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Impact of domestic violence on mental health of children and social work intervention

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Abstract:

Every family is responsible for the mental health and wellbeing of children at home. Protection and promotion of psychosocial wellbeing and character formation of children are responsibilities of the parents. However, studies have shown that children are not safe at a home where domestic violence takes place. Reports on the violence against women and children are found in daily newspapers and broadcasts in TV channels every day. Women and children are subject to physical, sexual and mental abuse at home. Every incidence of domestic violence has an adverse impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children. Children witnessing violent conflicts between their parents at home also indirectly become victims of domestic violence. The psychological wellbeing and mental health of children is at risk in such families.

Parents in conflict often neglect the mental health and wellbeing of their children at home. Such children are in need of social work interventions. There is a need to create awareness about the mental health and wellbeing of children who are victims of domestic violence. There is a need to create public awareness among the children, parents and the larger society about the protection and promotion of psychosocial wellbeing of child victims of domestic violence. This paper is based on qualitative research using primary data. Case study is

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the methodology used for the research. It is a qualitative study. The study highlights the social work interventions with child victims and other stakeholders of domestic violence.

Key Words: *Domestic violence against children, Child abuse, child victims, social work interventions, child rights*

A qualitative study of the impact of a social work intervention on child abuse in the home and the psychological impact of that abuse has been undertaken by the researcher. Five different causes and effects of family violence have been presented in this study. The purpose of this paper is to create awareness in the society child rights, child safety and child protection. This paper also advocates that the basic rights of children should be respected, physical and mental abuse in the home should be stopped, and social work intervention in this regard. The cases presented in this paper brings light into the causes and effects of domestic violence against children such as child abuse, children neglected due to parental disputes, children sexually abused, children permanently disabled due to domestic violence, and children under stress due to domestic violence. A review has been presented after studying the various researches done regarding the subject. The study has also shown the importance of social work intervention with child victims of domestic violence.

Review of literature

Domestic violence is a major public-health problem that affects millions of people which results in physical and emotional injuries and even deaths. Studies have been conducted to explore the association of domestic violence with various demographic factors, such as, family type, family size, education of wife and husbands, occupation of wife and husbands, family monthly income, addiction and food habits (Rana, 2016). Domestic abuse of married women can be classified under three major categories - physical abuse, financial abuse and emotional abuse. Physical abuse is the highest (Kumar, 2017).

Social institutions play a vital role in sustaining domestic violence against women. Institutional forces are equally powerful and industrious in controlling and shaping people's minds. Factors like caste, class, community, religion,

locality, family, and profession affect women because of the traditionally prevalent gender inequality. Women are treated as second class (Farooqui, 2013). Studies have shown that domestic violence has social, cultural and religious roots in India. The aggressive behaviour at home includes social recognitions and religious convictions within Indian culture. Setting of culture and religious convictions among Indian culture assume an imperative job in deciding how household women saw their encounters of viciousness, and the difficulties they are confronting in the domestic sector (Ratanshi, 2019).

There are researches conducted on the entire samples of the children and their mothers where both mothers and children had been exposed to domestic violence (Claude, 2004). A complex pattern of results has been documented indicating high levels of abuse and associated trauma disorders in both the children and their mothers. The significant correlation between child anger and PTSD indicates potential links between domestic violence in the home and aggressive behaviour in children. The children who were psychologically disturbed by their exposure to violence were possibly more likely to show angry outbursts both in the family and in the outside community (Claude, 2004).

Studies have shown that those who have Madhyamik to Post Graduate education are in a better position to avoid domestic violence (Mondal, 2011). Most forms of domestic violence occur more frequently among those who are less than 28 years of age. This study also indicated that the level of marital satisfaction and marital adjustment goes down after the birth of the first child. Among the victims of domestic violence, it was found that the rate of violence against mothers who had three or more children was more (Mondal, 2011).

The main cause of domestic violence is the dominating nature of the husband and her in laws towards the daughter in law. There is a need to change this attitude of the husband. When the daughter in-law is treated as a daughter and the daughter in law treats her in laws as her father and mother, then there is no chance of domestic violence. There is a necessity to counsel the parties before the marriage (Kumbhar, 2015). Family background is a major factor contributing towards the aggressive behaviour of children at school. A comparative study on the level of personality of the children from nonviolent and violent homes, showed that the students in low functioning schools who were from violent

homes reported more past-year violent behavior than students from non-violent homes (Anantharamakrishnan, 2012).

