

Factors Affecting Control and Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in Sri Lanka

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.805055>

Received: 26 April 2024; Accepted: 06 May 2024; Published: 04 June 2024

ABSTRACT

Child abuse has evolved into a strong social problem in Sri Lanka. In addition to this, children being victims of sexual abuse has grown into a strong social problem in this country today. It is clear from the study of the statistics published regarding sexual abuse that there has not been a significant decrease in the sexual abuse of children in this country. The sexual abuse of children, especially by using them for obscene postings and publications, has grown extremely in Sri Lanka. Thus, children are faced with a lot of effects and problems due to being victims of sexual abuse. This situation has a direct impact on the development of the country. Treatment of child victims after sexual abuse and enforcement of the law against abusers incurs huge economic and service costs. However, 100% compensation cannot be made for the negative impact on the child. Because of this, a strong emphasis should be placed on identifying the factors that affect the control and prevention of children becoming victims of sexual crimes in Sri Lanka. The research problem of this study is to find out what are the causal factors that affect the control and prevention of child sexual abuse. Also, the main purpose of the research is to study the factors affecting the control and prevention of children becoming victims of sexual abuse. In this study, special attention has been given to the relationship between the victimized children and their parents, parental weaknesses that affect the victimization of abuse and what measures can be taken to control and prevent sexual abuse. Data collection was done using two samples, and structured interviews were used to collect data. According to the research results, 79% of the parents have not informed their children about the factors that influence them not to become victims of sexual abuse. 89% of the parents have accepted that some weakness in the family has affected the children to commit a sexual crime. Among these, about 51% of the father's weaknesses have directly affected the abuse. The main suggestion is that the sexual abuse of children in this country can be controlled and prevented by implementing the law and making new laws. Also, it has been identified in this study that the family should be strengthened to control and prevent children from falling victim to sexual abuse.

Key words – Child, Control and Prevention of Sex Crimes, Family Background, Victimization, Sexual Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem faced by every country in the world. Being a victim of sexual abuse has a great impact on the child concerned as well as the entire society including the family in which he lives. In 2002, the World Health Organization pointed out that at least 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 have been victims of sexual intercourse or some other form of sexual abuse (Unicef, 2012:01). According to the information reports of the National Center for Missing Exploited Children in America, the amount of sexual abuse done to children without physical contact is more than the number of sexual abuse done with physical contact in every country of the world. Accordingly, it should be said that the total number of sexual abuses against children in the world along with sexual offenses related to obscene postings

and publication related to children is very high. According to NCMEC reports, 29397681, 32059029, 36210368 offenses related to obscene postings and publication related to children have been committed in the world from 2021-2023. (NCMEC, 2024). Also, on average, 1/3 of girls and 1/7 of boys in the world are victims of sexual abuse (Perera, 2005:36). Compared to other regions of the world, child sexual abuse is more common in Asian countries. In Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, child sexual abuse and HIV AIDS are also widespread (Nishshanka, 2004:22). According to the points indicated above, some understanding of the global situation of child sexual abuse can be gained. Scholars and researchers in many countries of the world are interested in conducting studies in this field because it is a social problem that affects globally and each country nationally. However, some countries in the world have conducted minimum research on child sexual abuse. This situation has affected the occurrence of adverse situations in dealing with the control and prevention of child sexual abuse. It is also important to examine the situation in Sri Lanka regarding this issue.

Children in Sri Lanka being victims of sexual crimes has caused many problems. There is no significant decrease in the reporting of sexual abuse to Sri Lankan legal institutions dealing with children. It is also a very problematic and tragic situation that a large amount remains unreported. The following table shows the number of sexual abuses against children in Sri Lanka from 2019-2023.

