

Child Abuse in Male' City of Maldives

*A Dissertation submitted to the School of Arts and Languages
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Master of Arts in Sociology*

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November, 2017

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “**Child Abuse in Male’ City of Maldives**” submitted for M.A degree is entirely my original work. All the ideas and references are duly knowledge and it does not contain any other work for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university.

Dated: 27th November 2017

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Child abuse in Male’, city of Maldives**” submitted by **Ameena** bearing the registration no. **11617623** has been completed under my guidance and supervision. The present dissertation is the result of her original work, investigation and study. No part of the dissertation has ever been submitted for any other degree or diploma at any university. The dissertation is fit for the submission of the partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of M.A in Sociology to the school of Arts and Language, Lovely Professional University, Punjab.

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse has been a persistent global issue which needs to be discussed broadly. The mistreatment of the children has always taken place throughout the history and among all cultures. Child protection became a cause for alarm in societies of the global North, in the late 19th century. Ever since the history of child mistreatment and of safety has been documented in the global North. In contrast, the modern history of child abuse and protection in the global South started merely with the adjustment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

My study is upon the child abuse in Male', City of Maldives. Basically my study is based upon why child abuse occur and what are the reasons behind it. There are three main objectives in my study, which are to assess the needs of these victims, find and discuss the causes for child abuse and create awareness for the society regarding child abuse.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The safety of some children nationwide is being threatened gradually through child abuse and neglect. Anything which does harm to a child whether done purposefully or not, or not providing the child with essential needs is defined as child abuse. Abuse can be in many forms, either emotional, physical, sexual and also neglect. Each form has its different characteristics. There can be multiple causes of child abuse. Parental, familial or community are the main causes.

Parental causes are the cases in which a parent who was emotionally abused, isolated from society or neglected by parents as a child, abused their own children. Child abuse is common with single parents or teenage parents who abuse their children due to a lack of experience in parenting.

Community based causes are the causes which are associated to the atmosphere or the surrounding of the child. Poverty, overcrowding, substance abuse and unstable marriages are all examples of community based causes. Child causes consist of the disability of the child and requirements of exceptional wants. Child abuse has extreme influence on a child's life as it damages their self-confidence, capability to sustain strong associations, and ability to function at home, at work and at school.

In capital city of Male', there is an alarming amount of child abuse cases reported to authorities every year. However, surveys indicate that the majority of the cases remain unreported. This is mainly due to ignorance or lack of awareness by the parents or guardian and most of all, due to the fear of losing the reputation in the society and lack of trust in state institutions.

The most common forms of child abuse are physical and sexual abuse. In Male', families often bring relatives' children from the islands to stay at their house in the name of providing them with education. However, often more than not, these children are forced to work like servants doing chores around the house and even subjected to abuse. They are abused physically and sexually. Most of the time the abuser turns out to be a family member or a

family friend. The most surprising aspect of this is that at most of the time, at least one of the family members is aware of the abuse taking place but keeps silent due to the embarrassment which would be caused if the authorities found out.

There have been many cases where a father has abused his children sexually too. In many instances, the mother knows of the abuse taking place but did nothing to stop it. Later on, the mothers have gone on to admit that the child had told them repeatedly about the abuse but they never believed them.

Due to the shortage of space and overcrowding of Male' city, many families are forced to live in small apartments. These 1 or 2 room apartments are overcrowded as well and families of 5-8 people are forced to share rooms and beds. There have been many reports of child abuse among this portion of the population who live in small overcrowded apartments. The frustration of poverty and overcrowding are taken out on the children in the form of physical abuse. In few cases there have been incidents where the parent or parents forced children into prostitution as a mean for earning money.

Furthermore, it is believed that a parent who had been abused as a child is more likely to abuse their children. A similar incident took place in Male' when a mother physically abused her child to the point where the child was beaten to death. The child's body was covered with scars and marks which indicated that the abuse had been taken place for a long time. Police investigations later revealed that the mother had been physically and sexually abused by her step father as a child.

Using child abuse as a means of disciplining is not uncommon either. Some parents who can be classified as extremely strict, use physical abuse as a disciplining method. Something as small as a complaint from school teachers to disobedience can trigger this 'lesson'.

There have also been incidents in Male' where early marriage and becoming a parent too soon has been the cause of child abuse too. This leads the parent to believe the child has taken away their freedom, career and many more aspects of their lives and this has led to brutal abuse. In addition to this, early marriage sometimes results in parental incompetence among spouses and difference of opinion which in turn lead to problems in the marriage. Such frustrations sometimes are also taken out on children in the form of abuse.

Having a child of special needs is also a risk factor on the subject matter of child abuse. Physically or mentally challenged children are more probable to be subject to mishandling

than other children. In Maldives, some parts of the society consider such children as burdens and their dependence on the parents often lead to child exploitation.

The main causes of child abuse in Male' is the lack of awareness on the topic. Most children are unaware and are unable to identify strange and inappropriate behaviours by outsiders. Their innocence is taken advantage of and the abuse stays hidden from people's eyes. I, for one think that in this age and time, children should be taught about these as lessons in school from an early age. As the saying 'knowledge is power' goes, knowledge can be used as power in this situation as a way of preventing child abuse. Ignorance is also an issue where the parent or guardian refuses to acknowledge the fact that their child is being or has been abused. They either do not believe the child or do not believe the accused party is capable of doing it. Awareness programs designed for parents must be organized and the importance of finding out the truth about what the child says has to be taught to the parents. In addition, embarrassment or the fear of losing the reputation among the society is another big issue.

The mentality that the attention attracted after the authorities are informed of the abuse brings shame to the family and reputation plays a huge role in people turning a blind eye to child abuse. The child's welfare means nothing to them compared to the respect and dignity they have among the society. In order to rise above this issue, people must be sensitised and empowered to believe that the shame or bad reputation and guilt brought by reporting child abuse, or any objected towards them, is not as important as to the well-being of the child and concern for the child comes first.

Physical child abuse is often ignored by the society if the abuse happens to be by a parent. It is looked upon with a 'not my problem' attitude and these incidents often remain unreported. However, more and more cases of child abuse by a parent or parents are being reported by neighbours or other civilians, who come across the issue.

These issues need to be challenged and the mentality which breeds child abuse in the Maldivian society needs to be eliminated. The importance of the rights of children has to be addressed much more broadly and awareness must be spread on the issue. Child abuse, the causes of child abuse and the effects it has on the children must be brought to immediate attention of every citizen, to the point where nobody idly stands by and turns a blind eye to child abuse in the Maldivian society.

1.1 Meaning and explanation of child abuse.

Child abuse and ill treatment of children is defined as all kinds of emotional or physical mistreatment, sexual abuse, any kind of negligence or exploitation which causes potential or actual harm to the child's wellbeing in any form.

According to the Convention on the Rights of a child, in article 19, it states that:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child”.

“Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement”.

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

- *"Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation"; or*
- *"An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."*

This description of child exploitation and negligence precisely speak of parents and other caretakers. A "child" in this description commonly refers an individual who is under the age of 18 or who is not a free minor.

1.2 Reasons and effects of child abuse

Child exploitation is one of the important subjects which has brought to attention nationwide. Several organizations are being formed as this is recognized as a vital issue to work for. It has many forms including the physical and mental mistreatment of the children.

Conferring to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define child abuse “ *as any act or series of acts of Commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child*”.

Lots of children go through different types of child abuse each year. Most of the abuse result from efforts to discipline or control the child. Whenever the child does something wrong or in order to prevent the child from being spoiled, the parents use methods of punishment which are often subject to physical harm. Hence, it is of utmost importance that we learn to differentiate between physical discipline and physical abuse. The most common way to separate physical punishment from abuse is by the occurrence or the lack of physical injury. *"It is important to recognize that most parents do not want to beat their children. Virtually all parents feel regret after such an incident and most believe physical punishment is not an effective route to increase compliance, learning or respect for the parent"* (Durrant, 1996, p.186)

Understanding the roots or origins of child abuse is very vital to discourse, in order to avoid it. Professionals and specialists who has assessed an abused child's surroundings or atmosphere and family history came up with three central causes for child abuse, which are parental causes, ecological causes and child problems.

Parental reasons involve people who are married and became parents at a very young age and have a shortage of experience in the area of children. They often neglect the needs of the child. Parents who face many problems in everyday life tend to lose control over their anger and as a result physically abuse their children. Moreover, parents who were abused as children tend to be more probable to abuse their own children

Ecological causes involve parents who are drunk, they cannot think straight and cannot attend the needs of their children. Their unrealistic behavior due to heavy drinking could lead to hurting their children without even knowing.

Certain studies relay that poverty can be a major factor in child abuse as financial problems prevent the parents from providing for the child's need.

