

SEXUAL ABUSE ON CHILDREN

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 Analysis

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO): "The child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."¹

Statistics show that the level of violence and/or abuse against children has increased at the rate of 90% over the last four years. While only 5% of the sexual abuse of children was revealed as a legal case; the remaining 95% was covered up. One in four adults were physically abused as children worldwide. In addition to these statistics, the Worldwide Children report shows that children suffered some form of violence in the past year such

as 23% physical abuse, 36% emotional abuse, 16% physical neglect, 18% girls-sexual abuse, and 8% boys-sexual abuse.²

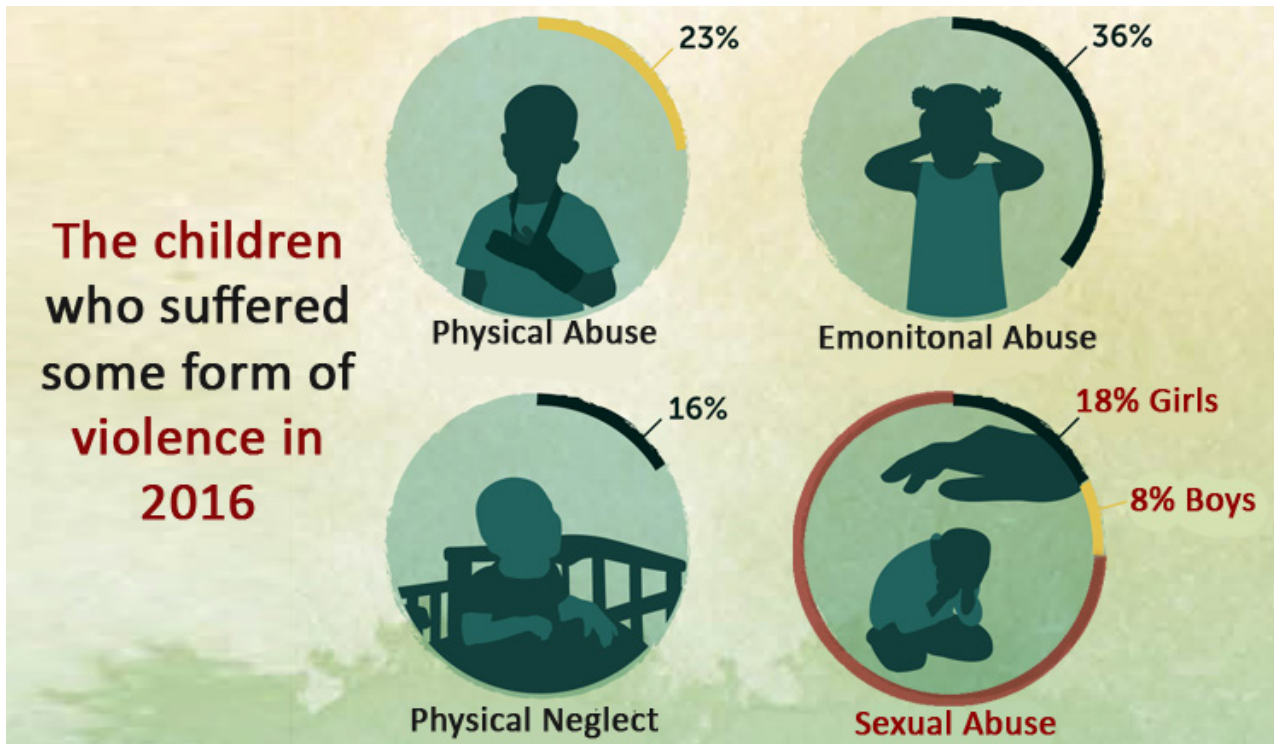
The increasing case of abuse on children shows the lack of preventive knowledge about this topic. This article will focus on sexual abuse on children, and the article will show that how important sex education and teaching are for children and their privacy. Moreover, it will be shown just how significant it is that not only children, but parents and the society as a whole too need to have the understanding about how to protect children from a trauma that might last for a lifetime.

What is Sexual Abuse ?

Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantages of victims where they



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Source: World Health Organization

are unable to give consent. These unwanted sexual activities may be acted against a child in the forms of:

- Use of child for sexual stimulation and satisfaction
- Use of child in pornographic performance and similar materials
- Forced prostitution
- Touching of a child's private parts
- Exhibitionism
- Rape, etc.

Sexual abuse may be committed against children by their mother, father, siblings, stepmother, stepfather, half-siblings, relatives, teachers, neighbours or strangers.

UNICEF Findings

- "In 38 low- and middle-income countries, close to 17 million adult women report having experienced forced sex in childhood.
- In 28 countries in Europe, around 2.5

million young women report experiences of contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence before age 15.

