

Psychological harm, causes and response to sexual assault of females in developing country

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Abstract. In many developing countries, due to the lack of sex education and knowledge about sex, sex can not be openly discussed and even becomes a topic that people avoid talking about. As a result, the severe consequences, core causes and effective solutions have not been displayed clearly yet. This dissertation focuses firstly on the psychological damage that occurs when women are sexually assaulted in developing countries, specifically discussing the short-term damage and phenomena like emotional damage and changes, the long-term damage and phenomena like Post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD), and the social constraints on seeking counselling like lacking of formal psychological clinics. It then discusses the causes of the criminalization of sexual assault. These include the shortage of sex education in the family and at school, regional gender inequalities and inadequate legal provisions against sexual assault. Finally, the response to sexual assault is discussed, divided into seeking help from the law and its advantages and disadvantages, seeking help from medication and psychiatric treatment, and awareness-raising on sexuality, the importance of this response is emphasized in each of these areas. For the meaning of the paper, it can provide help and instruction for people who are really attacked by sexual assault and people who want to make a contribution to improving the situation of fearful sexual assault.

Keywords: Sexual assault; Female; Developing country.

1. Introduction

Sexual assault is still a very urgent, important and unaddressed issue globally. Especially in developing countries, this form of crime is very common. A third (35%) of women and girls worldwide, according to estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO), have suffered physical or sexual intimate relationship abuse or non-partner sexual violence in their lives [1]. Even while these figures are startling, they only provide a partial picture of the situation. And, due to stigma and fear of retaliation by the abuser, not all victims report their victimization experiences, which proves that the true figure is probably higher than 35%.

After a victim has been assaulted, there is often a focus on whether the victim has been substantially harmed and using this to judge the extent of the crime. What is overlooked is the psychological damage that sexual assault inflicts on women, which does not stop at a few hours of confusion after the assault, but is more likely to remain for a long time, causing deeper psychological problems. And even if people and the victims themselves are concerned about the psychological problems, there are still a lot of social limitations in developing countries for seeking psychological help. Many low-income countries have poor and inadequate counselling services due to lack of funding and poor environments.

Few papers mention the root causes of sexual assault in developing countries, the serious lack of sex education in families and schools, gender inequality and laws on sexual assault. Especially in the last case, few papers mentioned legal provisions on sexual assault and its related issues like gender inequality [1]. This also proves that there are few legal regulations on sexual assault in developing countries and they do not pay much attention to this crime. But it does have a detrimental effect on females, lowering people's living standards.

There is also a need to study the response suggestions after an assault. One level is aimed at minimizing harm to the victim, such as filing a lawsuit and seeking counselling. At the other level, it is aimed at improving sexual knowledge and awareness in the State and society.

2. Organization Psychological Harm from Sexual Assault to Females

2.1. Short-term Psychological Harm and Phenomena

Short-term and reversible psychological harm and phenomena are often reflected by immediate emotional responses when an underage female just attacked by sexual assault. This kind of psychological harm will not cause long-lasting effects to victims, and can be cured in the future. Immediate emotion responses are distinguished by different phases: the reacting phase and the impacting phase.

Reacting phase refers to the stage at which the victim is being sexually assaulted. During this process, extreme fear can trigger dissociative processes including de-realisation which refer to a feeling that the world is fake, de-personalisation which means a kind of impression that the thing is occurring to "them" but not "me", and dissociation which means the impression of being excluded from the circumstance. It's conceivable that the victim was able to endure the unbearable because to dissociative processes that happened in or after the trauma. There is a list of the repercussions of dissociation that took place during the trauma. They include missing idea of what was happening, acting without consciously choosing to do so, and time appearing to be altered. For instance, things seem to be happening in slow motion, and there are sensory disturbances, such as moments when one's body appears distorted or changes, or memory loss.

The reacting phase is a post-traumatic stress reaction, but also in the short term. It is certain that everyone has distinct reactions after a distressing experience. The victim can display expressive and tearfulness, be silent and controlled, pained, or startled [2]. Anxiety, tearfulness, shame, physical revulsion, and helplessness are all signs of an early presentation [2]. Post-traumatic stress can lead to normal reactions like guilt and self-blame [2]. The dread of being by oneself and the worry of the attacker returning are the two common fears experienced after an attack. The general sense of exhaustion is exacerbated by hypervigilance, hyperalertness, and disturbed sleep. Reactivation of earlier traumatic events is a possibility. The psychological trauma is made worse by unresolved past sexual trauma, especially unresolved sexual violation.