Furthermore, problems in the marriage could affect their children emotionally. There are two types of parents under this criteria, the parents who are aware of the emotional abuse their child is being subjected to and still fail to stop it and the parents who are abusive, offended by and literally dislike their children.

Child problems comprise of disabled children. Parenting a child with special needs is challenging and need the support of both the family and the community. In such cases, a number of parents disregard the needs for the child. This means they are clearly taking away the rights of the child.

Each and every form of child abuse, irrespective of the causes, affect the child in some manner. Each form of abuse has its own effects. These effects can be physical emotional or psychological.

The signs of abuse can easily be detected from the short term effects. Wounds or burns which occur after physical abuse and are cured after receiving medical attention is an example of short term effects.

Long term effects can be slightly more challenging to detect at the beginning. However, as the development of the child progresses, these effects can be seen gradually. If the child did not receive any medical attention, these effects can be seen as the child matures into adulthood. For an example, facing difficulty in maintaining relationships with other people. A person who encountered sexual abuse as a child may abuse other children as an adult, hence continuing the cycle of abuse.

1.3 Types of child abuse

There are different types of child abuses or child maltreatment. The physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse; and neglect.

1.3.1 Child Negligence

The let-down of a parent or an individual with accountability for the child in arranging for nutrition, clothes, home, health facilities or care to the point where the child's well-being is threatened or endangered is defined as neglect or negligence. It is a form of child abuse.

Child negligence is a shortage in fulfilling a child's basic needs, plus the failure to deliver suitable medical facilities, clothes to wear, nourishment, shelter as well as their other needs. The general public typically considers that there are essential deeds a caretaker must provide in order for a child to develop physically, socially, and emotionally. The reasons of neglect may result from numerous parenting issues including psychological disorders, substance abuse, domestic violence, joblessness, unexpected pregnancy, single parenting, and poverty.

Child neglect or negligence is determined by the way a child and society sees the parents' conduct, not by the way parents consider they are behaving regarding their child. Failure of parents to provide for a child with alternatives available is different from failure to provide without any alternatives available. A shortage of resources and poverty are time and again contributing to child neglect and often prevent parents from providing for the child's needs when they otherwise would. The circumstances and intentionality must be observed before outlining the actions as neglectful.



1.3.2 Physical Child abuse

The second most frequent type of child mistreatment is physical abuse. The way it is defined legally varies from government to government however, the most broad definition states that any physical confrontation by a person in a caregiver position which results in the child getting hurt or injured as physical abuse. Physically abused children may suffer from traumatic stress. The risk of depression and anxiety are also high for them. Furthermore, child abuse may lead to poor physical, emotional and mental development.

When we say physical abuse most of the time people would know what it means, because we are able to see the symptoms of the physical abuse on the body of the child. Most of the time it's the physical injury to the child may include kicking, burning, striking or biting the child or any action results in a physical deficiency of the child.



1.3.3 Sexual Child Abuse

All states include sexual abuse in their definitions of child abuse. Sexual abuse is considered as a form of child abuse in all states. Sexual exploitation is also considered a form of sexual abuse in most parts. Human trafficking, sex trafficking or trafficking of children for sexual intentions are all included in the definition of sexual abuse in 21 States.

An adult using a child for sexual stimulation is referred to as child molestation or sexual abuse, which is a type of child abuse. Taking part in sexual activities with a child irrespective of via consent, pressuring or other means is a type of child abuse. This sort of abuse can happen in a range of surroundings as well as at home, school or work. One of the major forms of sexual abuse of children is child marriage. UNICEF has specified that child marriage signifies possibly the furthestmost predominant form of sexual abuse or mistreatment of girls.

Victims of sexual abuse can experience further harassment in adulthood, physical injuries and also depression, anxiety disorders and PTSD.

The American Psychological Association states that "children cannot consent to sexual activity with adults", and condemns any such action by an adult: "An adult who engages in

sexual activity with a child is performing a criminal and immoral act which never can be considered normal or socially acceptable behavior."



1.3.4 Child Emotional Abuse

Psychological abuse is considered as mistreatment of a child emotionally or neglecting a child emotionally. It can occasionally cause severe harm to the mental well-being and progress of a child.

Intentionally trying to scare or demean a child, separating them from society and ignoring the children can cause emotional abuse. Sometimes, emotionally abused children suffer a totally different form of abuse or neglect simultaneously, however, this is not always true.



CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

There are numerous articles and writings on child abuse as this is an issue which is going on in every part of the world. Due to the high result of child abuse cases there are so many laws and committees established. If we look into to Maldives, they have Convention on the rights of child. In UNICEF Maldives they have a program of public advocacy and partnership for child rights, Family Protection Authority, Ministry of Gender and also NGO's like Advocating Rights of Children (ARC) etc.

Child abuse and neglect: Community problem, Community solutions, Author(s): John R. Lutzker and Maxine R. Newman, (NOVEMBER 1986): the author identifies child abuse and neglect as a serious societal issue which was recognized as a problem only as recently as 1961. Although it remained as an unrecognized issue till then, the author points out that certain aspects of child abuse can be seen in early Greek and Persian documents from as early as the 17th or 18th century. In the 19th century, even after the English Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children successfully convicted 120 cases of child abuse and neglect along with the growing awareness about the severity of the issue, it took another 15 years for it to gain official status. To tackle the issue of child abuse, methods of prevention and treatment are discussed. Social learning and human behavior are analysed to predict parents of abuse and neglect, i.e. parents who were abused as children; parents with inadequate parenting skills. Community programs such as home-start which visit the homes of young families and provide volunteer help in the form of talking or babysitting have had a huge impact on child abuse and neglect clients who otherwise would not feel comfortable in a clinic or routine agency. Project 12-ways is identified as a project based on the conditions that are necessary and sufficient to cause child abuse and neglect which help prevent and treat child abuse and neglect. The layout of the project includes everything from identifying the abuse and neglect of a child to assessing the problem, to assigning a professional case worker to the family. Author maintains that child abuse and neglect has become a major issue in the community and that it should be both prevented and treated. The importance of both prevention and treatment programs being conducted at a community level is also stated. In order to fight child abuse and neglect, in-home programs such as home-start and project 12 ways are essential, but these programs need to be cost effective according to the author. Two issues to be considered are noted as providing a model for families to look up to, who are

stuck in the cycle of poverty and transmitted child abuse from generation to generation and to be careful not to hold a falsely accused adult accountable for child abuse and neglect.

Managing child abuse cases, Author(s): Helen F. Kristal and Ford Tucker, Source: Social Work, Vol. 20, No. 5 (SEPTEMBER 1975): It opens with a statement that separate fields have made many developments which help in identifying child abuse with the use of medical history, medical examinations and x-rays. Professionals have done a lot of research in different fields which help identify different danger signals of family disturbance. Furthermore the issue has received backing in the form of reformed and newly made laws in all states to fight child abuse. A need to improve services to families related to child abuse was found Social Work Division of the University of Rochester Medical Center and a plan to do so was devised, states the author. At a hospital affiliated with the university, a system was developed to handle and manage the cases of child abuse. House staff were trained and a manual outlining the procedures were handed to them and worked under supervision of a social work coordinator. The social work coordinator monitors the progress of the case, state of house staff and is in charge of managing or requesting resources. This has triggered the continued staff education program. As a result, as soon as a house staff encounters a suspected child abuse case in the emergency room the social work coordinator is informed and appropriate actions are then taken. The article includes a case study of a suspected child abuse case of a 4 year old girl and how the hospital handled the case. The author highlights that a coordinated effort from the social worker and the physician or the officials involved in the case is important for an effective solution. The article concludes with the statement that the university not only serves as a training facility for medical personnel, but also serves as a role model for other establishments in terms of managing child abuse.

Child Abuse in Stepfamilies, Author(s): Jean Giles-Sims and David Finkelhor, (Jul., 1984): The author portrays the topic of child abuse in step families as a widely held belief and accepted fact when in reality it has never been properly tested. One of the earliest inquiries into the subject found that a large number of stepfathers were involved in child abuse. However the author points out the fact that since these findings were limited to only officially reported cases, the result cannot be widely accepted. A similar study by National Incidence (NI) shows the real mother and father to be responsible of all forms of abuse except for in the case of sexual abuse, in which the step father leads the father by 30% to 28%. However, since these researches were limited to only a particular group, it may not be accurate to say all children in step families suffer child abuse. Some theories of child abuse in step families are

discussed in the article. The author also states the problems about each theory, suggesting that the future research should be based on data collected about the general public. Furthermore, research priority should be given to testing four particular factors which would help in deriving a more accurate result. The author concludes the article by saying that only further research would help in achieving a better understanding of the issue and that no one factor or factors can be enough to explain child abuse in step families. The author also goes on to suggest that the factors which can be easily manipulated are the ones that usually receive most attention.

