

A Review on the Sociodemographic Profile of the Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse in India

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a gross human rights violation and the worst form of abuse against children. Child sexual abuse is not just a private issue but a public health menace and has long-term psychological implications on children into their adolescence and adulthood. The primary goal of this paper was to conduct a systematic analysis of the sociodemographic profile of victims, rather than to critically evaluate each study, and to provide a systematic review of the available literature. The sociodemographic variables included in the writing of this paper are age, gender, socio-economic status of the victim, state-wise reports of CSA, and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Data consisted of secondary sources that included journal papers, government reports, and newspaper articles. The researchers examined the predictors of child sexual abuse. Age was an important indicator of sexual abuse as the majority of the adults interviewed were abused as children and adolescents. In most studies conducted, girls experienced higher rates of sexual abuse than boys. Although poverty was a strong predictor of sexual abuse, the disintegration of joint family to nuclear families and both parents working also puts children at risk for sexual abuse. In most metropolitan cities reviewed in the study, child sexual abuse was very high. A common misunderstanding among offenders is that having sexual intercourse with children would cure them of HIV/AIDS and STDs. Thus, this paper examined research published in the last decade on the sociodemographic profile of survivors of child sexual abuse.

Keywords: *Child Sexual Abuse, Sociodemographic Profile, Age, Gender*

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) 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 and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society”. Literature on child sexual abuse is full of clinical observations about problems associated with child sexual abuse, such as depression, sexual dysfunctions, and low self-esteem (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Higher levels of shame, depression, self-blame, remorse, somatic issues, sexual problems, eating disorders, dissociative habits, anxiety, relationship problems, denial, and repression. have all been linked to childhood sexual abuse. The most

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common long-term symptom among survivors has been discovered to be depression. Survivors can have trouble externalizing the trauma, leading to negative self-perception (Hall & Hall, 2011). Further research findings have shown the adverse effect of sexual abuse on both psychological well-being and physical health. Kempe emphasized this as 'another hidden paediatric problem' on child sexual abuse in his book 'A fifty-year legacy to child abuse and neglect. The historical perspective points to the fact that in the years after the First World War there was limited research or public awareness about sexual abuse of children and yet occasional abuse prosecutions of sexual offenders in criminal courts involving minors. Community assumption of abuse especially in the ordinary loving family was thought to be rare and its incidence concentrated in the lesser economic strata of society. There has been a tendency for adults to trust other adults on sexual matters and mistrust children (Coldrey, 1996). A large number of children are sexually abused by family members, friends, and acquaintances, according to research; however, the ratio of sexual abuse by family members is substantially higher (Wohab & Akhter, 2010).

India's constitution guarantees fundamental human rights for all children in the country and facilitates the state to make special exceptions for children. The Directive Principles of Public Policy explicitly facilitate the nation in protecting children from neglect and abuse and help ensure that children are provided opportunities and facilities for healthy growth in conditions of equality and dignity. The State is responsible for ensuring that early development is guarded against the mistreatment of emotional and physical abandonment (Social Statistics Division Central Statistics Office & Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Government of India, 2018). As a result of increased public awareness and activism around child protection, India's government passed the "Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO)" law in 2012. This law makes abuse, assault, and trafficking children under the age of 18 for pornography illegal. And it necessitates the creation of special courts to expedite the prosecution of such offences. (Choudhry et al., 2018) In spite of the law being passed, Child trafficking in India for commercial sexual abuse has emerged as a key worry for policymakers as a long-standing and deeply ingrained social problem. India is also home to a large majority of children that are vulnerable to exploitation (Carson et al., 2013). Child sexual abuse is believed to occur as a result of a complex interplay of individual and situational variables, necessitating the implementation of a broad range of necessary preventive measures over time. According to both retrospective studies and official reports, CSA is less frequent than child physical violence and neglect. However, the true prevalence of child sexual exploitation remains unknown since it appears that the majority of cases of CSA are either not disclosed during childhood or are not reported to authorities. Retrospective surveys provide more information, but there is evidence that "survey reluctance" and ineffective interviewing techniques can lead to underreporting by former adult CSA victims (Olafson, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The current article is a review of the existing literature on sociodemographic profile of Child sexual abuse survivors. A search of the Google Scholar, Research Gate and PubMed database was undertaken using the search terms "child sexual abuse", "India", "Sociodemographic", "POCSO", and "profile" in various permutations and combinations. The criteria that were established for the selection of the articles were (1) articles focusing on an age of up to 18 years, and (2) papers relating to sexual abuse in India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile of the victims

According to a study, more than 48,000 child rape incidents were reported between 2001 and 2011, with India seeing a 336 percent rise in child rape trials from 2001 (2,113 cases) to 2011 (7,112 cases) (Jacob & Kumar, 2018). According to researchers in India, between 18% and 50% of the country's population has been subjected to some kind of sexual abuse during their lifetime. These numbers may underrepresent the number of children (1 in 5) who are sexually solicited while using the internet, as well as the large number of victims who never report sexual harassment from inside and outside their families. The percentage of children who do not report could range from 30 percent to 87 percent (Carson et al., 2013). Meanwhile, only conscious memories are counted, and the earliest sexual abuse towards children is almost never recalled except during psychotherapy, these molestation rates tend to be only a fraction of the true rates (Iravani, 2011). Socio-cultural factors and family factors play a vital role in explaining the large statistics of sexual abuse in India. Poverty, illiteracy, child abandonment, underreporting, and cultural attitudes and behaviors regarding parental rights and styles are all factors. Parents who claim that their children are their personal property and that their children's rights and decisions are exclusively theirs are among the factors contributing to the menace (Carson et al., 2013). The socio-demographic variables included in this paper are age, gender, socio-economic status, location, of the victims of child sexual abuse.

