

# The Spiel of Male Victims Later Being the Abusers

*‘The Long-Term Effect and Consequences of Child Abuse’*

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## ABSTRACT

Children who are subjected to sexual abuse often endure deep, long-term psychological trauma. Many of them struggle with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual dysfunction, and self-harming tendencies. Research shows that children who experience such abuse are significantly more vulnerable to being revictimized sometimes not just once, but repeatedly throughout adolescence and even adulthood. Alarming, studies indicate they are up to 35 times more likely to be abused again than those who have not faced childhood sexual trauma. This increased susceptibility is often rooted in feelings of self-blame, worthlessness, and shame. This issue becomes even more disturbing when we look at children who live on the margins of society those without shelter, family care, or institutional protection. Children on the streets, in slums, or those forced into child labor such as rag-picking or begging are especially exposed. With no stable home, adult supervision, or legal protection, these children are not only easier targets for sexual predators, but they also lack the means to report abuse or even understand what is happening to them. For many of them, trauma becomes a silent companion unspoken, untreated, and slowly destructive.

Male victims face a particularly complex emotional aftermath. Unlike most female victims, who are often abused in heterosexual contexts, boys are frequently exploited by older men. This often leads to a deep confusion about their sexuality, further compounding the psychological harm. Many male survivors are left grappling with questions about their sexual identity, often in silence, due to the stigma surrounding male vulnerability and victimhood. Another common belief is that all sexual offenders were once victims themselves. While some studies have shown a link such as one which found that 8 out of 16 convicted child molesters had experienced abuse in their own childhood the evidence is far from conclusive. Small sample sizes and the widespread underreporting of abuse make it difficult to generalize this theory. This discussion is not merely academic it points to an urgent social need. Early intervention, strong support systems, and community accountability are essential. When ignored, the wounds of abuse fester. For vulnerable and unprotected children, especially those living on the streets or working in exploitative conditions, the consequences can be lifelong. And tragically, if unhealed, some of these children may unknowingly carry their trauma forward, repeating cycles of harm not out of intent, but out of untreated pain.

Child abuse remains one of the darkest and most shameful realities of our society. It is heartbreaking to witness children being subjected to abuse in various forms social, emotional, physical, economic, and most devastatingly, sexual. What is even more disturbing is our collective failure to protect them. This is not an issue limited to either metropolitan cities or rural areas it is happening everywhere, and we, as a society, are turning a blind eye.

While laws like the POCSO Act have been enacted, they alone are not enough. We continue to make children increasingly vulnerable to abuse, especially those who are poor, neglected, and marginalized. Every day, thousands of children around us collecting garbage, working menial jobs just to survive are at the highest risk of such exploitation.

Take the example of Akib, a 9-year-old child who roams the streets collecting garbage to support his family. He doesn't go to school, doesn't have a home, and remains invisible to the system. He lives in constant fear not only of adult predators but even of teenage co-workers who have tried to assault him. He speaks of van drivers, bus

conductors, and strangers who lure him with small treats like soft drinks or pretend friendliness only to exploit him later.<sup>1</sup>

Even more horrifying is that many of these abusers justify their actions, knowing full well these children have no one to speak for them, no support system, and no safety net. Who stands for them? Who listens to their cries?

## **VULNERABILITY OF MALE CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS OF SILENCE AND DIGITAL EXPOSURE**

The vulnerability of male children and young boys to sexual abuse remains one of the least acknowledged, yet most urgent crises of our time. While public discourse has gradually expanded to include female survivors, boys particularly those with soft, non-aggressive, or feminine traits remain dangerously invisible. These children not only endure abuse in physical spaces like streets, workplaces, or even homes, but are now increasingly targeted in digital spaces as well.

In conversations with child labourers and street involved boys, a pattern emerged: boys who deviate from conventional masculinity are more likely to be harassed. Many express an inherent fear of adult men, recounting experiences of being watched, touched, and approached with malice. “Everyone sees us with bad eyes,” said one child. “Even our male co-workers scare us.”

The growing influence of social media has only worsened the situation. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which should empower children and young users, have unfortunately become avenues for their objectification. Boys who express themselves with authenticity be it through fashion, makeup, or emotionally vulnerable content are frequently subjected to disturbing and sexualised comments. The comments sections of such posts often reveal a dark underbelly of society where grown adults, particularly men, openly lust after these boys. Even those who express traditionally masculine traits are not spared; any form of visibility invites predation.

