A Study on Factors of Child Abuse from Reported Child Abuse Cases to THJ in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka - (2015-2016)

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Abstract - Introduction: Child abuse is a devastating global problem that is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. Since the child protection structures are undeveloped, the problem of child abuse rises significantly in Sri Lanka. Teaching Hospital, Jaffna (THJ) is the tertiary center for the Northern Province, which encompasses five districts Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. This study focuses on reported child abuse cases to the THJ for the years of 2015 and 2016.

Objectives: To assess the socioeconomic factors of the affected children, to find the association between type of child abuse and the other factors and to identify the risk factors for child abuse by using statistical modelling.

Methodology: A record based retrospective study was conducted at THJ from January 2015 to December 2016. The nature of the abuse, socioeconomic details of victim and the characteristics of the perpetrator was extracted from the records maintained at the District Child Development Centre (DCDC) of THJ. Data was analyzed using SAS 9.4.

The results: There were four types of child abuse taken into account. The majority form of abuse was sexual (46.79%) and neglect (25.94%). Female (77.54%) children were mostly affected than Male (22.46%) children.

Most of the parents of victims were alive together (236) while 95 children have single parent and 11 of them had died. Most of the Fathers of affected children were working in temporary (63.64%) jobs. Most of the children were from low income families (87.97%). Nearly 90 pecent of the perpetrators were known to the victim and 40.64% of them were relative. Meanwhile 124 (33.15%) of perpetrators were within the age group 18-25. 23.5% of families have more than 6 members. 39.3% of children were school dropouts. The multinomial logistic model suggested that type of abuse influenced by victim's gender, victim's age, perpetrator relative or non-relative, perpetrator known or unknown, alcoholic perpetrator, and perpetrator's age.

Conclusion: socioeconomic factors mostly contributed to all forms of child abuse. Parents should protect the children even from their known and relative persons. Awareness program is required to be conducted to the parents which explain the importance of the child well-being to the society and the nation.

Key words - Child abuse, Jaffna District, Multinomial logistic model.

I. INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a devastating global problem that is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. Consequences of the child abuse affects the long-term survival of the child and as well as the country's economy. Recent research on child maltreatment by UNICEF Research Centre, found that almost 3,500 children under the age of 15 die every year from child abuse in developed nations.Sri Lankan's National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) says it has received 10,732 complaints on different forms of child abuse during the year 2015 and Attorney General's Office revealed that there were 3,548 serious offences against children in 2007 and it was increased to 4,480 in 2011.This statistics show the seriousness of the problem in Sri Lanka. After the end of the three decades of the civil war in Sri Lanka, the development of cultural, economic and social aspects of the Northern Province was expected. Since the child protection structures are undeveloped, the problem of child abuse rises significantly. Teaching Hospital Jaffna (THJ) is the tertiary center for the Northern Province, which encompasses five districts *Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar,*

Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. Therefore, most emergency and serious cases are reported to the JTH from five districts. Therefore, this study focuses on child abuse cases reported to the THJ for the years of 2015 and 2016. The WHO defines (In 1999) the term child abuse as "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to a child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship or responsibility, trust or power."

II. GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- To assess the selected socioeconomic factors of the affected children.
- To find the association between type of child abuse and the factors, including victim's characteristics, family background of victim and perpetrator characteristics.
- To identify the risk factors for child abuse by using statistical modelling.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The number of reported child abuse cases is much less than the actual incidence because a large number of children suffer in silence. But there are some authorities that have some records of child abuse cases relevant to the districts in Sri Lanka such as Divisional Secretariat, police station, hospital, NGOs, etc. District Child Development Center (DCDC) is a subunit of THJ, which is involving a child care program. One of the Social Officer's (SO) from the Jaffna Divisional Secretariat is assigned to the DCDC unit to collect data on admitted child abuse cases to THJ. Once the child abuse case is admitted to the THJ, it was examined by the Medical Officer and it was referred to SO. Other than admitting cases of THJ, some other cases are received from victim's caretakers, neighbor, police and Women Development Officer (WDO) to SO. Since each child abuse case is different from one another, there is no format for primary data collection by the SO. Therefore, these cases are recorded as a report which constitutes all necessary information to the case.

Prior to the beginning of this study, each case report should be gone through thoroughly and relevant data should be extracted. Detailed report of the cases mainly consists of nature, of the abuse, social background of the victim and characteristics of the perpetrator. Secondary data collection was carried out using MS-excel to categorize the variables into columns. Before the analysis, data cleaning and preparation are the most important part of the research, because each report is different from one another. Statistical software SAS was used to perform descriptive analysis, univariate analysis and generalized logistic model fitting.

