

A Criminological Study on the Nature of Sexual Abuse of Children in Rural Areas of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse against children has attracted much attention worldwide. The child sex industry in Sri Lanka is well-known worldwide and is closely linked to tourism, a major foreign exchange earner in the country. Most studies on child sexual abuse in this country have focused on tourist destinations. There has been a new trend of children being sexually abused in Sri Lanka, especially in rural areas. This research study examines the nature of sexual abuse against children living in rural areas of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the type of sexual abuse that occurs most frequently to children, the abuser who abuses most frequently and the place where it occurs, the relationship between the abuser and the child, the causes of abuse, and the problematic situations faced by victims due to abuse have been given special attention in this study. The main objective of the research is to study the factors that cause children to be sexually abused in rural areas. The other two main objectives are to study the socio-economic status of the families of the victims and to study the problems faced by the victims due to being abused. 60 children mentioned in the complaints reported to the National Child Protection Authority regarding child sexual abuse from rural areas of Kalutara District have been used as a sample. According to this study, 35% of the children live in a single-parent family or under another guardian, more than 60% of the parents have low education, 74% of the families are in debt and 77% of the fathers use drugs. The main reasons for children to be sexually abused are the poor interaction between children and parents, and the lack of knowledge about sex education in the entire society. According to the findings of this research, building a strong family environment is essential to controlling and preventing child sexual abuse in this country.

Key words – Child sexual abuse, Child rights, Rural societies, Victimization

INTRODUCTION

Every country in the world is affected by sexual abuse of children based on various factors. Being a victim of sexual abuse not only affects the child concerned, his family but also the entire society. Child victims face loss of childhood, education disruption, sexual impotence, sexualization, engaging in anti-social behavior, physical problems, mental problems, suicide or attempted suicide, and other post-traumatic stress disorders. Simply put, child sexual abuse can have a huge impact on a child's self-esteem to the loss of life. In general, the factors that affect children's vulnerability to sexual abuse can be described under individual, social, and psychological factors. However, due to different economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions in the countries of the world, the number of children who are victims of abuse varies from country to country. It is seen that children in developing countries are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than in developed countries. Some researchers have also focused on comparative studies of sexual abuse of children in rural and urban areas.

Not only is research on topics such as sex and sexual abuse conducted, but open discussions on these topics are also rare in Eastern countries like Sri Lanka. Especially in such countries, religious and cultural factors have influenced it, and it is clear when we critically examine this situation that this situation has caused more harm than good. The lack of proper sex education for children and all members of society has sometimes led to an increase in the incidence of sexual abuse of children. Because of this, an inevitable sexual curiosity has arisen naturally among the people of this country. The best evidence of this is that Sri Lanka has become the leading country in the world when searching for the word sex on Google for several consecutive years. Another fact that

confirms this is that some tourists from the world come to Sri Lanka only for sexual purposes. Accordingly, in areas where there is a lot of tourist attraction in the country, children are often victims of sexual abuse and sometimes children are also seen working as sex workers for tourists. In Sri Lanka, there has been a recent debate that children in rural areas are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than in urban areas. However, due to the above reasons, there have been few studies on child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka in general. The few studies that have been conducted have mostly focused on the sexual relations of children with tourists or on the sex industry centered on tourist attractions. Although Colombo District can be considered the most urban district in Sri Lanka, there are several rural areas within this district. Similarly, extremely difficult rural areas are found in the districts of Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Ratnapura, and Kegalle, which are located close to the capital. Apart from the few major cities in each district, the other areas are rural. Accordingly, this study has been conducted focusing on several rural areas in Kalutara district.

