



Guru Journal of Behavioral and Social Sciences

Volume 1 Issue 2 (April – June, 2013)

ISSN: 2320-9038 www.gjbss.org



Prevalence of Girl Child Abuse in Kerala: An Analysis

Lima Raj, K* & Manikandan, K**

*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Kerala

**Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Kerala

Abstract

Received: 30 Jan 2013

Revised: 3 Mar 2013

Accepted: 2 Apr 2013

Keywords:

Child abuse, Child rights,
Extra-familial sexual abuse,
Intra familial sexual abuse,
Rape, Sexual exploitation.

This study is an attempt to analyze the prevalence of girl child abuse in Kerala. News papers of three national dailies and Crime Records Bureau sites of Kerala (SCRB) and India (NCRB) were referred for the purpose of obtaining relevant data. It was found that there is an alarming rate of increase in the sexual abuse of girl children in Kerala. Based on the available information from the above media the study also tried to examine the details of the victim, the abuser/offender and news paper reports. A great majority of children who are exposed to sexual abuse are done so by someone they know -father, brother, uncle, male teacher etc. From the reported cases it has to be noted that sexual abuse manifestations occurred at two levels mainly- home and institutional level. The findings of the study are discussed in detail.

© 2013 Guru Journal of Behavioral and Social Sciences

The destiny of a nation depends on its children' and 'children are the future of the nation. If we want the future to be bright and optimistic, we have the responsibility to keep our present best. Violence against children is largely unchecked in the earlier periods. It is indubitable that children have equal rights as human beings and also need special care and protection. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The Convention sets out these rights in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. It spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. Child sexual abuse has exploded into the public awareness during a span of less than 10 years. But the alarming prevalence rate of child abuses poses serious threat to our belief of a highly civilized society. Child abuse is an international phenomenon. Child abuse is the physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment or neglect of a child or children.

Any act of commission or omission by individuals, institutions, or society as a whole, and any conditions resulting from such or inaction which deprive children of equal rights and liberties and/or interfere with their optimum development, constitute, by definition, abusive or neglectful acts or conditions (Gil, 1975). The nature of Child abuse may be addressed from two analytical concepts: the 'levels of manifestation' and forms of abuses. The levels of manifestation identify the agents and settings in which children may experience abuse. The causal dimension unravels various causes and its interaction of which leads to abusive acts and abusive conditions. Child abuse is manifested mainly in three levels. The most familiar one is identified as abusive conditions in the home and abusive interactions between the child and the care taker. The perpetrators are parents, siblings, parent substitutes, others living in home regularly or temporarily. Abuse in home may be intentional and conscious or unintentional and unconscious. The second level of child abuse is manifested at the institutional level. This includes settings such as schools, daycare centers, child care agencies, welfare departments, correctional and other residential child care settings. At this level, the abusive acts may originate with the individual employee of the institution, teachers, the caretakers, social



workers or even the warden. Societal level is the third level at which child abuse is manifested. On this level originate social policies which results in the severe deficits between the actual circumstances of the children and the conditions needed for their optimal development. Poverty, inadequate nourishment, cloth, house, education, health care facilities etc. are the direct or indirect consequences of such social policies. Certainly for what happens at this level determines not only how individuals fare on the institutional level, but also, by way of complex interactions, how they fare in their own homes.

Child abuse takes several forms such as physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Physical abuse involves physical aggression directed at a child by an adult intentionally or unintentionally. The deliberate inflictions of serious injuries, or actions that place the child at obvious risk of serious injury or death, are considered as illegal. Bruises, scratches, burns, broken bones, lacerations, as well as repeated "mishaps," and rough treatment that could cause physical injury, are the results of physical abuse. Emotional/ psychological abuse is defined as the production of psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child as a result of behavior such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality. Child neglect is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm. Neglect is also a lack of attention from the people surrounding a child, and the non-provision of the relevant and adequate necessities for the child's survival, which would be lacking in attention, love, and nurture. Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation. Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed toward the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act. Sexual abuse of children gained widespread attention especially through media and press for the last five to six years. Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles. Sexual abuse includes pedophilia (an adult's preference for or addiction to sexual relations with children), rape, and all forms of incest. Sexual exploitation is another term that is frequently used and it is more or less true that these children are exploited by making use of their inability to have developmentally determined control over their own bodies, helplessness and their unawareness regarding such sexual behaviors.

