

The eradication of child abuse is necessary for the economy to grow to its full potential

Vijayetta Sharma | 27 Nov 2023

The silent epidemic of child abuse in Indian society continues for centuries and steals the spark of budding gems from the nations, making them hollow, dull, and remorseful.

Most children do not report abuse to anyone due to non-judgement, humiliation resulting in lowered self-esteem, social stigma and fear, feeling of guilt, shame and embarrassment of revealing unethical conduct, and family honour.

The varied and protracted forms of child abuse keep on growing with evolving means, with the perpetrators giving way for new judgments and regulations.

It is well known that not all cases of neglect and child abuse come to the knowledge of authorities at the time they happen, and, hence, it becomes a matter of retrospective action.

Around 55% of children in India experienced some kind of abuse, as per the [National Commission for Protection of Child Rights \(NCPCR\)](#). A total of 50,857 complaints about child abuse were received during the last five years, from 2016–17 to 2020–21. The maximum number of 9,572 complaints were received from Madhya Pradesh, followed by 5,340 complaints from Uttar Pradesh, and 4,685 from Chhattisgarh.

In Madhya Pradesh, the [crime against the minors aggravated to 337%](#) from 2011 to 2021 which houses more than 2.4 crore children in the age group of 0-14 years. It is horrifying to note that the state reported 52 cases daily which includes abduction, kidnapping, murder, child marriage, sexual abuse, and others. As per National Crime Records Bureau(NCRB), [Uttar Pradesh tops in sexual offences against children](#) with 4 cases registered under POSCO Act, 2012 every 24 hours. In Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow is among the top five districts with 800 cases of [sexual crimes](#) reported against children from 2015-2021. Among the cases of child abuse, [the rampaging of a toddler girl by a female manager of an orphanage](#) in Kanker district in Chhattisgarh, became a matter of critical attention on the international fora, as child care NGOs turning child abuse units.

The pending cases of various forms of child abuse [increased by 28%](#) in a short time of 3 months as of October 1, 2023, in India.

During the timeline of July–September 2023, the states of Madhya Pradesh, Assam, and Chhattisgarh received the [highest number of cases](#) dealing with child abuse and protection issues, i.e., 2666, 2083, and 1098, respectively, which speaks loud of the adversities against children in different parts of the country.

A total of [25258 cases](#) are pending in the country for various forms of child abuse as of October 1, 2023. The cases [rose by 7081](#) in the duration of 3 months from July 1, 2023, to October 1, 2023.

From the year 2018 to 2022, the total RTI applications received were 1929, out of which [293 cases were not disposed of](#) in the timeline and were pushed to the next quarter.

There is no justifiable reason for the mistreatment of the child and exposing the innocent being to physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The causes of abuse, thus, can be grouped into the dis-aligned mental, moral and perceptual state.

There are continuous attempts of [evolution of jurisprudence](#) related to the POSCO Act, 2012, and [other acts](#) pertaining to violations of child care to provide legal safeguards.

These judgments ensure that the rights and dignity of children are protected with sufficient safeguards by providing imprisonment ranging from 3 years to 7 years and also life imprisonment for assaults of aggravated nature as per [Sections 6, 8, 10, and 12 of the POSCO Act, 2012](#).



The need for amendments has always been felt with variations in intensification in the zones of violation while interpreting and applying child rights by different activists, governments, and voluntary organizations for ensuring a safe, healthy, and dignified life for children.

The need has always been felt for the right stakeholder involvement, incorporation of ethical dimensions in absolute terms, and deciding the principal components of the policies with respect to the type of assault to be applied and implemented for safeguarding the children.

If we are to eradicate child abuse from society, the proportion of collaborative interventions and involvement by the three major actors, i.e., the government, civil society, and social activism, would define the scope of ending the silent, unheard, and unreported episodes of child abuse in India.

A deeper understanding from social researchers is required to explain why society is immune to the various forms of child abuse that go unheard and manifest into child development issues at a younger age.

Another intriguing paradoxical manifestation is whether the family system is not sufficiently empowered to give enough protection to their children that society and the government need to intervene to protect the children in the families.

The involvement of children in sports such as football and others could be a precursive measure to build their self-esteem, empower them to raise their voice and retaliate against any form of offensive conduct towards them, and make them less prone to abuse.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, needs to fasten ethical dimensions with a greater measure in every aspect of the policy structure while evaluating the deprivation and violation of child rights, the non-implementation of laws providing for the protection and development of children, and the non-compliance of policy decisions.

The expansion of technological dimensions in the governance processes in the growing economy of India, such as OTT platforms and the use of social media, cannot solely reduce the probability of the occurrence of abuse in society. There is an impulsive need for social activism to embed modifications in the culture and ethical and moral dimensions in the thought processes of individuals.

In order to realize the long-sought growth in the Indian economy and improve the SDG indicators, the promotion of the rights and dignity of children, which constitute 25.31% of the population and are seeded with the potential to provide a plausible representation of future sectoral growth, and the development of economic indicators such as GDP, HDI, etc., is the utmost priority.

Identification of possible grounds or scenarios leading to child abuse, sensitization on child care and promoting restorative measures to maintain child dignity is the future agenda for the government machinery. The Anganwadi workers stationed at the grassroots level are best suited to uphold the responsibility and provide critical care dimensions for protecting the child rights in their vicinity. A matrix of intervention-versus-instance relationship between the NCBR, NCPCR, child protection NGOs, individual activists for identification of hotspots and devising evidence-based care and restorative interventions would help in state wise plummeting of child abuse cases and achieve state wise improvement in child protection indicators which adds to SDG 16.2 i.e. Protect Children from Abuse, Exploitation, Trafficking and Violence.

Child abuse is not only an abuse on the children; it constitutes an abuse to society, to the personal self of the abuser, and to religion, culture, and morality. It hampers the growth of the economy and the country's achievement of human development indicators.

The economy would only grow realistically if the children were safe and their growth and development were ensured in safer families, societies, political, and governance setups.

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