



CHILD ABUSE: SEXUAL ABUSE

DEFINITION:

Sexual abuse exploits and degrades children, and can lead to a sense of hopelessness and to self-destructive and antisocial behaviors.

- **SEXUAL ABUSE** of a child is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully understand, is unable to give informed consent to or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Sexual abuse of a child is activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the other person sexually.
- Sexual abuse includes fondling of genitalia, molestation, rape and stimulating a child with inappropriate solicitation, exhibitionism, and erotic material. Non-contact behaviors also constitute sexual abuse, such as voyeurism, indecent exposure, and sexual remarks to children. Exploitation of a child for pornographic purposes, including through the internet, making a child available to another as a child prostitute, and stimulating a child with inappropriate solicitation, exhibitionism, and erotic material are also forms of sexual abuse.
- Children can be sexually abused by adults, or by other children who are in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim.

CHILD ACT 2001 DEFINITION:

A child is sexually abused when they are forced to take part in activity of a sexual nature.

- **Section 17 (2) (c), Chapter 1 - Part V of Malaysia's Child Act 2001** says that a child is
 “sexually abused if he has taken part, whether as a participant or an observer, in any activity which is sexual in nature for the purposes of:
 - any pornographic, obscene or indecent materials, photograph, recording, film, videotape or performance.
 - sexual exploitation by any person for someone else’s sexual enjoyment.”

NATURE OF ABUSE:

Sexual abuse occurs in all populations. It happens to children in all socioeconomic and educational levels, across all racial and cultural groups, and in rural and urban areas.

- Warning signs of abusers include excessive talk about the sexual activities of children or teens; excessive masturbation; talk about sexual fantasies about children; the encouragement of secrets in a child; viewing of child pornography; excessive time spent with children or teens, not with adults; and the identification of children with sexual slang terms.
- Other signs to look out for in potential abusers include when requests to adult partners to dress or act like child during sexual activity.
- An abuser might use tricks, bribes, pressure, threats, or force to persuade a child to join in sexual activity.



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CONSEQUENCES:

Sexual abuse can have damaging long lasting emotional effects including difficulty in later life to forming trusting and stable relationships.

- Children who are sexually abused can become pregnant and/or contract sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- Long-term consequences of sexual abuse include a chronic self-perception of helplessness, hopelessness, depression, impaired trust, self-blame, self-destructive behavior, and low self-esteem.
- International research indicates that repeated sexual abuse causes physical changes that may lead to drug and alcohol abuse later in life.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS:

- The physical signs of sexual abuse are often inconspicuous since most abusers avoid physically harming their victims so they can repeat the activities over time.

Physical

- Torn, stained or bloody underwear
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Redness, swelling, bleeding, itching in the genital area
- Suffering from frequent urinary infections and/or abdominal pains
- Sudden changes in appetite and massive change in weight (sudden weight loss or gain)

Behavioural and Emotional

- Becoming fearful and clingy (in toddlers/very young children)
- Displaying behaviours that the child should have outgrown, eg. thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, not speaking properly (in young children/toddlers)
- Fear of adults of a specific gender
- Feeling threatened by physical touching or closeness to someone else
- Sudden reluctance to go out with, or be with, someone
- Showing sudden changes in personality
- Experiencing depression and anxiety
- Saying things that show a level of sexual knowledge not appropriate for age (often in younger, pre-pubertal children)
- Displaying sexual behaviour that is extreme or not appropriate for age (often younger, pre-pubertal children)
- Behaving promiscuously (especially adolescents)
- Trying to run away (especially adolescents)
- Showing signs of suicidal behaviour (especially adolescents)