



Child sexual abuse: When home is not a safe place

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If needed, medical, counselling, and legal services should be offered to the child," says Khondkar. Parents need to make their children realise that they did the right thing by informing them about the incident.

"Doing something that the child may feel bad, expressing annoyance or fear, underestimating the incident or taking the side of the perpetrator are all very traumatic and negative for the child", says Khondkar.

Laila Khondkar also stresses that strict

actions need to be taken by parents to ensure that the victim does not have to see the predator again, that is, no matter how close the predator is to the family, s/he should be banned from the house or any other family function as not to further torment the victim by triggering the memory of abuse. Not only that, other parents in the family should be made aware of this incident so that they can protect their children from going through a similar abuse.

There are still many cases where the

children stay silent due to the fear of being accused of breaking the family apart and they grow up carrying that painful memory which makes their skin crawl and stomach turn. Even in cases where the victims muster the courage to inform their parents about it, the parents stay silent due to the same fear. It is high time parents acknowledge the fact that predators are not entitled to forgiveness just because they are family. Parents can only do this when they prioritise the feelings of their own children over society's opinions.

SEX EDUCATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

When asked about the role of sex education, Khondkar informs us that according to researches, sex education cannot directly eradicate the issue of child sexual abuse. She provides examples of developed countries where despite sex education being a part of the curriculum, child sexual abuse persists. However, comprehensive sex education is still necessary as it can spread awareness about the importance of consent in relationships, sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe sex etc. Sex education is designed to help young people acquire knowledge about sexual behaviour that can eventually lead them to make informed and healthy decision in life.

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not professionals in such matters, so their next step after identifying the issue is to get them introduced to someone who is a counsellor. In addition, the parents must also be informed.

This may however not be possible in the context of Bangladesh, as educational institutions in our country are more concerned about academics than the emotional well-

cater to the students' mental health. It is necessary to understand that students will excel only when they are healthy, both physically and mentally.

THERAPY TO HEAL

The after-effect of sexual abuse leaves a deep scar within the child, altering their personality and shattering their confidence for a lifetime. Losing trust in people, inability to express emotions, anger issues, depression, being uncomfortable with intimacy, nightmares, alcohol or substance abuse, youth suicides, etc. are all the consequential effects of child sexual abuse and they stay post-adulthood if not taken care of at an early age. Therefore, treatment is of paramount importance to heal the trauma of abuse for a mentally and physically healthy future of the victim.

It, however, becomes difficult to get help from a professional when the concept of mental health is still stigmatised in our society. Again, Laila Khondkar believes that it is the duty of the parents/guardians to encourage them to get therapy and support them in realising their potential rather than caring about society's opinions.

MUTUAL RESPECT

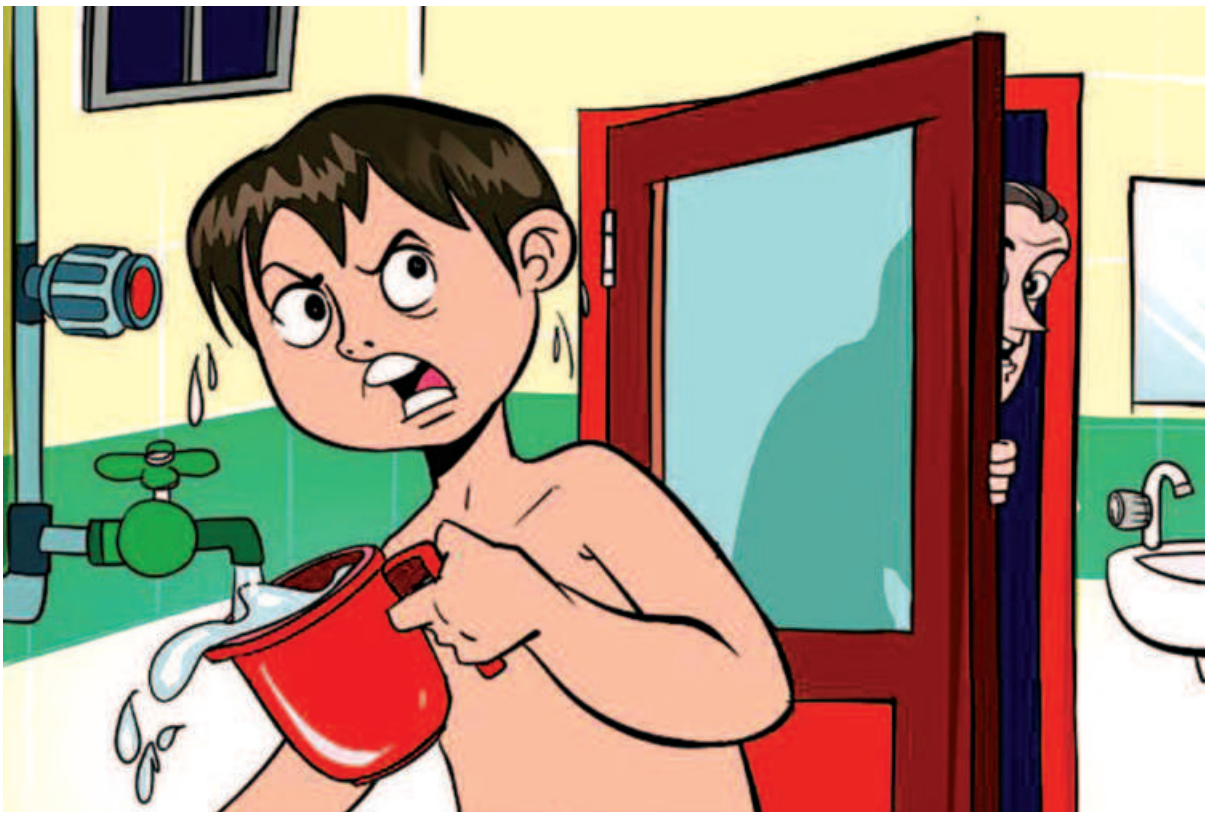
Lastly but most importantly, mutual respect among human beings regardless of gender is vital for an abuse-free nation. It

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Alongside parents, teachers also have a key role to play in protecting children from sexual abuse and its aftereffects. The duty of a teacher is not limited to disseminating knowledge. They need to be attentive to the students and observe any changes in their behaviour; receiving poorer marks, attention deficiency, inability to socialise with the peers, etc., and come forward to help them. Of course, teachers are

being of students. Due to this rigid mindset, we lack behind a lot when it comes to tending to their mental health. Even the most renowned schools in Bangladesh are unable to provide proper counselling to their students. The result? More suppressed trauma.

This system needs to change if we want to create a safer place for children. Every educational institution must have a councillor to

is important to understand that mutual respect does not mean being nice to each other; it involves respecting each other's feelings, opinions, dreams and aspirations, capabilities, flaws, and accepting each other as human beings despite differences.

By Tanzila Kamal Prottyasha
Photo: Manusher Jonno
Foundation (MJF)