

Women on the Move

Child Abuse : The Need to Expose It

by Gemini Wahaj

SEXUAL abuse of children was a taboo subject in Bangladesh, until some concerned people formed a group called Breaking the Silence. The group consists of several member organisations such as ADAB, Voluntary Health Services Society, Naripokkho, and the Disabled Forum. Breaking the Silence has held meetings to speak openly about sexual abuse, raise mass awareness, and take steps against the problem. The group held training and discussion sessions with teachers at Agrani and Urban Schools, with the view to holding similar sessions with parents and teachers. And just recently, Breaking the Silence published a leaflet that details the facts and myths of child abuse, defines acts of sexual abuse, and advises how to protect a child.

Open discussion within the forum has revealed many truths. Most adults experienced sexual abuse as children. When a child is abused, she thinks it's her fault. Since we are a long way from stopping abuse of small children, or guaranteeing prosecution of the abuse, it is very important to empower the child with sexual information. Instead of keeping children ignorant of sexual issues, we must teach them about sex, to recognise sexual advances, and how to protect themselves. The teachers at Agrani said, 'Why aren't we educating the children about this? We must include sex education in the curriculum.'

The target audience are teachers, parents and children. But at this stage, the

group is distributing leaflets to other network organisations only, to facilitate further discussions, raise mass awareness among the social workers, and train more people to speak about sexual abuse. There are still some touchy issues, such as reservation about letting a child find out about sex, but it is hoped that any concerned individual will be able to appreciate the advantages gained by the child.

The leaflet itself is a colorful foldout shaped like a house, which signifies the need to break the silence within the home. The front cover is a middle-class rural hut because children may be abused in any home, irrespective of social class.

Facts and Myths of Sexual Abuse:

Myth: Children are sexually abused in poor households only.

Fact: Children are sexually abused in all classes of society. They are the most likely victims of sexual abuse.

Myth: When a child is sexually abused, there must be signs of physical injury.

Fact: In most cases of child sexual abuse, the abuser uses other means such as psychological pressure and fear to obtain consent.

Myth: It is generally thought that child sexual abusers are psychologically abnormal or retarded.

Fact: Only a small fraction are psychologically abnormal or retarded. It is

impossible to classify a typical abuser-type. An abuser can be anyone among us.

Myth: A child who is sexually abused must be unusually attractive or alluring.

Fact: A child can never be blamed for the act of sexual abuse. Very small children are abused, even a child who has just learned to walk or is still in his mother's lap. If a child is attractive, the abuser may not be excused from his or her due punishment.

How to Make a Child Aware of Sexual Abuse:

It is not always possible to provide physical protection to a child within the family. A child must be taught how to protect herself from any potential danger.

A child must be taught about his or her body. She must be taught that if she is touched in any way that is suspicious or fearful to her, she must protest against the act and immediately inform a trusted adult.

Tell your child that if anybody touches her and tells her to hide the fact, then she must not agree. The child must immediately inform an adult.

Tell your child that if a child is given money or gifts (sweets/chocolate), and told to keep this a secret, then she must not agree. She is also not liable to do anything in exchange for these gifts.

Do not make any promises that you cannot keep.

Tell your child you believe him.

Tell her that she is not responsible for what has happened.

Tell him he has done the right thing in telling you about what happened.

Tell your child that grown-ups are not always nice. Grown-ups can also do something wrong. When a child is sexually abused, it is your moral duty to help him. If you unsure about what steps to take, seek



The Doubly Disabled

by Shahnaz Begum

MOST of the states in the Asia and Pacific region are very similar in the area of disability and other socio-economic conditions. The position of women with disabilities in these countries is a socio-economic phenomena. Usually the women are treated as unproductive and subordinate to men, who are considered the productive element of society. In this situation any sort of disability in a woman serves only to add severity to her condition. This situation has given rise to the phrase 'Women with disabilities are doubly disabled'.

One striking feature of the women's development movement of our country is that no one, even for a moment, is considering the rights of women with disabilities. No one has come forward to raise the issues of the women with disabilities. Even the women with disabilities are not conscious enough of the inhuman conditions of their lives.

To try to find out the situation concerning disabled women in our society from some of the socio-economic phenomena which I have gathered from my work in SARPV (Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable — an organisation working for raising awareness regarding disability).

disabled and non-disabled girl in it, that family will always deny the disabled woman's existence. The family feels that it must hide its disabled member from the general public, as the belief that disability is hereditary would otherwise make it impossible for them to arrange marriage for their non-disabled daughter.

Marriage of disabled women: I will just say a few words about the way disabled women are married. Marriages are generally arranged by parents in two ways:

Firstly, parents arrange a bridegroom for their daughter by unfair means. That is, they inform the bridegroom that their daughter possesses a huge property when in fact, she can lay claim to nothing of her own. In this way they managed a bridegroom for their daughter.

