

## A REVIEW ANALYSIS OF CURRENT/RECENT RESEARCH STUDIES ON "CHILD - ABUSE"

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It has been a decade plus, when the UN General Assembly adopted "Convention on the Rights of the Child". All, but two member states, have notified it. Pakistan is a signatory to it. However, according to a report, "Experts at a UN-sponsored conference on Psychological and medical service for sexually abused and exploited children in Karachi pointed out the lack of commitment on the part of successive governments to fully secure the rights of such under-age victims".<sup>1</sup> According to independent researchers, about a quarter of the children of Pakistan are victims of sexual or physical abuse. Corporal punishment and physical abuse are quite common in many government schools and private madrassahs. In some madrassahs caning is frequent. At work places too, it is practised to keep the child labour force from fleeing and freedom. Homeless poor children, who work and live in streets are often subjected to sexual abuse. They are too young harassed and helpless to complain. Last month, Dawn reported three cases in which only three-year-old children have been victims of incest, or sexual abuse by relatives.<sup>2</sup> These cases were registered by police under the offense of adultery which implies consent. The Government of Pakistan, in July 2000, promulgated the "Juvenile Justice, Ordinance", but it needs enforcement in letter and spirit.

Enforcement of the "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" is also called for. According to AFP report, there are about 3,00,000 children forcibly recruited for fighting. About 20,00,000 children are used in commercial prostitution. About 14,00,000 children are suffering from HIV/AIDS. Every third child is unable to

complete five-year basic education. About, 1,00,00,000 (10 million) children under the age of 5 years die every year of diseases which are curable.<sup>3</sup>

This year, the UN General Assembly (sitting from September 9, 2001) has on its agenda a 3 days review sessions to know how far the 1990 convention on the "Rights of the Child" has been implemented. Before it, three great men: Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, Nelson Mandella, the great African leader and Mr. Bill Gates, a US business magnate, have launched a "Say 'Yes' for Children" campaign, which includes a 10 principles/points appeal to the UN member states, calling for elimination of HIV/AIDS, stopping exploitation of children and saving them from forced recruitment for a war between warring factions, ending poverty, protecting environment, etc.<sup>4</sup>

In Pakistan the incidence of the "Camel Kids" is common. Parents sell their children, or other-wise the abducted children are sold in the Gulf states, where the rich Arab Amirs are fond of camel race, in which children are tied upon the race-camels, whose screams and shriek accelerate the running speed, and perhaps provide music to the spectators' ears. An NGO, called "Daste - Shafqat" (A hand of parental care), has carried out surveys "to identify the nature and degree, of physical punishment of children" (Reported in the Pakistan Journal of Clinical Psychology, pp.73-77), indicating that "in a Kutchi Abadi, physical punishment is the main mode of discipline used by parents. In likewise social groups it was found that physical, or corporal punishment was considered to be a normal part of parenting".<sup>5</sup> Researcher Khalida Shafi collected data on the nature and a number of children abuse incidents were reported in leading news papers during periods of the summers of 1991 and 1992. She puts it like this: (1)

Smuggled for prostitution 49, (2) raped 4 in 1991 and 2 in 1992, (3) Strangled by father 3, (4) Committed suicide in 1991 and 1992, (5) Subjected to violence 7 in 1991 and 8 in 1992, (6) Burnt 2+4, (7) Stabbed to death 2+28 respectively, (8) Kidnapped 10+9, (9) Involved in false theft cases 3, (10) Given opium by mother (to put to rest) 1, (11) Fell to road accidents 12+28 respectively, and (12) bitten by stray dogs 2+7 in 1991 and 1992 respectively. Besides, she refers to a "Long-going Radio Service: Whose child is this one?, held twice a day. These are cases of run-away children, indicating that "the children run away due to the fear of corporal punishment either by parents or teachers. Child beating is quite prevalent in rural society", (Ibid., p.74).<sup>6</sup> The Researcher further refers to Dr. Arif (1991), who reports that "Sexual abuse is more frequent against girls and can happen within the family circle (incest) . . . . it can cause serious problems in making happy sexual relationship later between husband and wife, and may also lead to prostitution".<sup>7</sup> She discusses a number of psycho-social factors responsible for child abuse and points out a repeat performance formula, "abused children have abusive parents". Rather, it should be, 'abusing parents have abused children'.