Press: Keeping Mum over Child Abuse Author (s): Raj Persaud Source: The author begins by highlighting a story that ran in the media about Munchausen syndrome, which accused paediatricians of destroying families. The author discusses how the Munchausen syndrome by proxy is affecting the society. Certain articles published by prominent news channels, which label paediatricians as such are also mentioned. However, according to the author, the meaning of Munchausen syndrome by proxy and how it occurs is left out in all articles. In the midst of a few parents getting their convictions for killing their babies overturned due to the syndrome, the media has gone on a frenzy. Although the issue has been getting a lot of media attention, very few worrying cases have been found after a review. The author goes on to mention the fact that even though convictions are overturned, the child will not be placed under the parent's care or custody. The family court will decide what should be done or what is best for the child. However, due to the discreet nature of family courts, this fact is unknown to most and hence allows the media to brainwash the society with their one sided articles blaming the paediatricians. Most people think parents fake the disease and once released, will be able to abuse their children again, which is not the case. Paediatricians receive no support from their employers or royal colleges. The author concludes by stating that the ongoing war among people regarding this issue is proof of how less they actually care about the real victims; the children.

Reviewed Work(s): Child Abuse and Culture: Working with Diverse Families by Lisa Aronson Fontes Review by: Claudia Bernard Source: The article concentrates on the importance of the beliefs and cultural aspect in understanding of child mistreatment. An eco-systemic framework is used by the author to state the importance of ethnic culture and social services coming together in order to understand the changing pattern of child abuse in minority ethnic families. The main argument made is for the need to be self-reflexive by the professionals in order to work from a framework which is strength oriented. The author also

notes that there are certain difficulties for experts in working with culturally different families. Calculating the risk and identifying theoretically dangerous families or families which might use culture as an excuse for abuse are all discussed in the article. The author highlights the importance of developing crucial thinking skills about not basing judgments on existing assumptions about child abuse in ethnic minority families. The article concludes with the overall offering of invaluable information for organizations of child care in health and social care sectors.

Making children's rights work: Country profile on Maldives by International Bureau for children's rights: The author begins with a brief introduction about the Republic of Maldives. The population of 359,008 (as of 2006), the 1,190 islands and 20+ atolls which make up the country are all mentioned. The history of the country is also summarized. The damages caused by the 2004 Asian tsunami disaster and how the country tackled the issue along with the aid it received from foreign countries is mentioned as well. The most affected group by the disaster is mentioned as children as many schools were destroyed or damaged. The author mentions the role of UNICEF and its USD 1 million worth of supplies in helping re-open the schools which were damaged in the tsunami. Maldives ratified the agreement on the rights of the child and enacted the law on protection of the rights of the child in 1991. International conventions or treaties signed and ratified by Maldives include Agreement on the rights of the child, elective procedure to the CRC on the participation of children in armed conflict and elective protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The main challenge faced by the Maldives to uphold these laws is stated as their geographical reality which isolates the inhabitants and complicates the full access to basic services. Nearly half of the Maldivian population is under the age of 14, it has a unique situation regarding children's rights. While many aspects of social services have improved the quality of life, certain areas still remain of concern. Such areas are gender inequality, discrimination and lack of access to basic health and education in the outlying islands. The ministry of education is involved in both promoting children's rights and collaborating with UNICEF. An early childhood care project by the name of 'First steps Maldives' aiming to ensure survival and protection of children under the age of 5 was also launched. However, despite significant improvements in health and social welfare, some islands still lack progress. The lives of inhabitants in some islands are very hard as they do not grow any vegetables or have no access to healthcare. Many children in these islands suffer from stunted growth and the maternal mortality rate remains high. Furthermore, the

limited access to health care and education raises a bigger problem which is lack of awareness. Due to this, children with disabilities are isolated from the society and go through discrimination. The author concludes by pointing out that the laws to regulate juvenile procedures in Maldives are not fully in line with the United Nations conventions on the treatment of juveniles and that drug abuse among adolescents is a rising problem in the Maldives.

Maldives National Laws: Child Rights International Network: The article is about the national legal provisions on children's rights in the Maldives in general. The author states that sanctioned treaties does not suddenly become enforceable in the laws of Maldives. The CRC or Convention on the rights of the child has not been directly unified into the national law. However, under article 68 of Maldivian constitution of 2008, courts are required to consider international treaties including the CRC. Maldivian constitution's chapter 2 contains extensive rights provisions that are applicable to both children and others but also a small number which precisely address children's rights. Although thematic legislation on the protection of the rights of the child is present, Maldives does not have a supplementary children's act. Links to websites with the English and Dhivehi (Maldivian language) translations of the Maldivian constitution is included by the author in the article, along with other websites of legal and governmental resources in order to provide information for people doing legal research on the topic. In 2007, the committee on the rights of the child welcomed Maldives' effort to amend the legislation according to the CRC. However, they also expressed their concern over several aspects of the CRC. It felt that maximum number of large areas of the Maldivian law fell short of the CRC, like a 7 year old being held accountable for 'haddu' offences for which the death penalty could also be possible. Furthermore, serious concerns were expressed in relation to sexual and physical abuse of children, stating that the laws were not adequate to protect children from them and the lack of a legal framework to prevent child labor or the economic exploitation of children. The author concludes by highlighting some of the current legal reform projects in Maldives like the intention of making primary education compulsory by law though it is yet to be conceded. Maldives also conscripted a Juvenile Justice Act nevertheless as of 2010 this legislation has not yet been enacted.

Public Advocacy and Partnerships for children's Rights UNICEF: The article begins with the author stating that the Maldives has started its foundation work for accomplishing children's rights through current and proposed legislation in Parliament. The author also states that

certain new child related policies such as disability act, evidence act and education act are under development. However, children's rights are still not being fully met and coordination between government and community based organizations seem to require additional effort. The author highlights the fact that UNICEF has been continued to advocate for human rights and freedom of expression for children and youth in Maldives. They have also provided support to the newly formed Human Rights Commission and provided training on objective and human rights based reporting to journalists in the Maldives. The author states how the participation of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives in the CRC session was a fruitful action. The willingness of the Maldivian government to openly discuss the challenges affecting children was greatly appreciated by the committee. Recently, a national database for measuring progress was launched by the name of 'MaldivInfo'. The author mentions that Maldives has made great efforts in publishing national data on key development indicators and concludes by stating that it is the first time data has been consolidated to one place and made available so widely to media and general public.

The Kempe Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, University of Colorado, Department of Paediatrics, School of Medicine, USA: The article is about a study conducted to compare internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems of people with a history of sexual abuse and those with a history of maltreatment or abuse except for sexual abuse. The study was based on the data collected from Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect and official Child Protective Services records. It was based on children who suffered abuse at ages between 4 years and 16 years. The author states that in order to examine the behaviour problems over time, Generalized Estimating Equations were used. The author goes on to discuss some prior studies which had been conducted by some scholars previously on the issue. The findings are discussed as well. The one thing common in all the previous studies, according to the author, is that a large amount of research on the matter shows that child sexual abuse causes significant short term and long term effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal behaviour and sexualized behaviour. Furthermore, the author discusses the lack of research on the matter of difference in behavioural symptoms between male and female child sexual abuse victims. However, the fact that some show higher internalizing problems for girls is pointed out. In order to collect data for the study, structured interviews was followed to talk personally with child and caregiver every two years beginning at the age 4. Children of age 12 and above were interviewed via an audio computer self-assisted interview format. The author highlights that

all interviews were conducted with consent from respective authorities. Based on the study, the author states that of the analysed parties, 18% had at least one alleged sexual abuse case filed with the child protective services, 53% had at least one referrals for child maltreatment but no allegations of sexual abuse and 29% did not have any type of reports. As per the purpose of the study, the results indicated that children with a history of sexual abuse had greater externalizing and internalizing problems over time than those without sexual abuse histories. Moreover, some differences among genders were also noticed. It was found that generally caregivers reported higher externalizing behaviour problems for boys than girls. However, it is worth noting that over time, boys inhabited higher internalizing problems than girls and that girls displayed increased problems during pre-teenage or teenage period. The findings of this study suggests that the consequences of childhood sexual abuse does not significantly increase or decrease with age but rather remain constant and is worse compared to those without sexual abuse histories. The author admits that there may be some limitations to the study as the study relied on Child Protective Services reports to assess the child abuse and some reports of abuse may not be registered by the Child Protective Services, caregiver testimonials and the fact that no attempt was made to assess the severity or chronicity of the abuse experiences. However, to conclude, the author maintains that the findings of the study shows a critical need to address the effects of child abuse. The high rate of polyvictimization among sexual abuse victims, higher internalizing and externalizing problems among sexual abuse victims compared to non-sexually abused victims and the fact that males exhibit greater internalizing problems but females face increasing problems with age are highlighted by the author. Finally, the need for further understanding of the issue, specifically based on genders is noted by the author.

