

Programme Media in Social Work Intervention against Child Sexual Abuse in Bawana: Significance and Tensions

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the application of program media in social work interventions aimed at building awareness against child sexual abuse in Bawana's rural communities. The authors, social work educators and fieldwork supervisors in Bawana, describe their efforts to address the urgent need for awareness and support among children and families in these isolated villages. Bawana's geographical remoteness limits resources, and its patriarchal, densely populated settings present unique challenges. The educators have employed various program media methods—such as films, documentaries, comics, and street plays—to educate stakeholders about the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. Drawing on Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000), the paper underscores the importance of deconstructing traditional communication processes and advocating for innovative, responsive social work practices. Through reflections on the implementation of these media techniques, the paper explores their significance, barriers, and effectiveness over a two-year period. It argues that social work practices must evolve from conventional approaches to embrace a people-centered, culturally sensitive methodology. The findings suggest that learning from the experiences of survivors and families in Bawana can lead to more effective, accountable social work interventions. This transformation is crucial for addressing the complexities of child sexual abuse in such communities.

Keywords: Social Work, Programme Media, Reflective, POCSO, Bawana, Sexual Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Globally, concerns about child sexual abuse, especially affecting girls, have surged in the past decade (Krug et al., 2002). In India, child sexual abuse is both under-reported and neglected, often due to fear and social stigma (Brain, 1979; Armstrong, 1983; Bass & Thornton, 1983; Breire, 1984; Bergart, 1986; Borgman, 1984; Slep et al., 2015). Despite a child population of around 444 million, only 1% of cases of sexual violence against girls were reported between 2012 and 2018 (UNICEF, 2019). The WHO defines child sexual abuse as involving a child in sexual activity they cannot understand or consent to (WHO, 2004).

The WHO classifies violence against children into physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (WHO, 2004). Physical abuse causes injury through misuse of power, while emotional abuse involves neglect and abandonment. These forms of violence can be indicators of sexual abuse, which also includes coercion into illegal sexual acts or exploitation (WHO, 1999).

Research from a humanistic social work perspective highlights that survivors in India are often blamed for their abuse, rooted in the belief that their suffering results from past deeds (Paul, 1607-1639). Studies reveal that both girls and boys face sexual violence, but cases involving boys are less reported (Armstrong, 1978; Attias & Goodwin, 1985; Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Bander et al., 1982; Berliner & Stevens, 1982; Bowlby, 1979; Brandt & Tisza, 1977; Browning & Boatman, 1977; Butler, 1978; Comfort, 1985; Putnam, 2003).

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (2019) shows a 4.5% increase in crimes against children in 2019, with 148,180 reported cases. However, only 31.2% were registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. Online assaults have also risen, especially among children under 16 (Seth et al., 2017). Sexual violence during childhood affects both genders and can lead to long-term psychological and behavioral issues (Singh et al., 2014; Sgroi, 1982; Shrivastava et al., 2017; Porter, 1984; Maniglio, 2009; Khan & Nyanungo, 1999).

Virginia Woolf's autobiographical reflections illustrate the profound psychological impact of childhood sexual abuse (Woolf, 1976). Addressing this trauma is crucial, as research underscores the need to prevent and mitigate the effects of abuse (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Bender & Grugett, 1952; Blanchard, 1985; Brassard, 1983; Browne, 1980; Butler, 1986; Byers, 1986; Choudhary et al., 2019). Extensive evidence links early childhood sexual abuse to lasting psychological and physical health issues (Elwell, 1979; Dayee, 1982; Freud, 1977; Irish et al., 2010; Yasvanth, 2019).

The research aims to explore the use of program media in social work interventions against child sexual abuse in Bawana's rural communities. Program media, including films and documentaries, helps raise awareness and provide support (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Contey, 1982; Courtois & Watts, 1982; Dawson, 1983 & 1987; Davidson et al., 2009; Belliappa & Ghosh, 2015). This approach addresses the lack of program media knowledge in social work, emphasizing effective information dissemination.

Bawana, with around 99,000 children from peasant and migrant labor backgrounds, faces significant socio-economic challenges. The program was designed to meet these needs, including gender-specific considerations for film screenings and discussions, facilitated by the local NGO 'Our Society for Social Welfare.' This research highlights the importance of innovative and culturally sensitive approaches in social work to combat child sexual abuse.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Given the increasing need for awareness about the Child Protection Act and its relevance to India's diverse child population, understanding and addressing child sexual abuse has become a major public health and professional concern. This paper stems from discussions with student fieldwork trainees and alumni who have lived in these communities. Rather than focusing on implementation gaps, the goal is to foster dialogue among survivors to address and modify behaviors and attitudes related to POCSO.

The objective is to design dialogue-oriented programs that enhance communication and support systems within families, peer groups, institutions, and workplaces (Goldstein, 1986).

