

# Child Abuse Cases Handled by Primary School Counsellor

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## Abstract

Children abuse cases have been arising from one year to another, and this is just adding to the nation's attention. All sides are responsible to find ways to this matter. There are many types of abuse that concern children at primary school such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Responsible sides such as charities, women rights authority and society's authority need to provide full access to help these victims in terms of counselling services in which they play the role to help these victims professionally to endure the trauma that has been kept because of the abuse incident. This research is to look into types of abuse cases that had been handled by the school counsellors at primary school. It also analyses any intervention used by the school counsellors to help the victims. Moreover, it aims to explore the existing obstacles that had to be faced while accessing to the matters of healing these abused children. This research is conducted using qualitative methodology as in interviews through phenomenology approach to see the issues around the children abuse cases handled by school counsellors at primary school in depth. Data provided will be compiled and analysed, themes will then be listed out to see clearer the pattern of children abuse cases handled at primary school setting.

**Keywords:** children abuse cases, intervention, obstacles, and school counsellors at primary school

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## 1. Introduction

Children are the next heir for nation. A prosperous and peaceful country always look after every human being's rights even though they are just a child. Back in the 1980s, children rights was not a stormy issue until the world was shocked by the finding of children's body with bruises on them. On behalf of that, Dasar Perlindungan Kanak-Kanak was embodied with seven main objectives as stated below:

- To increase awareness and commitment of all sides upon venture in protecting children as a responsibility.
- To embody a safe and child friendly environment.
- To encourage direct and indirect organisation with child services to imply child protection fundamental in each of every organisation.
- To protect every child from any forms of neglections, abuse, violence and exploitation.
- To instill only the right individual to have directly contact with the child.
- To increase support services in handling neglection, abuse, violation and exploitation upon children.
- To increase research and development in order to enhance protection over children.

To our knowledge, abuse and domestic violence has been widely spread lately, child abuse cases that has been reported at Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) only from 2000 to 2003 has showed an abrupt increment with 934 cases on 2000,

followed by 1036 cases; 2001, 1242 cases on 2002, and 1390 cases on 2003. Meanwhile, UNICEF has reported on 2008 there was 2780 abuses cases found which involved 952 child neglecting victims, 863 physical abuse victims, 733 was sexual abuse victims and 58 cases were discarded babies [1].

The norm of abuse cases that has been increasing has become a hot issue among the professionals, government, social services and medical services. By answering the Dasar Perlindungan Kanak-Kanak recommendations and objectives, researchers discussed a variety of issues concerning the abuse cases around the world. These include factors contributing to a child in becoming a victim, the offender behind the incident, evidences of child becoming the victim, motive upon abuse cases and also ways in handling the issues to repress it. There are also symposiums and talks specially made to bring awareness to the society on the vitality of being aware of people surrounding and the rights of the children itself. According to a research by Khoo et al [2] girls rank the top with highest percentage as abuse victims as compared to boys with 1.1: 1 rate with Malay as higher child abuse victims compared to the other main races like Chinese, and Indians with 44.6% [2]. This was also reported generally by UNICEF in its website saying that girls are four times more likely to be sexual abused as compared to boys [1]. Unfortunately, this percentage has been increasing with circulation period.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Child abuse cases is normally acted by someone who is near to the victims. West and in country research found that

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almost all the offenders are from the victims' family [3] with 36.7% are the biological fathers, 22.2% are biological mothers, 10.0 % are stepfathers, followed by 4.4% are relatives and 3.3% are from siblings [2]. Although government tried to take new initiative by building up social service bodies to repress this issue, only several cases were reported and getting help [1,4,5,6].

Young child who has become the victim is not capable of reporting as the threat from the offender and authority's intervention will cause the child to be afraid to validate and will make things worse [1]. Ahmad [6] said that most of the unreported cases was because of them being ashamed to confront the societies, to protect the family dignity, and to avoid court procedures [6]. Victims are also exposed to the threat of harm from the offender if they report incident to someone else [6] instead being persuaded with sweet talk as though it is how grown man show their love when it comes to sexual abuse cases [3].

Thus, this just adds complications to nation's effort to help child victims that are affected in terms of psychological, mental, physical and emotional development [3] as this undermines the child's health development, and hurts their dignity [1]. Research made by several researchers found that, the offender was from someone known by the victims [4,5]. Research made to 83 victims of physical child abuse cases age 0 - 18 years old at Kuala Lumpur has found that biological fathers are in the top as offender with 36.7%, followed by biological mothers with 22.2%, and stepparents with 10% [2]. Statistics made by Jabatan Kebajikan Sosial on 2008 stated that from 2780 abuse cases reported in Malaysia, 772 offender were the victims' own parent, meanwhile 494 cases reported biological fathers as offenders [1].