Table 1 – Child Sexual Abuse in Sri Lanka

Type of Sexual Abuse	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sexual harassment	1309	1315	1339	1232	1497
Exposure of Children to pornography	7	16	8	13	10
Procuration	2	3	17	8	8
Improper Sexual Exploitation	20	17	14	13	22
Rape	1412	1564	1600	1618	1639
Unnatural Offences	10	5	3	3	7
Grave Sexual Abuse	640	628	573	495	602
Incest	43	42	68	50	63
Severe indecent acts among persons	7	2	2	0	0
Trafficking in restricted goods, hiring and employing children for sex	–	–	–	–	7
Total	3450	3592	3624	3432	3855

(Source: Police Children and Women’s Bureau, 2020-2023)

Accordingly, 17953 cases of sexual abuse of children have been reported during the above five years. This amount is a very high value for a country like Sri Lanka, and the average value of reporting in one year is approximately 3590. Among the reported cases of sexual abuse of children, the most serious sex crimes have been reported.

With the development of new technology, children were used more for obscene publications and because of this, children in Sri Lanka became more sexual victims recently. However, from 2019-2022, only 44 cases have been reported to the Sri Lanka Police Department regarding obscene postings and publications against children in Sri Lanka. However, the National Center for Missing Exploited Children (NCMEC), which operates in the United States of America, points out that a large number of Sri Lankan children have made obscene postings and publications on the Internet. This agency is the main reporting agency on sexual crimes against children in the world. NCMEC reports that there have been 73202, 130267, 152811 and 146025 obscene postings and publications against children in Sri Lanka from 2019-2022 respectively. Investigating such a large number of complaints has become a serious challenge for the Sri Lanka Police

Department. Because the number of complaints investigated so far is very low and more than 100,000 new complaints are added every year. This situation is a new trend and a serious situation regarding child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it is essential to control and prevent all forms of sexual abuse against children as soon as possible.

In order to control and prevent child sexual abuse, it is very important to identify the causes of sexual abuse. Accordingly, tourism, war conflicts, family environmental weaknesses, children's physical and mental disorders, the influence of peer groups, social and cultural factors, communication and technical factors, natural and other disasters generally affect the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse. In particular, the main factors affecting the sexual abuse of children in Sri Lanka can be identified under poor family environmental conditions. The research study conducted by Niranjana & Udayakumara in 2019-2020 regarding child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka has identified many family weaknesses that affect sexual abuse. Accordingly, economic weakness of the family, low education of parents, death of parents, single parent family, parents leaving the family, extramarital relationship of parents, remarriage of mother or father, parents moving abroad, parents using alcohol and drugs, low handicap of parents, Family-related problems such as family disputes, both mothers and fathers working, parents' wrong behavior patterns and lack of facilities at home have affected children to become victims of sexual abuse. Through this study, the researchers have further shown that the loss of a mother or father or both has caused a significant number of children to become sexually victimized. According to the study, 37% of child victims have lost their parents due to various reasons (Niranjana & Udayakumara, 2022:112-113). Accordingly, family environmental factors that affect children in Sri Lanka to be victims of sexual abuse have been widely discussed in this research.

It is not possible to control and prevent children from becoming victims of sexual abuse only by identifying the causes of it. Specific solutions should be given for those reasons and for this there should also be a strong mechanism. Although Sri Lanka has a comprehensive and strong mechanism for child protection, there are still problems in its effective implementation. Sri Lanka has introduced a strong legal system to combat child abuse and protect children's rights. By enforcing these laws, there are several prominent government agencies established to control and prevent child abuse. Accordingly, National Child Protection Authority, Police Children and Women's Bureau, Department of Probation and Child Protection Services, Children's Secretariat office and Probation Offices established at the provincial level are important here. Apart from this, non-governmental institutions and organizations also play an important role in the control and prevention of child abuse in this country. Unicef and Save the Children play a special role here.

The research problem of this study is to investigate the causal factors that protect children from sexual abuse. The parents of the victimized children and the government officers involved in the subject field were used to study the reasons and suggestions. These suggestions are very important in controlling and preventing child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka.

OBJECTIVES

Identifying the factors affecting the control and prevention of children becoming victims of sexual crimes.