The study involves 150 children from rural Bawana and aims to assess their attitudes and understanding of POCSO. The research was conducted in various community locations, leveraging local resources and organizations to ensure accessibility and participation. This paper reflects on how program media interventions can effectively create sustainable behavioural changes and increase knowledge about the POCSO Act in Bawana.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, triangulation method during awareness generation programs about POCSO in schools in Bawana.
- Pain and trauma need purposeful engagement, not scale.
- The sample size constitutes – 150 children age group 12-16 years (from the community) from Bawana rural and JJ colony area on the rural outskirts, 50 parents – mother/father/guardian and 20 service providers – police officials, NGO personnel, and social workers.
- Informed Consent was taken from parents/guardians and other stakeholders.
- Ethical procedures keeping in consideration Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (2020) were followed while assessing the impact of programme media interventions.
- The purposive Sampling method was used to gather unexplored yet enriching data.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Around 90% of the children expressed that they never heard about POCSO or any action to be undertaken to express or report any act of sexual abuse.
- 78 % of Girls, constituted most participants expressed that they were most fearful of their parents as they witnessed that most of the time the parents of their peers who expressed the occurrence of such violence restricted them from studying further and got them married
- This occurrence of violence was found to be very prevalent amongst school-going boys and their dominant subgroups in the form of bullying. The majority of them expressed it in the form of 'reference' and shared that it affected those boys adversely and led to even isolation for most of their lives.
- One of the male participant's children expressed that the 'place' became a forever trigger for trauma in his life. He witnessed his first exposure to this violence inside the cinema hall and the perpetrators were his friends. During interaction with male children, it was found that most of the time sexual abuse of male children remains unreported and unattended.
- In Bawana, due to its remote location, most of the schools lack counselors, and there is a lack of a support system to which the children can look forward to expressing their problems about sexual abuse. It was very hard to make the girl children speak about it. There was an intense silence when we first expressed about this during an awareness session (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1975).

- It made us think about the re-work of the technique to generate a dialogue on awareness about POCSO. For this, to initiate a discussion, we planned to screen a Hindi film 'Highway' (2014) for girls and male children, a short film narrated by Lokesh Pawar and published by The Quint in 2022.
- The film scene was screened in two different groups based on the needs expressed by female students. They expressed that the presence of male students will not be a positive factor in dialogue over it. They said it would lead to hooting and targeting their vulnerability – *Majboori aur Mazaak!*
- Post-screening, during group discussion girl students expressed the fear of familiar faces and also the solace in peer groups as it was only peers that they trusted to keep the confidentiality and restrict disclosure.
- They also expressed that most of them are under fear 24x7 about what they faced and they developed disgust against their bodies. Many of them shared that the memory of abuse even makes them feel unsafe and is the reason when they cry at times.
- Post-screening, male children through their body language expressed nervousness and confusion, whether to express or not, very much like their female classmates. Most of these boys belonged to peasant families where they have always experienced the internal sense of superiority of one's gender.
- The first initial phase was group discussion was found to be unsure, embarrassing, and lacking fear – of not getting accepted. They expressed that most of the time it happens without any planning by the perpetrator. The physical appearance of a male child becomes the very subject of how the words, phrases, and expressions of violence that take place in groups. However, they said that though there had not been any such experiences they had heard about it from their friends.

To make this awareness generation process much more effective, during feedback assessment, it was found that these children and youth were not equipped with the right words and meanings to help make them express themselves when it was about sex and sexual violence as per POCSO act (Blick & Proctor, 1982).

Hence this resulted in making us utilize audio-visual methods – to explain through images and animation about the context. It is important for us to here acknowledge our collaboration in utilizing animation modules and resources by NGOs like SAKSHI –THE RAKSHIN project, Breakthrough organization, and Delhi Police's *Parivartan* initiative that were effective in building collective conscience against such sexual offenses. The Rakshin Project was an innovative and effective resource that we used for awareness generation. During the assessment of the second awareness generation workshop, significant transformation was observed in the understanding of children about sex, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, and prevention mechanisms.

- 98% of the children shared that they got good clarity on the correct words and names to express the various human body parts. Earlier they lacked this understanding as during school, this section on the biology of the human body was self-understanding and unwanted.

- 96% of them expressed that this workshop helped them to explain ‘everything’ through animation about which acts constitute sexual abuse and which acts constitute it.
- 99% said that the graphic presentation of case illustrations let them talk about what happened and how it was violent.
- 99% expressed that they felt comfortable and safe in representing and expressing their concerns without fear of being targeted and judged.
- 93% shared that this workshop helped them to identify, relate, and connect without feeling fearful, unsafe, blamed, and un-wanted.
- One of them wrote in the remark’s session of feedback form that it helped to move their understanding about safe and unsafe touch rather than limiting it to good and bad touch only. She assertively mentioned in remarks that the ‘best *thing was that workshop was about us, our life*’.
- In the feedback after this session, around 98% of students expressed that they have got significant information and that too in a comfortable and safer space without any fear from expression.
- From the feedback, the data also reflected that the use of role-play and street play was not found to be very useful in this awareness generation which was group-centric.
- 92% shared that this use of audio-visual intervention increased their self-confidence by rating it as 4. However, 7% rated it as 5 and the rest rated it as 3.
- Post this workshop, we observed that in our follow-up visits, most of the stakeholders gave positive feedback about the quality of the workshop and hence, the associated stakeholders also suggested conducting more such workshops using program media intervention in which they would also like to participate.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION: BRIDGING THE FRAGMENTS TOGETHER

Program media techniques like drawing, animation, and graphically designed storytelling are hence a collective of various reliable media interventions that helped our stakeholders to learn about concerns associated with child sexual abuse. And also helped us in identifying the various approaches for addressing them. Its primary aim must be quintessential need-based designing, monitoring, and follow-up to spread awareness on topics that need immediate attention, talk about prevention, and enable individuals with resources to intervene and build resilience. The fundamental purpose of these program media in the above context, however, is to make information dissemination possible and simple as per the felt needs of stakeholders, and hence, information is employed as an instrument to achieve systemic structural social change. It must be used to systematically break down the hidden and invisible social world, its language, and expressions, with thorough deconstruction aimed to disseminate it in a manner that makes easy, meaningful, sustainable access possible even in the stages of early childhood, adolescence, and youth possible. The future intervention and implications of this research are that it aims to build a self-reflective yet inclusive program module for and with - family, peers, institutions, and service providers responsible for child protection in an integrated manner.

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