

Impact of Child Abuse: Stop Talking Start Doing

Abstract

Childhood is the most important and precious time of life. It depicts innocence of nature, purity of heart and goodness of mind. Child gathers a lot of experiences during childhood and they decide the developmental path for him. It is the foundation building time of life so child seeks utmost care and love from his family, teachers and society. A single act of ignorance or violence can shatter his whole life and leave unforgettable imprints of agony, dishonour and fear on child's mind and soul. Child abuse is an act of physical, mental or emotional violence. It results into various physical injuries or diseases, psychological issues and developmental hazards. It is duty of every parent, society and nation to protect children from any kind of abuse. This paper throws light on meaning, types and consequences of child abuse and also talks about needed interventions.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Abuse in Schools and Home.

Introduction

Child is the core of family system as the whole notion of marriage revolves around family making and having children. Family is the key element of society and child is the centre of it. Child is like a blank slate and every experience he gathers, leaves deep impression on his mind. Life experiences decide the direction of child's growth. So it is very important to provide fruitful experiences by creating congenial environment in family, school and society. If Child receives abusive behaviour and grows in an authoritarian environment his growth gets seriously hammered. It is the core responsibility of parents, relatives and teachers to treat children with utmost care and concern. Child's mind is very delicate and fragile and a single act of physical or emotional mistreatment can lead to broken personality. Nowadays parents at home and teachers at school are expected to provide safe environment to children but sometimes children face bad behaviour which they do not know how to handle and whom to talk about it. This mal-behaviour can be in the form of mistreatment, neglect or abuse. Incidents of mistreatment have increased in the past few years. It is a matter of great concern for the entire society and nation as Children are future of both of the above.

Aim of the study

Child abuse is a highly threatening and horrible situation for any child. Few decades back only physical violence and sexual assault was supposed to be child abuse but in recent times psychological, emotional as well as neglect also comes under the head of abusive behaviour as all of these mal-behaviour, negatively affect the cognitive, emotional and physical growth of the child. In most of the cases, child fears to talk about a mistreatment and even if he tells his elders about it, parents like to hide it rather than reporting a case. Social taboos and societal reaction pressurize them for this. But it is quite essential to create awareness among parents and teachers so that they can support the child as well as take a legal action against the culprit. The aim of this paper is to understand the extent of child abuse across the globe and to suggest measures to stop this crime.

Child Abuse

Innocent Children with little exposure and experiences are vulnerable, easy to misguide and misbehave. Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional, sexual mistreatment or lack of care that causes injury or emotional damage to a child or youth [Canadian Red Cross]. Child abuse is a serious matter as it hampers the growth of child by causing damage to his body, mind and soul. It encompasses both physical and psychological aspects and ranges from mistreatment to neglect. People feel that Child abuse means physical and sexual misbehaviour but it also



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enfolds emotional maltreatment, lack of care and neglect of Child. Sometimes neglecting a child causes greater damage to child's personality in comparison to physical misbehaviour. WHO throws light on the dangerous consequences of child abuse by defining it as "all forms of physical or emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse or negligent treatment or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the Child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship or responsibility, trust or power" This definition elaborates the meaning and consequences of child abuse. It is clear that child abuse not only harms growth of the child but also destroys his dignity and self-respect. When a child faces any kind of abuse his trust on relationships is shaken to his core. The deep imprints of abusive behaviour are very hard to erase and can lead to different phobias. It seriously affects mental health of the child. Abuse and neglect are two poles of mistreatment. Abuse refers to act of commission while neglect refers to act of omission [Australian institute of family studies]. If a child is neglected or not appreciated for his talent and good work, if he doesn't find anyone at the time he needs help, if he is not listened to or taken care of he feels left and neglected resulting into high level of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and even suicidal thoughts.

WHO (2006) advocates that child abuse has various forms. It can be physical, sexual, and psychological and neglect. First two types denote harmful physical behaviour like beating, corporal punishment and establishing forceful sexual relation. The involvement of dependent child or adolescent in sexual activities with an adult in which a child is used as a sexual object for gratification of older person's need and desires and to which the child is unable to give consent due to unequal power in the relationship is called sexual abuse (Gupta and Kumar 2006). The other side of child abuse is emotional and psychological. Rejecting, humiliating, terrorizing, isolating and corrupting a child come under the heading of emotional abuse (www.childhelp.org). Child labour is also a form of child abuse as it involves physical and emotional humiliation. Emotional abuse can disturb emotional balance of the child. He can show extreme emotions, aggression, anti-social behaviour, high anxiety and sleep disorder.