Secondly, the parents of a disabled woman actually give their daughter a large amount of their property, making it easier for them to arrange a bridegroom for her.

However, ultimately, the outcome of these actions is the same. In the first case the woman is abandoned very soon after the wedding, in the second, the property is invariably taken by the husband as well as her being abandoned.

Even when a middle aged woman, having been married for a long time, becomes disabled, she still gets abandoned. The husband leaves even their children behind.

Disabled women are considered an unproductive force in our society:

People of our society treat women with disabilities as economically unproductive. They believe that they are not involved in the economic activities of the family and society, because they pass their life within the four walls of their home. But the fact is that both male and female members of a family containing a disabled female are freer to be directly engaged in the economic activity of the family and society. This is due to the fact that the disabled women perform all of the household chores and look after the house in the absence of the 'productive' forces of the family. Though, after the arrival of other members of the household, her presence becomes quite invisible and, though she lives with her family, she becomes totally isolated from the joys and sorrows of the family. Her contribution to the family and society gains no recognition, instead she is regarded as a burden and curse to the family.

Social unacceptability:

There is a general tendency, in families having a disabled member, to hide the person in their home, away from those outside, and even from neighbours. The disabled woman is not entitled to join any family social gathering. If a family has both a

Disabled women's lack of awareness regarding her position in society:

One woman colleague, who is apparently disabled, was going to visit a project, located outside of Dhaka. 'My family does not bother much about where I go or with whom, but do not allow my sister, who is younger than me, to go anywhere with anyone outside of our family', she said. Her younger sister is not disabled. This statement has so many dimensions, but one crucial is that nobody cares about the sexual abuse of women, with disabilities. Here it is the family which is the element pushing the women with a disability into such a situation, society is only providing the opportunity. But the unfortunate disabled women is totally unconscious about the family's discriminatory behaviour to her.

For the disabled woman who are shunned by family and society life is both hard and unendurable. Yet this needn't be so. Disabled women have an important role to play in the nation's development. As in other countries they can be productive citizens instead of burdens. But first we must give them the dignity they deserve. First we must acknowledge them as human beings.

World Education Report 1995

The Education of Women and Girls: Moving Towards Equal Opportunities

UNESCO's Third World Education Report puts the spotlight on women and girls. They account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults and nearly two-thirds of all out-of-school children. In well over 100 countries, girls' participation in education is significantly lower than that of boys. Although the gap is slowly closing, even when girls' participation is equal or higher at the second and third levels, the 'science barrier' remains an obstacle. All this makes the provision of equal opportunities for girls the most formidable challenge for teaching since universal education became a global possibility.

'We must not just witness this discrimination. We must try to go to the roots of the problem', says Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO. The 1995 World Education Report makes the first systematic attempt to provide a gender breakdown for all international statistics on education. It contains the first ever figures published which show that the under-representation of girls in science subjects is a truly global phenomenon shared by industrial and developing countries alike. Using such data, the Report offers educators and policy-makers lines of thought and possible strategies to tackle the obstacles which still prevent

girls from having equal educational opportunities.

The Starting Point — Access to Schooling

The global imbalance between boys and girls education enrollment rates comes from imbalances in the less developed regions of the world. In industrial nations, where all girls and boys are in school, there is no gender gap in enrollments. This is now the case at primary level in Eastern Asia/Oceania and also in Latin America and the Caribbean region, where female participation is often high at second and third levels.

Most of the lowest levels of female participation are to be found in Sub-Saharan Africa where less than half of 6-11 year old girls are in school. In Southern Asia, over a third of girls in that age group are out of school and in the Arab States region, the figure stands at one quarter.

School Life and School Survival Expectancies — Key Indicators

The report sets out to discover whether the problem of access to school or drop-out from school has the greater impact on girls' participation. In countries where there is a major problem of survival through the first four years of primary school, girls generally survive as well as boys. There are striking contrasts between 'school life expectancy' — the average

number of years of education girls in a population can expect to receive — and 'school survival expectancy' — the average number of years that girls who actually enter school can expect to receive. For example, in Morocco, the average school life expectancy of girls is 5.7 years, compared to eight years for boys, but the survival expectancy once in school is 9.3 years for girls, much closer to the boys' 9.9 years.

Such results are widespread and suggest that the education system is less 'unfair' to girls than the economic, social and cultural conditions which limit their initial access to school. This suggests the real challenge for policy-makers in many poor countries is getting girls into school in the first place. 'The best way is to attack poverty and exclusion,' notes Federico Mayor. Building water wells which free girls of a time-consuming task may be as important as any in-school strategy.

One in-school factor which has a direct correlation with girls' attendance levels is the presence of female teachers. Review of access to teacher education programmes could be a priority area for many countries, in order to offer women opportunities for their own advancement and also to overcome the problem of family reluctance to allow daughters to be taught by male teachers. Incentives could encourage married

women teachers to take posts in rural areas where young single women teachers are reluctant to go.

