

Impact of Sexual Abuse on Children and Intervention Strategies

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation. Forms of child sexual abuse include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of body parts to a child with intent to gratify their own sexual desires or to intimidate or groom the child, physical sexual contact with a child or using a child to produce child pornography. The effects of child sexual abuse can include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and propensity to further victimization in adulthood and physical injury to the child. Protection of children against sexual abuse Act, 2012 brings many incidents of sexual abuses into light and judgments are given immediately by special courts and. Intervention strategies like individual Therapy, Play Therapy and Family Therapy can be used to deal with children.

Keywords: Abuse, psychological disturbance, incest

1. Introduction

According to law “child sexual Abuse” is an umbrella term describing criminal and civil offences in which adult engages in sexual activity with a minor or exploits a minor for the purpose of sexual gratification. Sexual abuse by a family member is a form of incest and can result in more serious and long term psychological trauma especially in case of parental incest. The American Psychiatric Association states that “children cannot consent to sexual activity with adults” and condemns any such action by an adult.” An adult who engages in sexual activity with a child is performing a criminal and immoral act which never can be considered normal or socially acceptable behaviour. Child sexual abuse in case of chronic abuse starting at early stages is related to the development of high levels of dissociative symptoms which includes amnesia for abuse memories

1.1.1 Causes

Poverty, Poor family environment/Broken families, Pedophilia, Trust of neighbour/family members, Lack of supervision of parents

1.1.2. Consequences

Child sexual abuse can result in both short term and long term harm, including psychopathology in later life. And also results in physical, psychological and social effects

Physical Harm

Injury: Depending upon the age and size of the child and degree of force used child sexual abuse may cause internal lacerations and bleeding. In severe cases damages to internal organs may occur, which may cause death

Infections: Child sexual abuse may cause infections and sexually transmitted diseases. Depending upon the age of the child, due to lack of vaginal fluid, chances of infections are higher.

Psychological Effects: depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, eating disorders, poor self esteem, dissociative and anxiety disorders, general psychological distress and disorders such as somatization, neurosis, chronic pain, sexualized behaviour, school learning problems and behaviour problems including substance abuse, self destructive behaviour, animal cruelty, crime in adulthood and suicide.

Social Effects: The psychological effects creates isolation, poor school performance and class participation, have excessive fears, withdrawal from normal and regular activities and fear of social stigma. The child and the family fears on being labeled and avoids social contacts, peer groups. Many such situations are hidden by parents due to social status.

1.1.3 Protection of children from sexual offences Act 2012

The Act protects the children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography and provide for establishment of special courts for trial of such offences. The Act prevents (i) the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity (ii) the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices (iii) the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials. The Act also ensures punishments for a person who carries out any kind of sexual offences against children.

1.1.4. Current scenario

Even today it is evident from the media and newspapers that the child sexual abuse is on an increased rate. A total of 7,112 cases of child rape were reported during 2011 as equated to 5,484 in 2010 depicting a growth by 29.7%. India has the world's largest number of CSA cases: For every 155th minute a child, less than 16 years is raped, for every 13th hour child under 10, and one in every 10 children sexually abused at any point of time (Childline organisation. Childline 1098 service.

Studies propose that over 7,200 children, including infants, are raped every year and it is believed that

several cases go unreported. It is estimated by the government that 40% of India's children are susceptible to threats like being homeless, trafficking, drug abuse, forced labor, and crime. (Breaking the silence. Child sexual abuse in India. USA, Humans rights watch. 2013.

In India, every second child is being exposed to one or the other form of sexual abuse and every fifth child faces critical forms of it. (Sexual abuse in women with special reference to children: Barriers, boundaries and beyond. Behere PB, Sathyanarayana Rao TS, Mulmule AN *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2013 Oct; 55(4):316-9.)

A survey by United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) on demographic and health was conducted in India from 2005 to 2013, which reported that ten per cent of Indian girls might have experienced sexual violence when they were 10–14 years of age and 30% during 15–19 years of age. Overall, nearly 42% of Indian girls have gone through the trauma of sexual violence before their teenage. [Ray A. 42% of Indian girls are sexually abused before 19: Unicef. The Times of India. 2014. Sep 12, [Last cited on 2014 Sep 12].

The first study on CSA in India was conducted by Recovery and Healing from Incest, an Indian non-government organization (NGO) in 1998. Majority (76%) of the participants reported being abused during childhood or adolescence.

2. Intervention Strategies

Dealing with child sexual abuse is not so easy like any other problems. Intervention strategies can be used only if sexual abuse is reported. But in several cases it goes unnoticed when it is not reported or when the perpetrator is a close family member where the child may be controlled by the perpetrator or threatened by the perpetrator.

The American Academy of child and Adolescent Psychiatry provides guidelines regarding treatment procedure for the victim once disclosed

2.1.1. Play Therapy/Art Therapy Techniques

Art Therapy techniques can be used to help the child to communicate its own situation. Further therapies can be planned based on the child's coping capacity Play Therapy can be used to make the child to be normal and to overcome the fears. Play Therapy helps the child to avoid Isolation and it creates a good atmosphere for interaction among the peer groups.

2.1.2. Family Therapy

The parents should be made to help the child to calm down. The treatment of young children generally requires strong parental involvement. The family members should be oriented on the importance of supervision of the child's activities. The family members can be given counseling to accept the child and to promote a normal living. The family members can be motivated to assist the child to social functions slowly.

2.1.3. Individual Therapy

Individual therapy or counseling can be given when the child is able to come out of the situation and is able to listen to. The child should be motivated for a normal living without any frustrations. Confidence should be created in the child's mind that the parents will take care of them and should be bold enough to communicate of any such act to the parents

3. Prevention

Child sexual abuse is one crime that is not very easy to prevent, because it is usually inflicted by people close to us. These tips can help to minimize the exposure and occurrence

- Parents and family members has to pay attention to the caretakers of the children
- Parents has to speak with the children ,spend time with them to know what is happening around them
- Children should be educated on good touch and bad touch
- Intimate the child to report to parents or elders in case of bad touch
- Alert the child to be in groups
- Parents has to be conscious on the behaviour of their children

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