



An enquiry into the safety concerns of sexually abused girls against their vulnerability

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse is a common and a serious social problem in every society. It not only leaves a scar on the soul and the body of the victim, but also puts her entire family into shame and indignity. The majority of sexual assault cases is never reported to avoid social stigma and the number of such cases are only the tip of the iceberg.

This study focused on the protection issues and concerns towards sexually abused girls who were living in a vulnerable situation. Case study method was used for data collection. About six case studies of the victims who were sexually abused during 2015 to 2019 were selected for in-depth interview to understand the vulnerability of the girls and their family and the risk factors for ensuring their protection. Home study was also conducted for understanding the family background of the abused girls.

For ensuring multiple reasons for protection the researcher presented 6 cases. Interviews with six girls, and the offenders were analyzed with regard to the amount and type of information reported. The study compares the relationship between the protection issues and vulnerability of girls who has experienced sexual abuse living in socially and economically poor families. The majority of the girls reported with severe sexual assaults were from poor family background. In spite of expressing the highest form of insecurity both mentally and physically, the youngest child in this study was not willing to leave her mother emotionally. The present study indicated the girls' difficulties on reporting sexual abuse, even when the perpetrator is a stranger or a familiar person. The outcome of the study showed the vulnerability and its insecurity of protecting the girls from sexual abuse.

Key Words: Sexually abused girls, safety concerns, vulnerability, protection.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a common and a serious social problem in every society. It not only leaves a scar on the soul and the body of the victim, but also puts her entire family into shame and indignity. Child sexual abuse is a physical act and a psychological experience. As a physical act, it involves both touch and non-touch behaviors. As a psychological experience, it represents an abuse of power and authority, where perpetrators satisfy them emotionally and sexually and children are hurt and confused. Perpetrators get a thrill and a high out of sexual abuse, while children are afraid, confused, ashamed, and embarrassed. Children also feel used and discounted. Some children are so scared it is almost as if they are not there, and the sexual acts are being done to someone else. This is a psychological state called disassociation. The majority of sexual assault cases is never reported to avoid social stigma and the number of such cases are only the tip of the iceberg.

Methodology

This study focused on the protection issues and concerns towards sexually abused girls who were living in a vulnerable situation. Case study method was used for data collection. About six case studies of the victims who were sexually abused during 2015 to 2019 were selected for in-depth interview to understand the vulnerability of the girls and their family and the risk factors for ensuring their protection. Home study was also conducted for understanding the family background of the abused girls. For ensuring multiple reasons for protection the researcher presented 6 cases. Interviews with six girls and the offenders were analyzed with regard to the amount and type of information reported. The study compares the relationship between the protection issues and vulnerability of girls who has experienced sexual abuse living in socially and economically poor families.

Case study analysis

Case No: I

Age of the girl: 9 years

Education: 5th standard

Father was working as a cook in a Hotel. The members of the family had been residing in quarters on rental basis for the last 5 years. The mother doesn't have any regular job. The child's brother's is studying in 4th STD and her Sister is studying in 2nd STD. As per the child's words, she was sexually abused by her father around 3 weeks before. She said she could not remember the exact date. On that day, her father removed her panties, and tried to lay upon her body. She said, her mother actually witnessed the incident. At the same time, her father pretended like nothing was happened there. The mother also revealed that her husband had sexually abused her daughter even prior to this incident. She also seems to distressed to reveal on his husband's immoral sexual life. Father had an alcoholic dependence syndrome. He is addicted to alcohol and reported to be leading an immoral life.

Mother had reported this matter to the nearest school Headmaster. The father of the girl had revengeful feelings against her in this regard. A few days later, in an evening, after school time, when the child came to her house with her

siblings, her father intentionally harassed her physically by forcefully punching her stomach and lower abdomen by holding her neck forcefully. At that time, her mother was reportedly not present at the spot. The children were scared and hid this issue from their mother. The child has reported severe pain in her lower abdomen by interviewing her. The child is deeply attached with her mother and likes to live with her mother. Because of poor family situation & lack of job security the mother couldn't manage the household expenses and rent by her alone. After this issue the mother and children were forced to leave their rental house. So they were forced to shift their residence to another rented house that was far away from their earlier home. A complaint under POCSO (Protection of children from Sexual offences act) Act was filed against him. By the order of Child Welfare Committee the mother and her three children were placed in Govt. Mahilamandir. Researcher observed that the girl and her sister had strong revengeful attitudes towards their father. Both of them wish to live together with her Mother. The family is very poor and broken at present. The child is undergoing a lot of stressful feelings due to the lack of parental support. The child needs psycho-social support with education in a stress free environment.

