



Child sexual abuse: An overview

Sajad Ahmad Bhat

Research Scholar, Dept. of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

The problem of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a universal problem that is prevalent in every society and in almost every country. The repercussions of CSA are grave and lifelong as is evident from the adult survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. Globally it has been studied and observed that the life of survivors of CSA is full of complications. Complex existential and personal conflicts will emerge if the conflict didn't get resolved. The global statistics on CSA is worrisome as the prevalence of CSA has been estimated at 19.7 percent females and 7.9 for males. Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007 released a report on Child abuse which discusses the incidences of CSA and it was reported that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. In 90 percent of cases the offender is somehow related to or acquainted with the victim. The present is an attempt to provide a general overview of the problem of Child Sexual Abuse. This paper will define the overall perspective, prevalence and the repercussions of child sexual abuse. The implications of this paper will be for the common people to understand the problem of child sexual abuse in society in general.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, depression, PTSD

Introduction

Child Sexual abuse is a kind of abuse in which an individual or an adolescent person older in age than the child uses him or her for his sexual gratification and urges. There are various forms of child sexual abuse includes engaging a child in sexual activities whether by pressuring or by asking or by any other means or by indecent exposure or pressuring them to show their genital parts, females nipples or by child pornography. Child sexual abuse involves anal or vaginal penetration that is contact offences and non-contact offences include using the child for sexual exploitation. Child sexual abuse has negative, far-reaching impacts on victims.

WHO defined child sexual abuse as "The involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are—by virtue of their age or stage of development—in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim (World Health Organization, 2006). Child sexual abuse can occur or can happen in a variety of settings home, workplace, school, religious centres. Child marriage is regarded as the most prevalent and common form of child sexual abuse (UNICEF). The impact of child sexual abuse is horrible and a number of psychological and mental problems appear in the survivors of child sexual abuse. Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety, Self-harming behaviour, sexual dysfunctions, sexually reactive and poor academic performance were predominantly seen in survivors of child sexual abuse which further victimizing them in adulthood. The offenders of child sexual abuse in most of the cases are the family member in most cases cousins, or friend of a family, relative, or any other

acquainted. In 90 percent of cases, child sexual abuse offenders are acquainted and only in 10 percent cases, offenders were strangers. Also in most cases, child offenders are males as compared to females. Children who are sexually abused by a family member which is a form of incest are more vulnerable to long-term psychological trauma especially in the case of parental incest.

Professionals working in the field of sexual abuse believe that this problem is underreported. Societal taboos and stigma associated with sexually abused victims are believed to be the reasons for the underreported cases. Several accounts of adult survivors of sexual abuse reflected that they didn't report their abusive due to the victimization and social taboos. The gender of offenders and the victims also make this problem underrated in case of female offenders and male victims. The information and estimation about the prevalence of sexual abuse came from three main sources. Adult survivors which recount their experience being sexually abused, second by yearly reports by the professionals working with the child sexual abuse victims either survivors or victims and third offenders who are convicted or those who self-acknowledge their acts of sexual abuse.

The global prevalence of Child sexual abuse is estimated at 19.7 percent for females and 7.9 percent for males. Some professionals believe that between one in three and one in four women are sexually abused in some way during their childhood. The prevalence rates among males are lower than females ranging from 3 percent to 24 percent with professionals believing that one in 10 men were abused during childhood. But these findings and statistics are somewhat not conclusive as said earlier that there are underreported cases of sexual abuse when it comes to gender and social stigma and taboos. Also, the methodologies used to gather the data like

telephonic interviews, written letters, and face to face conversations was also limited in scope. The definition of sexual abuse also varies from context to context and culture to culture that also makes it difficult to summarize the incidences because what is abusive in one context might not be considered as abuse in another setting.