Whilst, according to Dewan Rakyat report made by Menteri Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat on 2015, Selangor has recorded higher cases on child abuse starting from 2001 to September 2014 with the amount of 10,184 cases reported followed by Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur with 6,930 cases. She added, child abuse pattern has been increasing starting on 2001 until 2014 whereby 2014 up to September has recorded the amount of 3024 cases reported. Therefore, government and nongovernment bodies have striven to find the cause, consequences and ways to overcome them. Research findings have found that the cause of child abuse are because of the child itself that differ from other children which lessens the loving bond between parents and child, it is also because of parents who have been experiencing negative incidents in childhood that affects their ways on educating and nurturing their child, poverty and life insistence that put more pressure [7].

Child abuse happened also because of parents that are not ready or do not have enough information on parenting, moreover if the parent have mental health problem, ailed chronic disease and depression will just add to abnormal actions and complicate the existing challenge in keeping the child [1]. These findings was also supported by Menteri Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat in Dewan Rakyat question and answer session held on 2015 by listing out several causes of child abuse cases as below:

- a. Offender is a drunkard
- b. Hyperactive child
- c. Adopted child since birth/young age
- d. Offender has been experiencing abuse incidents.

- e. Offender has mental health problems
- f. Offender is a gambler
- g. Stepchild/adopted
- h. Believes in superstitious (child that bring bad luck)
- i. Offender is a drug addict
- j. Offender has financial problem
- k. Child out of wedlock
- l. Offender involves in criminal activity
- m. Offender has sexual addiction
- n. Custody seizure by parents that come from household conflict.
- o. OKU child
- p. Offender is a boyfriend/girlfriend to one of the family members.

Therefore, research found that school counsellor is the main individual that is closer to the possible victim as compared to others who are able to overcome the effect of abuse incident when the offender itself come from the victim's family [8]. As it has been constructed in education system, every school needs to have at least one counsellor qualified to access school children in helping them overcome the widespread child abuse cases. Counselling services has been formally introduced on 1990, with the collaboration of Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM) and UNICEF, 1772 educators has been trained in guidance and counselling course in 1974 [9]. Thus, school counsellor plays an important role in knowing child abuse issues in depth. However, there are existing issues that complicate school children to be accessed such as their own perception towards counselling.

Research made by UNICEF found that only severe child abuse cases have been reported, meanwhile others are not [1]. Whereas child abuse should be helped from the beginning to lessen the impact that faced by the victims.

### 1.1. Paper concept objectives

- a. Discuss on primary school counsellor's understanding towards child abuse.
- b. Analyse types of intervention used by primary school counsellor to child abuse victims.
- c. Identify obstacles faced by primary school counsellor when handling child abuse cases.

## 2. Findings

In this literature review; there are three major factors that will be discussed by the researcher which are primary school counsellors' understanding towards child abuse, intervention and treatment carried out by primary school counsellors for abused child also the obstacles faced by primary school counsellors when handling child abuse cases.

### 2.1. Primary school counsellors' understanding towards child abuse

Research on school counsellors understanding towards symptoms, determinants and intervention of neglect and abuse cases in Sinop, Turkey found that most of the school

counsellors have not enough information about it [5]. Despite being able to accept the child abuse cases, they admitted that they were not capable of handling it. They realized that lack of knowledge upon the issues were complicating their effort to find intervention suitable for the victims thus chosen to turn a blind eye. These will just add to the victim's problems [5].

School counsellor that lack in knowledge and exposure about child abuse will eventually have problems when handling it. It is important for school counsellors to be able to understand the types of child abuse, symptoms of it, and the characters proven the child as the victim clearly at the early stage.

Hinkelman and Bruno [8] stated that research conducted towards former child abuse victims who has grown up have difficulties to disclose their abuse incidents to others [8], therefore it is twice harder for the child who are just in the level of trusting people to do the same. Even child abuse victims are prone to mistrust others as the offender is someone known to them.