Identifying the family background of sexually abused children and the factors affecting sexual abuse.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the districts of Kalutara and Colombo in the Western Province. 47 parents of children who were victims of sexual abuse reported to the National Child Protection Authority from 2020-2023 were selected as one sample under the simple random sampling method. Also 40 government officers

dealing with children were selected as another sample under purposive scheme. Forensic medical officers, police children and women's unit officers, child rights promotion officers, probation officers, child protection officers were included in the sample of officers. Formatted interview method and questionnaire method were used for data collection. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was done in data analysis. Microsoft Excel software was used to prepare tables and graphs during data analysis.

FINDINGS

Officers who studied some important facts about the sexual abuse of children in Sri Lanka have explained according to their experiences. According to them, most of the children are sexually abused by the boyfriend. Accordingly, 35% of boyfriends, 35% of acquaintances, 20% of relatives and 10% of neighbors have sexually abused children. When asked about the place where the sexual abuse took place, 58% of the sexual abuse takes place in the victim's home. 28% of sexual abuse occurs in the abuser's home. Elsewhere, children are less likely to be victims of sexual abuse. Accordingly, it is clear from the above information that people who are very close to children commit sexual abuse. Also, officers point out that most sexual abuse happens to children living in rural areas and coastal areas of Sri Lanka. It is stated that 45% of rural areas and 25% of coastal areas have sexual intercourse.

According to the results of this research study, there are many family-related weaknesses and problems that have affected children in Sri Lanka to become victims of sexual abuse. According to the sample of officers, illiteracy and lack of understanding often lead to child sexual abuse. 58% of victims suffer sexual abuse due to illiteracy. It is pointed out that 20% of the victims are sexually assaulted due to romantic relationships. The illiteracy and lack of understanding described above exists on the part of both children and parents. The lack of understanding about sexual knowledge is key here. In examining only the problems of the parents, the officers have shown that the illiteracy of the parents, the mother's migration abroad, the family's economic problems, the parents' casual relationship and the poor interaction between the parents and the children have mostly caused child sexual abuse.

According to the sample of parents, some of the main problems that influenced children to be sexually abused can be identified. Ignorance of parents is the main reason. The percentage of parents who did not go to school is 9%. 36% have less than 6th grade education. 17% have education up to grades 7-9. The highest education received by the parents is passing the A-level examination. That percentage is 6%. Accordingly, the lack of education and ignorance of the parents has directly affected the children to be sexually abused.

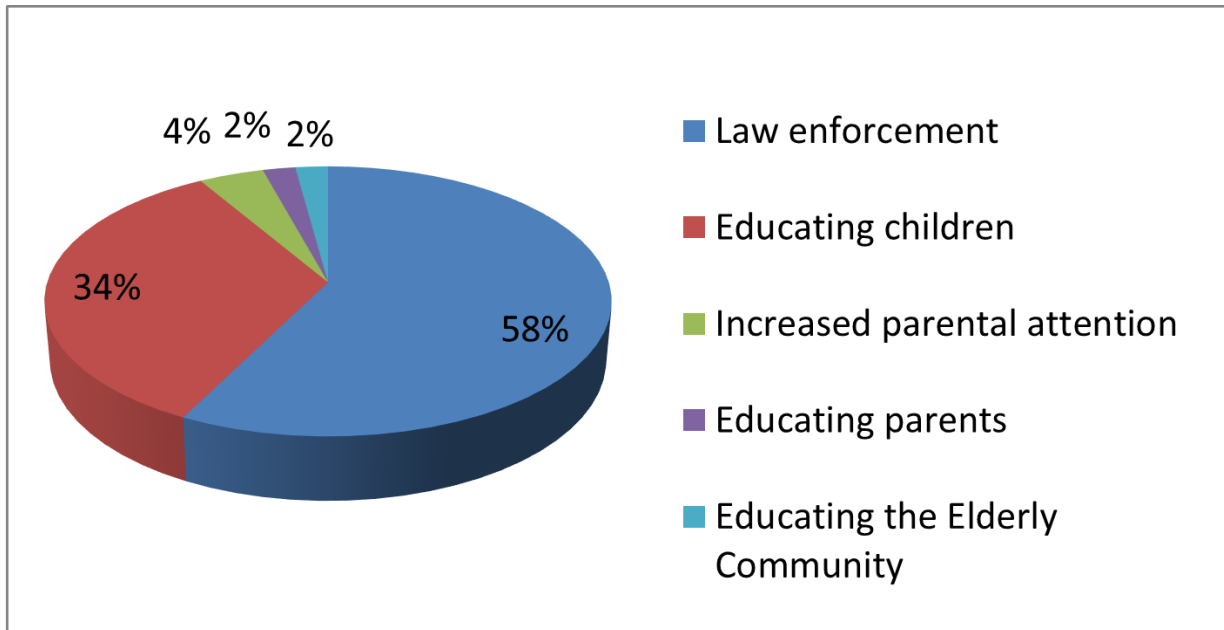
Parents themselves admit that there are weak interrelations in the family. It has been stated that 57% of the families live unhappily. Due to such situations, parents have not been able to ensure the safety and care of their children. Most of the parents do not look into their children's education and do not participate in the meetings held by the school. Also, not many parents look into the child's travels. 89% of parents do not set aside specific time to spend with their children. Also, most of the children do not share their problems with their parents and most of the parents do not intervene to solve their children's problems. Parents listening to their children is also very poor. 86% of parents do not look into their child's daily routine. 57% have admitted that they have paid less attention to their children. According to that, the majority of families have weak relationships and pay less attention to children.