Differentiating abusive from non-abusive sexual acts

There are three factors that are useful in differentiating the abusive sexual acts from non-abusive sexual acts. These three factors are likely to be interrelated. However, the presence of any one of these factors should raise concerns that the sexual encounter was abusive

- **Power Differential:** Power differential means when the offender controls the victim and is in some sort of role or authority and the sexual acts between them are not mutually conceived and undertaken. This power can be derived from the relationship between the offender and the victim. Father, teacher, religious clerk or any other person can happen to be in that position where the victim is obliged to follow his instructions.
- **Knowledgeable Differential:** Knowledge differential implies when the offender is more sophisticated and knowledgeable than the victim about the consequences and implication of sexual abuse. This differential implies that the offender is older than the victim and more intellectually developed, advanced and witty. Most professional and clinicians expect that offender should be 5 years older than the victim of the act to be deemed predatory. Some persons define an act abusive if the offender is 10 years older than the victim in case victim is adolescent.
- **Gratification Differential:** In most cases, the offender is aimed at gratifying his sexual urges if not in all the sexual abuse cases. This goal of sexual gratification is not mutually agreed, however, the offender tries to persuade the victim and they sexually arouse him/her because it is more appealing to the offender. Some offenders convince themselves that their goal is to sexually gratify the victims although their sole motive is their own gratification.
- **Effects of child sexual abuse**

Psychological Effects: The psychological effects of child abuse are grave and include both short-term and long-term effects. The effects sometimes take the form of psychopathology in later life. The most common short-term effects of childhood abuse are depression, PTSD, anxiety, eating disorders, the problem with self-esteem, body somatisation, sleep disturbance, disorders of disassociation, thumb sucking, sexually violent behaviour and self-harm. Clinicians believe that the strongest indicator of sexual abuse is the sexual acting out and inappropriate knowledge of sex and interest.

Sexually abused children often left out school and lost interest in social activities and exhibit various behavioural problem like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder ADHD, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Adolescents experienced childhood abuse

reported as many as four incidences of self-harm.

The long-term effect of Child sexual abuse is the victimization of survivors in adolescence and adulthood. A causal relationship has been found between childhood sexual abuse and various adult psychopathologies, including crime and suicide.

Adult males who were sexually abused in childhood are more frequently involved with criminal justice system. A study funded by UN National institute of Drug abuse found that "Among more than 1,400 adult females, childhood sexual abuse was associated with increased likelihood of drug dependence, alcohol dependence, and psychiatric disorders. Women who experienced nongenital sexual abuse in childhood were 2.83 times more likely to suffer drug dependence as adults than were women who were not abused. A study was conducted in which females with sexual abuse were compared with nonsexual abused women and it was found that the sexually abused women have more health care costs than their counter parts. Several studies have found that 51 percent to 79 percent sexually abused children exhibit psychological symptoms. Chronic child sexual abuse especially started at early age is responsible for dissociative symptoms that include the amnesia of abusive memories. Dissociative symptoms are more prevalent if the type of abuse is penetrative (vaginal or anal) and if there are several perpetrators and last for more than 1 year.

- **Physical Effects:** Various physical effects emerge in children with sexual abuse like physical injury, Infections and neurological damage.
- **Injury:** Child sexual abuse in extreme cases can cause death to the victim. The physical harm of sexual abuse is based on the age and size of an child. The younger a child is the more vulnerable he/she is to physical harm.
- **Infections:** Child sexual abuse may cause infections and sexually transmitted diseases. As the female children lack sufficient vaginal fluid, chances of infections can heighten depending on the age and size of the child. Vaginitis (Vaginal Infections) has also been reported.
- **Neurological Damage:** Research has shown that traumatic stress caused by, sexual abuse, causes significant changes in brain functioning and development. Various studies have suggested that severe child sexual abuse may have a deleterious effect on brain development. Ito *et al.* (1998) ^[10] found "reversed hemispheric asymmetry and greater left hemisphere coherence in abused subjects Teicher *et al.* (1993) found that an increased likelihood of "ictal temporal lobe epilepsy-like symptoms" in abused subjects. Anderson *et al.* (2002) ^[2] recorded abnormal transverse relaxation time in the cerebellar vermis of adults sexually abused in childhood. Teicher *et al.* (1993) found that child sexual abuse was associated with a reduced corpus callosum area; various studies have found an association of reduced volume of the left hippocampus with child sexual abuse and Ito *et al.* (1993) found increased electrophysiological abnormalities in sexually abused children.

Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to provide an overview of child sexual abuse. The paper highlighted some issues pertaining to child sexual abuse as the prevalence and the effects of child sexual are horrible. Researchers, professionals, and social workers need to develop intervention plans to cater this problem more effectively. The implications of this paper are to provide a general overview of prevalence and the effects of child sexual abuse to get the general briefing about this sensitive issue. There are limitations of this paper as it didn't cater every phenomenon associated with child sexual abuse.

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