Studies have been conducted to understand the subjective experiences of adolescents living in families with violence (Anitha, 2017). The levels of physical abuse, involvement of adolescents during violence, co-occurrence of abuse, and exposure to violence in community were various dimensions of the study. The traditional understanding of the father as the aggressor, the mother as the victim and the child as a powerless bystander being exposed to the violence, underline the complexities of the dynamics in families living with domestic violence (Anitha, 2017).

Studies have highlighted various effective ways of dealing with domestic violence (Khamguilu, 2018). Abstaining from the use of alcohol and substance abuse is one of the effective ways to curb domestic violence. Other strategies include making education compulsory for everyone, punishment made mandatory for the culprits, counselling services and awareness programme for the victims as well as the culprits. Domestic violence in family should not remain a notion of private sphere. Belief in the inherent superiority of males must be abolished (Khamguilu, 2018).

Methodology

This is a qualitative paper and case study method is used to prepare this paper. The researcher, being the social worker in the agency which is working with child victims of domestic violence, had the opportunity to personally intervene in several cases of domestic child abuses. Researcher has selected 5 representative cases for preparing this paper. These five cases present five different situations and five different types of social work interventions.

Case studies

Case No.1

Nikita (name changed) was a sixteen-year-old girl and she used to go to the forests of her neighborhood along with her grandfather to graze goats. One day, her grandfather raped her and threatened her not to disclose it to anyone else in the house. The girl did not tell anyone because of fear and remained

quiet at home for some time. After two months, she developed uneasiness. She started having abdominal pain and vomiting. After visiting the hospital, she was found two months pregnant and she disclosed the counsellor the entire story of her domestic violence. She was rescued by the Child Welfare Committee and her grandfather was arrested. Presently she is undergoing counselling and trying to cope with a new life at an NGO in Ahmednagar.

Case No. 2

There were a husband and wife always quarrelling with each other. They had a nine-year-old son, Rahul (name changed). The husband was a drunkard and neglected his wife and his son. Rahul's study was adversely affected due to his disputing parents. The teachers always made complaints about his studies. One day the quarrel between the parents took an aggressive form and, in a rage, the father took a burning wood from the stove and put it on the boy's head. Due to the burn, the boy became permanently disabled. He was rescued by the CWC and is sheltered at a children's home at Ahmednagar.

Case No. 3

There was a 15-year-old girl named Anita (name changed), whose parents were living with HIV. Anita was also HIV infected by birth. Parents died of HIV/AIDS. After her parents' death she had nowhere to go. Finally, she was taken care of by her uncle and she started living with her cousins. Her cousins did not like it and started troubling her. Anita was always under stress because her cousins used to abuse her physically and mentally. They even threatened to kill her. Anita, with the help of a social organization, reported the incident to the police station who rescued her and gave her temporary shelter in the organization under the supervision of the child welfare committee (CWC).

Case No. 4

Sayli (name changed) is a 16-year-old girl studying in class 10th. She loved education. But her family decided to marry her off. So, the girl was in stress. Somehow, she heard about the child helpline service, 1098. One day, she rang up the Childline number 1098 and gave all the details about the fixation of her marriage. Ahmednagar child helpline with the help of an NGO decided to

rescue her. After informing and taking help of the CWC and the local police, NGO and Child line conducted rescue operation. They managed to prevent the child marriage due to timely information provided by the girl. The rescued girl was given temporary shelter at a children's home in Ahmednagar. The parents of the boys and girls were produced before the CWC. They gave a written undertaking that they would not conduct child marriage.

Case No. 5

Aniket (name changed) is a four years old child. His parents are in dispute and do not get along with each other. They are undergoing the divorce procedures and are separated. The son is living with his mother against her wish. She started abusing him physically. Realizing the torture, his son faced at her house, the husband approached the family court for the custody of the child. The mother was summoned in the family court and was counselled about care and protection of the child.

Conclusion

Due to domestic violence, children's minds are disturbed and their mental health is adversely affected. Social work intervention in this context is necessary to protect the fundamental rights of children, such as, Right to Life, Right to Protection, Right to Development and Right to Participation. Home environment influences children. Marital disputes, addiction and gender disparity often account for domestic violence against children. Social work interventions are required with the child victims of domestic violence, such as, psychological counselling, educational and vocational guidance. Social work interventions are also required with the child abusers, the parents in conflict, addicts and alcoholic members of the family, so that, children may be protected from custodial violence and abuse. Legal awareness and education of all the adult members of the family about child rights is another effective intervention strategy to prevent domestic violence against children.

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