

## **The Acquainted Perpetrator: Incidence of Sexual Abuse of Boys and Girls in Jammu**

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### **Abstract**

Child Sexual Abuse is a silenced social reality which leaves deep rooted physical, social as well as psychological scars on the child victim who is extremely innocent, indisputably defenceless and least responsible for the provocation if at all there is any. This paper highlights that sexual violence against children by adult acquaintances is not an uncommon phenomenon in Jammu, but it is still not acknowledged, accepted, reported and fought against. Survivors as well as their families prefer to bury the issue since disclosing amounts to stigmatization of victim because of the dogmatic social laws.

**Key Words:** Sexual Abuse, Acquaintance, Child, Stigma, Narratives, Child Sexual Abuse, Incest

### **Introduction**

The issue of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is conspired by so much silence that an illusion is created that it does not exist in the society. It was completely ignored a few decades ago but slowly and gradually some professionals, involved in child welfare, started breaking silence around girl child sexual abuse which is still not getting much attention but is being talked about somewhat now. However, until very recently, sexual abuse of boys was virtually unrecognized by these professionals.

This paper highlights the issue of sexual violence against children by adult acquaintances in Jammu, which has not been studied till now by any government or private agency. Victims/survivors as well as their families prefer to bury the issue since disclosing amounts to stigmatization of victim because of the dogmatic social laws.

It also examines whether there is any significant difference between the experiences of male and female victims of child sexual abuse. The perceptions of the victims have also been taken into account as to how they perceive the abuse, the abuser and how, according to them, the abuser perceives them. Some important concepts that have been used have been defined as under-

**Child** - Child has been defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as a person not having completed 18 years of age.

**Child Abuse** - The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:8) defines Child Abuse as follows, "Phenomenon that children are the victims of parents, guardians, caregivers, or other persons who wilfully cause them physical, psychological and emotional damage and may also sexually abuse them or allow others to abuse them sexually." WHO defines it as, "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."

**Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)** - As per the 'Study on Child Abuse: India 2007' by Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India, "sexual abuse" is inappropriate sexual behaviour 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 day-care provider), or related to the child. If a stranger commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault.

**INCEST** - includes consensual or non-consensual sexual relationship with a child by an adult family member with whom the sexual relationship has been socially and culturally prohibited.

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### **Myths/Theories**

There are different myths and theories related to children and aggressors when it comes to their sexual abuse. Many of these tend to project that it is the child who is the villain and the abusers is rather a victim.

#### **Child**

The Fantasy Theory- Many clinicians still are taught that children want genitally specific contact with the adults in their immediate environment, fantasize it, and when angry may even make up such stories to punish the male figure (Rush, 1980). In reality, from reports gathered by Sandra Butler in her 1980 work *Incest: Whose Reality, Whose Theory?*, children go to great lengths to lie in order to assure others that incestuous assaults do not happen. She goes on to say that she has never known a child who claimed being assaulted and had “made it up”, rather there are many who do not tell anyone until early adolescence or when they have a feeling of enough power to survive outside the protection of the family. Besides accusing children of making up stories, many begin with the view that it is the child who is the source of the blame, responsibility and seduction of the adult.

Child Collision or Victim Blame Theory - Another theory which prevails portrays that the victim is a bad sort of child anyway and also it is a way of life in some families. In these theorists' opinion, in some instances, child is the “active seducer rather than the one innocently seduced” (Herman, 1981); some “avoid guilt feelings by denying their enjoyment in the sexual experience” while many children are “passive participants who seldom complain or resist” (Bell, 1993). So, according to these writers, these children not only instigate it, but, even if they do not, it is seen as proof that they are seductive by “their submission and albeit masked pleasure”.

#### **Aggressor**

One of the most notable features of the literature on child sexual abuse is the extent of agreement over the gender distribution of abusers. It is men and adolescent boys who make up the vast majority of abusers. For female victims of all ages, men are perpetrators in 95 per cent or more of the cases. When male victims are considered, clinical and hospital studies report that at least 85 per cent of sexual offenders are men (Pillai, 2004).

They were described during the 1940's and 1950's as uniquely pathological, culturally different and rare, when they were mentioned at all (Herman and Hirschman, 1981). Another argument which works in favour of abusers is if the victims feel orgasm, it is not an abuse.

One factor often taken into account is the sexual maladjustment and estrangement between the husband and the wife coupled with the male's “poor impulse control”. They ignore the fact that sexual assaults are violent crimes committed by people who are in a position of power and violate the trust placed in them. They are sometimes referred to as victims of poor parenting.

Majority of people believe that these sex offenders are 'crazy' and are under treatment of a psychiatrist for mental illness. But the truth is that 9 out of 10 child abusers test normal (FASCE, 2010). Another prevalent myth is that it happens only in poor, illiterate and 'problem' families. Such theories and myths were tested in Jammu using intersubjectivity and dramaturgical approach.