Before discussing the situation of sexual abuse in rural areas of Sri Lanka, it is very important to gain a significant understanding of the situation of child sexual abuse in the country. Accordingly, a relevant explanation is made based on the statistical documents, research reports and articles, books and magazines on child sexual abuse reported in the country. With the tourism industry, the child sex industry in Sri Lanka has become famous in many countries of the world. In the *Spartacus* magazine, published in Amsterdam, Netherlands, which reports experiences on the use of children for sexual purposes in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka has been named as a “paradise for male homosexuality”. Another magazine called *Little John* has stated that “if you want prostitutes, you should go to Thailand and if you want child prostitutes, you should go to Sri Lanka” (Amarasekara, 2012, p. 147). Among the world's sexiest people, Sri Lanka has also become known as the “Paradise of golden boys on the silver coast” (Coory, 2007, p. 67). Some internet reports say “Thailand for Girls, Sri Lanka for Boys” (Rathnavell, 2005, p. 4). All these facts are true according to the details given in the book *Prostitutes of Sri Lanka* written by Professor Nandasena Ratnapala. In this book, he has provided a good explanation of how children are commercially exploited by tourists and the child prostitution industry operating in the country. Professor Ratnapala has also introduced several tourist attractions and coastal areas where such children can be used for sexual activities (Rathnapala, 2014, pp. 47-49).

While active tourism in the country is not the only cause of child sexual abuse, it seems that a large number of children in the country are victims of sexual abuse for various other reasons. Although, as mentioned earlier, little attention has been paid to this topic due to religious and certain cultural factors, there are several studies conducted on the subject of children in the country being victims of sexual abuse, whether commercial or otherwise. Professor Ratnapala has specifically described the areas where they can be found in the country while studying child prostitutes. A study on child sexual abuse was conducted in the Puttalam district of Sri Lanka in 2016. Accordingly, this study has revealed several important facts about the nature of sexual abuse of children in rural areas. 183 children who were victims of sexual abuse have been used in the sample of this study, which has been conducted based on the cases reported to the Puttalam Base Hospital. Attention has also been paid to the basic information of the child victims, their educational level, the abuser and their family background (Amarathna & Vidanapathirana, 2016, pp. 34-36). Similarly, Professor Harendra De Silva has conducted a study on child sexual abuse by taking 899 university students as a sample. The main finding he made was that Sri Lankan children are not sexually abused by tourists. Accordingly, his research has emphasized that locals are more involved in sexual abuse in the country (De Silva, 2000, pp. 25-26)., (De Silva, 1996, pp. 10-11). A study on child sexual abuse conducted by the Rural Development Institute of the Samurdhi Ministry of Sri Lanka in 2001 has identified the places where children are sexually abused and the factors that influence children's vulnerability to sexual abuse. According to the study, factors such as mothers' migration abroad, fathers' alcohol and drug use, loss of maternal care, parental separation, parental extramarital affairs, parents' remarriage, obscene media, women's fashion and commercialism have been shown to have an impact on child sexual abuse (Palipana, 2001, pp. 3-4).

Another study on child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka was conducted by Rohanachandra and his team in 2015 using 35 children who were victims of sexual abuse at the Lady Ridgeway Children's Hospital in Colombo. The family environment of the abused children, the relationship between the child and the abuser, the manner in which the abuse occurred, and the problems faced by the children due to the abuse were discussed in this study (Rohanachandra et al, 2015, pp. 163-164). This is also a very important study to identify child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka. Similarly, a study on commercial sexual exploitation of children was conducted by Professor Sarath