As found in this study, the number of families with economic problems is 77%. The percentage of families with family disputes due to various reasons is 74%. In addition, it was found in this study that reasons such as father's death, parents leaving the family, parents' extramarital relations, fathers' alcohol and drug use, parents' criminal or antisocial behavior pattern and mother's migration abroad have influenced children to be sexually abused.

The two samples used for the study have presented the factors affecting the control and prevention of

children becoming victims of sexual crimes. The following chart shows the suggestions given by parents to control sexual abuse.

Figure 1 – Factors Affecting Control of Child Sexual Abuse



Source – (Field Survey, 2020-2023).

According to that, 58% have stated that priority should be given to law enforcement to control child sexual abuse. 34% stated that children should be informed about sexual education and ways to protect themselves from sexual abuse.

The following table shows the proposals presented by the concerned field officers for the control of child sexual abuse.

Table 2 – Factors Affecting the Control of Child Sexual Abuse

Causal factors	Percentage
Law enforcement	25%
Educating children	12.5%
Educating society	45%
Parental protection should increase for children	2.5%
Providing sex education	2.5%
Strict legislation	2.5%
Strengthening the family	5%
Awareness of target groups	5%
Total	100%

Source – (Field Survey, 2020-2023).

Majority of the officers, 45%, suggested that the entire society should be informed. Accordingly, it is essential to educate people from all walks of life, including parents, children, and elders. 25% suggested that child sexual abuse could be controlled by law enforcement. In addition, educating children, new legislation,

strengthening the family, and increasing parental protection are pointed out as factors affecting the control of sexual crimes against children.

Protecting children from sexual abuse is absolutely important. Accordingly, in this research, suggestions have been made by the parents of the victimized children and the government officers regarding the factors that affect the prevention of sexual crimes against children.

Table 3 – Factors Affecting the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

