

## **Module 3 Child Abuse, Child Labour and Violence against Women**

### **Lecture 15**

#### **Child Abuse: Concept and Types**

##### **Concept of Child Abuse**

Child abuse is a state of emotional, physical, economic and sexual maltreatment meted out to a person below the age of eighteen and is a globally prevalent phenomenon. However, in India, as in many other countries, there has been no understanding of the extent, magnitude and trends of the problem. The growing complexities of life and the dramatic changes brought about by socio-economic transitions in India have played a major role in increasing the vulnerability of children to various and newer forms of abuse. Despite hectic planning, welfare programmes, legislation and administrative action in the past six decades, a large majority of the Indian children continue to remain in distress and turmoil. In most families, the parents neglect them, caretakers batter them and in work-place employers sexually abuse them. Though this problem of emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children in India is increasing, it has failed to capture the attention of sociologists and psychiatrists in our country. The public and the government also are yet to recognize it as a serious problem. Public indignation and professional concern is yet to be translated into positive and realistic action. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or 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. Some studies limit the term 'child abuse' to "children who have received serious physical injury caused willfully rather than by accident" (Garden and Gray, 1982:5). This definition has not been accepted by the social scientist because of the ambiguities in the word 'serious' and diversities in 'physical injury'. Kempe and Kempe (1978) have defined child abuse as "a condition having to do with those who have been deliberately injured by physical assault". This definition is limited in scope as it restricts

abuse to those acts of physical violence which produce a diagnostic injury. Thus, acts of neglect and maltreatment of children which do not produce an injury but are equally harmful cannot be included in this definition. No definition of child abuse can be considered valid unless it includes non-physical acts like mental injury and neglect and ill-treatment of child. Burgess(1979:143) has given a wider definition of child abuse. According to him, child abuse refers to “any child who receives non-accidental physical and psychological injury as a result of act and omission on the part of his parents or guardians or employers...” Verbal abuse, threats of physical violence and excessive physical punishment which do not require medical attention are also included in the definition of child abuse.

A child is defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, as “Every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable under the child majority is attained earlier. Throughout the consultation the importance of the CRC in the area of child abuse was emphasized. While Article 19 of the convention specifically addresses child abuse and recommends a broad outline for its identification, reporting, investigation, treatment, follow-up and prevention. **The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act** (CAPTA) defines child abuse and neglect as: “at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” For CAPTA, the term child is someone who has not reached the age of 18; or (except in the case of sexual abuse) the age specified by the child protection law of the State in which the child resides; Within the minimum standards set by CAPTA, each State is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. Most States recognize four major types of maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Although any of the forms of child maltreatment may be found separately, they often occur in combination.

### **Child abuse across the globe**

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that almost 53,000 child deaths in 2002 were due to child homicide. In the Global School-Based Student Health Survey carried out in a wide range of developing countries, between 20% and 65% of school going children reported having been verbally or physically bullied in school in the previous 30 days. Similar rates of bullying have been found in industrialised countries. An estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact. UNICEF estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and Sudan, 3 million girls and women are subjected to FGM every year. ILO estimates that 218 million children were involved in child labour in 2004, of whom 126 million were engaged in hazardous work. Estimates from 2000 suggest that 5.7 million were in forced or bonded labour, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography and 1.2 million were victims of trafficking. Only 2.4% of the world's children are legally protected from corporal punishment in all settings

### **Child abuse is usually classified into three major types:**

**Physical abuse:** According to WHO, Physical, abuse is the inflicting of physical injury upon a child. This may include burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child. It may, however, be the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age. According to study by Sloan (1983:2-3) indicators of physical abuses in child are: bruises, burns, fractures, lacerations and abrasions, abdominal injuries, and human-bite marks. The behavioral indicators of physical abuse are: the abused child is wary of contact with adults, he/she becomes apprehensive when other children cry, s/he shows aggressiveness in behavior, he/she seems frightened of the parents/caretakers, and he/she is afraid to go home or cries when it is time to go home.