Extent of Child Abuse

Sometimes it is assumed that child abuse is a problem of poor countries only but it is a problem spread across communities, states and countries. It covers both boys and girls and ranges from infancy to adolescence. In 1999 BBC reported the RAHI foundations survey of sexual abuse in India in which 76 percent of respondents said that they had been abused as children, 40 percent of those stating that perpetrator was a family member. PRAYAS foundation in collaboration with ministry of women and child development India (2005) conducted a survey on the extent of child abuse. It was found that one out of five children face emotional abuse. The level of emotional abuse was seemed to be highest in young children (44.3%). 18.2 percent children reported physical injuries by family members due to

beating. 27.9 percent children told about adults trying to rub their private parts against children in private place. Boys (52.9%) are as much sexually abused as girls (47.1%). Another survey conducted by ministry of women and child development (2007) showed that prevalence of all forms of child abuse is extremely high (physical abuse 66%, sexual abuse 50% and emotional abuse 50%). A survey by UNICEF on demography and health in India from 2005 to 2013, reported that ten percent of Indian girls might have experienced sexual violence when they were 10-14 years of age and 30 percent during 15-19 years of age. As stated earlier child abuse is found across the globe. Boys, girls and even children with disabilities are found to be victims of child abuse. Sumba and Abosi (2011) conducted a study to know the extent of abuse in children with disabilities. 31 pupil with disabilities (15 hearing impaired and 15 vision impaired) were selected from special schools in Botswana. It was found that majority of participants sexually, physically and emotionally abused by their teachers. In 2015 an estimated 1670 children died from abuse and neglect in U.S.A. nearly 70000 children are abused annually. Out of total abused children three-fourth suffered neglect, 17.2 percent suffered physical abuse and 8.4 percent suffered sexual abuse. It is clear that extent of child abuse is quite high in most of the societies. Children are found to be soft targets as they are easy to threaten. They don't know how to tackle an abusive situation. That is why they are easily abused by a stranger, teacher, relative and even parents. The Global Status Report on Violence prevention, 2014 says reported homicides in India in 2012 was 35122. It is 2.89% per 100,000 population.

NCANDS data released in 2018 and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2018 in United States of America, show a mix set of trends over the short-term. Neglect continued to decline (down 1% from 2015), Sexual abuse was essentially unchanged. By contrast physical abuse rose 5% and child maltreatment fatalities rose by 8%.

Child Abuse At Home and School

Statement of John Locke that child is like a blank slate denotes the importance of childhood experiences. The training child receives, knowledge he gathers and behaviour he encounters determine his personality development. Home is supposed to be the safest place for child. He receives utmost love and care by family members. It is his first school and mother is the first teacher. He learns language, manners, etiquettes, values and traditions at home only but sometimes home turns into most dangerous place of his life and parents become culprits of child abuse. Authoritarian environment at home, poverty and illiteracy form base for child abuse. Children of the family are mistreated, punished or pushed into child labour. In a survey it was found that four out of five child abusers are victim's parents in U.S.A (all nation child abuse and abuse statistics 2015). In most of the physical and sexual abuse cases parents and relatives are found to be guilty. Physical abuse can be diagnosed easily but emotional abuse is hard to identify. A survey conducted by PRAYAS foundation

revealed that out of those girls with brothers (4138) 48.4 percent girls feel that parents take side of brothers. Gender discrimination leads to neglecting girl child. It is also seen that in order to prove their kids the best parents become too rigid and over conscious about studies. They do not accept child's interest in other fields and continuously compare him with his siblings and classmates. This type of humiliation breaks child's self confidence and self respect.

School is a place where child's developmental story is written. He gains knowledge life experiences vocational training and skills in school. He gets influenced by his teachers but sometimes teachers with ill minds act as child abusers and deteriorate his personality. A study by national commission for protection of child's rights conducted among 6632 respondents in 7 states of India revealed that 99 percent children face corporal punishments in schools. Daral s et al (2016) conducted a study on 1060 adolescent girls studying in semi-urban government schools of Delhi. It was found that approximately 70% study subjects faced at least one form of maltreatment. Physical abuse was faced by 42.6%, sexual abuse by 26.62%, emotional abuse by 37.9% and neglect by 40%.