IV. RESULTS

Sexual abuse was the commonest form of abuse among victims in this study with 175 (46.79%) incident. Among this total sexual abuses 45.14% of complaints were recorded as "abused" and 24.57% were recorded "child missing". Among 97 of neglected children, 30.93% of complaints were recorded as "Child missing", 15.46% were "Attempted to commit suicide" and 7.22% of them were recorded as "No birth certificate" due to parents were not having the marriage certificate. Percentage of female children were getting married before their 18 years of age was 15.51. In any type of abuse female children were at a higher risk of being abused than male except physical abuse.

Children belonging to the age group 15-18 and 10-14 were mostly affected. 36.89% of the children's parents were separated or single parent or both died. 63.64% of the victim's fathers were working in temporary jobs and 32.62% of them were not in a position to earn for their family but 60.16% of them were non-alcoholic. Thirty eight percent of victim's mother were engaged in laborer jobs. 170 of children lived with more than five in their family while 7 children were living in orphanages. Most of the children were studying. Nearly 90% of perpetrators were known and 40.64% were relative to the victim. 124 of the perpetrators were belonged to age group 18-25 and 87.7% of them were non-alcoholic. There was an association between type of abuse and victim's gender, victim's age group, known or unknown perpetrator, type of guardian, family size, father's income to family, present condition of victim's mother and school dropout at the 5 % level of significance.

Two models were tested in this multinomial logistic regression, one comparing children who were neglected versus other category (physical and teenage marriage) and one comparing children who have sexually abused versus other category. Modelling suggested that, type, of abuse was influenced by victim's gender, victim's age, perpetrator relative or non-relative, perpetrator's age and perpetrator alcoholic. The deviance of the fitted model was 465.7531 on 656 degrees of freedom with. This indicates that the model has good fit. To quantify the association between the types of abuse and explanatory variables odds rations were used. The odds ratio for male children being neglected over other types of abuse is 0.360 times the odds for female child. The odds ratio for male children being sexually abused over other types of abuse is 0.055 times the odds for female child. And the odds ratio of sexual abuse versus other type of abuse is increased by 3.614 if the victim age group 10-14 versus 15-18. Children who have abused by relative perpetrator versus non-relative perpetrator, decreases the log odds of a children being sexually abused versus other types of abuse by 1.0324. Perpetrator belonged to age group 26-35 versus 18-25 increases the log odds of children being sexually abused versus other types of abuse by 0.9791.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research show that, sexual abuse was the most common type of child abuse faced by female

children. Similarly, local studies of (Amararatne RRGS & Vidanapathirana M, 2016) and (Waidyaratna, 2005) found that, female children were at higher risk of being sexually abused by known perpetrators. When consider the age of victim, higher number of children above 10 years were affected by sexual abuse (146, 39%).

Similarly, above mentioned two researches showed that, children belonged to the age group 11-18 and 12-18 were at higher risk, respectively. Since the above studies were conducted by the medical officers, neglect and teenage marriages were not considered. But a result of this study showed that, neglect was the second highest (25.94%) type of child abuse and female were mostly affected. 7.22% of them were not having the birth certificate. This is an indication that these children have lost their right to official identity, a recognized name and nationality. Only the female children were affected by teenage marriage and 55.17% of them were identified at the time of delivery.

As per the previous study and this study, these children belonged to low income families. This does not mean that, children belong to higher income family are not affected by any type of abuse and children and their parents may be quiet due to their social status.

When considering the global findings, study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India (Loveleen Kacker, 2007), showed that, there seemed to be not much difference in sexual, physical and emotional abuse being faced by female and male children. Since there was higher gender discrimination, female children belongs to any age group at higher risk of being neglected by their caregiver and relatives. The survey of "child abuse among working children" was found that 21% of children were in the labor force. The study conducted by CJCP and GHJRU

in South Africa found, that many of the children had already experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse, neglect or had been exposed to high level of family and community violence.

When considering the UK and USA as developed countries, neglect by the caregivers was the most common type of child abuse. A study conducted in UK, showed that, considering all kind of gender difference in maltreatment, young male children were most frequently affected by other males in public space in the form of physical abuse while young female children from sexual abuse by men. In USA children who were in the age group 1-3 were at higher risk of being abused and neglected by their parents. Approximately 90% of all child maltreatment incidences occur in families whose income is below the national median. Above discussion shows that, child abuse is a common problem in each country all over the world. But the type of child abuse and factors are different in each country due to the country's socio-cultural and economic factors. In over all, poverty, unemployment, social norms and values, alcohol and drug usage, parenting skill, negative adult behaviors, and lack of opportunity for children to express opinions are the main factors for child abuse.

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