Amarasinghe using 120 child victims from the Gampaha, Colombo, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Anuradhapura and Kandy districts of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it has been found in this study that the main factor affecting the sexual abuse of children is economic poverty in the family. The study also shows that the main problematic family conditions, including the low educational level of the parents and the drug use of the fathers, have led to child sexual abuse (Amarasinghe, 2002, pp. 32-79). A.J. Weeramunda also conducted a study on child sexual abuse in 1994 based on three schools in the Kalutara district. This study also provides significant insight into the nature of sexual abuse of children in rural areas of Sri Lanka (Weeramunda, 1994, pp. 39-44). In 2014, Wijekoon Banda conducted a study on male child sex workers in Negombo, Hikkaduwa and Tangalle and conducted a comprehensive investigation into the factors that influenced children to engage in sexual activities (Banda, 2014, pp. 65-93). In 1999-2001, American national researcher Jody Miller also conducted a similar study to the above study. This study was conducted with special attention to the “Beach Boys” who engage in sexual activities in the coastal region of Sri Lanka. A study has been conducted on the sexual relations of children with tourists for commercial purposes (Miller, 2011, pp. 493-504). The South Asia Partnership International organization has also conducted a study on sexual relations between children and tourists in Sri Lanka. This study was conducted in Negombo, Colombo, Mount Lavinia, Hikkaduwa, Galle, Anuradhapura and Trincomalee and the study specifically discussed the fact that children are involved in sexual activities due to family economic difficulties and the way in which these activities are organized through brokers (South Asia Partnership International, 2003, pp. 18-44). Squire & Wijerathne conducted a study on child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka in 2008, focusing on the Anuradhapura, Colombo, Dambulla, Gampaha, Galle, Matara and Polonnaruwa districts. This study included several rural areas of Sri Lanka and identified factors such as commercial sexual exploitation of children, child sex tourism and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes, and factors that influence victimization. Glen Mitchell's study on child sexual exploitation in Sri Lanka, based on the Moratuwa area, is also an important study on child sexual abuse. Although not a study focused on a rural area, this study, conducted on 145 children aged 13-17, found that economic hardship in their families was the main reason for children engaging in sexual activities (Squire & Wijerathna, 2008, pp. 12-19). A very comprehensive study on child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka was conducted in 2022 by Sangeeth and Udayakumara, using a sample of 228 children who were victims of sexual abuse in Colombo and Kalutara districts. This study was conducted in a representative manner from both urban and rural areas, and special attention was paid to the age, educational level, behavioral characteristics, family and social relationships of children who were victims of sexual abuse, the nature of the sexual abuse, the relationship between the abuser and the child, parental weaknesses that influenced the abuse, and the short-term and long-term effects of the abuse (Niranjana & Udayakumara, 2022, pp. 107-119).

The above studies on child sexual abuse conducted in various parts of Sri Lanka provide a significant insight into the nature of child sexual abuse in the country. Since some of the studies described above also include rural areas of Sri Lanka, they provide an understanding of the various forms of sexual abuse of children in those areas. Sri Lanka has established a strong legal system to control sexual abuse of children and is further bound by various laws, national and international laws and conventions. Institutionally, the Sri Lanka Police, the National Child Protection Authority, the Probation Department, the Children's Secretariat and other government institutions related to the subject, as well as other non-governmental organizations including Unicef and Save the Children, work to ensure the safety of children in Sri Lanka and protect the rights of children.

To further examine the recent trends in child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka, it is important to look at the statistics reported on child sexual abuse in the country. Statistics on child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka are reported to the Police Department and the National Child Protection Authority. The number of complaints related to child sexual abuse reported to the police department from 2019-2023 according to the provinces of Sri Lanka is shown in the table below.

Table 1 - Child sexual abuse by province in Sri Lanka

Province	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Western Province	606	579	644	581	654

Southern Province	471	431	458	504	562
Northern Province	192	199	186	205	236
Eastern Province	213	249	244	240	249
North Central Province	405	432	434	384	434
Central Province	383	412	387	334	414
Northwestern Province	459	555	565	488	564
Sabaragamuwa Province	413	434	404	406	448
Uva Province	260	252	244	251	252
National Child Protection Authority	37	46	14	20	8
Police Children and Women Bureau	11	3	44	19	34
Total	3450	3592	3624	3432	3855

(Source: Police Children and Women’s Bureau, 2019-2023)

When considering the provinces, it is clear that most sexual abuse against children occurs in the Western Province. Then, the Southern, Northwestern, Sabaragamuwa, North-Central and Central provinces of Sri Lanka are among the provinces where most sexual abuse of children occurs. Problems arising in the families of the child victims, as well as socio-cultural factors and geographical characteristics that are unique to each of these provinces, have also led to child sexual abuse. It is also important to examine the situation of child sexual abuse by district in Sri Lanka.

Table 2- Child sexual abuse by district in Sri Lanka

District	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Colombo	190	179	209	190	208
Kalutara	200	195	195	188	209
Gampaha	216	205	240	203	237
Anuradhapura	294	302	307	269	275
Polonnaruwa	111	130	127	115	159
Kurunegala	292	381	369	313	376
Puttalam	167	174	196	175	188
Galle	201	165	196	202	226
Matara	119	119	136	152	193
Hambantota	151	147	126	150	143
Ratnapura	243	277	252	252	266