Case No: II

Age of the girl: 16 Years.

Education: 8th std

The child is the sole daughter of her parents. Parents are engaged in coolie works. She hails from a tribal community. They are illiterates.

The girl is 16 years old. She is in the second stage of adolescence. Researcher noticed that, the girl having a thought fluctuation towards her infatuation. She had been in love with an 18 year boy, for the past 1 year and so. As per the child's words, the boy had proposed her to marry. Their place of residence is nearby. It is a reserved forest area. There is no transportation facility towards the place. The nearby town is far away from her home. Both of them are studied in the same school. It is observed that the girl is alone in her to- and -fro journey for the schooling. She is in a family of tribal community and the JCL is in a family with higher social strata. She was allegedly exploited by her own lover, sexually during her return to home. After the school time the boy followed the girl and he had tried to abuse the girl. As per her words, he pushed the girl in to the forest near by her place of residence and sexually abused.

Adolescent frustration and lack of parental care has been observed. The girl's friends were in support with her relationships. Peer group pressure may be a factor for emerging such issues in adolescence, especially in this case. The place of residence of the child is in a tribal area. No transportation facility is available. The educational institutions are away from this area. It is also a dangerous situation for the child's protection. The parents feel it as a burden to arrange paid special vehicle for her travel to school.

Case No: III

Age of the girl: 12 years

Education: illiterate

Because of poor socio-economic situation of her family, the girl was trapped and trafficked by an agent nearby her village. Her village is situating in Odisha state. On 2014, she was trafficked to Kerala. As per her words her father and the agent came together to Kerala. Father placed in another location as a labourer. She was placed in a house for doing household work for 1 year on bonded labor basis. As per her words, she reached to a big House for cattle rearing. The child did know only the house hold cleaning work just before coming for bonded labor. From the house she learned cattle feeding and cooking. Even though she has been doing all duties in the cattle, she couldn't get single rupee of salary for her laborious work. And she was brutally raped by the House Owner. As per her words; most of the less-fortunate children in her place are forced to do child labor. Trafficking is common and there are some agents who act as mediators in the transfer of these children to different locations. Most of the parents are not aware about; where these children are working and the difficulties they are facing

By the interview, it is realized that girl had been facing lack of proper care and protection from her place of residence. If the child has been transferred to her native place, there is a potential danger to repeat the incident. That is; there are more chances to hand over the girl to the same or other agents in the locality to exploit her labor potentials.

Case No: IV

Age : 6 Years

Education: 1 STD

She is the sole child of his parents. Her mother was working as ayah in a School. His father was a person with alcohol dependence. As per her words, when the father tried to sexually abused by the girl in inebriated mood, the mother had prevented the attempt. In that attempt, the father of the child was allegedly killed by his mother. His mother was on remand custody in sub jail and after 3 month mother is released on bail. She was under care and protection of her grandmother. Four months before grandmother died of Jaundice. Grand father is also alcoholic and not willing to take care of the child. So the child was placed in short term custody Children's Home. Four months before grandmother died of Jaundice. Grand father is also alcoholic and not willing to take care of the child.

Ofcourse he is a vulnerable child requiring immediate attention. But the options are less when it happens in a rural village where the existing system is weak due to lack of proper institutions. Crisis is due to the tender age of the child. More over there is no such institution where both the mother and child can be admitted. Here the general options of Non-institutional care such as Foster care /Adoption/ Fit person are not in an immediate reach.

Case No: V

Age : 15 year

Education : SSLC

As per the child's words, she was allegedly abused by her father. He was reported to be inappropriate sexual behavior towards his daughter. As per the information from the girl child the two elder brothers also suspected to be sexually abused by her. When the child had in 9th standard, her mother was in her relative's house. That day(on 2019)her father allegedly sexual abused by her. The episodes of repeated sexual assault from her own father. She may lost interest in her life. The severe psychological & emotional distress from this experience she attempted to commit suicide at the day using a house hold chemical.

