Child Sexual Abuse

Why in news?

Recently, in a fake National Cadets Crops (NCC) camp in Tamil Nadu, School girls were subjected to sexual assault and abuse.

What is child sexual abuse?

- **Child** – Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (POCSO), defines Child as any person below the age of 18.
- **Child sexual abuse** - It is the sexual activity with a child by an adult, adolescent or older child.
- Sexual assault, sexual harassment and using a child for pornography are the different forms of child sexual abuse.
- **Sexual harassment** – It is when a person with sexual intent
  - Utters/ makes any word or sound or gesture or exhibits any object or part of body to the child
  - Makes the child exhibit his or her body
  - Shows anything to the child for pornographic purposes.
  - Repeatedly follows or contacts the child either directly or through electronic or other media
  - Threatens to use in any media a real or fake depiction of the involvement of the child in a sexual act
  - Entices the child for pornographic purposes.
- **Sexual assault** - Any act done with sexual intent on a child involving physical contact
  - Touching the private parts of a child or making a child touch the private parts of another person
- **Penetrative sexual assault** – It is a more serious offence where the offender
  - Penetrates his penis into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a child or makes a child do the same.
  - Inserts any other object into the child's body.
  - Applies his mouth to a child's body parts.
- **Using a child for pornography** - Using a child in any form of media (e.g. television channels, internet, etc) for the purposes of sexual gratification.

Status of Child Sexual Abuse in India
• According to National Crime Records Bureau Data 2022, - **Child abuse case** – It *increased by 8.7%* reaching a total of 162,000 incidents - **Child rape and penetrative assaults** - 38,911 - **Sexual violence** – It has *surged by 96%* from 2016 to 2022

What are the impacts of child sexual abuse?

- Child sexual abuse can affect psychological and physical well-being, family and intimate relationships, faith, and education and career.
- **Dilutes the interpersonal relationships** – It can cause difficulties in forming intimate and trusting relationships.
- **Affects emotional well-being** - Victims experience depression, lack of trust in authority, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, self-harming and attempted suicide.
- **Deteriorates physical health** - victims and survivors of child sexual abuse are affected by a physical injury such as internal damage and also prone to sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Difficulties in learning** – Victims feel *disengaged in school education* and have learning difficulties due to the trauma.

What are the measures taken by India?

- **Policy measures** – ***National Policy for Children, 2013*** provides for the multisectoral and multidimensional approach to secure the rights of children.
- **Institutional measures** – Organizations work on prevention, punishment of child sexual abuse and protection of children.
    - **NCPCR** – National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, a statutory body under Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
    - **SCPCR** - State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, constituted under the 2015 Child Rights Act.
    - **NCW** - National Commission for Women, a statutory body established in 1992.
    - **POCSO Court** – They are Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) established under POCSO Act 2012.
- **Legislative measures** - Protection of Children from Sexual Offences ***(POCSO) Act 2012*** to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography.
- ***Juvenile Justice Act 2015*** provides for penalties for committing offences against children.
- **Reporting mechanisms** - ***POCSO e-box*** is an online complaint box for reporting child sexual abuse established by NCPCR.
- ***EBaalNidaan*** is an online complaint registration system for general public to report various violations and deprivation of child rights.
- ***Child Helpline 1098*** is a 24 Hour emergency toll free phone service for children in need of care and protection.

Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse of School students

• Develop a comprehensive pan-India strategy to eliminate all forms of child abuse in schools.
• Implement *physical security systems* such as surveillance technologies, secure entry and exit points.
• Regular *training for staff* on child protection.
• Conduct a *special discreet session* of the parents and management for the purpose of ensuring vigilance of school children.
• Develop policies and protocols for *reporting and addressing* abuse.
• Ensure a fair and *time-bound investigation*.
• Legally enforce child-abuse-free campus infrastructure, both tangible and intangible, in every school.

> *In loco parentis is a concept whereby, every teacher, principal, implicitly pledges to act as the parent of each child within the campus, nurturing and safeguarding them throughout their time there.*

What are the challenges?

- **Under reporting** – Many cases of sexual abuse go unreported, making it difficult to address the issue effectively.
- **Stigma and shame** – Societal attitudes often stigmatize victims, making it difficult for them to seek help or justice.
- **Lengthy legal processes** – The legal process can be lengthy and traumatic for victims, often deterring them from coming forward.
- **Limited resources** – Many jurisdictions lack sufficient resources to investigate and prosecute sexual abuse cases.
- **Close perpetrators** – In most of the case the abuse is done by family persons, school.

What lies ahead?

- Conduct education and awareness campaigns to prevent sexual abuse from occurring.
- Provide support services for survivors, including counseling and legal assistance.
- Ensure perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.
- Promote a culture of respect and equality and removing harmful cultural norms.

References

1. Swarajya | Child Sexual Abuse in a Fake NSS Camp
2. Vikaspedia| Child Sexual Abuse

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