2.1 Scope of Study

This study is based upon why child abuse is a widespread war against the children. In this study I will be highlighting what are the different types of child abuses and causes for such tragedies. It will also discuss about what are the necessary steps that we could take in to stop child abuse. In this study we will also look into what are the needs of these children and families who had gone through these kind of child abuse issues.

2.2 Objectives

- To assess the needs of children and families who have gone through these kind of child abuse issues.

- To find out the causes for child abuse in Male' city of Maldives.

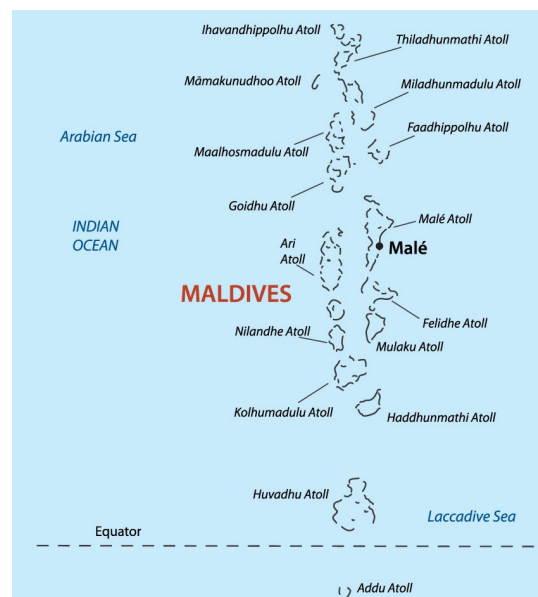
- To promote the need for child abuse awareness in the society.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

This study is based on child abuse in Male' city. The methodology used in this study is primary and secondary data which is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. In analysing the data's I have used the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Area under study



My area of study for this topic is the Capital city of Maldives.

Maldives is a South Asian Island country, it is located in the Indian Ocean, situated in the Arabian Sea. It is poised with 26 ring-shaped atolls, which is made up of 1,192 coral islands. It lies southwest of India and Sri Lanka. Maldives is famous for its white sandy beaches, crystal clear water, the blue lagoons and extensive reefs. It is known as one of the world's most geographically dispersed country. The capital, Malé, has a busy fish market, restaurants and shops on the main road, Majeedhee Magu, and 17th-century Hukuru Miskiy (also known as Friday Mosque) made of carved white coral. The population of Maldives according to 2016 census is around 417,492, the population growth rate is 2.0%. The official language of

Maldives is Dhivehi. Maldives Schools are categorized into three types and they are namely English language primary and secondary schools, Quaranic Schools and Dhivehi language primary schools. The literacy rate of Maldives is of 2012: 98.4%.

Tourism is the largest economic industry in the Maldives, as it plays an important role in earning foreign exchange revenues. Tourism began in the Maldives in 1972. At present, there are over 105 resorts located in the different atolls. Today, more than 800,000 tourists visit the Maldives each year. The fishing industry in the Maldives is the island's second main industry.



CHAPTER 4

State Role in preventing child abuse

The Maldives has gone to great lengths to reinforce child privileges and nationwide child safety system. After a mapping workout with the motive of identifying loopholes and shortcomings in the legal framework overlooking the rights of children, a new Child Rights Bill was drafted to modify and improve the existing Child Rights Act of 1991. The purpose of this new law was to bring the child protection system of Maldives in line with its obligations under the CRC.

Several new laws such as the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act have further reinforced the protection mechanism against the abuse of children. A further bill titled the Juvenile Justice Bill, which was expected to be submitted to the Parliament this year would start a Juvenile Justice and welfare system. Additionally, the Ministry of Law and Gender is also currently involved in a consolidation exercise, reviewing all child rights and protection related legislations and regulations, in order to modernize, harmonize as well as facilitate better enforcement.

However, there are many complications still remaining in confirming the privileges of the children, as underlined over the high profile case of flogging against a minor in 2013. In the flogging case, the verdict of the Juvenile Court was appealed by the accused with assistance from the State and ultimately overturned by the High Court, setting precedence for cases of criminal offences and sexual abuse of children. The child involved in the case is now being assimilated under the state home care and provided education with the other children who are in conflict with the law.

There were also many activities commenced to create awareness about child abuse and its prevention. The Juvenile Justice Unit (JJU) of the Ministry of Home Affairs in collaborated with UNICEF in order to train law enforcement officials, magistrates, judges and social workers on justice for children through specific capacity building programs. These programs were also aimed at the media, with the goal of making the media personnel aware about the

CRC and ethical reporting of children in the media. For this purpose, a code of ethics and reporting guidelines were developed for the media.

According to the UNICEF Annual Report, the year 2010 marked the end of implementing the country program. The main objective of the annual work plan was to convert from responders to tsunami to proper policy support. It is expected that the Data Base for Child Protection in Maldives will fortify the national child protection system.

The short term technical expertise set in the Department of Gender and Family and in the Juvenile Justice Unit has been very useful in building the capability of executing and supervising, evaluating laws and regulations and conveying operation's course of action. To some extent, progress has also been made in child participation. Children from different parts of the country were referred to while developing the advocacy plan for Child Friendly Schools. Youngsters were crucial in passing on information about the effects of drug abuse and averting HIV. Key restrictions faced in execution and success of results included insufficient resources and frail monitoring throughout all programs. Maldives has experienced substantial political and governance transformation in the past three years and the state of the country in-between affected the work being done by UNICEF at different levels.

There was a child protection program designed for 2008 and 2009, however the child Protection Action Plan was not fully achieved and in 2010 there was efforts made to achieve those results. Under child protection services first thing in the CPAP was to get reported cases of exposure of children to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation document it, profiled and tracked, children have access to designated protection services.

Societies across all the targeted atolls are familiar with the protecting atmosphere needed for children and the contrivances in place for support. Both the police and judiciary have improved their aptitude to execute child friendly laws and see that offenders receive justified sentences according to the best interest of the child. The main objective of the program was to make sure that the children of Maldives are safe from all the means of abuse.

Furthermore, the database report of child protection was restructured and stretched out to specifically two more atolls. In association with the human rights commission, evaluations were made in order to gather information on child involvement and representation through

different segments and policies were established to help increase the contribution in matters affecting them. Regular functioning measures in case recommendations were reviewed to improve management between the responsible state organizations.

To cope up with the issue of child abuse some initiatives have been taken to defend and support the rights of children are increasing the capability of different organizations to study cases of child abuse and gender based violence. In Maldives, various regional initiatives have been taken by SAIEVAC (South Asian Initiative to End Violence against children) which is helpful to maintain relationship between civil society, government and regional bodies.

Children's are assured the right of entry to schooling, without boundaries on admission and re-admission below the age of eighteen. The Maldives has sanctioned protections against child marriages, particularly of the female child, with a strict ground of 18 years for marriage, and clear parental approval and counselling in other situations. There was a report from the Family Court and the Registrar of Marriages, where it stated that there were 23 minors contract legal marriages in 2012, followed by 14 minors in 2013 and 16 minors in 2014. Yet, the Family Court maintains that at the time of marriage, all minors were 17 years of age, and were calculated to be eighteen ensuing the Muslim (lunar) calendar. Hard work are also continuing to gather statistics on the marriage cases that is not registered, including those involving children in the Maldives.



CHAPTER 5

Data Analysis

It's hard to imagine someone intentionally hurting a child. Most of the time the kids know who are their abusers, and it happens most of the, at home by parent or some relative. This makes it difficult for the kids to speak about it due to the fear of the abuser's power over them, so they stay silent.

My study is based on the primary and secondary data, which I have collected from the relative authorities of the government of Maldives who are working on the cases of child abuse such as Ministry of Gender and Family, Maldives Police Service and Human Rights Commission of the Maldives.

