

Sexual Abuse against Children

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Abstract - Child sexual abuse, a high-profile crime prevalent in most parts of the world, yet, it stands in need of attention even in the 21st century. Childhood being the most important phase of a child's development, when crushed under the debilitating effects of abuse, leaves an incessant effect that one carries for years. To the child, the abuse might seem as clear as the daylight, yet as dark as a gloomy night, being stuck in the inescapable stark and inexorable bout of sufferings caused due to oppression from various forms perpetrated against him/her by a close and trusted person. It seems obscure until the child becomes conscious about what exactly is happening, but once aware, this consciousness brings with itself an all-encompassing and overpowering feeling of fear, guilt and angst, which the child vents on himself/herself, causing self-harm in numerous ways, becoming evasive, and questioning self-worth. The unbearable pain of accepting what has happened and the gut wrenching feeling of not being able to disclose the abuse to anyone, fearing embarrassment, aggravates, resulting in a series of arduous yet futile attempts at camouflaging the scars and staying nonchalant as if nothing ever happened.

No doubt it alleviates the suffering for some time but there is no assurance, god forbid, that the brunt of the maelstrom is not going to recur again in the form of reality or as a nightmare or, and if it happens, it embarks the appalling phase of reclusion, forcing the victim to suffer in silence, cursing self for the tragedy that the child was not at all responsible for, slowly walking towards darkness and gradually becoming an enemy to oneself. Little did the child know that the internal havoc and suffering of all-consuming humiliation and misery is more detrimental than the effects of taking a stand for the self. The overwhelming feeling when the mind continuously ponders and laments over the question, "WHY ME?", crumbles the heart into a million pieces, and, shattered and lifeless, the innocent child is forced to carry the imbued image of self, making the child aggressive and hysteric, lowering morale and going further down on the path of dejection. A feeling of being lost, hopeless, depressed for the trauma, and anxious for every little thing, pervades all senses, all at the same time. It is exactly like the feeling of being trapped in a life beautiful from outside but plagued from inside, devoid of any idea about how to live this miserable life.

And what's weird about our Indian society is that even if the child gathers the courage to speak up after a lot of lurking and annihilation to the closest one, seeking support and trying to find a way to unburden the heart to some extent from the distress, the child gets slammed with the so-called saying, "Ssshhhhh....don't say this to anybody else, it will have undesirable consequences, you will be looked down on," and the topic vanishes from conversation the very next moment, giving rise to the feeling that the suffering isn't really a matter of concern for anybody else. This suffering is completely personal.

Index Terms - Child, Sexual Abuse, Family, Rape, Crime, Nightmares

INTRODUCTION

On November 29, 2020, an all-women police station team in Chennai, took into custody a television reporter, 39-year-old Vinoba G, who, along with 15 others, had compelled a 13-year-old girl Perumbakkam into prostitution after having sexually assaulted her for months. Earlier, the girl's six relatives, a police inspector, a BJP functionary, a few brokers as well as men who raped her over a period of two months were arrested.

Another major news of such heinous sexual assault on a child was the rape, torture and murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl in Kathua, in Indian-administered Kashmir, in January 2018. Three men were sentenced to life imprisonment, while three police officers, supposedly keepers of national safety and security, were found guilty of destroying evidence, and sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment. Eight people, including a former government official, four policemen and a minor, were charged in connection with the crime. While one of them was later acquitted, the minor was set to be tried separately.

Right next door, in Pakistan, Imran Ali, who was convicted for the rape and murder of a 7-year-old girl in Kasur, Pakistan, was hanged to death the morning of October 17, 2018, in Kot Lakhpat Central Jail. The police had arrested Imran two weeks after he raped and

killed the minor girl and abandoned the body in a dumpster. But once her was found, nationwide protests spread fast and furious in Pakistan, the intensity of which triggered the police to conduct DNA tests on more than 1,000 suspects, and finally arrest Imran.

On February 17, in a rather swift judgment, the court handed him four counts of death sentences, one life imprisonment, a 7-year jail term and a hefty fine of Rs. 4.1 million.

Makes us wonder though, while Imran met his fate, closer home when would the Kathua rape victim get justice?

Farther away, in January 2020, Jelani Minaj, brother of the popular American rapper, Nicki Minaj, was sentenced to 25 years of life imprisonment for sexually assaulting an 11-year-old girl, at his New York residence. The sentencing came more than two years after Maraj was found guilty of predatory sexual assault and child endangerment in November 2017.

Sometimes I find it hard to believe that such an atrocious crime is even possible. I have often heard from a particular category of people whose minds still dwell in the age of the dinosaurs, that rape takes place because women provoke men by wearing inappropriate clothes, or by being too smart, or independent. I am now inclined to ask these people, how exactly do children provoke their assaulters. The saddest part is, most often the assault is perpetrated by family members, or someone much trusted upon. This breaks my heart; an age which is meant for enjoying, playing and learning, turns into one of nightmares and destroyed innocence.

The reality of sexual abuse on children is a disturbing reality in the world over. Despite it being a widely recognized social issue, the majority of jurisdictions are yet to develop mechanisms of protecting their children from being victims of the vice. Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a widespread issue that causes harm to thousands of children in the world over; to both girls and boys; in small and large communities; across all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Besides, the acts are perpetrated by a wide variety of offenders, including women and men, trusted friends, strangers, family members, and others. Against this backdrop, it becomes important to explore the psychological effects of the victims that cause them to withdraw from the society in the majority of sexual- assault- on-children incidences.