Generally child sexual abuse occurs in two different manners: extra familial and intra familial (Russell, 1983). Extra familial child sexual was defined as one or more unwanted sexual experiences with persons unrelated by blood or marriage, ranging from petting (touching of breasts or genitals or attempts at such touching) to rape, before the victim turned 14 years, and completed or attempted forcible rape experiences from the ages of 14 to 17 years(inclusive). Intra familial child sexual abuse was defined as any kind of exploitive sexual contact that occurred between relatives, no matter how distant the relationship, before the victim turned 18 years old. The latter is more upsetting and traumatic, which has to be addressed from an all-inclusive causal dimension. Child sexual abuse needs to be recognized as a serious problem of childhood as it has severe impact on the mental health of the child which includes fear, anxiety, depression, anger and hostility, aggression and self-destructive behavior. The victim suffers from such misfortunes as distorted self-perception, somatic complaints and inadequate social functioning, interpersonal relations etc. with short and long term effects.

During the last 10 years, the public concern about child abuse and neglect has grown dramatically. Generally, the offences committed against children or the crimes in which children are the victims are considered as Crime against Children. Indian penal code and the various protective and preventive 'Special and Local Laws' specifically mention the offences wherein children are victims. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 is a piece of landmark legislation. For the first time a special law has been passed to address the



issue of sexual violence against children. It seeks to protect all children below the age of 18 from sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. These offences are clearly defined for the first time in Indian penal law. The Act provides for stringent punishment to the offenders. Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault, for example, carries an imprisonment of no less than 10 years, which can be extended to imprisonment for life. In this act the age to define 'child' is increased to 18 years. According to Prevention of Offences against the Child Bill, 2009 while we recognize a child as individual possessing rights, it is imperative to laws and procedures that operate in the Best Interest of the Child and that protect every child from violations of their rights thereby helping them become responsible citizens. The constitution enforces certain set of laws and responsibilities to every state to protect and safeguard the rights of children. Kerala, 'God's Own Country', as in most social sector indicators, ranks first in the national child rights index. But the reported cases in the State Crime Records Bureau indicate that there is a steady increase in the crimes reported against children especially girl child sexual abuses.

Everyday media reports a vast number of cases on various issues that are happening round the globe. The stories provided by media are the major source of information for most people. The media representations of such social issues have a major impact on the public attitude (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). The Times of India, Bhopal edition, (Nov 24, 2012) reported that one in every two children is subjected to child sexual abuse in India, while 80% of the cases go unreported. Sorenson and Snow (1991) found that fear of further harm had an impact on a child's motivation to disclose about the abuse to anyone. Berliner and Conte (1995) also noted that the fear about Perceived reactions of others prevent some children from disclosing sexual abuse. Stories of crime and deviant behavior, in particular, provide a significant part of those news reports. Grabosky and Wilson (1989) suggest that issues of crime and criminal justice attract so much attention because such reporting is full of drama, involves life and property, and the frightening power to deprive a person of liberty.

It was found that various Media widely report crimes against children. We access this information through newspapers, televisions and authentic sites. But in reality there are variations in the actual number of such incidences. Not only that the media merely provide the numerical data in order to sensationalize the news rather than exploring the sociological and psychological background and the impact the incidence has on the society as well. Kerala is a state which occupies top position in such social indicators as literacy, education, culture, women status, gender ratio and so on. But as we go through the national dailies of last few months, it is annoying that a considerable number of girl child abuses are being reported. The present study attempts to investigate the victims details such as age, education, parents education, socioeconomic status of the family etc. and the offenders details such as age, relation with the victim, occupation, socio economic status, marriage relation between spouses, addiction to alcohol/drugs, criminal background, mental problems if any etc. also tries to examine the feature of news reported in the dailies such as name of the paper, the page number and location of the news, news coverage area/space (in cm sq.) etc. Though there are many government agencies and service organizations who work to address these issues, more explicit and extended service is essential as the scenario is worsens. The findings of the study may help the NGOs and government authorities to have a look into the psychological, emotional and social picture of the core aspects of victim and offenders and hence appropriate measures could be taken to improve the condition.

Objective

1. To know the prevalence of girl child abuse in Kerala based on the reports of national dailies.

Method

Material

1. Primary data was obtained from the news reports of three National Dailies, Kerala editions, India -Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama &The Hindu- of last 6 months



(August, 2012-January, 2013). Newspapers of Saturday, Sunday and auspicious days were excluded from the data source.

2. Secondary data was obtained based on the Crimes Records Bureau of India and Kerala.

Variables

1. Victim- age, education, parent's education, socioeconomic status of the family.
2. Offender/abuser- age, relation with the victim, occupation, socio economic status, marriage relation between spouses, addiction to alcohol/drugs, criminal background, mental problems if any.
3. Newspaper- name of the paper, the page number and location of the news, news coverage area/space (in cm sq.).