Ministry of Gender and Family Protection Authority

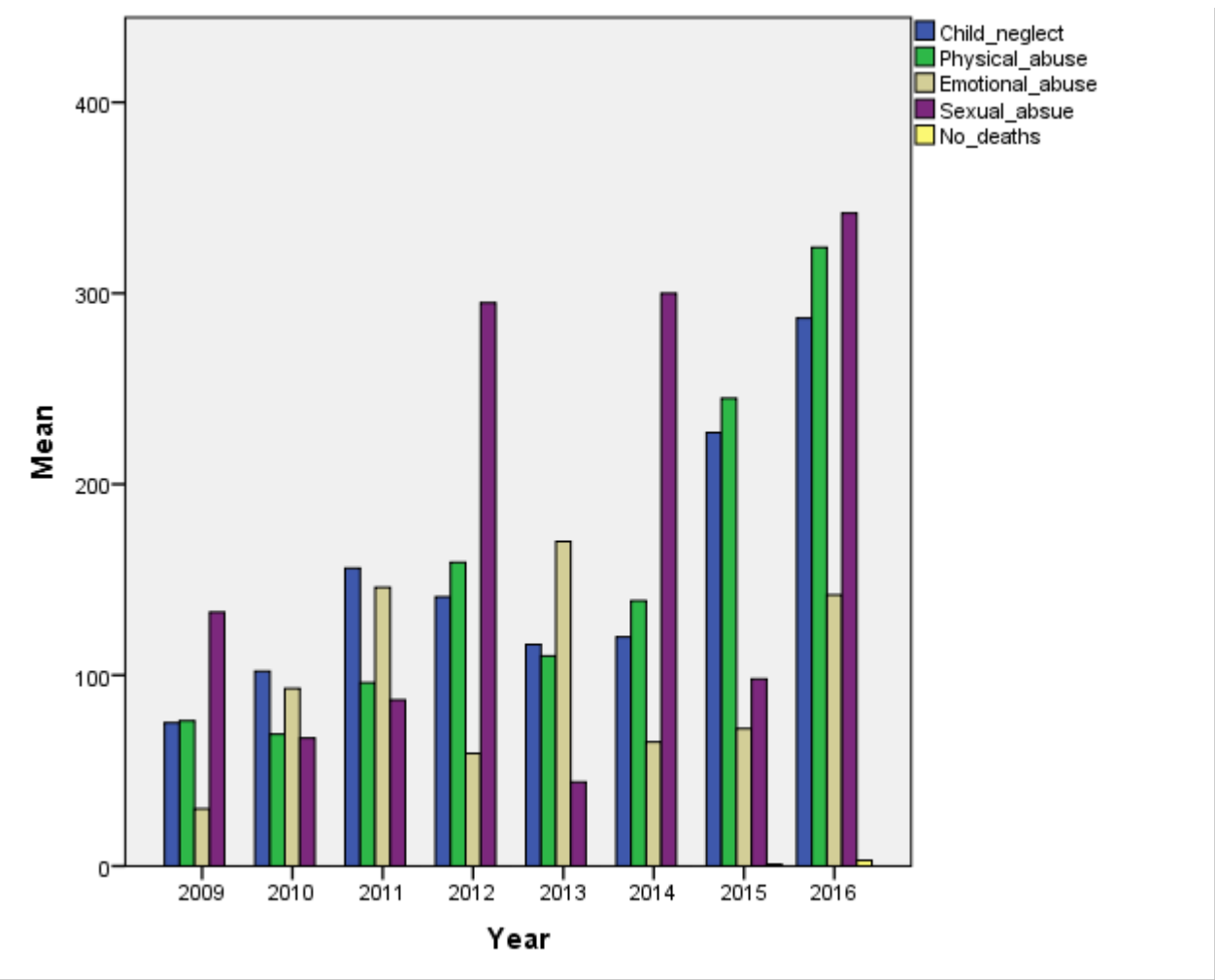
Ministry of Gender and Family is the main statutory body that is working for the issues that is based on gender and family protection. This organisation take the responsibility of resulting up the reports of child abuse, with cases of sexual abuse. The act specifies verdicts of up to 25 years in jail for those who convicts the sexual offenses against children. If a person is legitimately married to a minor under Islamic law, that will not be counted or specified as lawbreaking in the legislation.

Table 8.18: NUMBER OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE CASES (UNDER 18) BY TYPE, 2009 – 2016

Types of abuse	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	314	331	485	654	440	624	642	1,095
Neglect	75	102	156	141	116	120	227	287
Physical Abuse	76	69	96	159	110	139	245	324
Emotional Abuse	30	93	146	59	170	65	72	142
Sexual Abuse	133	67	87	295	44	300	98	342
No of Deaths	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

Source: Ministry of Gender & Family

GRAPH OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE CASES (UNDER 18) BY TYPE, 2009 – 2016 ACCORDING TO THE DATA'S GIVEN IN THE EXCEL



This graph represents the number of child abuse cases reported to the Ministry of Gender and Family in Male' from 2009 to 2016. They are categorised into number of child neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and the number of death cases.

According to the data in 2009 it could be said that the number of child abuse cases lodged are 314 cases which include, child neglect 75, physical abuse 76, emotional abuse 30 and sexual abuse 133. There were no death cases reported in 2009. When comparing data's from 2009 and 2010, we can see that there are some variations.

In 2010, we can see that there was an increase in child neglect and emotional abuse while there was a decline in physical abuse and sexual abuse. Child neglect cases went up from 75 in 2009 to 102 cases in 2010. This shows an increase of 0.27% in child neglect cases. Emotional abuse cases went up from 30 cases in 2009 to 93 cases in 2010. This shows an increase of 0.63%. However, in 2009 physical abuse cases reported were 76 and in 2010 this number decreased to 69 cases with a percentage decrease of 0.07%. Sexual abuse cases in 2009 were 133 compared to 67 in 2010. This shows a high decrease of 6.6% in sexual abuse. However the number of total cases increased from 314 in 2009 to 331 in 2010.

In 2011, the data shows that a total number of 485 cases were reported including, child neglect 156, physical abuse 96, emotional abuse 146 and sexual abuse 87. There were deaths reported in 2011. When we compare the data's with 2012 it shows that the total number of child abuse cases reported increased from 485 to 654 in 2012. This shows a significant increase in the number of cases when compared to 2009 and 2010. It can be noted that sexual abuse cases has increased drastically to 295 cases in 2012 compared to 87 in 2011. This shows an increase of 2.08% in sexual abuse cases. Physical abuse cases increased from 96 in 2011 to 159 in 2012 at a percentage of 0.63%. There was a slight decrease in cases of neglect from 156 in 2011 to 141 in 2012 at a percentage of just 0.15%. Emotional abuse cases also decreased from 146 in 2011 to 59 in 2012 at a percentage of 0.87%. However, there were no deaths reported in 2011 and 2012. Although number of number of neglect and emotional abuse decreased slightly the increase in number of physical and sexual abuse cases in 2012 was more significant.

In 2013, the data shows that the number of total cases decreased to 440 compared to 654 in 2012. The only increase is seen in emotional abuse cases compared to others. Emotional abuse cases increased from 59 in 2012 to 170 in 2013 at a percentage of 1.11%. We can see that there is a significant decrease in sexual abuse cases in 2013 compared to 2012. It decreased from 295 in 2012 to 44 in 2013 at a percentage of 2.51%. The number is the lowest it has been since 2009. The number of child neglect cases also went down from 141 in 2012 to 116 in 2013 at percentage of 0.25% along with physical abuse cases which went down from 159 in 2012 to 110 in 2013 at a percentage of 0.49%. There were no deaths reported in 2013.

Compared to 2013 there was an increase in the total number of cases lodged in 2014. There was a rapid increase in sexual abuse cases of 2.56% in 2014 compared to 2013. There was a

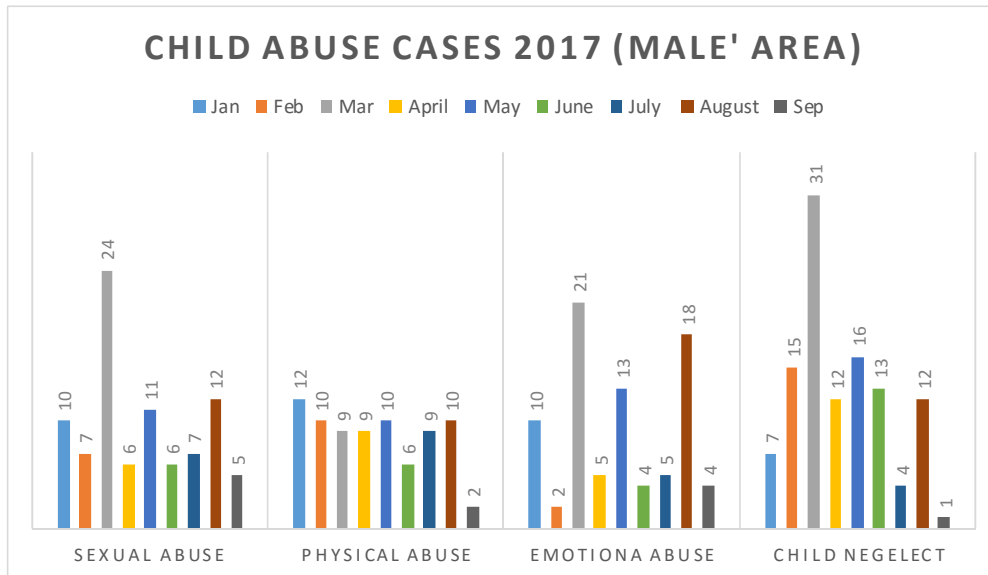
significant decrease in emotional abuse cases that were lodged in 2014 compared to 2013 at 1.05%. There were slight increase in child neglect and physical abuse compared to 2013 at 0.04% and 0.29% respectively. No deaths were reported.