This digital violation mirrors what is happening offline as well. A recent incident in Indian Railways underscores this horrifying reality. A young man, aged 23–24, was reportedly sexually assaulted while traveling by train. Shockingly, the perpetrator was a man traveling with his wife, indicating how sexual violence is not limited to a certain ‘type’ of predator. It also demonstrates how male survivors are dismissed, and perpetrators remain protected under societal myths of masculinity and shame.

Support systems like NGOs and social workers attempt to bridge the gap, offering some children temporary shelter, food, and a sense of safety. However, even these protective spaces are increasingly compromised, with reports of abuse surfacing from within their walls. The children themselves acknowledge that while these efforts are minimal, they still appreciate them because at least someone is trying. But appreciation for minimal protection cannot be a substitute for systemic change.

This is where the government must step in not merely as a lawmaker but as an active protector. Token laws are insufficient in the face of everyday cruelty. What is needed is an ecosystem that ensures every child, regardless of gender, identity, or background, is guaranteed safety offline and online. Policies must ensure access to food, shelter, psychological support, and digital safety education. Simultaneously, legal reforms must address male sexual abuse with the same urgency and compassion granted to other genders.

Turning away from the sexual exploitation of male children especially those who exist outside traditional masculine boundaries is not just a failure of governance, but a collective moral collapse. It is time we look these boys in the eye and say: you are seen, you are heard, and you deserve to be safe.

Many children have shared heartbreaking accounts of being forced to live under the control of men who, under the guise of offering shelter and basic necessities, turned their lives into a business of exploitation. In exchange

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<sup>1</sup> Real stories, “Preying on young boys”, 2015

for food or a place to sleep, these children especially boys were objectified and used. And yet, this deeply rooted problem remains severely underestimated.

Abuse doesn't come from just one place. These children have been violated in schools, on the streets, and even in their own homes. Each space adds a different layer to their trauma. Most of the boys who fall into this cycle are those who have either fled abusive households, lost their parents, or are grappling with their sexual identity leaving them isolated and vulnerable. With nowhere else to go, they're more likely to fall into lives marked by drugs, sexual abuse, theft, and crime.

And while it might sound heavy writing all this down, for these children, it's their daily reality. The numbers back it too a significant portion of drug addicts, many of whom are victims of such circumstances, are HIV positive. But society hardly questions why. Because all of it abuse, homelessness, crime, addiction is part of a vicious circle that continues unchallenged. These children aren't choosing drugs or crime they're being driven into it by the trauma and exploitation they endure. And that is what should alarm us as a society.

Addiction, especially to substances, is one of the most destructive consequences faced by these children. It renders them emotionally numb, socially dysfunctional, and over time, makes it nearly impossible for them to return to a healthy or stable life. Substance abuse builds stronger chains than most other forms of control. Psychologists often observe that for such children, the initial instances of sexual abuse are terrifying but when these experiences become routine, they begin to normalize them. Eventually, many of them stop resisting. Instead of being abused for nothing, they start seeing it as a way to earn thus turning their exploitation into a source of income. And that's exactly how abuse turns into business.<sup>2</sup>

This isn't just the loss of innocence. It's deep psychological harm. The trauma doesn't just disappear it reshapes itself into maladaptive coping mechanisms. These children, having no support or therapy, begin to project their pain outward. They start abusing their own peers in the same way they were once abused. And just like that, the cycle continues victims slowly becoming abusers themselves.

Some psychologists trace this disturbing trend back to historical roots pointing out how, in many patriarchal societies, women were long considered inferior and kept out of public life. In such systems, vulnerable young boys were often sexualised in the same way because they were seen as accessible and subordinate. That legacy of distorted power and attraction still echoes today, creating yet another layer of danger for these children.

In India, children make up a significant portion of the population, yet nearly 40% of them experience some form of sexual abuse. As early as 2007, India was ranked the sixth most unsafe country for children. A nationwide study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, with support from the UN Child Fund and Save the Children, revealed alarming data: 53.22% of children had been subjected to one or more forms of sexual abuse. Among them, 52.94% were boys and 47.06% were girls clearly showing that abuse affects children of all genders almost equally.

