

## **Child Abuse – Is it Existing in the Families – a Qualitative Case Study**

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**Abstract:** Child abuse is not something new to our society, it has been there from time immemorial, but only in the recent past, it has been discussed much by various people like child rights activists, Government and Nongovernmental organizations. Child abuse can be categorized into four types namely physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and child neglect. Since this area, child abuse is not being given the desired importance, and various types of child abuse are brought to light by the media, in the recent past it was envisaged to do an in depth study in to this area. This article deals with the depth and intensity of the menace called child abuse in the families through a single case study of a girl child. The objectives of this study are, 1.to assess , to what extent child abuse can be perpetrated by the own family members, 2. to analyse how this child was able to cope up with the abuse 3.to find out how this child was able to get away from the abuse. It is a qualitative study and the data was collected by informal interviewing of a single girl child and has been presented as a case study. It describes how far child abuse can be perpetrated by her parents themselves and how this girl child was able to cope up with the abuse till she was institutionalized. This study intends to pave ways and means for future strategies of sensitising the children and parents towards this issue, in an appropriate manner and create awareness among the public in a large scale.

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Girl Child, Parents, Sensitization

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### **Introduction**

A child is a human being who has not completed 18 years of age, as per the law. Child abuse is not something new in our Society. It has been there from time immemorial, but only in the recent past it has been talked about much, by various people like child rights, activists, Non governmental organizations, Government etc., mainly because of the western influence. In Western countries Child rights is an important and crucial matter. In India also protection of child rights, is gaining momentum, and consequently the state and central Governments have formulated various bodies like Juvenile Justice Boards, Child Welfare committees and Child protection committees to look into the issues of the children, the abuses they go through and how to protect them. The District Child Welfare Committee takes care of the children who are in need of care and protection. These children could be abandoned or orphaned children, run away children, children who are from dysfunctional families. Surely all the children experience, some form of child abuses. The Juvenile Justice Board looks after the issues of the children who are in conflict with law. Enough research studies have not been done on Child abuse, in India. Hence an attempt was made to look into the various features of Child abuse by means of a study.

### **What is Child abuse**

The child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children especially by a parent or a caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregivers that results in actual or potential harm to a child and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools, where the child interacts with others. According to the World Health Organization child abuse and child maltreatment is defined 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".

### **Types of Child abuse**

There are four types of child abuse- physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse / psychological abuse and neglect.

### **What is Physical abuse**

Physical abuse is an injury resulting from physical aggression. Even if the injury was not intended the act is considered physical abuse.

### **What is sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse of a child is any sexual act between an adult and a child, including penetration, intercourse, incest, rape, oral sex and Sodomy.

### **Psychological and Emotional abuse**

All behaviours towards children that cause mental anguish or deficits constitute psychological abuse, it is also termed as emotional abuse, because damage caused to one's mental state creates emotional abuse.

### **Neglect**

When parents are continuously unavailable for their children it constitutes abuse – neglect or the absence of parental care, can have damaging effects on a child's well being. It is also a most common form of child abuse.

## **Review of Literature**

There are not enough studies on Child abuse, done in India and hence review of Literature could be done only from the articles of foreign authors. A study on the prevalence of Child abuse and neglect in Suriname aims to provide reliable estimate of the prevalence of all forms of Child maltreatment in Suriname. A significant proportion of these children experienced maltreatment. Among the adolescents 58.2% and 68.8% of young adults have been exposed to atleast one form of maltreatment. Child abuse and neglect (CAN) cases presenting to health services may be complex, when they go seriously wrong such as a child death or near miss. Even in a developed country like Australia there was no formal process for the review of cases where child protection is the primary concern. In an other study which aims to examine the benefits of home based paraprofessional parent aid services in reducing physical Child abuse and neglect in high risk parents, mothers receiving parent aid case management services reported significant improvements.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

This study was done with the following objectives

1. To assess what extent child abuse can be perpetrated by the own family members, especially parents
2. To infer, how the child was able to cope up with the abuse
3. To find out how the child was able to get away from the abuse.

This is a qualitative research study, by giving the case summary of a single girl child. The data was collected by informal interviewing of the child. At times as a catharsis, this child herself would ventilate, whatever she has gone through.

## **Findings – Case Summary**

This article narrates the story of a girl child who has gone through severe physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect, by means of a single case history. The name of this girl child has been changed in order to protect her identity and privacy. This girl named Kamala now completed 17 years and is at present living in an institution for the orphaned and abandoned girl children. Kamala lost her mother when she was 3 years old and was fully brought up by her father. Her father did not remarry after his wife's death, and he moved away from his native place and relatives, as he was not in good terms with them. He moved to various places, with this child Kamala and came back to a village near his native place. There he was working in a Rice mill and was staying in the same vicinity along with his child Kamala, as that rice mill owner belongs to his same community. The rice mill owner's family members adored Kamala as a child and Kamala was most of the time care of this family members. They were practically taking care of Kamala so well, like their own child and Kamala, reminisces now that all the values and good traits were taught to her only by this family members, and she really owes a lot to them for her good character and attitude. Years passed, Kamala attained puberty and she grew into a beautiful girl, Because of her father's, frequent migrations work wise, she was not able to continue her education peacefully and now and then she was stopped from school. At this time, Kamala's father thought of remarrying a widow with 2 children, due to the pressure from a marriage broker. Hence later kamala, her father, her step mother and her two children (one boy and one girl) started living together. Kamala's step mother was treating her well, not like any other usual stepmother. Kamala was sixteen years old at this period. One day her step mother made all effects to get kamala married to another widower of 40 years old, in exchange of Rs.