2.2. Long-term Psychological Harm and Phenomena

PTSD, irritability, anxiety, substance abuse, depression, and anger are common difficulties experienced by many survivors, who will experience longer periods of distress and develop difficulties [3].

According to research, most women get over the attack's immediate consequences between three and four months after it happened. Rothbaum et al discovered that 94% of people who investigated satisfied the clinical criteria for PTSD in the first 12.64 days following the incident, but 47% of them did so 94 days (mean) later [4]. Unpleasant feelings after assault will trigger a lot of diseases. PTSD is a common occurrence. Experiencing or witnessing a horrific incident can lead to PTSD, which is a mental state disorder that can be triggered by it. Just a few of the possible symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the incident. Several biological mechanisms are influenced by PTSD, including neurochemistry and brain circuitry, as well as endocrine, immune, cellular and metabolic function [5]. PTSD can last a very long time, perhaps the remainder of people's whole life. However, the actual time period it lasts and actual reactions vary among different people.

The victim is in a negative state of tension for a long time after being sexually assaulted, which can easily trigger depression. Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R., & Mathews, S found that there are 84.3% of women had high levels of depression symptoms in 140 participants recruited from public hospital

services [6]. It is also a long-term psychological problem that needs professional therapy and medical help.

Of course, besides these two symptoms, more and more severe diseases and troubles like anxiety, bipolar disorder, and committing suicide may occur in victims, but will not be described precisely in this paper.

2.3. Social Limitation in Seeking Psychological Help

In many developing countries, seeking help from a counsellor to solve problems is not a common phenomenon or even a rare one. Due to high costs, inadequate mental health promotion and the number of counselling agencies, people tend to pay less attention to their psychological state, and even if they are chronically unhappy or anxious, they do not choose to go to a counselling agency, but rather to seek help from those around them. Al-Shannaq, Y., & Aldalaykeh, M found that the individuals who researched 707 Arab youth aged 16–24 years had extremely poor suicide literacy levels, a strong stigma associated with suicide, and unfavourable attitudes regarding obtaining psychiatric assistance [7]. The most often mentioned sources of psychological support were family, relatives, and friends, and the least often mentioned sources were psychological healthcare providers.

Stigma is an obstruction when people seek professional help. According to Dagani et al.'s research, findings imply that students who experience severe psychological distress employ coping mechanisms to deal with the stigma associated with requesting assistance [8]. The lower the stigma associated with seeking assistance, the more likely it is that such intentions will emerge.

School counselling services in developing countries also need much improvement. This has a great impact on the psychological condition of students, and if students could receive more useful and correct psychological knowledge through school counselling services, it might be possible to reduce their existing psychological stress and distress, as well as to prevent future mental illnesses. Their issues are urgent: they have a limited number of school psychologists; they have a high pupil-to-psychologist ratio; and their school psychologists frequently lack graduate education, adequate pay, and appropriate technology [9]. It is clear that the needs of the twenty-seven least developed countries are beyond the current and foreseeable resources [9].

3. Causes of Sexual Assault of Female in Developing Countries

3.1. The Lack of Sexual Education in Schools and Family in Developing Countries

Lack of sex education and knowledge is fatal, and victims are vulnerable to being attacked in an unguarded manner. It also takes longer to react to being assaulted, not knowing how to defend themselves. This type of situation occurs more often with minors and students. The shyness of schools and families to teach sexuality leads to the high frequency and repetition of sexual assaults.

Through Pradhan et al.'s research, they carried out a study to identify the risk factors for teenage pregnancy in poor nations [10]. In ten of the twelve investigations, the effect of schooling on adolescent pregnancy was examined. Nine of them discovered that one of the most prevalent risk factors for adolescent pregnancy was having little to no schooling [10]. In addition to the overall education level, four researches looked at the relationship between specific sex knowledge and reproductive health and risks of unintended pregnancy among teenagers: Three studies found a connection between adolescent pregnancy rates and a lack of sexual education. Girls frequently turned to their peers for information on sexual problems, but two studies that employed qualitative approaches indicated that this was problematic since peers were as misinformed.

Although the main body of research mentioned above is about pregnancy rates, it is nonetheless quite closely related to this topic because a portion of the pregnancy rate does occur in sexual assaults. The fact that minors give birth when they are not yet physically mature and developed does argue for the lack of sex education in low-income areas.