Kegalle	170	157	152	154	182
Kandy	204	219	220	175	213
Nuwara Eliya	87	77	62	70	92
Matale	92	116	105	89	109
Badulla	120	143	171	141	143
Monaragala	140	109	73	110	109
Batticaloa	63	75	66	54	68
Ampara	86	99	87	106	94
Trincomalee	64	75	91	80	87
Jaffna	61	75	55	80	103
Kilinochchi	39	29	37	27	25
Mullaitivu	28	34	43	41	55
Vavuniya	49	43	25	25	44
Mannar	15	18	26	32	9
National Child Protection Authority	37	46	14	20	8
Police Children and Women Bureau	11	3	44	19	34
Total	3450	3592	3624	3432	3855

(Source: Police Children and Women’s Bureau, 2019-2023)

Accordingly, it appears that children are most likely to be sexually abused in the districts of Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Gampaha, Colombo, Kalutara, Ratnapura and Kandy. According to the above statistics, it can be pointed out that children are most likely to be sexually abused in the districts where rural areas are prevalent in Sri Lanka. Although the reported statistics are given above, it should be noted that a large number of sexual abuses against children go unreported due to various reasons.

During and after the Covid-19 pandemic, with the introduction of online education to Sri Lankan children, mobile phones and computers became closer tools for them. Many adverse effects were reported, especially abuses involving children using pornography and displaying it. However, very few cases of sexual abuse of children in this country online have been reported to the police department. Accordingly, from 2019-2022, only 44 cases of pornography-related offenses against children in this country have been reported to the Sri Lankan police department. However, the National Center for Missing Exploited Children (NCMEC) operating in the United States of America points out that a large number of Sri Lankan children have posted pornography online. NCMEC reports that 73,202, 130,267, 152,811 and 146,025 child pornography cases were reported in Sri Lanka from 2019 to 2022, respectively (NCMEC, 2024). Investigating such a large number of complaints has become a major challenge for the Sri Lanka Police Department. No matter where it happens in Sri Lanka, no matter what the reasons are, children face a lot of problems due to sexual abuse. This study comprehensively studies the nature of sexual abuse against children, mainly in rural areas, and also examines the social and economic conditions of the families in which these children live.

Objectives

1. To study the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of children in rural areas of Sri Lanka.
2. To examine the social and economic status of children in rural areas who have been victims of sexual abuse.
3. To identify the impacts and problems faced by rural children due to sexual abuse.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the nature of sexual abuse against children in rural areas of Sri Lanka. This research was conducted in several rural areas of Kalutara District, Sri Lanka. A total of 116 complaints of child sexual abuse were reported to the National Child Protection Authority from Kalutara District in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Out of the complaints reported, 60 child victims of sexual abuse were selected for the sample through a random sampling method. These child victims were selected to represent the remote and rural areas of Kalutara District, and the areas where the victims were selected belong to the Divisional Secretariats of Horana, Matugama, Ingiriya, Millaniya, Madurawala, Dodamgoda, Agalawatte, Boolathsinghala, Palindanuwara, and Walallawita. Interview and observation methods were used to collect data. The feelings and emotions, postures and body movements of the data contributors were also useful in understanding the problem during data collection. A quantitative analysis was primarily conducted in analyzing the data. Microsoft Excel software was used to prepare tables and graphs for quantitative analysis. Both primary and secondary sources were used for this research. Data obtained from field research were used as primary sources, and books, research papers, online information and other relevant documents and information were used as secondary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study conducted on the nature of sexual abuse against children in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. According to the findings of the study, first, the focus is on identifying the factors that contributed to the victimization of sexual abuse by examining the basic and behavioral information of the abused children and the social and economic information of their families.

The majority of rural children who were subjected to sexual abuse are girls. Accordingly, 90% of the victims are girls and 10% are boys. When examining the age of the victims at the time of abuse, the majority, that is, 43%, represent the age of 15-17. In the 12-14 age group, 28% and in the 9-11 age group, 13% have been subjected to sexual abuse. Children in the 15-17 age group and 12-14 age group are often aware of the abuse they are being subjected to, and most of them are abused against their will. Children who are particularly vulnerable to abuse in love affairs fall into these age groups. 82% of the abused children are Sinhalese and 18% are Tamil. They belong to religions such as Buddhist, Hindu and Christian. When examining the educational status of the victimized children, 33% are in grades 10-11, 28% have passed the Ordinary Level Examination, and 17% have studied up to grades 7-9. Due to the victims of sexual abuse, their school journey is interrupted and their educational activities are reported to be weak (Field Survey, 2023).

