry small items.

- **Tradition and Cultural Practices**

Traditional and cultural practices are the main cause of child abuse. Child labour, child marriage, son preference, caste based discrimination and consequent neglect of the girl child, are harmful traditional practices and are responsible for child abuse in the society. The Devadasi tradition is prevalent in other parts of the country^{xviii}.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse can affect the overall development of the child whether it is done physically, emotionally, sexually and socially. This paper discusses the possible consequences of child abuse.

- **Physical Consequences**

Child abuse has consequences on the physical health of the child. The effect of child abuse can be very harmful and long lasting. In cases of sexual abuse of girl child, girl child suffer from chronic pelvic pain. Brutal child abuse results in genital injuries such as hymen laceration or damage to the genital organs of the victim girl and urinary retention^{xix}.

- **Behavioural Consequences**

Children subjected to corporal punishment show a greater tendency towards aggressive and risky behaviour. Children run away from home, lie and commit crimes because of aggressive and risky behaviour. Children who experience physical abuse or neglect and sexual abuse, have less academic success. Abused children are become addicted to drugs, alcohol.

- **Psychological Consequences**

Child abuse have psychological effect. It include low self esteem, depression and relationship difficulties. Physical and sexual abuse children suffer from personality disorder, depression anxiety and other psychiatric disorders^{xx}. Child abuse destroys the entire psychology of the child. This pushes him into deep emotional distress. These may also include bed wetting, sleep disorders. A child who is abused has a sense of guilt. The child begins to blame himself, holds himself responsible for everything that happened.

CONCLUSION

Child abuse is an abuse of the self-respect of human being. It not only affect the physical, and mental health of children. But it also affects the child 's parents life. This creates permanent, long-lasting and multifaceted problems for the society and the victims. Child abuse can be reduced if children are given proper training. Today's victimized children, without protection and treatment, may become the child abusers of tomorrow. Parents should be taught that every child needs care and attention. It is basic needs of all children. Promotion should be positive towards social and cultural norms, attitudes, traditions, and practices, that are essential to address such issues of child abuse. Capabilities of families, caregivers and all those who come in contact with children should be strengthened. Due to increased capabilities, they will be able to provide effective care and protection of children.

“Violence against children is a serious breach of human rights, which must end NOW! Let us continue to work together to make this world a world free from any forms of violence against children.”

..... Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, Secretary General, Save the Children Sweden^{xxi}

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