

AN OVERVIEW OF CHILD MALTREATMENT AND DENIAL

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Child abuse most probably existed from time beyond memory or record. At an early stage of human evolution, child abuse and incest may have been accepted as a norm like animals having sex with its own progeny and of course, animals would not have an 'age of consent'.

History of sexual abuse: Ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Greek and Roman history reveals sexual abuse of boys and girls including commercial sexual exploitation in the form of boy brothels and 'rent a boy' services. Documentations in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan has revealed a practice of older and rich men having "attractive beardless" youth for their sexual pleasures often referred to as '*Balkey*' and in some areas referred to as '*Ashmas*'* (Khan, 2000). The '*Devadasi*' system in India although now legally banned is still in existence. One of the first recorded cases of (what can now be interpreted as paedophilia) in Sri Lanka (Ceylon then) was recorded in the 'Kadugannawa Parcel Bomb Case' in 1945.

Corporal punishment and physical abuse: All over the world, including South Asia, society has justified corporal punishment of children through phrases like "spare the rod and spoil the child" and "the taste of the curry depends on how well it is stirred".

Denial: Kempe & Heifer (1980) indicated that doctors often hesitated to refer to legal authorities. The description of a large number of cases of sexual abuse over a short period in Cleveland in 1987, led to widespread disbelief and denial. I We, as individuals, as a society, or as a nation, are proud of ourselves when one (or a team) of our nationals performs well I in sports or any other activity. Individuals in society who may not have had even the remotest affiliation to this success would try to identify with the success as a 'national' and would like to have 'ownership' to this success. However, iff contrast, when your national team has done badly, society would not accept responsibility or ownership, fearing that the negative effect would reflect on them. Similarly, when incidents of child abuse stigmatise our society, neither the society nor the individuals would like to belong to that society and it would be not be surprising for them to reject reality. It is also easy to justify this denial because of the hidden nature of abuse,

Other forms of child abuse: Physical and sexual abuse of children would be described by other speakers.

Child soldiers: Although the issues of other forms of child abuse are being addressed effectively, the international community has not yet been able to challenge the global impunity of child recruitment by terrorists or governments. Compared to most other forms of child abuse, which is caused by individuals, conscription is by organized groups that are not answerable to the community, local lawmakers or the international community. The justification of children as brave soldiers and martyrs to facilitate fund raising in diaspora communities, children being paid less than adults, while eating and demanding less food or other conditions of work, would make conscripting children more attractive than adult. These conditions become 'norms' the children would be obliged to endure.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children: Sri Lanka is well known as a tourist destination for about 3 decades. Initial unrestricted inflow of tourists in the seventies and cheap accommodation, as well as cheap flights, led to the influx of undesirable tourists including drug addicts, sex tourists and paedophiles. Very soon, Sri Lanka became a "paradise" for paedophiles especially on the Southern Coast, with beautiful beaches and new hotel complexes that came up with a flourishing trade. The advent of the internet and its popularization resulted in the sale of children including pornography on the net. Easy access to internet, even in not so developed tourist areas, has become a menace compared to its benefits. Poverty, ignorance, domestic abuse, single parents, alcohol/drug use by parents often contribute to the problem.