Any form of child abuse leads to serious mental and physical disorders. It can delay the development of child. He can face speech disorders learning and health problems due to abuse. It also affects behavioural and psychological path of growth. Child can even develop anti social behaviour resulting into engagement in criminal activities. He is not only physically and socially disturbed but his emotional balance is shattered. He can show extreme emotions aggression and over complaining nature (www.childhelp.org). His personality is suppressed, dreams are shattered and cognitive development is destroyed. A longitudinal study on the effect of child abuse and children' exposure to domestic violence (2006) shows that exposure to domestic violence increases the chance of experienced behavioural and emotional problems like depression, irritability, academic problems and problem in language development (www.unicef.org). A child who faces abuse shows sudden fall in school achievement. They become over aggressive, neglect teacher's instructions, become over defensive or offensive and feel isolated without reason. Their attention and retention power is subsidised.

Interventions

Responsibility of nurturing a child doesn't only lie on the shoulders of family. It is a joint responsibility of family and the state to provide a healthy and safe environment to the children. Family members should be fully aware of child's development and should create an environment in which potential of child reach to the fullest, in which he gathers sound experiences, can realise his ability and his personality can bloom. Abusive behaviour pushes a child into black hole of physical and mental illness. Educating and supporting parents, creating awareness about support services and laws are essential interventions to prevent child abuse. Education empowerment and

enabling mechanism can be helpful in child protection (Saini, 2013). Educating parents about different laws and government schemes, empowering families by financial support can remarkably reduce child abuse and child labour. WHO suggests that child maltreatment can be prevented through interventions that support parents, provide education and life skill training, strengthen family income and economic security, offer high quality response and support services, create and sustain safe environment for children and implement laws against child maltreatment. Eliminating roots of a problem is the best way to treat it. Broken families, poverty, communication gap with children, bad relationship between parents, child labour and contact with ill minded person are some root causes of child abuse. Creating awareness about consequences of child abuse can make parents more flexible and communicative towards their children. Parents should establish healthy relationship with their children. They should start open conversations and behave friendly so that children can talk freely to them about their personal problems and tell them about any kind of abuse they face. Financial assistance in the form of welfare schemes and easy bank loans should be provided to poor families so that children are not pushed into child labour. Parents should be encouraged to enrol their wards in schools to gain knowledge and skills for their future lives. Parents and teachers should always keep an eye upon child's behaviour and if they find any kind of sudden change in the behaviour, emotions or habits of the child they should talk and try to dig the reason behind it.

Many laws, various schemes and support service have been provided to protect children against child abuse. In India a national commission for protection of child rights was set in 2007. A national policy for children 2012 has replaced 1974 policy. The ninth ISPCAN Asia pacific conference of child abuse and neglect 2011 reaffirmed and placed a resolve to stand against the neglect and abuse of children rights and the building of a caring community for every child, free of violence and discrimination. The government of India has reported thrice to the United Nations on national efforts to realise child rights. Its latest report (2011) lists some welcome forward looking legislations and actions but unfortunately lacks information on impact of laws and programs and actual benefits. State bears three fold responsibilities towards elimination of child abuse. First, setting suitable laws, second ensuring effective implementation of laws and third establishing support services for victims of child abuse. In India many laws have been set and many schemes have been launched but lacuna lies in the implementation part. Any rule or law cannot bring a change by itself until its effective implementation is insured. Culprits take advantage of gaps in laws and do not fear committing a crime. Child abuse is a situation in which a small kid is the victim. They are easy to manipulate and threaten. In most of the cases children do not tell their elders about the abusive behaviour and the situation becomes worse when parents or relatives are the culprits. Even parents do not know where to report a

case of child abuse, how to support the child and what all schemes are there to get benefited from. In most of the cases social taboos stop parents to take an action against the culprit. They feel reporting a case of child abuse will dishonour them and society will laugh and discard them forever. Mody and Seth (2008) suggest that family awareness of the rights and information about government assistance would ensure proper utilisation of various schemes. It can be said that child abuse is a ugly truth of the society and providing a safe environment to the children should be the top most priority of every parent teacher and state. Classroom discussions, debates drama, posters and short films are effective means of creating awareness about child abuse among children. Children should be encouraged to report any unwanted or wrong behaviour. Culprits should be punished and child should get love and support from the family.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that child abuse is an ugly truth that prevails in most of the societies. Whether developing or developed, most of the nations are facing this problem. Child abuse is not limited to girls only but boys and disabled children are also found to be victims of it. In India, reported cases of child abuse are quite less than the actual number of cases. Parents of victim child do not know where to seek help and what all government schemes are there to help the child that is why they suppress the whole incident of abuse. It is very important to teach children about good and bad touch and also establish healthy and open relationship with child so that he can freely talk about anything with his elders. Good communication can check many abusive incidences at an early stage.

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