Additionally, 69% of children reported being physically abused, and 5% of school-going children admitted to facing corporal punishment. Shockingly, 50.2% of children worked all seven days of the week, yet most never reported the abuse they faced. Children employed in industrial or factory settings reported the highest number of sexual assault incidents, indicating how severely vulnerable they are in such exploitative environments.

Although the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, enacted in 2012, criminalizes child abuse, reporting still remains a deeply complex and painful process for many survivors. The fear of being blamed, retraumatized, or ignored by the criminal justice system often discourages children from speaking up. For many of them especially those living on the streets the abuse becomes a normalized part of their daily lives. They stop reporting it not because they don't feel the pain, but because they believe nothing will change. They know they will likely face the same horrors again day and night because they simply have no place else to go.

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<sup>2</sup> peer on peer child sexual exploitation, "UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORD"

While numerous cases of child abuse have been reported in India, a common thread that runs through them is the existence of strong social and cultural barriers to psychiatric and psychological intervention. Despite being the country where prenatal sex determination is illegal and having one of the lowest sex ratios globally, India's patriarchal structure has failed to protect even its male children something clearly reflected in the statistics showing that boys are as likely to be sexually abused as girls.<sup>3</sup>

Research suggests that boys are more frequently subjected to physical abuse by parents, face corporal punishment in schools, and are often forced to survive on the streets, earning for themselves with no control over their income. What's even more concerning is the normalization of abuse among boys by other boys a disturbing trend that seems to stem from the patriarchal ideology where masculinity is tied to dominance, control, and exploitation of those perceived as weaker.

Indian patriarchy demands different things from different genders. Boys are expected to "be men" not cry, not complain, even when facing abuse. It is not uncommon for boys to endure beatings or assaults under the guise of being "taught to be strong," with abusers justifying their violence as character building.

Although Indian patriarchy isn't monolithic it ranges from Brahminical patriarchy to tribal patriarchies the control it exerts spans across caste, religion, family, sexuality, reproduction, and production. And while this often focuses on subjugating women, it also harms boys, especially those with non-conforming sexual identities or emotional vulnerability.

Another worrying trend is the gender gap in child protection services. In hospitals and NGOs, more girls than boys utilize support systems. This reflects the iceberg phenomenon in the context of male child abuse we see only a fraction of what actually exists. Unlike girls, whose abuse may come to light through physical consequences like pregnancy or family investigation, boys often suffer in silence. The disclosure rate among boys is significantly lower, and accidental disclosures are extremely rare leading to prolonged, often uninterrupted years of abuse. Because boys are taught not to speak, not to cry, and never to appear weak, their suffering stays hidden just like society has trained them to keep it.

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<sup>3</sup> silence of male silence abuse,'Indian journal of psychiatry , NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE.

<sup>4</sup> www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov , Silence of male child sexual abuse, 'Indian journal of Psychiatry', NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE. [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)



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Referring to the 2007 report on child abuse in India by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, a closer look at the statistics concerning male victims reveals a deeply concerning trend. In 9 out of the 13 states surveyed, the percentage of boys reporting sexual abuse was higher than that of girls. For instance, in Delhi, 65% of boys reported being sexually abused, followed closely by 59.96% in Mizoram—figures that reflect the gravity of the issue.<sup>5</sup>

The data shows that across almost all forms of sexual abuse, the number of boys affected was either equal to or greater than that of girls. This clearly indicates that the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, while progressive in its intent, is not sufficient on its own to fully address the reality of sexual violence faced by boys.

Although our legal system has made commendable efforts to adopt a gender-neutral framework, the real challenge lies within societal attitudes. The way we perceive and respond to cases of abuse involving boys is still shaped by stigma, denial, and silence. Only when we begin to confront and shift these deep-rooted mindsets will real change take place.

Childhood sexual abuse is a form of deep-rooted trauma. While some survivors are able to manage and cope with its aftermath, many others struggle with long-term psychological difficulties. Trauma, in this context, is not simply a moment—it is an enduring state of chaos, an overwhelming inner storm, often described by survivors as a feeling of constant noise or emotional screams in the mind. Psychologists define it as a normal response to an abnormal experience. The betrayal of trust during childhood can lead to lasting damage, especially in the ability to form and maintain relationships—even as adults, survivors may develop profound trust issues within families, friendships, or everyday life.