### **Methodology**

#### **Perspective/Framework**

Dramaturgical approach has been used for the purpose. It is a sociological perspective stemming from 'symbolic interactionism'. The term was first adapted into Sociology from theatre by Erving Goffman in his 1959 work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and emphasizes that people observe and interpret each other's actions and react accordingly; and sexual violence is one among such reactions. It is an art of impression management in the front stage by using various strategies and methods behind and off the stage individually or as a team. The concept of front stage and back stage has been taken from the above said approach and used to find out the front and the back stage of the survivors as well as the perpetrators.

Ann J. Cahill (2011) thinks on sexual violence with a new concept, 'derivatization'. As 'objectification' has been defined as 'treating a person as an object', 'derivatization' is defined as 'treating a person as a derivative'. To derivatize means the aspects of their subjectivity that do not directly reflect the derivatizer's subjectivity, will not be perceived at all, and may in fact be suppressed.

Understanding this phenomenon demanded an understanding of embodied intersubjectivity. Alfred Schutz (1967) sought to show how people comprehend the consciousness of others while they live with their own stream of consciousness. Intersubjectivity, in case of CSA, does not amount to equality or symmetry. The assailant imposes his/her desires, will, body and sexuality upon the victim.

Thus, perspectives of dramaturgy (symbolic interactionism) and intersubjectivity have been used in order to understand the meaning the victims as well as the society attaches with such acts of sexual violence towards children.

Sample:

Total sample size is 1010 which includes respondents from the age of 7 to above 70 years and are classified into three categories of sample as shown in the table below-

Table - Total Sample Size

Type of Sample	Sex	No. of Respondents
Sample I* (Students)	Males	252
	Females	348
	Total	600
Sample II* (Public)	Males	180
	Females	220
	Total	400
Sample III* (Convicts)	Males	10
	Females	0
	Total	
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>1010</b>

(\*Break-up of samples has been shared below)

- Age group : 7 - 74 years
- Students : 600 from Government, Private and Public Schools for equal representation of children from all classes of society; and Colleges and Universities.
- Public : 400 from slums, courts, NGOs, markets, corporate offices, Google form, bureaucrats, civil and police personnel, beggars etc.
- Convicts : 10 males (No female convicts were found).
- For Jammu : 10+600+400 = 1010

### Incidence of Child Sexual Abuse in Jammu

Questionnaires were administered to 600 students of different schools, colleges and Universities of Jammu. Majority of respondents 70.83 percent came from urban areas, 19.33 percent came from rural areas and 9.66 percent belonged to semi-urban areas. Similarly, majority of them 53.17 percent were living in nuclear family and 46.83 percent were living in a joint family. They came from all income groups- 39.84 percent had a monthly family income of less than Rs. 50000; 17 percent had more than Rs.50000 and less than Rs 1, 00,000; and 11.16 percent of them had a monthly family income of more than Rs 1, 00,000 while 32 percent did not disclose their family income. Out of 600 respondents, 73.50 percent belonged to Hindu religion, 16 percent were Muslims, 6.16 percent were Sikhs, 1.83 percent were Christians, 0.83 percent were Jains and 0.18 percent followed Buddhist path. Similarly most of them 69.17 percent were from General caste, 8.33 percent belonged to Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 7.50 percent were from Scheduled Caste (SC) while 2% percent belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 0.18 percent belonged to Reserved Backward Area (RBA). Thus, the respondents came from different areas, different types of families and socio-economic backgrounds.

Out of 600 respondents, 31 percent of them reported that they were (and some are still) sexually abused by someone known to them. The sex-wise break up reveals that the rate is higher in females as compared to males. 38.70 percent males have confirmed abuse as compared to 61.29 percent females. The incidence of abuse is almost double in case of females.

Maximum females have been abused at the age of 12 and males between 8-11 years. It has been

observed that the probability of girls getting abused increases as they near beginning puberty and it goes on decreasing for boys during that period. A declining trend has been observed post 13 years of age for both boys and girls.

Maximum number of survivors 89.25 percent have been abused by males and 7.53 percent were abused by a female while 3.22 percent survivors were abused by both males and females. Top three abusers were cousins - 37.63 percent; Family Friends/Neighbours - 19.35 percent and Maternal Uncles -13.98 percent apart from others like fathers (3.76%), mothers (1.07%), grandfathers (1.61%), grandmothers (0.54%), stepmothers (0.54%), siblings (6.99%), paternal uncles (12.90%), paternal aunt (2.15%), maternal aunt (1.07%), spiritual leaders (2.15%) and teachers (8.60%).

**Impact Of Csa On Girls And Boys**

It is generally believed that boys are not vulnerable to sexual abuse and even if they undergo any such experiences, it is not much harmful to them. Considering the same public view into consideration, the respondents were asked about the kind of impact this experience had on them immediately or after a few years and the results were more or less the same for both sexes. Though number of girls who reported more serious consequences is higher than the number of boys yet it will be absolutely wrong to conclude that it does not affect boys at all.

