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PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS – PREVENTION OF GIRL CHILD FROM ABUSE

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Introduction

Childhood abuse is a major pressure that affects young individuals and it often has a lifelong negative impact. A range of physical and mental health problems are associated with childhood abuse; these include common mental disorders, self-injurious behavior, personality pathology, psychosis, and sexually transmitted diseases. childhood abuse has been linked to early mortality in adulthood. Furthermore, Preventing and recognizing all forms of child abuse at an early stage, as well as identifying the environments where abuse occurs, are essential due to its severe and long-lasting adverse effects. Global studies suggest that 25 to 50% of children experience physical abuse; around 20% of girls and 5–10% of boys experience sexual abuse (World Health Organization & International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect, 2006). India is home to nearly 20% of the world's children, totaling approximately 440 million.

Statement of the Problem

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a globally prevalent phenomenon. Childhood abuse is recognized for its enduring negative impact on children's mental, physical, and social well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as a coercive act with a child who is unable to comprehend or provide consent, leading to serious physical or psychological damage. CSA includes sexual activities like inappropriate touching of private parts or indulging the child in touching the private parts of the perpetrator, molestation, sodomy, exhibitionism, pornography, and cyber sexual acts. Prevalence rates of CSA range from 8% to 31% for females and 3% to 17% for males. When sexual abuse remains unreported, and children are denied the protection and therapeutic support they require, they are left to endure their suffering in silence. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) has only recently gained public recognition as a significant issue in India. Very few cases of CSA are formally reported, and many victims do not even disclose their ordeal to their parents. The most distressing aspect is the pervasive silence and shame that often surrounds cases of sexual abuse among children. To overcome the detrimental effects of child sexual abuse, awareness has to be created among youth. The last decade has seen a steady raise in the number of child abuse cases irrespective of strict law enforcement like the POCSO 2012. Our study is to focus on the reason behind the raise in child

abuse cases; the efficacy of the prevailing pertinent laws and also to analyze the status of the existing child abuse cases registered and the role of Childline in protecting child rights.

Objective of the study

Child abuse, a global issue that transcends socio-economic boundaries, manifests in various forms such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. Its pervasive nature inflicts long-lasting trauma on children, affecting their physical, psychological, and emotional development. Addressing child abuse requires a multi-faceted approach, including awareness, prevention, and intervention. One critical player in this endeavor is Childline, a helpline dedicated to providing immediate assistance to children in distress. In this research article, the main objective is to find the role of Childline in protecting the rights of a child and how they are recovering the child physically as well as psychologically.

Source of Collecting Data

The primary data for the study will be consolidated through observations, focus group discussion, and face to face interviews with the respondents from the ChildLine. The secondary data will be sourced through the information gathered from the government reports, publications, and documentaries on the particular group of people both in Tamil and Malayalam.

Area of the study

The study area for the research is the state of Kerala, and some randomly selected Districts shall be the research field through Childline records.

Analysis of the study

The study population includes children below the age of 18 years. There are a number of cases filed under child abuse and harassment are registered under child line in the district of Kerala, hence in order to restrict the sample size some randomly selected cases, that is group of children from various districts are taken as the target group from the data available with ChildLine.

Child abuse in India

Child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a significant concern in India. With one of the largest child populations globally, Census data from 2011 reveals that India has 472 million children under the age of 18, comprising 41% of the total population. Every child deserves to lead a happy childhood and the opportunity to live a life safe from violence, rejection, exploitation, deprivation, and discrimination. Protection of this 41% of the young population is not only a matter of their human rights but also an investment towards building a robust nation. However, Child Abuse has become a growing concern in India. Data shows that millions of boys and girls are sexually abused within and outside their homes by relatives or by known people. Only a small number of child sexual abuse cases are reported, while many victims do not even disclose their experiences to their parents. The increasing menace of child sexual abuse is not just limited to domestic spheres but also vulnerable populations like rag pickers and those who beg on the streets. Thousands are being exploited in return for a meal or a meager daily wage barely sufficient to sustain their livelihood.

Forms of Child Abuse

Child abuse is not confined to one form; it spans multiple types, each leaving a distinct scar. Physical abuse involves inflicting bodily harm through actions like hitting, burning, or shaking. Emotional abuse involves actions that damage a child's self-esteem or emotional well-being, such as persistent criticism, threats, or rejection. Sexual abuse refers to any form of sexual activity involving a child and neglecting refers to the act of fulfilling the basic needs of the child, primarily food, shelter, healthcare, and education.