In most cases, boys are initially abused by older individuals. However, as the pattern progresses, abuse often takes place within peer groups—usually by someone slightly older than the victim. Research estimates that nearly one-third of all sexually abused children are abused by someone from their own age group. This trend often stems from a tragic cycle—children who were once victims, unable to stop their own abuse, end up mimicking that behavior with others.<sup>6</sup>

To many of these children, abuse becomes a kind of unspoken game—not in any positive or playful sense, but rather a silent, damaging ritual where both victim and perpetrator pretend nothing is happening. This silence is deeply tied to the stigma associated with being a male victim. Over time, such experiences shape and influence a child's understanding of relationships, control, and intimacy.

The child who becomes an abuser often carries a strange internal conflict. He is aware that what he's doing is wrong, but having been abused himself—and silenced by stigma—he assumes the other child will also stay quiet. Shame, in these cases, exists not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator. The abuser often experiences a fractured sense of self, guilt, and a lack of emotional agency. He may develop thoughts like, "I am a bad person," or internalize blame for both being abused and becoming an abuser. These unresolved temperamental issues—rooted in past trauma and suppressed emotions—can surface later in life through aggression, control, or continued cycles of abuse.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> What happens to a child when he /she suffers sexual abuse, 'LEWIS UNIVERSITY' Depression And child sexual abuse | Dr Rosaleen McElvaney, 'AWARE'

<sup>6</sup> When Childhood Abuse Turns into Disturbing Behaviour — The Story of Beth Thomas, 'LAW AND CRIME NETWORK' Child sexual abuse: the suffering untold, 'Indian journal of Psychiatry', NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE.

<sup>7</sup> Do Abused Children Become Abusive Parents?, 'U.S DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE', OFFICE OF JUSTICE POGRAMS

This lack of self-worth can extend into adulthood, affecting mentalization (the ability to reflect on one's own and others' mental states), intimate relationships, and parenting capacity. For instance, a man who was raped as a child may struggle to form a healthy relationship with his spouse. He might feel that physical intimacy is wrong or undeserved, even when consensual. Over time, such distorted thinking patterns become habitual. Some individuals begin rationalizing their thoughts and actions, eventually crossing over into abuse again choosing victims they perceive as vulnerable, repeating the cycle they once experienced.

The root of this tragic cycle often lies in the maladaptive coping mechanisms that sexually abused children develop to survive their trauma. Many turn to substance abuse, alcohol, or other forms of self-destruction as a way to dull the emotional pain. In a desperate attempt to self-medicate, they unknowingly trap themselves in a vicious circle—the abused becoming the abuser, or spiraling into addiction and further vulnerability.

What deepens this cycle is the severity and nature of the abuse itself. Studies show that revictimization is often linked to whether force was used, whether penetration occurred, whether threats were made, and most heartbreakingly—whether the abuser was someone the child trusted or loved. Trust, once broken in such a violent way, rarely heals without intervention.

But this problem can't be fixed by a police officer alone, or by the legal system in isolation. The deeper failure lies within society itself—in the culture that glorifies aggression, equates masculinity with emotional suppression, and celebrates dominance. On television, we see men beating men, men posing as alpha figures, and toxic behavior paraded as strength. This is what's normalized, while the real victims—the survivors—hide in bedrooms, in bathrooms, in silence, waiting for someone to tell them it's okay to speak, to feel, to heal.

Male survivors of sexual abuse are often invisible in our healthcare systems. Recovery services for male victims are almost non-existent, and seeking mental health support is discouraged by a culture that tells men to “man up” and move on. But beneath that mask, boys and men are silently breaking down—showing some of the most alarming signs of untreated trauma and psychological distress.

Society continues to cling to this dangerous idea: be a man, and get over it. But the truth is, no one is helping these men get through it. I am Ishita Shrotria, and I will end this paper with one undeniable truth:

**Male child sexual abuse is not an unknown issue it is a deliberately ignored one.**

**It is not silence that protects these boys it is silence that destroys them.**

**The time has come for men to speak, to cry, to confront, and to heal.**

Because every time a boy is abused and told to stay quiet, another abuser is created.

Because every time a man chooses silence, another boy loses his voice.

Let's break this silence not tomorrow, not eventually But now.

