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Fatherhood and the absence of emotional responsibility: Implications for child protection

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Background: As Judicial Medical Officers, we often examine cases of sexual abuse involving female children, with a particularly distressing subset involving biological fathers. Despite legal protections and ongoing economic development, these violations persist, indicating underlying issues beyond law, poverty etc. Many victims suffer long-term psychological consequences, revealing the depth of harm caused. This raises a crucial question: beyond strengthening laws, are there social and moral dimensions that require deeper academic attention? Exploring recurring patterns in these cases can help uncover root causes, foster professional dialogue, and inform more effective, ethically grounded preventive strategies.

Method: A comparative case study was conducted on five instances of paternal sexual abuse referred for medico-legal examination at a tertiary care hospital, focusing on identifying common patterns, socio-economic factors, and psychological influences.

Results: Common patterns emerged: the mother was absent or unaware, and all victims later developed psychiatric disorders. One father used cannabis and alcohol, while the others were chronic alcohol consumers. The perpetrators displayed extreme cruelty, using threats and violence to silence victims, disrupting their education and well-being. Beyond socio-economic factors, a lack of responsibility, respect, and moral integrity played a key role. While parasexual behaviors and pedophilia may be difficult to address, fostering ethical awareness in perpetrators is crucial. Children require continuous parental care and love to navigate life successfully.

Conclusion: Despite Sri Lanka's legal protections, paternal sexual abuse persists. Solutions must go beyond poverty alleviation or stricter laws—fathers must develop responsibility, respect their children's dignity, and reject selfish impulses. Strengthening mental health initiatives, promoting ethical education, and reshaping societal values are vital to prevention. Increased investment in mental health programs and moral education is essential to safeguarding vulnerable children.

Keywords: Attitude change, sense of responsibility, respect for the child, selflessness.