'Distrust in relationships' is the most common aftermath of CSA in both boys and girls; 'being scared of people' is the second most common outcome while becoming 'suicidal' has been reported to be the third common aftermath. It is important to note here that suicide attempts have also been committed by boys and girls who have not any history of sexual abuse, but the number is higher in respondents with sexual abuse history.



Fig. Showing 'Sex-wise Break-up of Suicide Attempt by Respondents'

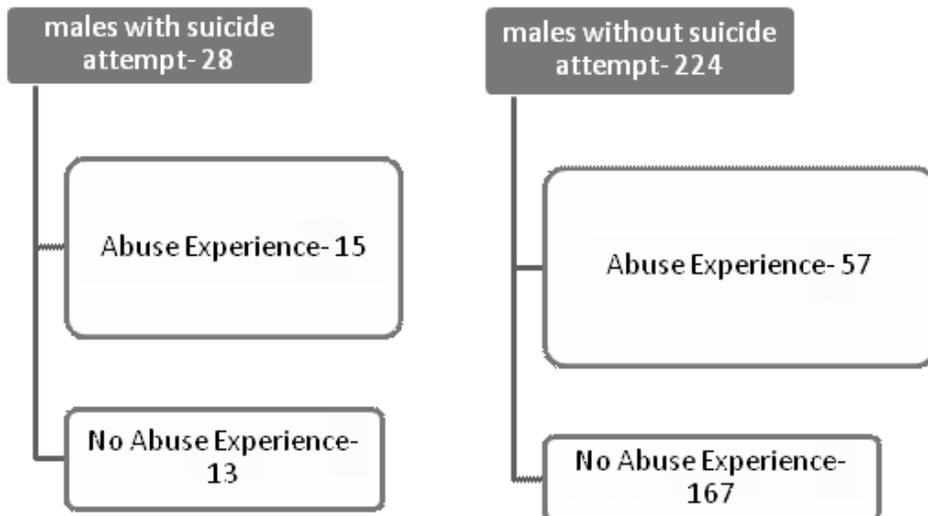


Fig. Showing 'Abuse History and Suicide Attempt by Male Respondents'



Fig. Showing 'Abuse History and Suicide Attempt by Female Respondents'

**Major Socio-cultural Causes**

There are many factors that can be attributed as a cause of CSA but broadly there have been three causes- biased socialization, power structure and silence.

Only 28.34 percent boys were sensitized by their parents against initiating a sexual activity with anyone while the percentage is high for girls. Similarly, lesser boys were questioned by their parents if they came home late or went for a night-out whereas the percentage for females was again higher. This can be attributed as a reason why males are mostly involved in CSA as the social system gives them the power to do so. Concepts like female virginity is so overvalued (which is not the case with men) that it is now leading towards a new trend of vagina-tightening and whitening products and medical procedures which are highly risky as per the medical practitioners.

Adv. Seema Shekhar Khajuria, Additional Advocate General in J&K High Court opines that she is yet to see shame and guilt in the eyes of rape accused who come to Jammu courts and those who are convicted are not ashamed but disappointed that their lawyer could not save them. She puts it, “yahan ulti ganga behti hai” (we have biased social norms where a rape/sexual abuse victim is stigmatized and the abuser still enjoys respect in society). There was a case from J&K Prisons where a rape convict got married when he was out on parole. Wife of Akshay Thakur (one of the rape convicts in Nirbhaya gang-rape case) starts questioning the judiciary when she got to know that her husband was given death sentence and says that a woman is protected by her husband, if he is dead, who will protect her and for whom she will live?

Due to lack of societal support, it becomes difficult for survivors to disclose their abuse secret. In case of children, it is due to lack of support from family. For various reasons, children do not feel comfortable in sharing with their parents. Out of 186 respondents who had an abuse history during childhood, 35 had disclosed to their parents but actually in most of these cases, the parents were not informed but they found out by themselves. In many cases, where the parents were informed, they asked the child to try to forget the issue. Only 1 case, out of 186, was reported to the police. The abusers were not even confronted in most of the cases. So, every silenced case gives more power to abuser.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded that CSA is an issue of power and control. It affects the way social reality is constructed by its survivors and those who say that 'Child Sexual Abuse' does not happen in Jammu and it is only a concept prevalent in bigger cities like Delhi, they must know that 3 out of 10 children in Jammu have been silently suffering inside their homes. They are trying their best to wear a forced smile on their lips so that they can hide their pain behind it from the public. As Erving Goffman (1959) uses the terms 'dark' and 'strategic' secrets; these survivors live them every day. They strive hard to present a cordial picture in the front stage so that they are not stigmatized by their families and society. Most of them blame themselves for it; they live with low self-esteem because the social structure around them perceives the acts of sexual abuse like that.

They remain in cognitive confusion, not able to comprehend what to think or how to interpret what is

happening to them. These feelings of insecurity and inadequacy are further enhanced by culture's rigid gender norms. This is how their emotional and cognitive abilities are shaped to synchronize with others. They simply succumb to the consciousness of others while living in their own stream of consciousness.

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