

A Study on Violence against Children

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Abstract

Violence against children has been one of the most brutal and serious problems in our contemporary society. Children in institutional care, schools and even in their own homes are subjected to some type of violence, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, caste, gender and culture. This could seriously affect their physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. The child violence can be caused by a number of reasons including their socio-economic factors, cultural norms, beliefs and their household environment. For the prevention of child violence, an effective and collective effort is required. From implementing strong and effective laws to providing education and community awareness, the prevention and elimination of child violence from the society could be a long and complex process. This paper studies and discusses the different types of violences, it's consequences on the children and the various ways through which we could reduce and eliminate it from our society.

Keywords: Violence, Abuse, Children, Parents, Laws

Introduction

Violence against children includes all forms of violence - physical, mental, emotional abuses, against children who are 18 years or less. Infants and younger adolescents are at high risk in experiencing violence. Both boys and girls are equally at risk of experiencing physical and emotional violence. However, girls are at more risk in experiencing sexual violence. In a study made by the United Nations, it has been observed that, globally, millions of children become victims of some form of violence - physical, emotional or sexual.

The different forms of violence include physical, emotional, mental, sexual violence, and neglect. Physical violence refers to the use of physical force against the children with the intention of punishment. Emotional and mental violence consists of emotionally torturing a child with constant criticism, discrimination and verbal abuse, causing mental distress in a child.

Sexual violence refers to the forced and non-consensual sexual act that a child has to perform resulting in the sexual exploration of a child. Neglect is a lack of attention by the parents or caregivers in providing the basic facilities to the children.

Child violence can be prevented and eliminated from the society by an effective and systematic approach. It starts with educating the children and the public about the various prevention programs

and policies. A safe and violence-free environment within the household shall be promoted and ensured. Community awareness campaigns shall be held and the national and international laws on child protection has to be strengthened. The government shall collaborate with national and international organisations to help protect the children in the country.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the various forms of violence against children
- To analyse the impact on the child's physical, mental and emotional health
- To identify the risk factors and the causes of child violence
- To understand the child protection laws - national and international
- To understand the role of family, Government and organisations in the child protection

Review of Literature

“The single most significant predictor that an individual will end up in the mental health system is a history of childhood trauma, and the more severe and prolonged the trauma, the more severe are the psychological and physical health consequences.” (Kezelman and Stavropoulos, 2012)

Kezelman and Stavropoulos (2012) describe a ‘culture of silence’ around child abuse, where secrecy and denial allow it to continue. This makes it harder for victims to speak up and for society to address the problem.

Children have the same basic rights as adults, but their age makes them especially vulnerable and in need of extra care and protection. They have the right to safety, education, and play, as well as the right to express their views in matters that affect them. Ensuring these rights helps children grow up in a secure and supportive environment, allowing them to develop into healthy and capable adults.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of violence against children consists of the basic concept, risk factors, consequences and the various factors that contribute to the occurrence of this issue.

Definition

Violence against children refers to any form of harm, exploitation, or mistreatment that affects children's physical, emotional, psychological, or social well-being. (WHO, 2020)

Forms of Violence against children

The various forms of violence are physical, emotional, mental, online, sexual violence and neglect. Physical violence refers to the use of physical force against the children with the intention of punishment. Emotional and mental violence consists of emotionally torturing a child with constant criticism, discrimination and verbal abuse, causing mental distress in a child.

Sexual violence refers to the forced and non-consensual sexual act that a child has to perform resulting in the sexual exploration of a child. Online violence against children includes exploitation, trafficking, cyberbullying, and invasion of their privacy in their digital environment. Neglect is a lack of attention by the parents or caregivers in providing the basic facilities to the children.

Child Violence in India

Child violence in India happens due to many social and economic reasons. Poverty, lack of education, and unemployment are major causes. Social norms, cultural beliefs, and traditions also play a role in increasing violence against children.

According to a study made by 'Child Rights and You', 46% of the total percentage of child violence in India is kidnapping and abduction. The rest are sexual offences and exploitation, child labour, bullying and trafficking.

A study conveyed that most of the abuses and exploitations are done by someone close to the child, for instance, parents, family members, teachers or relatives. The violence occurs in their own homes, schools, institutional cares or on online platforms.

The national laws ensuring the protection of children are as follows: 1. Juvenile Justice Act (2000,2015 A) 2. Prohibition of child Marriage Act (2006) 3. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012) 4. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation Act) (1986, 2016 A) 5. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1987) 6. Education Act, 2009 7. POSCO Act (2012).

In addition to these laws, organisations like 'National Commission for Protection of Child Rights' and 'Child Welfare Committee' have been set up to promote child well-being.

Risk Factors

Risk factors contributing to violence against children can be categorized into individual, family, community, and societal levels.

On the Individual level, child's age, disability and gender plays a major role. Relationships between the family members and substance abuse by any member affects the well-being of the child. Social and economic conditions like the societal norms, poverty, lack of support, culture values also plays a major role in the existence of child violence.

Consequences of Child Violence

Violence against children can have a serious impact on their physical and mental health, having both long-term and short-term effects.

1. Death - The most serious impact on a child is death. WHO calculates that every year 53,000 are being murdered in the name of child violence.
2. Physical health problems - Serious brain, arm injuries, asthma and chronic illnesses like obesity, cancer, cholesterol and high blood pressure are caused.
3. Mental health problems - Depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, eating disorders, PTSD and loss in their cognitivity.

Significance of the Study

India holds the second position in child population—India houses 19% of the total children in the world and 18% among them are below 18 years. Overall occurrence of physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, and witnessing intimate partner violence were 5–35%, 15–30%, 4–9%, 6–12%, and 8–25% according to Ruth Gilbert et al (2009). A government of India survey reported that 53% of the children encounter some kind of abuse. In the last 10 years, a gradual rise in the number of child abuse victims was observed –8,804 in 2014, 14,930 cases in 2015. A study that conducted in Kerala stated that 35% of boys and 36% of girls below 18 had faced some kind of abuse in their childhood. Children in the age group of 5-12 years were found to be at higher risk. Among them, the most exposed were the home-less on the streets and children who were exploited child labor.

In the year 2022, India experienced an increase in child abuse cases, amounting to 162,000 incidents in total (National Crime Records Bureau). As per an analysis by Child Rights and You (CRY), kidnapping and abduction makes up 46% of the crimes against children in India, followed closely by sexual offences. Cases of sexual violence against children have increased by 96% between 2016 and 2022.

Suggestions

To reduce and eliminate child violence from the society, the following suggestions can be considered.

1. Avoid toxic parenting, provide counseling for children and caregivers, making the children aware of their rights.
2. Create safe spaces for children and caregivers.
3. Offer healthcare and education to the victims. Provide financial assistance, training, and job opportunities to the victims
4. Strengthen laws, ensure an efficient justice system, develop strategies, and organise campaigns
5. Educate children and parents on cyberbullying and on online risks and safety.

Conclusion

Violence against children is a complex issue that demands collective and collaborative action. The risk factors on individual, family, community, and societal levels is essential in addressing this problem. Strengthening laws, policy reform and spreading awareness accounts to effective prevention and intervention strategies that could contribute to the elimination of child violence in the society. The need of the hour is to understand the severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of violence against children so as to break this cycle of harm by working together. Safeguarding children's right requires a collaborative effort from governments, society, families, and communities. Ultimately, only through sheer commitment and constant action can we eliminate the issue and create a safe and nurturing environment for our children.

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