According to the national report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, Two out of every three children were physically abused. Out of 69% children physically abused in 13 sample states, 54.68% were boys. Over 50% children in all the 13 sample states were being subjected to one or the other form of physical abuse. Out of those children physically abused in family situations, 88.6% were

physically abused by parents. 65% of school going children reported facing corporal punishment i.e. two out of three children were victims of corporal punishment, 62% of the corporal punishment was in government and municipal school. The State of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar and Delhi have almost consistently reported higher rates.

**Sexual abuse:** According to WHO, Sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual behavior with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. To be considered 'child abuse', these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for the care of a child (for example a baby-sitter, a parent, or a daycare provider), or related to the child. If a stranger commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault and handled solely by the police and criminal courts. Kempe (1978:127) defines child abuse as "the involvement of dependent and immature children in sexual activities they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent". The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986, defines child sexual abuse as interaction between a child (under age of 18 for girls and 16 for boys) and an adult (who is significantly older than the victim and in position of power and control over the child, or may even be an acquaintance or an known person) in which the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or the other person". There are some behavioural indicators too of sexual abuse. The sexually abused child may appear withdrawn or retarded, may have poor peer relationships, may be unwilling to participate in activities, may indulge in delinquent behavior, may run away, or may display bizarre or unusual sexual knowledge.

According to the national report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, 53.22% children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar and Delhi reported the highest percentage of sexual abuse among both boys and girls. 21.90% child respondents reported facing severe forms of sexual abuse and 50.76% other forms of sexual abuse. Out of the child respondents, 5.69% reported being sexually assaulted. Children in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Delhi reported the highest incidence of sexual assault. Children on street, children at work and children in institutional care reported the highest incidence of

sexual assault. 7. 50% abuses are persons known to the child or in a position of trust and responsibility. Most children did not report the matter to anyone.

**Emotional abuse:** It is the neglect or the maltreatment of the children. ‘neglect’ is difficult to define exactly since it may involve a disregard of the physical, emotional, moral or social needs of the children . Physical neglect has been defined as “ failure to provide the essential for normal life, such as food, clothing, shelter, care and supervision, and protection from assault”. Emotional neglect includes both the lack of expressed love and affection and deliberate withholding of contact and approval. Moral neglect includes exposure to situations (alcoholism, obscenity, illicit sex relations) that present a pattern of moral conduct at variance with the norms of society. Society neglect includes failure to train or discipline a child (Kratcoski, 1979:120). Thus, emotional neglect or maltreatment may be described as negligent treatment of a child under the specific age prescribed by for the children by the given society (18 for girls and 16 for boys in India) by a person who is responsible for the child’s upbringing, care and welfare is harmed or threatened thereby. This definition characterizes ‘omission’ not ‘commission’ as abuse. Emotional maltreatment of child includes blaming, belittling, rejecting, constantly treating siblings unequally, and persistent lack of concern by the parent/caretaker for the child’s welfare. Emotional maltreatment is rarely manifested in physical signs. According to WHO, Emotional abuse is also known as verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological maltreatment. It includes acts or the failures to act by parents or caretakers that have caused or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental trauma. This can include parents/caretakers using extreme and/or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement in a closet or dark room or being tied to a chair for long periods of time or threatening or terrorizing a child. Less severe acts, but no less damaging, are belittling or rejecting treatment, using derogatory terms to describe the child, habitual tendency to blame the child or make him/her a scapegoat. The behavioural characteristics of emotional maltreatment are habit disorders (biting, thumb-sucking), conduct disorders (destructiveness, cruelty, stealing), neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play), psycho-neurotic reaction (hysteria, phobias, obsession), behavior extremes (appearing

overly complaint, extremely passive or aggressive, very demanding or undemanding), lag in emotional and intellectual development, and attempted suicide.

According to the national report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, every second child reported facing emotional abuse. Equal percentage of both girls and boys reported facing emotional abuse. In 83% of the cases parents were the abusers. 48.4% of girls wished they were boys.

Besides above mentioned three types of child abuse, we can also refer to social abuse of children, like kidnapping children and forcing them to beg in streets.

### **References**

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