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How to Prevent, Recognise, Act against Child Sexual Abuse? Start with Awareness



There is a need for primary prevention and clinical intervention and spreading awareness about child sexual abuse as well as empathic responses towards survivors

LAST UPDATED: MARCH 26, 2022, 08:00 IST
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ABHINAV MEHROTRA

Sexual abuse is accompanied by adverse consequences concerning freedom of choice and opportunities and domestic violence, writes Abhinav Mehrotra. Photo for representation: Shutterstock

The Kerala High Court recently received a petition on the eve of International Women's Day from a mother of 10-year-old rape survivor who is in her eighth month of pregnancy for judicial intervention in terminating the pregnancy under exceptional circumstances recognised under Section 5 of Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971. Her father has been booked under the provisions of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

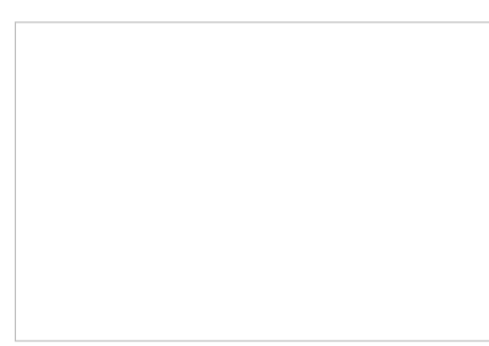
In this light, a question arises: What is the impact both physically and psychologically on the child and what can be the possible way out to prevent and deal with such cases not only at the judicial but societal level?

The root of the issue is the violation of a woman's bodily integrity. As a result, she suffers from what is known as Type II trauma — exposure based on traumatic events, adversities and day-to-day stressors, existing birth defect or neonatal problems in infants. In simple terms, child abuse or maltreatment constitutes *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. The gravity of this global issue is reflected by the United Nations' 2015 Sustainable Development Goals that aim to improve prevention, identification and optimal responses to sexual abuse.

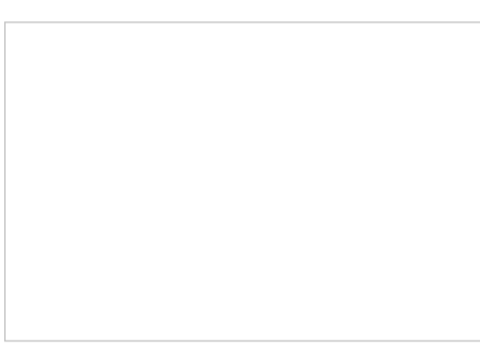


Sexual abuse is accompanied by adverse consequences concerning freedom of choice and opportunities and domestic violence. These have adverse health outcomes like high infant, child and maternal mortality rates. To illustrate, child sexual abuse **affects** one in eight children and causes massive costs including depression, unwanted pregnancy such as the case under consideration. Thus, there is a need for primary prevention and clinical intervention and spreading awareness about child sexual abuse as well as empathic responses towards its survivors.

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What needs to be considered is that prevention, recognition, and action are required at the *individual, institutional and societal levels*. At the individual level, awareness must be developed in children themselves, and those legally responsible for them like parents, guardians. At the institutional level, among professionals in education, childcare, health, law enforcement, social welfare etc. to minimise perpetration and prevent a culture of concealment so they can respond appropriately to disclosures, and can even identify cases at an early stage.

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By Outbrain

In the larger context, the survival of the democratic structure of India is at stake because the dignity of an individual must be safeguarded as mandated under the Constitution. The need of the hour is taking proactive steps by putting in place an active problem-solving mechanism for these children. These measures can help reduce the impact on their mental health caused by untimely pregnancy and ensure their best interests as defined under Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of Child. This article emphasises that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the *areas of safety, health as well as competent supervision*.

Guidance can be sought from the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law proclaimed by the UN in 2005. These mandate that the victims of human rights abuses shall be provided full and effective reparations such as restitution, rehabilitation and guarantee of non-repetition.

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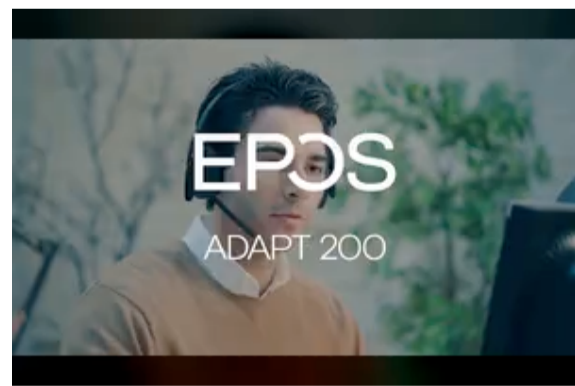
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- FIRST PUBLISHED: MARCH 26, 2022, 08:00 IST

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