Although some factors such as the age and lack of knowledge of the victims may lead to victimization, the study identified that the main factors that led to children becoming victims were the weaknesses of the parents or family. Based on the study findings, the weaknesses of the parents and family will be discussed from here on.

This study found that children living in a single-parent household or with another caregiver are at higher risk. The majority of child victims, about 65%, live with their parents. However, 35% live in a single-parent family or under another guardian. This is a significant situation, and receiving less parental care alone can sometimes lead to sexual abuse. Among the reasons for losing a parent are factors such as the death of a parent, the mother leaving the family, and the father leaving the family. According to the study, when examining the reasons for losing a parent among the 35% of victims living in a single-parent family or under another guardian, 32% of fathers have left the family, and 14% of mothers have left the family. The death of the father has been reported in 12% and the death of the mother in 4%. Informal relationships or remarriage of the mother or father have also had a direct and indirect impact on child sexual abuse. The fact that 10% of fathers and 6% of mothers in the overall sample were remarried is significant because this research study identified children who were sexually

abused by their stepfather. These situations have a direct impact on the safety of children (Field Survey, 2023).

The economic status of the family is also very important in discussing the causes of child sexual abuse. It should be noted that the sale of children as sex workers in Sri Lanka with the tourism industry is due to the economic difficulties of the families in which these children live. These children, who live in rural areas and are victims, also expect certain economic benefits and other benefits from their abusers due to the economic problems of their families. Especially, there are cases where girls who have love affairs at a young age receive economic and other benefits from their boyfriends. The occupation of the parents directly determines the economic status of the family. In this study, the majority of fathers are employed in the labor profession. 78% are employed in the labor profession and only 14% work in the public and private sectors. 42% of mothers are employed in labor professions and 38% are not employed at all. 60% of the families earn a monthly income of less than Rs. 40,000. 13% have a monthly income of less than Rs 20,000. Given the current economic situation in this country, a lot of money is spent on food and children's school education, so this kind of family income is not useful at all. Also, 74% of families are in debt due to various reasons. About 7% of mothers had gone abroad at the time of the abuse to find solutions to economic difficulties, which has also directly affected child sexual abuse (Field Survey, 2023)

The poor education of parents is also a major factor in the sexual abuse of children. Research shows that the majority of adults living in rural areas of Sri Lanka have a low level of education. According to this study, 65% of fathers have received education up to grade 11 or less. In addition, 30% have less than grade 6 and 5% have never attended school. When examining the status of mothers, the percentage of those who have received education up to grade 11 or less is 62%. The percentage of those who have received education below grade 6 is reported to be 24% and the percentage of those who have never attended school is 6%. 6% of mothers and 6% of fathers have passed the Advanced Level examination. Similarly, the percentage of parents who have graduated is also a very low percentage of 1%. Accordingly, this research revealed that the parents of children who were victims of sexual abuse in rural areas had a low level of education (Field Survey, 2023).

Fathers' alcohol and drug use also has a direct impact on sexual abuse. 77% of fathers of child victims use alcohol and drugs. This affects economic weaknesses as well as problematic situations in terms of providing security to the child. The percentage of using alcohol or drugs daily or several times a week is 60%. It is also reported that conflicts at home are caused by drug use, and conflicts that arise due to other reasons are often due to the parents' extramarital affairs, economic problems and children's problems. Because of this, a considerable number of children live unhappily (Field Survey, 2023).

Most child victims report having poor interpersonal relationships with their parents. Calling children by bad names, not looking out for their personal needs, and not listening to them have particularly affected interpersonal relationships. Some children also avoid talking to their parents about issues that affect them. This is evident from the fact that 40% of child victims do not choose their mother or father to talk to about their problems. 47% state that they do not talk to their fathers or have strong interpersonal relationships. It was also clear during discussions with some child victims that neighbors do not have good relationships with the victim families (Field Survey, 2023). Accordingly, factors such as living in a single-parent family or under another guardian, economic hardship, poor education of parents, father's alcoholism, poor interaction between children and parents, and mother's migration abroad, Lack of parental attention are the main reasons why children are victims of sexual abuse.