- Worldwide, around 15 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime; 9 million of these girls had been victimized within the past year.
- In 20 countries, nearly 9 in 10 adolescent girls who have been victims of forced sex say this happened for the first time during adolescence.
- Data from 28 countries indicate that 9 in 10 adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex report being victimized by someone close/known to them.
- Friends/classmates and partners are among the most commonly reported perpetrators of sexual abuse against adolescent boys in 5 countries with data.
- Based on data from 30 countries, only 1% of adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex reached out for professional help."³

The Risk Factors of Sexual Abuse

- Parents with alcohol and drug dependency
- Single parent homes/broken homes
- Neglected children
- Parents and children living in a shared bedroom
- Unaccompanied children
- Being fatherless or motherless child
- Being with family members with mental illness
- Children of very young parents
- Lack of education
- Children who are not given care and interest
- Violence in family
- Family with too many children
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Physically or mentally handicapped children
- Lack of social support
- Psychological vulnerability

Symptoms of Sexual Abuse

- Fear of stigmatization and punishment.
- Fear of abandonment and clingy behavior
- Shame and guilt
- Hiding the abuse and abuser
- Wounds, cuts, bruises, fractures, dislocations in the body of the child
- Unexplained genital injury
- Poor self-esteem
- To describe the sexual abuse as if it happened to someone else
- Behavioral changes
- Eating and sleeping disorders

- Fear of strangers
- Talking like a baby
- Bed wetting beyond the usual age
- Aggression in behavior

Besides, the children who have been sexually abused may exhibit some expressions such as inappropriate sexual behaviors and chronic sexual play like masturbation due to the impact of victimization.

What are the Effects of sexual Abuse on Children?

Sexual abuse can effect children's long-term behaviours and emotions. These effects involve:

- Fear
- Depression
- Aggression
- Inappropriate sexual behaviours
- Crying without reason
- Become introverted
- Low academic success
- Sexual and psychological disorders in the advancing ages
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of social competence
- Alcohol and drug addiction

Preventive Measures of Sexual Abuse on Children

- Trusting the child is the most important and first step of the preventive process. Pay attention to every concern that a child might have. Because a child would never lie about the threat of abuse.
- Parents should encourage their child to talk about any problem and listen then support the child and avoid from being angry or judgemental.

- Give the right sex education to the child at the right time. Through sex education, a child would learn about his/her body, the physical and emotional changes they are facing, and so on.
- Respect of privacy is also an important education in terms to prevent a child from sexual abuse, because if parents do not respect the privacy of the family members in the house, a child will imitate his/her parents.
- Parents and the society should make sure that the law of the country is able to prevent sexual abuse against children.

Sexual abuse against children is something that cannot be forgotten easily by the victims. The effects might last a lifetime not just for them, but also for the people around them.

- CCTVs in public places such as children's parks, playrooms and schools is essential in preventing children from becoming victims of sexual abuse. Although, the right of privacy should be taken into account during the process.
- In addition to these techniques, public education about child psychology, sex education, what to do and not to do in an adult-child relationship is also necessary.

- Schools should provide regular sex education to their students according to their age.
- Providing psychosocial support to children, especially those who are exposed to the risk of being sexual abuse victims.
- Make sure televisions and computers in the house are children-friendly where children are not able to access materials that are unsuitable for their age.

- Encourage children to wear clothes and behave according to their age.
- Pay attention to our children's relationships with their friends, relatives, other people around them as well as strangers.
- Teach them to be assertive and able to say "no."

What to Do When A Sexual Abuse Happen to Your Child

- When the child feels guilty and ashamed, parents should be empathic and try to give trust and be with the child.
- Parents should explain insightfully that the child is innocent.
- Take legal action against the perpetrators.
- Provide psychological support to victims of sexual abuse.

Conclusion

Sexual abuse against children is something that cannot be forgotten easily by the victims. The effects might last a lifetime not just for them, but also for the people around them. This article may be helpful for children but there is a reality that if parents do not care about this topic and pay attention to their children in their everyday life, children will be exposed to the risks of all kinds of abuses, including sexual abuse. Another important aspect is that children observe and imitate their parents, teachers and society. Therefore all of us should take care in what we do, what we say, and about how we respect our privacy.

Endnotes

- ¹ Neha Gupta, N.K. Aggarwal, 'Child Abuse', *Delhi Psychiatry Journal* Vol. 15 No.2, October 2012, p.416, <http://medind.nic.in/daa/t12/i2/daat12i2p416.pdf>
- ² Children Maltreatment, WHO, http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/child/Child_maltreatment_infographic_EN.pdf?ua=1
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