When we look into 2015 it shows that the total number of cases lodged has only increased by 18 cases compared to 2014. Compared to 2014 child neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse has increased to some extent, whereas sexual abuse cases decreased significantly. However there was one death recorded in 2015.

Compared to year 2009, in 2016 the child neglect has increased from 75 – 287 number of cases. It shows that during this eight years period the child neglect has been drastically increasing. When comparing physical abuse within the first three years there was a slight change in the increase of number, but looking from 2012 physical abuse has increased to a high level. When taking a glance at emotional abuse it shows that there was quite number of cases increase from 2009 to 2011, however there was a drastic change in the year 2012 where the number of cases decreased to 59. Looking at the data's it could be analysed that emotional abuse of children has been varying for the past three to four years. When we look in to sexual abuse it is seen that from the year 2009 it has always been at the highest rate excluding 2013 where the sexual abuse cases were declined to 44. In 2016, there were 3 cases of child deaths recorded which is higher than the past seven years.

Child Abuse Cases 2017 (Male' area)

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	Total
Sexual	10	7	24	6	11	6	7	12	5	88
Physical	12	10	9	9	10	6	9	10	2	77
Emotional	10	2	21	5	13	4	5	18	4	82
Neglect	7	15	31	12	16	13	4	12	1	111
Total	39	34	85	32	50	29	25	52	12	<u>358</u>



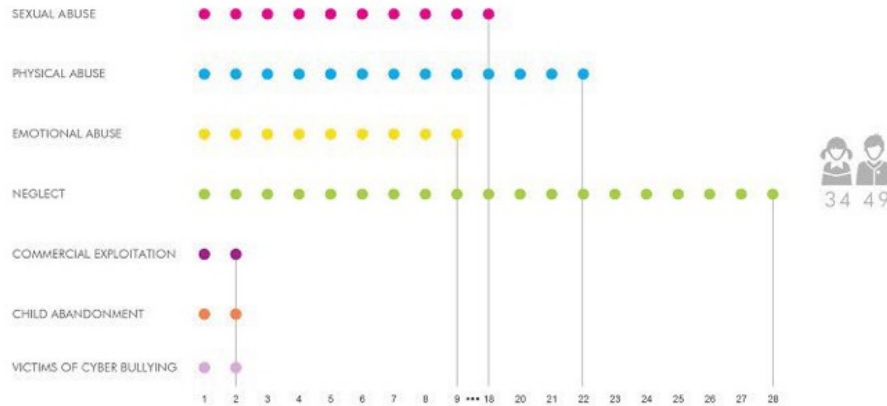
The records for the ongoing year 2017, the data has been collected for the first nine months. The total number of cases that were lodged in January were 39, February 34, March 85, April 32, May 50, June 29, July 25, August 52 and in September it was 12.

Based on the data shown in the table as well as in the graph indicates that in March there were a high level of cases lodged. In March the number of cases of sexual abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect has increased rapidly. We can state that in September all the child abuse related cases has declined significantly.





VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



34 49

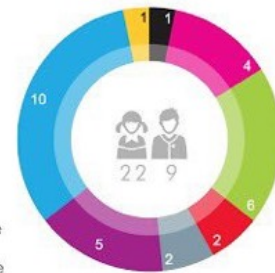


CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW



GENDER BASED VIOLENCE / DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Rape
- Neglect
- Intimidation
- Sexual Violence / Abuse
- Controlling Behaviour
- Emotional / Verbal Abuse
- Physical Violence / Abuse
- Economic & Financial Abuse



CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

- Refusal for Access to Education



1 1

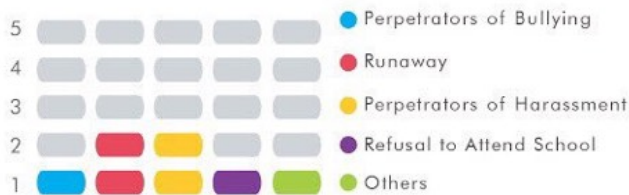
NUMBER OF CASES REPORTED REGARDING

- Care & Support to Elderly
- Care & Support to Persons with Disabilities



2 2

BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS



4 3

SELF HARM, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR



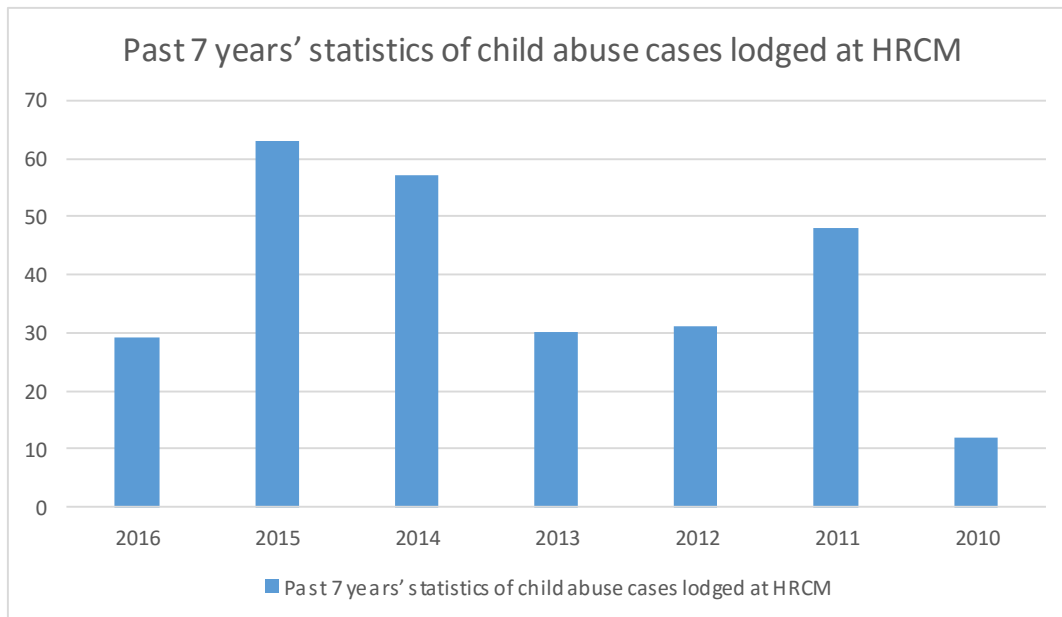
Human Rights Commission of the Maldives

It could be said that The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives was first established because the government realized that it was important to establish this institution. Then it was first established on 10 December 2003 as an independent and autonomous statutory body created by the Declaration by the President of the Republic of the Maldives with the right to sue and be sued. The Commission then established, had nine members including a Chairperson. Till the ratification of the present Human Rights Commission Act on 18th August 2005, making the HRCM a constitutionally recognized autonomous body, the HRCM worked under regulations circulated under powers vested with the President of the Republic of Maldives in Article 42 (e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives to determine the powers, duties and responsibilities of the HRCM.

In order to give the Commission the constitutional support and thus independence from the Government of the Republic of Maldives; diversity, including in association; a broad mandate based on universal human rights standards; and adequate powers of investigation; the First Amendment to Law No: 1/2005 was passed by the People's Majlis as Law No:1/2006 (Human Rights Commission's Act) and ratified by the President on 17th August 2006.