Impact of Child Abuse

The aftereffects of child abuse are long-lasting and sometimes last till eternity. In general, children subjected to physical abuse may suffer chronic health problems,

developmental delays, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and even suicidal thoughts. The sexually abused survivors may also struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and may fall prey to drug addiction. Children who have faced negligence often are academically backward, isolate themselves, and have mental health issues. It is a long enduring trauma that affects every aspect of the survivors' lives.

Child Abuse and the Role of Childline

Childline was established in 1986 in the UK by Esther Rantzen, a British television presenter and journalist. The thought of establishing ChildLine originated when she presented a program on the extent of child abuse in the country where she realized the need for a dedicated helpline service for the children to address their issues. The impact of the launch was overwhelming since many children reached out for help highlighting the predominant need for the service. The success of UK Childline paved the way for the opening of Childline across the globe. Many countries implemented the service as per their specific needs. In India, the Childline India Foundation was founded in 1996 by Jeroo Billimoria, a social entrepreneur. Today, ChildLine services are established in numerous countries to support children in need of care and protection.

Child abuse, is a global issue that persists in all sectors be it rich or poor, affecting the physical and emotional well-being of the children which has to be addressed with utmost care and also promote the awareness to prevent its occurrence. Childline plays a major role in addressing this which has a 24-hour free dedicated helpline for immediate assistance to children in distress. The services of Childline include Counselling, emergency support and referral to designated services. It acts as a bridge between the child and our support system. It also conducts campaigns and education programs for the Children, Parents and educational institutions to create its awareness. It elicits the public about the signs to recognize abuse at the right time and reporting it, and trains children how to seek help in case of an abuse, which fosters a protective environment for the growing children and the community.

Intervention and support

As soon as Childline receives a call, it is transferred to trained counsellors who shall provide immediate emotional support analyse the situation, and proceed towards immediate necessary action. If the severity is very sensitive, Childline will immediately contact Law enforcement and child protection agencies to ensure maximum protection for the child. Depending upon the situation, it connects the child with his/her family, social services, legal aid, and Professionals in mental health services. Childline also continues to render support until the child feels safe and independent.

Case Narratives 1

The case study is about a distressing incident reported to Childline, where a 16-year-old girl, Aditi was subjected to physical abuse at her residence by a close relative of her. The incident was reported to ChildLine by Aditi's sister. Immediately, a member from the ChildLine visited Aditi's school to speak to her, provide support and get details to resolve the issue. The girl narrated that she was frequently abused by her uncle who was also an alcoholic. She was scared at first to disclose to anyone fearing that he might harm her.

Collaborative Action

Childline, immediately called for action by filing a formal complaint at the Karunagappalli police station, adhering to mandatory guidelines, and also notified the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and (DPCU) District Child protection unit. The objective was to initiate legal and protective measures through the proper channel.

Holistic support and recovery

Understanding the severity of the case and the emotional rehabilitation the child needs, Childline extended comprehensive support to Adithi and also her family. Sessions for

Emotional balancing after the trauma, reassurance, and guidance were provided not only to Aditi but also to her parents who had to cope with the challenging situation.

Positive Transformation and Ongoing Care

The meticulous effort by Childline resulted in positive outcomes, Aditi under the unconditional care and support extended by the team, demonstrated visible signs of emotion recovery very quickly. She returned to her school and showed significant improvement in overall well-being. Childline continued to maintain regular contact with Aditi and her family with periodic follow-up sessions to monitor her emotional state, ensure progress, and to address any emerging concerns

Impact and Outcomes

The case study of Aditi (name changed) justifies the role of proactive intervention and support rendered by Childline. The Childline not only addressed the issue but also provided emotional healing, support, and a sense of security for Aditi and her family thus providing a permanent relief from distress proving that Childline will always be a source of support, especially for the vulnerable children.

Effect of the POCSO Act, 2012 for the protection of child rights in this case :

Reporting and Legal Framework:

The POCSO Act focuses mainly on sexual offenses conducted against children under the age of 18 and enforces immediate reporting of such incidents by the child or anybody who comes to know about the incident. The Childline's quick intervention and association with the police station is clearly in line with the POCSO Act. It ensures that child sexual abuses are dealt with strict legal action as per the norms set in the POCSO act for protecting and safeguarding the children.

Child-Centric Approach:

POCSO Act functions completely as a child-centric approach during the whole process, from receiving the complaint to the course of legal proceedings, with the prime goal of ensuring the well-being of the victim. In addition, it works with the vision of providing emotional support to the child who is in distress to combat the trauma caused by the abuse.

Effect of Juvenile Justice Act, 2015:

The Juvenile Justice Act 2015 has launched the Child Welfare committee (CWCs) and District child protection units (DCPUs) to cater to the needs and rights of children who require care and protection. Childline's strong alliance with the CWC and DCPU in reporting the cases promptly clearly aligns with the JJ act, which ensures safeguarding the interest of the child and for ensuring required regular follow-up and support.