Age of the victim

India has the highest number of CSA cases in the world. A child under the age of 16 is raped every 155th minute, a child under the age of 10 every 13th hour, and one out of every ten children is sexually assaulted at any one moment. While children in the younger age groups are often subjected to various types of sexual abuse, the rates of sexual abuse appear to increase after menarche. In the year 1998, Recovery and Healing from Incest, an Indian non-governmental organization (NGO), conducted the first research on CSA in India. The majority of the participants (76%) said they had been abused as children or adolescents (Singh et al., 2014). A study conducted by Sharma and Gupta in Chandigarh, India, found that the youngest girl who had been sexually assaulted was just two years old. In another study conducted by Deb in the year 2015 in India, nearly 45.8% of participants said they were sexually abused between the ages of 14 and 17, while 37.5 percent said they were abused between the ages of 10 and 13. The remaining 16.7% were sexually abused when they were very young, between the ages of 6 and 9.

Gender of the victim

Girls in India, especially in rural areas, face discrimination in terms of education, nutrition, and medical care, are more likely to experience infanticide and are frequently viewed as a family burden. In addition, in Indian households, boy children are usually respected and favored, and boy children also reap the benefits of what their parents have to offer. All of these factors place female children at a higher risk of sexual harassment and exploitation than boys (Carson et al., 2013). According to the most credible scientific studies in India, 30 percent of men and 40 percent of women recall being sexually molested as children, with "molestation" defined as actual genital contact, not just exposure. Around half of these are expressly incestuous with family members, with the other half usually being with others; nonetheless, caretakers are complicit in at least 80% of the cases. (Iravani, 2011). In 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India conducted a report that covered 13 states. According to the report, almost 21% of the participants had been subjected to serious types of sexual abuse. 57.3 percent of the participants who reported being victimized were

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boys, 42.7 percent were girls, and about 40 percent were 5–12 years old. Other types of sexual harassment were experienced by around half of the participants. A study of 2,211 school-aged children in Chennai was conducted in 2005 by Save the Children and Tulir–Center for Healing and Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, an Indian NGO. More than one-tenth (15%) of the participants claimed that they had experienced serious forms of sexual harassment, while about 48 percent and 39 percent of the boys and girls, respectively, reported being sexually assaulted. The overall prevalence of CSA is high in both genders, though studies show that girls are more susceptible than boys. Because of a lack of documentation and transparency, CSA research has received little attention in India. Despite the fact that sexual harassment of women has received a lot of coverage, there is a scarcity of information on CSA in India. (Singh et al., 2014).

Socio-Economic Status of the victim

While CSA is strongly linked to poverty, it can also be found in wealthy communities from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. To meet the ever-increasing financial demands, India is moving away from joint to nuclear families, with both parents working. As a result, young children are often left to fend for themselves or are forced to entrust their treatment to childcare centers. The outcome being, these children are much more vulnerable to abuse (Srivastava et al., 2017). It was also seen that children in institutional care, children at work and children on the street exhibited the highest prevalence of child sexual abuse (Singh et al., 2014).

State wise reports of CSA

In 2010, 107 cases of child rape, 125 cases of kidnapping and abduction, and 21 cases of procuring minor girls were registered in Karnataka; by 2012, those numbers had risen to 142, 471, and 45, respectively. Bengaluru, Karnataka was responsible for 26.76 percent of all sexual assaults recorded in 2012. In 2010, there were around 27 cases registered, which increased to 47 in 2011. More than 2,000 school-aged children have been sexually assaulted in Bengaluru, according to reports. In 2012, 38 cases of rape were registered to Bangalore City Police, followed by 34 in 2013, and 47 in 2011. According to Kerala records, 157 cases of CSA were registered between April 2011 and March 2012 (Singh et al., 2014). Around 73.3 percent of those surveyed said they had been raped after being drugged and sold to brothels in major cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, and Kolkata. Others said they left home because of better job opportunities in big cities, only to become stuck in a cycle of violence (Deb, 2015).

The perpetrators of sexual abuse

The male gender is dominant in India, which makes girls even more vulnerable. Furthermore, there is a widespread misconception among people in rural areas that individuals infected with sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, may get rid of their problem by having sexual relations with a minor child. As a result, the tendency of many adults to financially and sexually abuse children create a high risk of child trafficking and sexual exploitation, particularly in an environment of overpopulation, poverty, low-paying jobs, illiteracy, lack of educational opportunities, general lack of promotion of children's rights, and the limitations on children's life chances due to poor education (Deb, 2015). Findings show the majority of sexual abuse cases occur within the family environment, with the perpetrators being close family members (Singh et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

Despite the implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2012, which makes harassment, pornography, and trafficking of children under the age of 18 illegal, and mandates the use of special fast-track courts to expedite trials of these crimes, child sexual abuse remains a long-standing and deeply rooted social problem. Thus, it is evident that child sexual abuse is a serious problem in India. Journalistic posts, reports in local languages, and grey literature may help future researchers gain a better understanding and shed new light on child sexual abuse. Parents, teachers, and the community need to play a larger role in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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