Past 7 years' statistics of child abuse cases lodged at commission

Year	Number of cases
2016	29
2015	63
2014	57
2013	30
2012	31
2011	48
2010	12



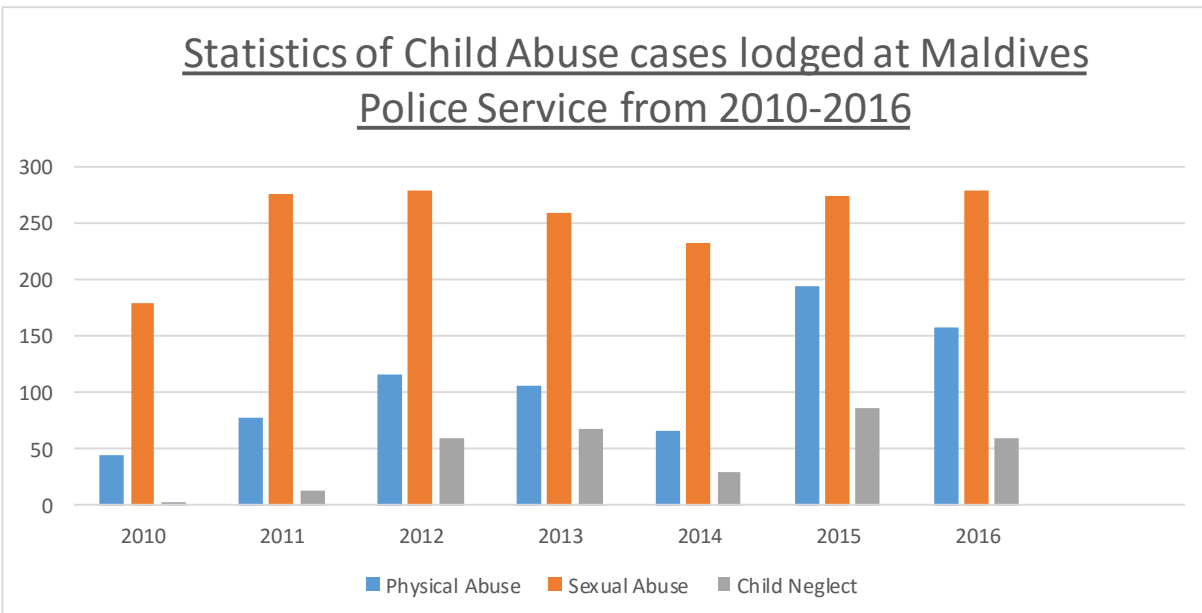
Reports that have been done on the cases that have been registered at HRCM. Regarding child abuse cases lodged to commission, investigation department investigates cases, give recommendations to government institutions where necessary, and also does a bi-annual review of such cases lodged to commission.

All child abuse related cases are investigated with the combined effort of Ministry of Gender and Family, Human Rights Commission of Maldives and a special unit of Maldives Police Service – the Family and Child Protection Department. In most cases, the HRCM acts as an advisor or middle man between authorities. However, the HRCM does have the authority to take the initiative and investigate and intervene in cases on its own without any request or report being lodged officially. Although HRCM has this authority, it does not intervene in just any case. Mostly they just investigate the cases which are officially reported to the HRCM or on the request of Maldives Police Service or Ministry of Gender and Family. If we take a look at the above table, it shows that the number of cases lodged at the HRCM is not so significant compared to the recorded cases in the Male' area. The highest number of cases lodged are 63 cases in the year 2015. The lowest number of cases recorded are 12 cases in the year 2010. According to the table, the cases were on the rise from 2010 to 2015. However, from 63 cases in 2015 the number decreased to 29 cases in 2016.

Maldives Police Service

Statistics of Child Abuse cases lodged at Maldives Police Service from 2010-2016

Offense Type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Physical Abuse	44	78	115	105	66	194	158
Sexual Abuse	179	275	279	259	233	273	278
Child Neglect	2	12	60	67	29	86	60
Total	225	365	454	431	328	553	496



Maldives Police service has taken a very strong step in taking action for the child abuse cases. There have been opened a special branch for the investigations in the capital city of Maldives. However sub sections are also opened at various islands. The data that I have got from Maldives police Service does not include or examine any cases lodged for the emotional abuse and regarding the number of deaths.

When we look into the past 7 years in this statistics we can state that in 2015 the total number of cases lodged regarding child abuse have increased drastically in 2015 by 553 cases, however the rate of number of cases reported where fluctuating from 2010 to 2014. In 2010,

we can see that the number of child neglect cases was only 2. However there was a drastic change in 2015 with 86 cases of negligence cases reported. We can note that sexual abuse cases has not been declining but it has always been in a constant way and the variation is very less. In 2015 there have been 194 cases of physical abuse which we cannot consider that it in few numbers.

When we compare the statistics obtained from Maldives Police Service and Ministry of Gender and Family, we can observe some irregularities. For instance, in the year 2016, according to Ministry of Gender and Family, 342 cases of sexual abuse, 287 cases of child neglect and 324 cases of physical abuse were reported. However, for the same year, Maldives Police Service has recorded only 278 cases of sexual abuse, 60 cases of child neglect and 158 cases of physical abuse. This shows that the authorities involved in preventing and investigating child abuse do not put in a combined effort like they should. Each party record cases individually which are reported to them specifically. These irregularities could prove costly in the long run as it would be very difficult to pin-point exactly whose data is accurate. If the main authorities involved are in conflict as to regarding how many cases of abuse were reported over a given period of time, the cases they make against the perpetrators cannot be expected to hold in court. As if we don't have enough loopholes in the justice system, this would open a whole new door for perpetrators to escape justice.



CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

According to the Child Rights International Network, *article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Children states that protection should be given to children from abuse and neglect.* Article 19 addresses violence against children. It highlights that Government Parties duty is to have proper regulations in place to forbid violence, but it also requires States to implement administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence, both physical and psychological, which fall under article 19.

“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”

“Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programs to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.”

In this study, it has been analyzed that there is a drastic difference between the three main organizations. There is no real co-relation between the organizations which is the reason for the difference in number of cases lodged with Maldives Police Service and the Ministry of Gender and Family.

Observed from the data of Ministry of Gender and Family, is the fact that child abuse had been on the rise from 2009 onwards. The number of cases were increasing at a steady pace between 2009 and 2012. However, in the year 2012, it can be seen that sexual abuse cases in the year 2012 increased significantly compared to 2011. The following year, it decreases significantly again, only to rise higher than before. The only logical explanation for this can be that the government does not take sufficient measures to stop child abuse. For instance, it

can be said that they did not take enough steps between 2009 and 2012 but after a significant rise in the child abuse cases that year, they decided to implement some laws to prevent it. As a result, child abuse cases were at its lowest the following year, in 2013. However, again in 2014 it increased more than the previous years. This is mainly due to inconsistency of the state in implementing the laws and regulations against child abuse. If the state holds its ground and keeps up its preventive measures each and every year, the number is more than likely to fall. The year 2015 saw a decline in sexual abuse cases but an increase in physical abuse and child neglect. The numbers increased drastically the following year, in 2016, more than any past year.

In my personal view, the state does not show consistency in implementing the laws. My personal experience as a member of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives has been that unless otherwise a severe case of child abuse hits the headlines of the media, nobody shows any intent of seeking justice for the victims or maximum punishment for perpetrators. This can be observed in the graph as well, that whenever the number of cases reach a boiling point, the number of cases for the next year decreases. This is because of the actions taken by the state to stop child abuse. However, after a while they slowdown in their pursuit and as a result the number of cases again increase.

Hence, it must be noted that along with laws and regulations being put into place to prevent and fight child abuse, consistency in implementing those laws is just as important. The laws are meant to be implemented for everyone whenever necessary, not when a high profile case hits the media and shocks the entire country.

According to 2016, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Maldives, in 2015 the Ministry of Gender and Family published their first available child sex criminals register. There were 77 individuals whose photos, with full name, identification card number, house addresses the date of conviction and dates of sentences, dates of arranged release and current locations were published. However, it can be said that after this initiate taken by the statutory body till today the people who commit these crimes are not known to the society.

Reports of child abuse were still on rising, as there were reports released by the local NGO Advocating the Rights if Children (ARC). The association brought it to notice that the current traditional norms were constructing a high risk atmosphere for the children and informed the state to endorse and implement all the policies under the Child Rights Bill.

In 2015, the UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund came up with an abusive – prevention program to increase the awareness of child abuse and to support this program by UNICEF, the Ministry of Gender and Family launched a hotline for reporting, where the calls were investigated and reported to police.

According to the Ministry of Gender and Family, they state that the reports of sexual abuse were increasing and underage marriage was becoming a main concern. The state reflects that the cases are increasing due to the increased public awareness programs been conducted. However, they also agrees that still there are people who hesitate to report abuse cases that takes place within the family.

In Maldives, getting married in an early age was not a problem in the recent time. However, once the marriage act came into existence from 2000 it clearly states the minimum age for marriage as when an individual is of 18 years. But in the act it also states where a person who is under the age of 18 according to Gregorian calendar applies for marriage, the registrar of marriages has the option to sanction the validation of that marriage, given the applicant has reached puberty. However, this is subject to several conditions being met, such as the physical and mental wellbeing, capability to sustain a livelihood etc. The Ministry of Gender and Family has to be accountable in submitting assessment of the proposed marriage to the Supreme Court in cases involving people under the age of eighteen. According to this report, only 3 cases of underage marriage were reported by the Ministry of Gender and Family however the Department of Judicial Administration reported a higher number of cases where the birth certificates of the married couple were not checked prior to officiating the marriage.