When examining who the abusers are, the weaknesses of the family are also demonstrated by the involvement of family members in the abuse and the abuse of children by people who have close ties to the family. The table below shows who sexually abuses children.

Table 3 – Types of Sexual Abusers

Abuser	Number	Percentage
Father	2	3%

Step father	4	7%
Brother	1	2%
Relative	8	13%
Neighbor	5	8%
Teacher	4	7%
Friend	1	2%
Boy friend	23	38%
Priest	4	7%
Unknown person	3	5%
A known person	5	8%
Total	60	100

Source – (Field Survey, 2023).

Accordingly, in rural areas, most of the sexual abuse of children has been committed by the boyfriend of the victims. 38% of the cases have been committed by boyfriends. In general, the study has confirmed that the person who most often sexually abuses children in this country is the boyfriend. Secondly, relatives have committed the most sexual abuse. The percentage is 13%. It is clear that children have been sexually abused within their own family with the father and stepfather becoming sexual abusers. It is a case that shows the illiteracy, informal and low family relations of the people in rural areas. Similarly, responsible people in society have also been involved in child sexual abuse. Accordingly, 7% of teachers and clergy have been involved in child sexual abuse. It is important to investigate the place where the sexual abuse of children took place.

When it comes to the location of sexual abuse, children are most likely to be abused in places where they have close relationships and are known. This shows that parents or families are not paying much attention to the protection of children.

Table 4 – Place of Sexual Abuse victim

Place	Number	Percentage
At the child's home	21	35%
At the abuser's home	14	23%
At a neighbor's house	5	8%
At a friend's house	3	5%
At a deserted place	7	12%
At a school	4	7%
At a temple	4	7%

On a road	2	3%
Total	60	100

Source – (Field Survey, 2023).

The majority of children who have been sexually abused in rural areas of Sri Lanka have been abused in their homes. The percentage is 35%. 23% have been sexually abused in the abuser's home. In particular, the third most common place for children to be abused is in the deserted places found in rural areas. It is 12% as a percentage. This includes rural jungle areas. 8% of children have been abused in Aslawasi homes and it is special that children have been victims of sexual abuse in socially recognized and socially responsible institutions.

When examining the effects and problems children face due to sexual abuse, it is important to consider the type of sexual abuse they experienced. That is one of the main objectives of this study.

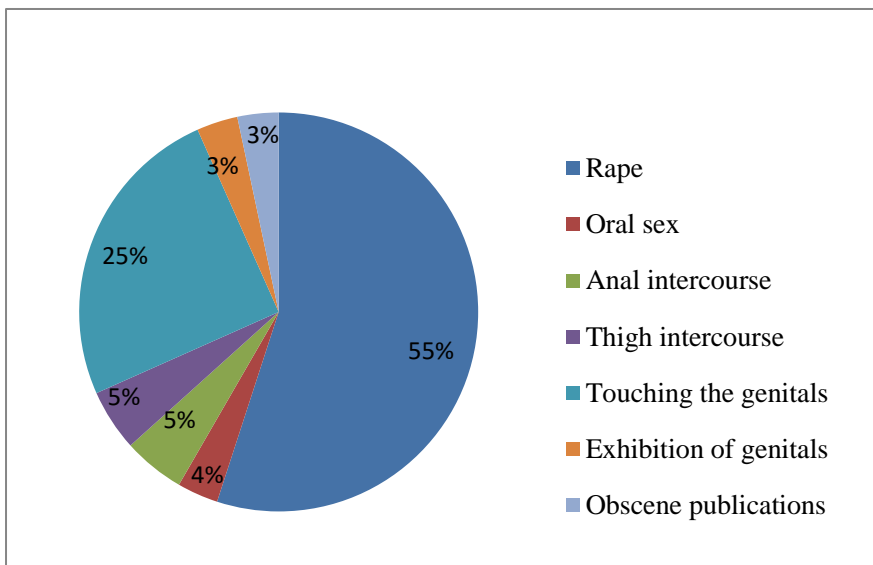


Figure 1 – Types of Sexual Abuse

Source – (Field Survey, 2023).