It is important to be able to recognize this matter immediately especially when it comes to school children in primary school because most of abuse reported cases came from primary school [8]. These thus proved that primary school children have high risk to be the potential victim, and research found that abuse cases that managed to be accessed at early stage will lower the impact when the child grows up [5]

## 2.2. Interventions and treatments used by primary school counsellors to the child abuse victims

Conventional interventions used for abuse victims are less suitable to be conducted towards child victims. This is because their vocabularies development are still in lower level [10]. Child victims may have problems to tell the stories of who the doer is and what happened in clearer state [8]. Research conducted upon 90 sexual abused victims found that 22% of them will disclose because they realize that it is wrong, 18% of them will disclose when they want it to stop, 16% of them will disclose because of feeling anger towards the doer and only 14% of them will disclose because they have found someone to trust [8].

This result proved that child victims have difficulties to disclose the offender and their abused incidents to others. Research conducted using Play Therapy however proved effective when applied to traumatized abused victims [10]. It was also proven effective when Filial Therapy was conducted towards traumatized physical child abuse and attachment trauma victims [11].

Summarized research written in *Therapeutic Services For Sexually Abused Children and Young People* [12] showed that "children like not being forced to talk, being able to engage in other creative activities (play therapy, non-directive play therapy, CBT- Based Play Therapy, Gestalt Play Therapy, Structured Group Play Therapy, Filial Play Therapy, Drama Therapy, Psychodrama Therapy, and Art Therapy), the sense of not being alone with their experience, and the safety of the group as a place to talk". Overall findings show that victims of child abuse like to use creative activities in expressing their feelings rather than talking [12].

There are also several other interventions used by other researchers such as *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* [6] to traumatized children, however few researchers admitted that

this intervention used a lot of time with several counselling sessions to ensure the effectiveness. Moreover the researcher said that school counsellors would not have enough time to fully use the intervention [13].

Though various research has been made upon child abuse cases, interventions effectiveness has not been assured. Research made by Ahmad [6] upon sexual abuse victims on their depression level showed that even though majority of victims has gone through counselling session after the incidents, it was hardly determined whether it is effective or not as the level of depression was still in critical level. This matter also supported by researchers saying that it is because the techniques and strategies used by counsellors are not coincide with the victims that has different abuse impact.

Thus, the rights interventions should be identified for every child as every one of them bring different character and need different approach. They are also prone to not exposing their abuse incidents because of loyalty or care towards offender, feeling ashamed, guilty, or feeling responsible to the incidents [8]. To that extent, suitable approach and intervention is vital to access child abuse cases.

## 2.3. Obstacles faced by primary school counsellor when handling child abuse cases

Usakli [5] has identified that trained psychiatrists will help child abuse cases to be recognized at an early stage also help in reducing the worst impact. It is appropriate for school counsellors and educators to identify changes in child attitudes and behaviours at school as they spent longer time at school more than other places.

However, for some reason, school counsellors faced difficulties to access and recognizing the child in risks of abuse. Apart from being burdened by others works, in Malaysia, school children have different perceptions towards school counsellors. They believe that school counsellors are mostly for the naughty children as disciplinary teachers always send child to school counsellor whenever they make mistakes. This has made the roles of a counsellor to be misunderstanding. Interestingly, it differs with the school counsellor services in other countries, research made by Rasul et al [14] in United kingdom showed that students are interested to see school counsellor as they are easy to access, placed in a compatible place, and does not required them to go outside the school, even parents do not have to leave work just to send them to counselling session.

In addition, research found that school counsellors are having difficulties handling heavy cases including child abuse. They even have difficulty in making a decision whether to report the abuse case or not [15].

This is because school counsellors have undergo self-conflict when handling child abuse cases as it a heavy case that needs more attention. Research conducted by Hinkelman and Bruno [8] said that school counsellors are having conflict on how abuse cases occur, and their own value and different personal reactions in learning complicated and many of child abuse cases, they also have problems in providing reports of child abuse cases as it involves lots of legislative aspects, thus the effect of reports made were also feared by the school counsellors [5]. Counsellors' attitude towards victims which is more likely to blame them also contributes to the factors of not reporting the incidents to the authorities [8]. These thus

eventually harm the victims when their issues are not handled effectively [8].

### 3. Conclusion

For the conclusion, this research is conducted to identify primary school counsellor's understanding towards child abuse cases as in types of child abuse, characteristics of child abuse, and symptoms, also interventions used and obstacles faced while handling the child abuse cases.

This research is made based on previous research, however, Malaysia is lacking in research that focuses on child abuse cases handled by primary school counsellors. Direct focus on understanding, intervention proven effective and obstacles faced by Malaysian counsellors are still lacking. Therefore, this research hopefully will be useful to the counsellors in Malaysia in acquiring the new information on child abuse.

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