Among the causes of child abuse, Dankertring (1971) finding holds good: "under stressful situations . . . financial problems, a wailing disobedient child can turn a parent to violent behaviour".<sup>8</sup> This is common, and thrashing the child is considered his improvement. An old maxim says, "Spare the rod, and spoil the child". That may be a conscious pre-emptive action of a severe disciplinarian parents or teachers. There are also incidences of parents who are emotionally bad by nature, sadistic, abusive, drug addicts or alcoholics, who behave with children abnormally.

There are two other research reports, which are published in the Daily Dawn, Karachi: (1) Dr. Amin A. Gadit reports 490 child abuse cases were registered in one year. He says, "Child sexual abuse is a very serious problem"; and concludes that "Child abuse is rooted deeper than you think";<sup>9</sup> (2) Syed Ali Raza writes on child sexual abuse, raising the question: "Is denial the answer"? He proposes a number of remedial measures. This write-up is supported by an informative discussion by Dr. Ajmal Kazmi as to "How serious is it? He tells that child abuse has a lot more than sexual abuse. It is physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and (even) child neglect, leading to child labour and denial of education. He mentions a number of research findings e.g. "(1) Child abuse affects the future mental health (of the abused child) There is positive correlation between reporting child abuse and greater level of psychopathology, including substance abuse, suicidal behaviour, eating disorder, depression and anxiety disorders; (2) Child abuse can occur in any section of society, though it is much more common in under-privileged lower socio- economic classes; (3) Child abuse is reported in families having multiple family (joint-family) system and social disadvantages, family instability and disruption; (4) Parents who have themselves been abused as children are more prone to abusing their own kids; (5) The children more vulnerable to abuse are those who are: (i) Product of unwanted pregnancy, (ii) An unwanted child in family, (iii) Mentally or physically handicapped, (iv) Separated from parents specially mothers during early childhood, (v) Difficult in temperament, (vi) Hyperactive, or (vii) Physically un-attractive. He points out more types of child abuse and suggests: What must be done? — a network of child care centres, included" <sup>10</sup>

To conclude this short review, it may be

mentioned that: (1) Child abuse is an international issue, and is being tackled by the UNO. (2) It is not being solved, because it involves funding, while the poor, particularly in the third world countries, are themselves funded by child abuse. (3) It is basically an economic problem. Poverty alleviation and skill education can cut across its roots. (4) Local communities, national societies and the international community must put in concerted and coordinated efforts for providing a healthy socio-economic order for the future generations of mankind. (5) It must be warned and understood that one prevented human soul is more destructive than one hundred builders of cultural and civilized society.

#### REFERENCES

1. The Daily 'Dawn', Karachi, April 29, 2001, Editorial.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., April 27, 2001.
4. AFP Report, datelined New York, The Daily 'Dawn', Karachi, April 26, 2001.
5. Dast-e-Shafqat, *Newsletter*, Vol.III, March 1991.
6. The Pakistan Journal of Clinical Psychology, Vol.II, 1993, pp.71-77: Khalida Shafi, "Child Abuse and Mental Health".
7. Arif M.A., (1991), "Behind Closed Doors", News International, Weekend Magazine, quoted; Ibid --.
8. Dankerting W.F. (1971), "The Growing Tragedy of Battered Children - the Plain Truth, quoted, -- Ibid --.
9. The Daily 'Dawn', Karachi, March 14, 2001.
10. Ibid, September 20, 2000.

**NOTE:**

The three research reports reviewed herein, come from psychologists' circle. Dr. Amin A. Gadit is head of Psychiatry Department of Hamdard University Medical College, Karachi, Syed Ali Raza is a Research Associate at the same place, and Dr. Ajmal Kazmi is a Consultant Psychiatrist at the Defence Psychiatric Institute, Karachi. If professionals are at work, more reliable data and research findings will be forth-coming.