Accordingly, the above statistics show that the majority of children who have been sexually abused in rural areas have been raped. The percentage of child victims who have been raped is 55%. 25% have been sexually abused through touching the genitals. Similarly, rural children have also been sexually abused through oral, anal, and vaginal sex, and the incidence of sexual abuse through obscene postings has been reported to a very low level. However, as mentioned earlier, the NCMEC in the United States has reported a large number of cases. Especially in rural and urban children in this country, a large amount of abuse is not reported due to the lack of understanding about sex education, fear of going to court, trivializing abuse, fear of telling parents about abuse, and being threatened by the abuser.

Accordingly, a large number of children have been victims of serious types of sexual abuse, and as a result, they have had to face a great deal of problems and impacts. However, it does not matter whether a child is a rural or urban victim, and they face the same effects of sexual abuse. According to this study, it is clear that child victims have faced a number of problems. About 95% of victims and family members have faced legal problems. Accordingly, they have had to get involved in the activities of legal institutions such as the police, courts and probation. 73% of victims say that their educational activities have been disrupted due to sexual abuse. Some victims have faced problems such as learning difficulties, dropping out of school and intermittent school attendance. In terms of health, 77% have had to be hospitalized. The main reason for hospitalization for the majority of victims is to appear for a medical examination. However, 45% of the child victims who were hospitalized have received treatment for physical and mental problems caused by the abuse in addition to

appearing for a medical examination. Accordingly, treatment for mental problems has been received while staying in the hospital, and some victims have gone to mental clinics for treatment on scheduled days from home. Also, 15% of female child victims who have been raped have become pregnant. 8% of the victims have had to change their residence due to the abuse. Also, 45% of the victim's report having to face various problematic situations in the family. The percentage of victims who have been subjected to various inconveniences from society, including social humiliation, is 77%. After the abuse, 19% of the victims had engaged in various juvenile delinquencies. It is also noteworthy that 24% of the victims had to be subjected to repeated abuse after the abuse. It was a problematic situation for some girls who were molested by their boyfriends to continue having sexual relations after the abuse. Accordingly, it is clear from this study that child victims of sexual abuse have faced a number of problems due to the abuse (Field Survey, 2023).

Accordingly, when the results of the research are summarized, the nature of sexual abuse that happened to children in rural areas, the factors that affected the victimization of sexual abuse and what effects the victims faced due to sexual abuse can be broadly identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

When examining the forms of sexual abuse of children in rural areas, the most common types of sexual abuse are rape and minor sexual assault. However, in recent times, children in this country have been mostly victims of sexual abuse due to the posting of obscene statements on the Internet. This research also confirms that this offense is rarely reported to the Sri Lanka Police Department. The main reasons for victims not reporting this offense to the legal institutions of this country are the lack of awareness of the relevant act as a crime, the ignorance of children and parents, considering it a minor offense, being threatened by the abusers, and the fear and reluctance to go to court. It is a situation that can be identified that people who have very close relationships with children are motivated to commit sexual abuse. Among these groups are fathers, stepfathers, boyfriends, relatives, neighbors, teachers, religious priests and people with social responsibilities. Accordingly, this study shows that most of the people who can exert some power and influence over children commit sexual abuse against children. In rural areas, children are mostly sexually abused in the victim's home and in the abuser's home. Accordingly, it can be shown that abusers maintain close relationships with the victims and their families. It can also be identified that children are mostly sexually abused in deserted and isolated places in rural areas. Accordingly, children can easily meet abusers in these places when they come home after school or after support classes. Such places are also located in large numbers in rural areas. It seems that girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys. This study can identify that children who are often sexually abused are young adolescents. It is clear that children living in single-parent families or under other guardians are at a higher risk of being sexually abused. The main reasons for children becoming victims of sexual abuse include low education of parents, father's addiction to alcohol and drugs, economic weakness of the family, mother's migration abroad, and poor relationships between children and parents. Accordingly, the study shows that many of the factors affecting child sexual abuse are weaknesses in the family environment of the victims. The above problematic situations can be seen in many families living in rural areas, and therefore children from such families are at greater risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse. Children from families with these problems also tend to engage in juvenile delinquency. The effects and problems faced by victims of sexual abuse are similar regardless of the area they live in. In this study, victims faced legal, educational, social, health, family, pregnancy, leaving their homes, and repeated abuse. By providing children with a good education, including sex education, and empowering and regulating the family for child protection, we can control and prevent the sexual abuse of rural children in this country.

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