3.2. Gender Inequality in Developing Countries

Gender inequality is also an important contributor to the occurrence of sexual assault. In some developing countries, female's status and rights are very low, resulting in them being at the mercy of others, disrespected, and violated without being able to resist or having the right to do so.

There is an example in India. As a result of societal situations they created, predetermined gender states that are impressively ingrained in India's sociocultural fabric and last for a long time, there is gender inequity [1]. Women have traditionally lived in mostly patriarchal environments due to the pervasiveness of patriarchal traditions in Indian culture. As a result, they have faced discrimination in many aspects, in social, political, educational, and economic opportunities because of their perceived inferior position. In the educational aspect, low-income Indian families tend to spend more money on boys rather than girls. The common explanation is that girls will belong to another family after they get married so the investment is worthless.

Violence against women is a consequence of gender inequality. In India and other developing countries, discriminatory regulations and exclusive social norms that limit females' opportunities for schooling, employment, and independence serve to legitimize gender-based violence problems. Especially when there is hostility against women who stray from traditional norms, violence against women can occasionally go hand in hand with changing power dynamics within families and communities.

3.3. Legal and Regulatory Protections Regarding Sexual Assault are Inadequate

Research has demonstrated that the majority of victims will not choose to seek help from the law immediately after being sexually assaulted. While the criminal justice system can provide an array of services to sexual assault survivors, only 5–20% of survivors report the assault to police [11]. They may ask for advice from informal institutions and people close to them, or suffer in silence. These phenomena indicate that legal support is insufficient or has gaps, resulting in victims not using the law to protect themselves in the first place.

Examples show that victims and their supporters need awareness about their rights when reporting sexual assault and access to legal advocates who can help reduce secondary victimization. In some cases, police were careless and gave victims misleading information that was also revictimizing [11]. In addition to the poor treatment that some women received from the police, courts often reduced the severity of the crime by giving women who faced legal proceedings lenient punishments [11].

Nowadays, 49 countries still do not have laws and regulations that protect women from domestic violence like gender based violence and sexual assault, which can not give justice to women who are being sexual assault. It also exacerbates the extent and likelihood of their psychological victimization.

4. Suggestions of Response to Sexual Assault of Female in Developing Countries

4.1. Legal and Regulatory Protections Regarding Sexual Assault are Inadequate

When people are attacked inappropriately, it is wise to choose to seek help from the law and a professional lawyer. But this requires consideration of the practicalities of the situation. There are definite benefits to this approach, but there are equally drawbacks. The advantages are that it is one of the most legitimate ways to fight back and that legal and government services can assist you with a range of litigation matters. If successful, the abuser will also be punished accordingly, waking up more people who try to commit crimes. And the disadvantage, this response is more time-consuming because of the complete and standardized legal process to go through. And the victim needs to repeat his/her victimization experience while the case is being processed. This is likely to lead to secondary victimization if the victim is psychologically fragile and has a heavy history of victimization.

In many nations and locations, sexual assault is illegal, and each jurisdiction has its own definition of what constitutes sexual assault. Non-consensual penetrative sexual contact is what is meant by sexual

assault in some jurisdictions, such as New South Wales. There is an example from China. Article 236 of the People's Republic of China's Criminal Law states. The law states that anyone who rapes a woman using coercion, violence, or another method will get a fixed-term prison sentence of between three and ten years. Anyone found guilty of raping a little girl under the age of 14 will face harsh penalties. If one of the legally aggravating circumstances applies to the rape of a woman or a young girl under the age of fourteen, the offender will be given a fixed-term prison sentence of at least 10 years, life in prison, or the death penalty.

4.2. Seeking Help from Medical and Mental Treatment

Psychiatric treatment for post-sexual assault is extremely urgent and important. Victims should take this response as quickly as possible. Psychotherapy can help victims rebuild trust in themselves, others, and the world, understand their emotions and needs and learn skills to cope with issues such as PTSD. This is especially true for victims who have been sexually assaulted by an acquaintance or someone close to them. This is because it can cause the victim to feel extremely insecure and to have thoughts that the whole world is a lie, which is one of the mental injuries mentioned above. And if the victim chooses to heal themselves, this can be a very long and painful thing to do. Timely counselling and medication can go a long way to alleviate the psychological damage, however not most victims do this. Within six months of their assault, around a third (43.5-31.4%) of the current sample sought treatment [12]. Psychological treatments for victims of sexual assault usually employ methods such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Uplifting Therapy (EMDR). These methods help victims deal with emotional distress, alleviate emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, and help them rebuild themselves so that they can resume a healthy life.