Rehabilitation and Support:

The JJ Act does not limit only to addressing the abused children but also focuses on the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who are subjected to trauma or abuse. Childline regularly follow-ups with the child / family / guardian to ensure the emotional well-being and safety of the child is good. It ensures regular support and monitoring for maximum efficacy of the Act.

In brief, both the POCSO and JJ Act synchronise hand in hand in protecting the rights and well-being of the children. It provides a clear, well defined legal framework for reporting incidents working as a child-centred approach. It aims to render an overall holistic protection and well being of the children who are subjected to physical and mental exploitation.

Case narrative 2

On the evening of June 28, 2022 at 3:55 pm, Childline's help line number; 1098 received a distress call from the Head Mistress of LP school. She reported the incident of a 7-year-old girl who shared with the counsellor during regular school counselling session that she was sexually abused by a neighbour residing close to her house.

Childline, without any delay sent a Childline counsellor and a team member to the school to meet the child directly as per the clause stated in the POCSO Act 2012. The initial objective was to provide the required counselling and emotional support for the child who was shocked by the situation.

During the intervention, the child revealed that she had endured sexual abuse by a 55-year-old man residing very near to her residence. The abuser visited the child's house frequently and misbehaved whenever he got an opportunity. This traumatic experience had deeply affected the child. Having realized the situation, the ChildLine counselor extended compassionate support to help the child to cope with the trauma which if left untreated would have become a lifelong threat.

Collaborative Action with Allied Systems

Based on the information gathered from the child, ChildLine filed a mandatory report with the Sastamcotta police station. Simultaneously, a comprehensive report was submitted to both the (CWC) Child Welfare Committee and (DCPU), District Child Protection Unit.

Positive Outcome and Post-Intervention Support

The swift response and action by the ChildLine team focused on emotionally rehabilitating the child and also ensuring the child's safety and providing all the essential support. Simultaneously, The parents were also contacted and were in touch providing them with comfort and instilling trust. This resulted in the child exhibiting significant emotional improvement, displaying signs of happiness and contentment.

Need for Childline in protecting Child rights

Childline is the need of our society considering the massive child abuse occurrences every day. Despite many initiatives to mitigate this issue, still, many children still continue to suffer in silence due to less awareness or accessibility to the support systems. Childline plays a crucial role in filling this gap by providing a free and easily accessible platform where children can reach confidently to seek help.

Childline acts swiftly in rendering support to children in distress. Be it abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the child receives immediate support and comfort from the trained counsellors, re-instilling their confidence in the world filled with such cruel thoughts and actions. The support received from Childline could act as a life-saving deed for the child especially when the severity of abuse is high.

Childline functions 24/7 and is easily accessible for all children so they can reach out for help at any time. There is no service charge (direct or hidden) removing financial constraints that might refrain the children from seeking support. Childline also caters to multiple modes of communication – like phone calls, text messages, online messages, and chats, missed call services to accommodate different situations.

The other important factor of Childline service is maintaining confidentiality of the reported incident/person. Which encourages children to come forward to share their problems. Where the confidence is given to them that their concerns will be dealt with utmost privacy. This helps the children to build trust and breaks their inhibition to seek help.

In addition to immediate intervention to resolve the issue, Childline also addresses the root cause of a child in distress. They use various strategies like counselling, mentoring, connecting the child with their family, with Shelter homes if the family is the root cause for the problem, legal aid, etc. It also does a constant follow-up to ensure the continued safety and well-being of the child.

Furthermore, Childline plays a prominent role in creating awareness of child abuse and also the preventive measures to combat the crime. This is done through educational Programs and Campaigns. Where Childline educates children about their rights and teaches them how to protect themselves. It also educates the Parents and society/community to create a safer environment for the children.

Childline also does research and surveys to collect data on cases, nature, and extent of abuse, which is used to reform the policies and improve the current child protection system in our country. Childline also collaborates with Governments and Other organizations to implement stronger laws and better resources to protect our future generation.

Conclusion

Child abuse is a very serious crime and a direct violation of children's rights. To eradicate the crime rates, Childline has an inclusive approach and provides immediate support. It also raises awareness among the public and advocates stringent policies to fight this issue. Through its meticulous efforts over the years, Childline not only saves children from abusive situations but also strives to create a safer and supportive environment for all children.

However, Childline requires a collective responsibility, where everyone should work in unison to protect and give hope to vulnerable children worldwide.

Childline also collaborates with Government and Non-Government organizations to implement policies and legislation procedures to protect children from child abuse. The data and insights available with Childline are invaluable in shaping policies that prioritize child safety and welfare.

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