After the above said incidence mother know the things what happened to her daughter. But her mother conceals the complaint about the child's father on because of the after effects of this complaint. Her Brothers also suspected to be allegedly sexual abused by her after this incidence. As per her words, her siblings continuously sexually abused by her every night. Recurrences of the traumatic events from her family members' leads to suicidal thoughts in her .There are a history of suicidal feelings in her. There has no own house and stable source of income to protect the girl child. As per the child's words, the conjugal relationship of her parents is unhealthy. Father is suspected to be adultery in relationship while he was in Mumbai.

Case No: VI

Age: : 13 years

Education : 8th STD

As per the words of the girl, the family has been consider as a vulnerable family. The children as well as mother also the survivor of the domestic violence .Very awful family living condition has been noticed through home visit. Lack of father's care and support being noticed. Because of alcoholism of their father, children are unable to perform in their studies. Because of his alcoholic dependency father couldn't involve for job on regular basis. He is a skilled carpenter. But his typical personality pushing him to reject from every job site. Mother is a coolie worker, and she is the only bread winner of that family. Parents and their two children are living in a small hut like rented home. It doesn't have electricity connection. There is no any Bathroom facility. The girl was sexually abused by a drunkard, who is one among the friend of his father while she was in an open bath near to her home. She admitted to commit suicide on because of the physical abuses faced from his father and the psychological problems arose by the sexual abuse.

Results and Discussions

The majority of the girls reported with severe sexual assaults were from poor family background. Majority of the abusers are family members, known persons as compared to the strangers in the cases analysed. These abusers are known to the child, which gives them an access without arousing much suspicion. Deception and false promise are widely used by the abusers to gain the child's trust and cooperation. The level of self blame is higher because of the greater taboo and secrecy attached to sexual abuse. In such cases disclosure was very less. From the cases, observed that the girls had been facing lack of proper care and protection from their family. There are more chances to hand over the girl to the same suspected persons in the home to exploit her sexually.

Most offenders of child sexual abuse were not sexually abused themselves. Survivors of child sexual abuse who did perpetrate did not work through the effects of their abusive experiences, they did not share other personal, sensitive information about themselves that resulted in their letting go of self-blame and rage, and they believed they had entitlements to make themselves feel better through abuse. Some gave the appearance of being emotionally expressive and open, but they were not in regard to digging deep enough to see that their abusive behaviors harm children. In spite of expressing the highest form of insecurity both mentally and physically, the youngest child in this study was not willing to leave her mother emotionally.

Risk factors leading to abuse

Higher incest rates were found among cases due to the their vulnerability and dependence on the family member. Single parents and step parents too abused the children. Girls whose mother's were absent, sick or incapacitated have a particularly high risk. From the cases analyzed it is reported that, similarly having a step father and he was addicted to substance abuse and having at risk behavior was increased a girl's chances of being sexually abused. Parental disputes also make the child prone to Physical as well as sexual abuse. Financial problems of the family, single parent, addiction which are the stressful events which heighten the likelihood of sexual abuse.

From the case studies it was noted that the family with low social supports or no social contacts was more likely to be violent in the home. The association between financial problems and lack of coping mechanisms among parents was found to be an important causative factor in sexual violence.

Conclusion

Children who sexually abuse are out of touch with their own emotions and the emotions of others, are emotionally disconnected from others, and hold beliefs of entitlement to take what they want regardless of consequences for others and themselves. In addition, a variety of factors influence how sexual maltreatment impacts on an individual. These factors include the age of the victim, the gender of the victim and offender, the extent of the sexual abuse, the relationship between offender and victim, the reaction of others to knowledge of the sexual abuse, other life experiences. There are countless millions of children at risk because of insecure and disorganized attachments and who receive their sex education and guidance for sexual behaviors from peers and the media. Such children have complex

risks for various poor outcomes. Some of them perpetrate child sexual abuse. An educated public would take immediate action to provide children and families the resources they require to thrive. There is much to be done.

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