Sexual assault survivors have access to a range of resources for mental health help, including victim advocates, crisis counsellors, and mental health experts working in private practice and community mental health organizations. [13]. Society may help victims of sexual assault in various ways outside just psychological care. Creating support groups, offering financial aid, and offering legal assistance are a few examples. The feeling of care and support that comes from this support can give victims their confidence and optimism back.

4.3. Educating Awareness about Sexual Knowledge

Due to poor sex education and poor regulations, the problems of infant abortion, illegitimate infants and baby dumping are continually rising in many countries and areas. For example, research conducted in Malaysia indicated that the consequences of reckless behaviour among adults and teens become increasingly significant. In Malaysia, there were on average 83 illegitimate births every day. Those babies were registered without their father's name since their parents had illicit relationships and gave birth to them [14]. Due to the fact that about 10% of babies were conceived through unlawful means, free illicit sex in Malaysia is a big issue [14]. What is commonly referred to as sex education is really a mix of two or three subjects covering issues like sex in the Islamic context, reproductive and fertility system development, and the physical growth of children and adolescents. If the themes are taken into consideration, what the students learn and accept is not 100% sex education and sex knowledge but rather a few related topics that instructors are required to teach in order to meet the requirements of a system that is examination-focused. It is also can be a source to argue the idea above that sexual education in schools in developing countries is inadequate.

In contrast to the developed countries in the West, there was the Oscar-winning *Juno* as early as in the past, and later on there was the globally popular *Sex Education*. With an open Western society, coupled with affluent material living conditions, children are exposed to a wealth of knowledge about sex at an early age. This kind of education has something to learn from.

In the US, the policy about sex education can be referred to as a kind of response. Individual states, districts, and school boards control how federal monies and rules are implemented at the state level. Schools must prioritize sex education above academic courses and other crucial health issues

including substance abuse, bullying, and suicide due to a lack of resources and time for in-class instruction [15].

Apart from constructing a higher level of teaching in schools, the books, advertisements and popularization of science are also crucial. They can be incorporated into people's daily lives to make sex more intuitive.

5. Conclusion

Based on the problem and issue discussed above, the conclusion will also be divided into three parts according to the structure above.

Firstly, psychological harm from sexual assault on females will be concluded by short-term effects, long-term effects, and social limitations. For the short-term effects, it shows the immediate emotional response in reacting phase and impacting phase. The commonest responses are a sense of afraid, guilt, sadness, shock and denial. While they will not have a more detrimental and profound influence on victims. For long-term effects, these refer to diseases that triggered by sexual assault, like depression and PTSD. The paper demonstrates that these diseases will last for a long time and cause serious phenomena. For social limitation, the paper points out the relationship between stigma and limitation in seeking help, also giving data for support. And this paper also reveals the ineffectiveness of school psychological counselling.

Secondly, the causes of sexual assault of females in developing countries will be concluded by a lack of sexual education in schools and families, gender inequality, and inadequate legal and regulatory protections regarding sexual assault. Sex education, this paper demonstrates this by showing different sources that people get to know about sex education, but finally found that the commonest sources are friends who are around them rather than formal education from school and family. For gender inequality, India as a focused subject representing developing countries is researched by this paper. Through information supported by other literature, the paper displayed the phenomenon that the status of women in some developing countries and areas is not equal to men's like women cannot get equal and sufficient education resources. For inadequate legal protections, the paper found that the policies in some developing countries are not effective, and do not pay attention to sexual assault. Also, there are still 49 nations that do not have any regulations to protect women from sexual assault.

The last, suggestions of response are divided by legal action, mental treatment and educating awareness. This paper points out the importance of each response and gives relatively correct example of the USA to compare with developing countries.

However, there are still some omissions in this paper that need to be filled in the future. For example, what is the level of education in developing countries, the effectiveness of legal measures on sex education, and how to make sex education more popular and effective. Moreover, it is also worth exploring whether sex education is related to religion, because religious beliefs and cultural traditions are deep-rooted and difficult to change. In future, conducting research that covers these shortages is necessary.

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