In recent years, the issue of sexual abuse on children has been connected to development of psychological dysfunctions amongst victims. The observation is held against the backdrop that childhood experiences play a fundamental role in shaping their well-being and health in the course of their lives. The study by Assink et al. (2019) indicates that sexual abuse can form scars which might be impossible to cure for a long time. Different forms of sexual abuse exist: a reason why it has become difficult to have a definite definition of the vice.

Sexual abuse on children involves a stronger victim overpowering a weaker one. In such a situation, one thing is certain: every act of sexual abuse on children always leaves them psychologically destroyed and struggling with identity issues. One of the common misconceptions that hinder positive progress includes the notion that the vice is solely perpetrated against the female gender by male offenders who are formerly strangers to their victims. The act occurs when one individual overpowers and takes advantage of the other through sexual activity or suggestive gestures (Borelli et al., 2019). Consequently, the victims' self-esteem is always impaired since they consider themselves weak and unworthy as reasons why such a tragic incidence occurred to them.

Past studies correlate sexual abuse amongst children with levels of guilt, depression, and eating disorders. Depression was identified as the most prevalent enduring impact amongst survivors (Choudhry et al., 2018). They could face difficulties contemplating the abuse and develop negative feelings and thoughts about themselves. The outcome is withdrawal from their social circle and keeping to themselves since they feel they lack something meaningful to offer.

HISTORY OF SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN

The atrocity against children is not new but has strong cases, not only in India but all over the world. My heart skips a beat when I read about the misconduct done to children not even half year old. Sexual abuse done against children is often committed by their acquaintances, distant relatives and friends. One of the main forms of child sexual abuse is child marriage, UNICEF has stated "Child marriage represents perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls." The word "Pedophile" is

commonly applied to those who sexually abuses a child. Child sexual abuse has gained public attention in the past few decades and is now serving as one of the high-profile crimes but existed long back, with no one talking about it, complaining about it to protect the name of the family and to uphold their dignity. There was no such thing as child abuse until the 1920's. It was during the second wave of feminism which spoke distinctly about sexual child abuse and made it a public, political issue. Judith Lewis Herman, Harvard professor of psychiatry, wrote the first book on father-daughter incest which she had discovered during her medical residency that a large number of women she was seeing had been victims of father-daughter incest. Her second book *Trauma and Recovery* coined the term "complex post-traumatic stress disorder" and included child abuse as the main cause. When I read about the history of sexual abuse, my heart broke into pieces to know the man we consider our heroes and first love, the man who created were the one exploiting. In world full of strangers and people waiting to knock you down, a daughter looks up to her father to protect, but sadly the history of sexual child abuse was started by fathers. However, child sexual abuse is not solely about physical contact, there is a non-contact abuse such as exposure and child pornography.

SEXUAL CHILD ABUSE STATISTICS

Studies by David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes against Children Research Center. Shows that:

- 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse.
- Studies shows that about 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males recall a childhood sexual abuse incident.
- During one-year period, 16% of youth ages 14-17 have become victims of sexual abuse.
- 37% of India's population are girls under 18 and about 53% reported different kinds of abuses done to them.

According to a study conducted in 1986, 63% of women who had suffered sexual abuse by a family member also reported rape or attempt to rape after the age of 14. Recent studies in 2000, 2002, 2005 have all concluded similar results.

According to the Journal of Adolescent Health, compared to those with no history of sexual abuse, young males who were sexually abused were five times more likely to cause teen pregnancy and three times more likely to have multiple partners.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DURING COVID-19

Covid-19, other than its own destruction, also increased crimes such as domestic violence, marital rape and child sexual abuse. When the whole world had to stay indoors, these devil minds got what they always wanted and the crimes doubled and CSA committee in India reported a 50% increase in the phone calls than usual days in the last two weeks of the lockdown, out of the total calls received during the period, 30% were related to protection from abuse. There were many social media campaigns which were made in order to protect them. Nykka had started a initiated which aimed at saving such victims by giving code names to various abuses, when the whole world was trying to fight the pandemic, these victims were trying to fight for themselves and save their lives from such atrocious beings. Interpol report 2020 suggests there is increase in the child sexual abuse videos in the darknet during Covid-19. In a district Dhenkanal, Odisha the pandemic led to increased incidence in sexual abuse in minors. From April 27 to September 30, about 27 minor girls have reportedly been sexually abused in the district. It is sad to read about such incidents when the World didn't know whether they will survive to this pandemic or not.

CONCLUSION

A positive relationship exists between sexual abuse on children and enduring psychological effects on the victims. Various forms of sexual abuse amongst children exist and the victims stretch from close family members to strangers. In recent decades it has been difficult to control sexual abuse amongst children because of the misconception that it is girls who fall victims to male offenders. Past studies indicate that survivors of sexual abuse tend to develop a myriad psychological disorders, such as depression, low self-esteem, guilt, eating disorders, amongst others; leading to withdrawal from the larger society. Is there a way to stop such atrocities on a child? I don't know. But I do know that a child is innocent, pure, with a

spring in the step and dream sin the eyes. We have no right to spoil that innocence by our bestiality, defile that purity by our monstrosity, or shatter their dreams for our few seconds of sadistic, inhuman, twisted pleasure. People who stoop to such lows should be clobbered to death. And there should be a law to enforce this as fast as possible. No sexual assaulter should be running around free within minutes of the crime coming into the forefront. That is how it should be. That is probably how a lesson could be taught. Making the world safer for our children lies in our hands. Let us do it together, you and I. Period.

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