After discussion about the sexual harassment of the children, various provisions has been passed which include special provision act that prohibits child prostitution and forcing the children below the age of 18 for phonography. Under the eye of the law this crime is punishable by imprisonment between 15 to 25 years, this act specifically involves children of age group 13 to 18 years. The law also treats prostitution of children by the third party as a matter of human trafficking which comes under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act with a sentence of 15 years.

When the new Penal Code came into effect in July 2015 permitting the Prosecutor General Office, to lodge multiple charges against the culprit for a single offense. For sex trafficking they can file charges for human trafficking under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and for prostitution under the Child Sexual Abuse Act and combine the penalties so culprits oblige longer sentence for a single offense. However, this is seen very less. As mentioned before these actions are taken when there is an alertness in the society regarding such incidents.

The local NGO, ARC came up with a statement in March stating the detail abuses happening in the government –run “safe homes”. These accommodations were intended to be temporary stopovers for children being taken into state care, but ARC reported children usually spent months in these homes.

As per the findings , ARC brought into light that The “safe homes” were ineffectively furnished and equipped, they lack the basic essentials that is need and were often understaffed, which results in inadequate care, protection and education for the institutionalized children. Going on with the findings from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in January report, the ARC also stated and expressed the concern about children living in the same living quarters as adults with serious mental disabilities in the government –run Home for People with Special Needs. The Ministry of Gender and Family reported that that it has accommodated 163 children in the Kudhakudhinge Hiya and Fiyavathi facilities. However, in October there was a death of a five-month old baby who was living at Fiyavathi home and yet Maldives Police Services and HRCM has not published any of their findings about the case.

If we look into the legal framework for the issue, it can be said that there are laws and policies that have been drafted, however it’s frozen at the stage if implementing these laws and policies effectively. As mentioned earlier the action is only taken when everything goes from worse to worse. However, Maldives launched its first National Child Abuse Prevention campaign “AHAN” ...LISEN TO US. It was launched on the National Children’s Day , 10th May 2015, and was a nationwide campaign on child abuse prevention which has invited every Maldivian to be an important part of the society to stop the violence against children and to keep them safe and protect their innocence.

This campaign was launched by the Ministry of Law and Gender and UNICEF, where its aim was to prevent child abuse and raise awareness on violence against children across the communities' country. In the launch speech of this campaign the Attorney General of the Maldives, Honourable Mohamed Anil stated that *“the wellbeing of children can only be assured when we allow them to grow in a caring and protective environment that is an environment which is free from all forms of violence.”* He also stated that *“we cannot afford to be silent, neither can we just simply look at the litany hurdles and injustices unleashed upon children, and not do anything. We have to be a community that addresses the different forms of child abuse, exploitation, exclusion and other violations of children’s rights”* he further added.”

This event was honoured by the President of the Maldives, His excellency Abdullah Yameen Abdul Qayoom and his First Lady Madam Fathimath Ibrahim who was also the Chief Guest of the event. In this event the First Lady has accepted to be the honorary advocate for the child rights in the country. This campaign of “AHAN” LISTEN TO US..... the child abuse preventive campaign will last for a year and the First Lady will be taking the initiative to take the campaign to the South Central region, which is known to be a child abuse related cases prone area. Moreover, she will also be meeting with the officials of national and sub-national levels as an advocate for child abuse prevention.

The messages of the campaign is due to be distributed via posters, brochures, social media platforms, TV and radio spots with the aid of private and media partners. The main goal of



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First Lady Madam Fathimath Ibrahim receiving a plaque as the "Honorary Advocate for Child Rights". She will be a leading figure in the implementation of the one-year campaign

the campaign is to highlight the importance of listening to children and establish that the community will do anything to keep them safe. It also encourages the public, especially parents and teachers, to openly discuss about child abuse and the effects it has on children.

There was also a Statement by the Maldives at the Third Committee under Agenda Item on the Rights of the Child - 11 October 2017, Statement by Ms. Zeena Mohamed Didi, Second Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations. Where she highlighted the importance given by the government of Maldives to preventing violence against children. She states that the Maldives takes the issue of

preventing child abuse as a moral obligation. Moreover, she states that considerable efforts were being made to train parents and professionals involved in identifying such cases at early stages and that as a result, there has been an increase in the number of cases being reported. She also states that although the number has increased, it is more than likely that a lot of cases still go unreported.

Furthermore, in order to broaden the reach of the protective services, Family and Children's service centres have also been established in nineteen atolls across the country. New and more innovative ways have also been made available, through which, even children can report abuse via a mobile application and a hotline which are both available 24/7. She then goes on to state that such violence against children can be countered by empowering women and that the recently passed Domestic Violence Prevention Act, and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act also strengthen protections mechanisms for children against abuse. She further states that the Maldives had launched a National Action Plan to end violence against children.

She closes the statement by highlighting the importance of education in advancing the rights of children and how the government of Maldives is trying its best to provide equal access to education. She repeatedly states the fact that the Maldives is strongly committed to eliminating all forms of child abuse and preserving the rights of children through steps taken at all levels, from the very foundation to all the way up to legislations.

The State's role in fighting child abuse, despite ground breaking advancements and reforms to prior laws and legislations, is still very much limited. In my point of view, simply having laws against an action does not guarantee that people will refrain from it. The laws need to be strictly implemented and upheld.

Moreover, as I have mentioned earlier, I strongly feel that the Maldivian government has not made sufficient efforts to uphold these laws and is not at all consistent in its fight against child abuse. The justice system has been too lenient too often, and as a result hundreds, if not thousands, of cases have been left unsolved with the suspects released into the society. These perpetrators avoid punishment and are free to repeat their crimes again.

There have however been times when these laws were strictly implemented, but sadly, every such occasion came after a severe case of child abuse or in a few cases, death of a child due to child abuse. Ibthihaal's case is an example of this. The concerned authorities were aware

of the torture and abuse he was going through but did not act on the information until it was too late. The child succumbed to his injuries caused by his mother in January of 2015. This caused an outrage in the media and the public outcry forced the State to investigate the case very seriously. The following five to six months prompted an increase in convictions and serious investigations involving any form of child abuse. However, with time, these convictions turned into stalled court sessions, suspects being released on technicalities and investigations became slower. The case of Ibthihaal is still pending its verdict hearing to this day. Even though the doctors who examined the accused said that she was mentally stable while committing the crime, there has been too much stigma surrounding the case which indicates the accused was not of sound mind and severely depressed. This has happened way too often and has been a never ending cycle over the past two decades or so.

Cases where the step-father or a male figure was accused of child abuse and the mother of the child, while being aware that her husband was guilty but tries to hide it and help prove him innocent are also very common. It is not that the woman agrees with or has no problem with what the man does, it is the situation she would be in financially, emotionally etc. that compels her to do so. Hence, in this case it can be said that women empowerment and child abuse go hand in hand. If such women become independent and aware enough, they would not protect a criminal over their own children. The State must take note of this and improve its regulations on women empowerment and awareness for women on this issue.

In order to prevent child abuse, the State must become more proactive in its pursuit of justice. The Maldives Police Service, Ministry of Gender and Family and the HRCM must coordinate together much better than now and carry out its investigations and interventions thoroughly and faster than now. Such cases should not take a long time to investigate and should not be dragged out over a long time in court as well. All the concerned authorities must join hands to take proactive action against child abuse, with a much faster speed and efficiency than now, with respect to reducing the post-incident trauma for the victims. Too often, we see that the child is interviewed by the Police, Gender Ministry officials and HRCM officials separately, forcing the child to go over the incident over and over again, which causes trauma. An alternative must be introduced, through which the concerned authorities can take victim's account at the same time, minimizing the trauma.

In addition to this, even today, there is a clear need for more awareness programs in the society. Hence, the State must take the initiative to organize such programs and with

effectiveness, must involve as many people as possible. A nation-wide campaign would help reach the maximum amount of people and in return create awareness among the population of the country. These programs must include both child abuse and women empowerment as its main topics because the more independent women become, the more it would tempt them to break their silence on the abuse cases they hide due to fear of losing the male figure who provides for the household.

As the saying ‘words are meaningless without the intent to follow through’ goes, the laws in place against child abuse are absolutely useless without the State strictly implementing them. The organizations which investigate the cases must become more vigilant in their investigations and prevent any suspect to escape through loopholes in the system. The State must work on improving the justice system and eliminating loopholes in it. Every case of child abuse which comes in must be dealt as a serious issue and the perpetrator must be punished according to the law. As the number of perpetrators punished increases, the number of child abuse cases are sure to decrease. However, the State must be both consistent and persistent in its pursuit of fighting child abuse. Convicting someone once in a blue moon will not help anyone, except the perpetrators who will become more motivated since they feel a sense of security, that the risk of getting convicted is small.



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