Procedure

Newspapers of three national dailies Matrubhumi, Malayala Manorama and The Hindu of last six months were collected and searched for any reports on girl child abuses. Based on the reports the above mentioned variables are collected. For further information regarding the statistics, the Crimes Records Bureau of India and Kerala were referred.

Results and Discussion

The present attempts to analyze the prevalence of girl child abuse in Kerala. Kerala is often cited as a model and is considered to be unique as compared to other states of India. Not only that it has achieved a quality of life which is much higher than the rest of India and perhaps some industrialized countries. Living in such a society, where we considered ourselves exemplary it is unfortunate that crimes against children are being reported widely. Hence it is significant to understand the actual prevalence of girl child abuse crop up in our society. In order to obtain necessary data the reports of 3 main national dailies Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama and The Hindu were referred. Further information regarding the crime statistics were collected from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and Kerala State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB). The finding of the present study was shocking, that nearly 14 cases were reported within last 6 months (August 2012- January 2013). It is a fact that many cases go unreported and we have to assume that the actual number of cases could be more than that. The details of the findings are given below.

Table 1

Characteristics of Victims

Sl No	victim	Age	Education	Victim's Relation with offender	SES
1	a	4	KG student	Father	Low class
2	b	11	6 th Std	Neighbour	-
3	c	13	9 th Std	Father	Low class
4	d	16	Plus 2	Father	-
5	e	14	9 th std	Male teacher	-
6	f	11	5 th	No relation	Low class
7	g	14	9 th Std	No relation	-
8	h	16	Plus 2	Neighbour	Low class
9	i	10	5 th Std	Sex racket member	-
10	j	16	Plus 2	Lover	-
11	k	14	9 th Std	Lover	Middle class
12	l	10	5 th Std	Father	Middle class
13	m	9	4 th Std	No relation	Low class
14	n	14	9 th Std	Relative	Middle class



The findings show that there is greater number of girl child abuses occurring than is reported by media and in majority of the cases it was the immediate family member (nearly 36% father) who is the abuser/offender. The age of victims varies from 4 to 16 years. Out of 14 cases reported here, 5 of them (a, c, d, & l) were abused by their father himself. From the available information about the Socio Economic Status (SES) of the victims, it was found that majority of the victims belongs from low class families.

Table: 2

Characteristics of offender

Sl No:	Offender (Code)	Age	Occupation	Offender's Relation with victim	SES	Alcohol addiction	Mental problems
1	L (a)	32	Carpenter	Daughter	Low	Yes	-
2	M(b)	49	Unemployed	Neighbor	-	Yes	Yes
3	O(c)	43	Mine worker	Daughter	Low	-	-
4	P(d)	35	-	Daughter	-	-	-
5	Q(e)	38	Teacher	Student	Middle	-	-
6	R(f)	47	Auto driver	No relation	-	-	-
7	S(g)	40	Unemployed	No relation	-	-	-
8	T(h)	24	Hotel employee	Neighbor	-	-	-
9	U(i)	36	Political leader	No relation	Middle	-	-
10	V(j)	22	Shop keeper	Lover	Middle	-	-
11	W(k)	22	College student	Lover	Middle	-	-
12	X (l)	36	-	Daughter	Low	yes	-
13	Y(m)	40	Auto driver	No relation	Low	-	-
14	Z(n)	32	Business	Relative	High	-	-

The age of the abusers varies from 22 to 49 years. Based on the available information it was found that majority of the abusers are from middle class families. Some of them were reported to have severe alcohol consumption and one with some mental disturbances. Regarding the offender's relationship with victim, it is unfortunate and shameful that daughter children were brutally raped by their father. A careful look at the SES shows that majority of the offenders are from either middle or high class families. No other details regarding the abusers are given in any of the news papers. The media made little attempt to explore further information regarding the sociological and psychological aspects of the offenders and the impact such cases has on the society.



Table: 3
Cases Reported in National dailies

Report of victims	Name of reported daily	Page no:	Location	Coverage space (In cm sq.)
A	MB	9	Down left	162
	MM	6	Center	140
	HND	-	-	-
B	MB	10	Down right	190
	MM	8	Center	72
	HND	-	-	-
C	MB	10	Down right	56
	MM	12	Down right	50
	HND	-	-	-
D	MB	3	Center	16
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
E	MB	13	Top right	90
	MM	9	Top left	120
	HND	-	-	-
F	MB	5	Down left	160
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
G	MB	12	Down right	60
	MM	9	Top left	80
	HND	-	-	-
H	MB	12	Down left	45
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
I	MB	10	Center	110
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
J	MB	5	Right top	75
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
K	MB	3	Down right	40
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
L	MB	5	Top	50
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-
M	MB	13	Center	104
	MM	9	Top left	78
	HND	-	-	-
N	MB	3	Center	60
	MM	-	-	-
	HND	-	-	-