50000, which money the stepmother wanted to make use of educating her own children. Kamala, sensed this matter, and she wanted to utilize the services of the Child line 1098 and she rang up to them, without her father and stepmother's knowledge. The irony is that Kamala's father also connived to this effort, as he became totally a "yes man" to his new wife. He knowing her wife's bad intentions, never attempted to stop this marriage proposal. After Kamala rang up to 1098 Child line, the child line volunteers and a woman police constable visited their home and rescued her and later, institutionalized her in a Girls home, for destitute girl children.

After her admission into this home, she was admitted in a Government school in class IX std. She is very very hard working and motivated, well behaved, balanced and matured for her age. Her calm and composed disposition used to attract many visitors who visit this home. She used to be good in her studies. After a few months, her father and step mother gradually reconciled and visited her at home, and Kamala though she has gone through enough abuse, also wants to be in good terms with her father, as she loves her father too much. She used to say that her father is a nice and affectionate person, only her step mother tries to influence him a lot, for the sake of money. This step mother is always money conscious and avaricious. Later during the school vacation Kamala used to be taken to her father's home by him and she used to spend some days with them. In one of the vacations with her parents, once kamala developed severe right knee joint pain and got it swollen very badly. But her parents neglected this and tried to seek some hand remedies, but the pain and swelling did not subside. Her parents decided to take her to a non allopathic treatment which seems to be barbaric, in which her knee joint is supposed to be given a burn shot. But since this matter was brought to the knowledge of the institution authorities, when they rang to up find out why kamala did not turn up even after the vacation, they advised her to come back to the institution. Following this she was brought back home by her father, later she was taken to a pediatrician for consultation, who later referred her to an Orthopedic specialist. There Kamala was X-rayed and after seeing the X-ray she was given tablets and ointment for external application. After a week she became alright perfectly and there was no relapse of this pain also subsequently.

After some months the annual examinations were conducted and approximately 2 months summer vacation was declared by the school. Kamala wanted to go home to her parents for the vacation and was taken by her father. After nearly 2 weeks of her vacation, again the marriage proposal was suggested for Kamala, and this time the groom was a 35 years old man with the condition that , the would be bride groom should give Rs 50000 to Kamala's parents. This time Kamala who was not at all interested in marriage, and is interested in continuing her studies, spoke to that groom himself, saying that she is not interested in marriage and her marriage was cancelled. This act of Kamala, irritated her father and stepmother to the core and they started abusing her very badly. She was put in a room and locked outside, as they feared she would report this to the Child line like last time. She was beaten severely by her father, to the extent of getting bruises all over her body. Kamala just wept and wept, went through severe physical and emotional abuse and also neglect. She was not given food and a neighbor girl, was given the task of watching Kamala, as she might try to escape. This girl who is of Kamala's age, saw Kamala sobbing and sobbing without food, and her heart started melting by looking at Kamala's plight. She became sympathetic towards her and once when Kamala's parents were away, Kamala pleaded her to give her mobile phone and through this phone Kamala sent a message to the Child line woman police inspector. After this that woman police visited kamala's parent's home and rescued her and she was brought back to the same institution.

Since then kamala was spending her vacation here and after the school reopened after summer vacation, she resumed her school going. Though she has gone through severe abuse and mental agony and turmoil, she pacified herself and looks cheerful now, though at times she looks stressful by thinking of her parents, especially her father's act. Again now the parents have started visiting her once in a month and just talk with Kamala as a formality without any real feelings. Kamala is invited to come home by her parents, but she just refuses to go with them, as she might again be tried for another marriage proposal. Kamala never shows her anger or resentment to her parents, though she is upset by their behavior, but she behaves with them in a decent and respectful manner. The scars of the past incidents are still lingering in her mind, but she is able to cope up and is fully concentrating on her studies. She is good in stitching, embroidery work, very polite, well behaved, obeys and respects the elder, adjusts with each and everyone in that institution. She participates in all the oratorical and composition writing contests, which are being conducted in her school. She is given counselling whenever necessary by a Psychologist

### Discussion

Quantifying emotional abuse is extremely difficult, and very few studies have been conducted to establish prevalence rates of this type of violence. Qualitative studies that have been undertaken conclude that it is just as damaging to ones health to be continuously emotionally abused as it is physically abused. Degrading a Child's sense of self esteem can have serious mental and physical health consequences. Children who experience domestic violence may develop serious emotional, behavioral, developmental or academic problems.

As they develop, children who grow up with domestic violence or abuse in the household are more likely to use violence at school or community in response to perceived threats, more likely to attempt suicide, to use violence to enhance their reputation and self esteem and to become abuses in later life.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

From the real story of Kamala, we can infer the fact, how far the parents themselves can abuse their children and make their lives miserable. This one story is a tip of the iceberg and there are so many such stories go unreported in our society. Hence, it is the duty of each and every individual in the society, to work towards this issue of child abuse and how we can mitigate this problem, though not eradicate it fully. Parents should be sensitized in an in depth manner towards this issue. In schools when they conduct parent-teacher meeting this issue of child abuse can be addressed, by the teachers, after they get an insight of this menace. Public health workers have a responsibility to build awareness by creating and disseminating materials and innovative audio visual messages, which project positive image of girl child and women in the society. They have a vital role to play in networking with NGOS, and voluntary organisations and creation of social support networks.

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### **Author Profile**

Dr. Geetharamani Shanmugam has got her P.hD in Social Work. She has put in more than 25 years of service in the Department of Social and Behavioural Studies, in the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis, Chennai, India. She has presented many Research papers on the Sociological aspects of Tuberculosis in many conferences and has got them published. She was sent to Atlanta, USA to observe the “Behavioural Aspects of Tuberculosis Patients in USA”, on a WHO fellowship. She has served as a District Child Welfare Committee Member for the period of three years in Chennai.