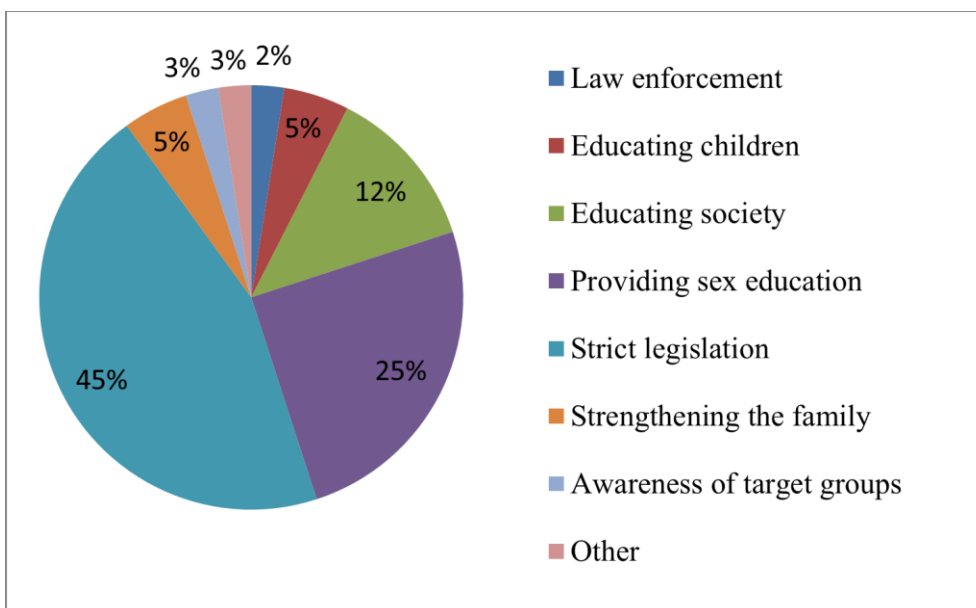
Causal factors	Percentage
Law enforcement	28%
New legislation	34%
Educating Children	4%
Educating Children & parents	6%
Educating society	4%
Having a strong family	15%
Getting more attention from parents	9%
Total	100%

Source – (Field Survey, 2020-2023).

The above table shows the suggestions made by the parents of the victimized children regarding the factors affecting the prevention of sexual crimes against children. Accordingly, to prevent sexual abuse of children, the main proposal presented by the majority of parents is that new laws should be enacted and strict punishments should be implemented. Secondly, it has been emphasized that the implementation of the existing law is important. Also, having a strong family environment and increasing parental attention to children have been shown as leading factors.

The following graph shows the suggestions made by the officers to prevent sexual abuse against children.

Figure 2 – Factors Affecting Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse



Source – (Field Survey, 2020-2023).

Officers have pointed out that the main factor is that sexual abuse of children can be prevented through strict legislation. Also, they have shown that providing adequate sexual education to all citizens of the society, including children, is also a major factor affecting the prevention of sexual abuse. Also, educating the society, the need for a strong family environment and educating the children have also been emphasized as the main factors.

CONCLUSION

In this research study, it was found that the weakness of parents and family has mainly affected children to be sexually abused. Accordingly, there is a direct and close relationship between child sexual victimization and the vulnerability of their families. Also, it was found that children who have to live in a single parent family are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse. In this study, it was confirmed that the relationship between the parents and the victimized children was at a very poor level, and it can be identified as a major factor affecting child sexual abuse. Also, it can be pointed out that there is a strong relationship between the family's poor economic condition, Father's alcohol and drug use, children's and parents' ignorance, and children's love relationships and being victims of sexual abuse. The Measures taken nationally to control and prevent child sexual abuse and the control and prevention measures identified in this study are similar. Accordingly, both samples mainly show that whatever these control and prevention measures are, their formal and efficient implementation helps prevent child sexual abuse. Accordingly, by implementing the existing laws in a formal and efficient manner, the formulation of some new strict laws was identified in the study as an extremely important factor in the control and prevention of sexual abuse. Also, it has been pointed out that more attention should be paid to educating the entire society and target groups about child safety and care. The officials used in the study have shown that the provision of sex education is a factor that strongly affects the control and prevention of sexual abuse of children. There is currently no proper national program for providing sex education to children, and there is currently a wide discussion about it. Although there are discussions from time to time in Sri Lanka about providing sex education to children, it has not yet developed into a national policy. Accordingly, the strong need to provide sex education to children in Sri Lanka has been confirmed again through this study. It is extremely important to include this proposal in the preparation of the national policy for the control and prevention of child sexual abuse. Also, the need for a strong family environment has also been identified as a key factor in child protection and care. Overall, this study highlights the need for family, society and government to intervene to control and prevent sexual crimes against children, and the need for an integrated approach.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I Special thanks to the parents of the victimized children who contributed to the sample data for this study. And I would like to thank the officers of the Police Children's and Women's Bureau, probation officers, child protection officers, child rights promotion officers and forensic officers who are working to ensure the safety and rights of children in Sri Lanka.

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