Note: MB- Mathrubhumi, MM-Malayala Manorama, HND=The Hindu



It is to be appreciated that media helps a lot to bring about the realities to us. The present study considered 2 Malayalam news papers and one English news paper. Table 3 shows the referred news papers MB - Mathrubhumi, MM- Malayalamanorama, HND- The Hindu and its details. From the data it is clear that maximum number of cases were reported by Mathrubhumi news paper. Also this news paper has given maximum coverage for each news reported. Malayala Manorama news paper reported less number of cases as compared to Mathrubhumi. Most of the cases are being reported in the local page of the respective news paper. Little effort was made to follow up the cases progress. A careful look at the data reveals that, The Hindu, the only English news paper considered for the present study reported hardly any news regarding such sexual abuse cases, perhaps in respect to the policies and guidelines of the news paper.

As we noticed child abuse attracted attention of the general public through various print-visual media and authentic sites. The result shows that girl children are more disposed to such abuses especially sexual exploitations. Formerly it was women who were victims of sexual abuses such as rape, molestation etc. But now the trend has changed and it is pathetic that the focus is shifted to children (NCRB). Table 4 is The State Crimes Records Bureau statistics published by the Kerala police.

Table: 4

Crimes against Children in Kerala during the Period 2008-2012

Sl.No	Crime Heads	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (Provisional)
1	Total Murder	37	44	42	47	34
a	Infanticide	0	0	1	1	0
b	Other Murder	37	44	41	46	34
2	Rape	215	235	208	423	455
3	Kidnapping and Abduction	87	83	111	129	147
4	Foeticide	0	0	0	0	1
5	Abetment of Suicide	4	0	3	2	3
6	Exposure and Abandonment	6	7	9	4	4
7	Procuration of Minor Girls	13	14	6	9	10
8	Buying Girls for Prostitution	0	0	0	0	0
9	Selling Girls for Prostitution	0	0	0	0	0
10	Prohibition of Child marriage Act	4	0	6	3	6
11	Other Crimes against Children	183	206	211	835	664
Total Crimes		549	589	596	1452	1372

Source: Kerala State Crime Records Bureau

It shows that 1372 cases of crimes against children including murder were reported in 2012. It is to be noted that 455 new rape cases were reported in 2012 as compared to the previous year which was 423. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), an increase of 24.0% was reported in the incidence of crime against children in 2011 over 2010. The data released by NCRB on January 16, 2013 point out that, 76,152 children went missing in 2011. This includes 28,853 boys and 47,299 girls. Kerala's percentage contribution to all India rates of crimes against children is 4.4 (NCRB, 2011).



Conclusion

Kerala 'The god's own country', which occupies top positions in many social indices, is now witnessing an alarming rise in the rate of sexual crimes against children. A great majority of children who are exposed to sexual abuse are done so by someone they know -father, brother, uncle, male teacher etc. It shows how insecure and vulnerable the children are in their own families and schools. From the reported cases it has to be noted that sexual abuse manifestations occurred at two levels mainly- home and institutional level. Nowadays media play an important role in bringing about such issues to the public but at the same time it has a negative impact when they merely sensationalize it. It is high time to open our eyes to initiate legal and therapeutic interventions for the protection of our children and thereby making the future of our nation bright.

References

- Berliner, L., & Conte, J. R. (1995). The effects of disclosure and intervention on sexually abused children, *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 8-124
- Browne, A., & Finkelhor, D. (1986). *Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Research*. In A. C. Donnelly & K. Oates. (2000). *Classical Papers in Child Abuse* (Ed), Sage: California
- Gil, D. G. (1975). *Unraveling Child Abuse*. In A. C. Donnelly & K. Oates. (2000). *Classical Papers in Child Abuse* (Eds). Sage: California
- Grabosky, P., & Wilson, P. (1989). *Journalism and Justice: How crime is reported*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Hutson, S., & Liddiard, M. (1994). *Youth homelessness: The construction of a social issue*. London: Macmillan.
- Kempe, C. H. (1978). Sexual Abuse: Another Hidden Pediatric Problem. In A. C. Donnelly & K. Oates. (2000). *Classical Papers in Child Abuse* (Eds). Sage: California
- Russell, E. H. D. (1983). *The Incidence and Prevalence of Intrafamilial and Extrafamilial sexual Abuse of Female Children*, In A. C. Donnelly & K. Oates. (2000). *Classical Papers in Child Abuse* (Ed), Sage: California
- Sorenson, T., & Snow, B. (1991). How children tell: The process of disclosure in child sexual abuse. *Child Welfare*