Staying in the System — A Global Trend For Girls?

In some parts of the world, girls tend to stay longer in the education system than boys. Greater female participation in the second and/or third level is prevalent in most industrial countries, in many Latin American and Caribbean countries, in Gulf countries such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, in countries in other regions, such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The tendency for girls on average to stay longer than boys in the education system is particularly pronounced (i.e. 6 months or more) in Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Spain and the United States.

The data suggest that a significant global trend may be emerging. There are several hypotheses for girls staying longer in education. They may really be performing better academically; they may feel they have to get higher qualifications to compete professionally; boys may have better/earlier job opportuni-

Women And Science — An "Iron Law" Of Under-Representation

Historically, the idea that women should have access to all fields of study has met with more resistance than any other aspect of women's education. The Report's figures show that the under-representation of women in science subjects is a truly global phenomenon. It occurs in second and third level education. In every country for which data are available, the share of women's enrollment in science, engineering and agriculture in higher education is lower than the share in women's total enrollment in all fields. The opposite trend is apparent in the humanities.

These findings, from countries in all regions, at all levels of development, seem to constitute an 'iron law' of education. 'This is not only a loss for women, it is very probably a loss for science too,' says Federico Mayor. There is to date no explanation for this continuing gender specialisation across industrial and developing countries in spite of huge changes in women's participation in

the work force. Whatever the causes, restricted access, social conventions — it constitutes a formidable challenge to pedagogy.

What Kind of Pedagogy? — What Kind Of Society?

In the co-educational model, pedagogy needs to be sensitive to the dangers of taking the boy-pupil or an undifferentiated 'child' or 'learner' as the point of reference. A multidimensional gender-sensitive approach could include the following:

- * using more co-operative and interactive modes of learning;
- * linking mathematical and scientific content to societal issues;
- * emphasising discussion and collaboration as well as competition;
- * balancing the presence of male/female historical figure, scientist, activity etc. in teaching material.

Low female participation in science subjects cannot be attributed to ineffective pedagogy alone. Breaking down the 'science barrier' also depends on what happens outside school, especially in industry. In the direct association of science with the dominant mode of production and organization of work, many women perceive a 'machismo' which they reject. — UNESCO.

Rhythm Leads to Sour Note

According to the State of World Population 1995 report from UNFPA, reproductive health means that people should be able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and the capability to reproduce when they wish to. Access to effective family planning is an essential part of this. Criselda Yabes reports from the Philippines on a women's health clinic which is taking this issue very seriously.

her everything'. Dr Hedida Lara, who had been trained by the Foundation on women's reproductive health, cured Ms Datu's pains and offered her options for family planning.

Ms Datu had two grown children from her marriage and had never before used anything to control her fertility — aside from the rhythm method. 'Rhythm — that was all I knew,' she smiled. At age 38, she was advised to use an IUD rather than the pill which could cause serious side-effects.

Four years later, when her lover returned to settle with her in Manila, she decided she would like to have a baby. She was counselled about the risk of child-birth at her age but said she was willing to go ahead. 'I'm very thrilled about this,' she said, gently rubbing her four-months-pregnant belly.

programme of Action and described in The State of World Population 1995 — from UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. It has three clinics, each with a staff of five, located in commercial districts accessible to working mothers, students, housewives and club entertainers.

Since it was organized about 15 years ago, the foundation has served almost 31,000 clients, mainly middle-class women. Its medical staff occasionally visit department stores, public schools, colleges and community centres, offering personal counselling and free

lectures on family planning, prenatal care, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and even first aid — all with the intention of providing information and education not normally available to Filipino women.

The Government has launched a high-profile campaign promoting family planning, hoping to curb an annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent. Women's rights groups say that in the past, a general lack of services contributed to the widespread incidence of unwanted pregnancies, forcing women to resort to illegal and dangerous abortion. Unofficial estimates of

induced abortion range from 155,000 to 750,000 cases every year.

There is a lot of hypocrisy around this issue,' said Dr Florence Tadiar, the foundation's Executive Director, alluding to religious groups which have lobbied against family planning and reproductive rights. 'Those who can afford to can always fly to Hong Kong or elsewhere to get an abortion, she continued. For the rest, the first thing they do is to go to church and pray — but prayers are not always answered.'

Although contraceptives are available, it can be hard for Filipino women to go against cultural norms. It's new to them,' explained Dr Tadiar. They are not so receptive. But when they learn to accept and realize their rights, then their husbands can become the problem!'

Criselda Yabes is a writer and journalist based in Metro Manila. — UNFPA



Students at Manila University, Philippines: Reproductive health implies that people can have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide when to do so, says The State of World Population 1995 report from UNFPA. — Photo: Ron Gilling/Panos Pictures.

James Bond



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