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Psychological Impact and Recovery Support: Sexual Abuse Victims in Children

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Abstract

The incidence of child sexual abuse has risen sharply in recent years, becoming a significant social issue that deeply concerns both the public and the government. This issue leaves a profound impact on the individuals involved, particularly the victims of sexual abuse. Therefore, it is crucial to address the issue of child sexual abuse with immediate attention, ensuring that all parties understand the psychological effects experienced by victims, their coping mechanisms, and the moral support they require. The primary aim of this study is to examine the psychological effects experienced by child sexual abuse victims, the coping strategies they adopt, and the support they receive from rehabilitation institutions. To achieve these objectives, group interviews will be conducted with five child sexual abuse survivors. The purpose of these interviews is to gather feedback from the respondents regarding their personal experiences. This study will involve five sections of the survey: Section A focuses on demographic information, Section B covers the events and chronology of the abuse, Section C explores the psychological effects experienced by the victims, Section D examines the coping mechanisms employed by the victims, and Section E investigates the forms of support the victims have received. The data obtained from the respondents will be analyzed according to the established procedures, and the researcher will classify each item into three levels: minimum, moderate, and critical. The findings of this study reveal that the psychological effects and coping mechanisms of the victims tend to fall under the critical level, while the support received by the victims is categorized as minimal.

Keywords: Impact to Psychology, Form of Support & Sexual Abused Child

Introduction

Sexual abuse of children is a serious form of violence that threatens the safety and fundamental human rights of a child. It is a social issue that often evokes various reactions from the public, especially when this issue is raised in the media or when a child becomes a victim. This form of abuse can occur both within the family and outside of it. This definition is recognized by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Education (2023),

which states that child sexual abuse refers to any exposure to sexual behavior perpetrated by an individual who exploits the emotional vulnerability, maturity, and cognitive development of a child who is unable to understand such behavior. Based on statistics, the increasing number of abuse cases each year has raised awareness among the public and professionals that swift action and measures to address this issue must be taken seriously. This is because, if the abuse continues to be ignored, negative effects such as trauma to the victims can occur, potentially causing them to fail to function effectively in society. This situation will directly harm the country due to the loss of individual potential and the potential increase in social problems in the future (Conte, 2022).

Sexual abuse not only has physical effects but also causes deep psychological impacts such as stress, depression, and low self-esteem. The effects of sexual abuse can also influence the behavior of the victims. According to several studies conducted by researchers, it has been found that sexual abuse has different and unique effects on each victim. Some victims experience long-term trauma, while others are able to cope with it. Some may not show any effects in the early stages, but the trauma and suffering will emerge after a certain period of time. Although the effects experienced by victims may vary, those responsible must take appropriate steps to help these victims recover from the trauma they have endured. Adapting to the psychological effects and providing the necessary support are crucial in assisting these victims of abuse in undergoing an effective recovery process.

This study is essential as it aims to provide the best services to victims of abuse, particularly in helping to heal the effects of abuse they have suffered due to their past traumatic experiences, especially those who have undergone sexual abuse. Based on the findings from this study, the implementation and reinforcement of the roles of responsible parties, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private bodies, in evaluating and reviewing existing programs, activities, and forms of support provided to children can be carried out appropriately. This evaluation can be adapted to incorporate relevant views and recommendations, in line with the needs of children outlined in the laws and regulations pertaining to child sexual abuse crimes. With this in mind, the researcher hopes that the findings from this study will have a positive impact on improving the existing support system, as well as making necessary enhancements to meet the needs of improving the quality of services, support, and rehabilitation for all victims of sexual abuse.

The objectives of this Study are

a. To examine the psychological effects experienced by child victims of sexual abuse.
b. To investigate the types of support received by child victims of sexual abuse.

Problem Statement

Various efforts have been made to curb sexual abuse against children, yet this issue continues to persist. Among the steps taken is the strengthening and tightening of the **Sexual Offences Against Children Act,** as well as the drafting of legislation related to children's issues through the **Children and Youth Act 2016** and **Criminal Procedure Code Sections 173(a), 293, and 294.** These measures align with the national goal of prioritizing the protection of children from all forms of violence and abuse (Lukman, 2019).

However, based on the study conducted by Mohamad and Sarnon (2021), only a small proportion of child victims of sexual abuse show positive psychological effects regarding the recovery they have undergone.

Khalijah Ahmad and Amy Hasmi (2020) in their study found that the moral support provided to child victims of sexual abuse was minimal. This situation forces children to find their own way to reduce the risk of failure in their lives. Meanwhile, the study by Idham Mohd Yusof (2015) focuses more on the factors and effects of sexual abuse on children in the context of welfare and rehabilitation, without investigating the extent to which moral support is needed by victims based on the findings of the study.

In the study conducted by Noor Zulaikha and Ridzuan (2020), it was found that there is limited knowledge regarding the psychological effects, self-adjustment process in rehabilitation, and the need for types of support required by victims of abuse in dealing with stress and depression.

Based on these studies, the researcher intends to explore further into the lives of child victims of sexual abuse. The main objective of this study is to identify the psychological effects experienced and the types of support needed by child victims of sexual abuse.

In general, incidents of child sexual abuse are now a widely discussed issue. There have been cases where children went missing or died as a result of sexual abuse by irresponsible individuals. Factors like these have sparked the researcher’s interest in conducting this study, especially since the number of studies related to this issue is still limited in Malaysia. Although there are differences between this study and previous literature, the researcher will focus on the psychological effects, self-adjustment processes, and the types of support needed by child victims of sexual abuse. The scope of this study focuses on child victims of sexual abuse, and the researcher hopes that the findings from this study can serve as a reference for all parties, especially in efforts to assist these victims.

Importance of the Study

This topic needs to be studied in depth as the impact of sexual abuse on children is a highly relevant and pressing issue in today's society. Worldwide, including in Malaysia, the rate of sexual abuse against children is increasing, which is extremely concerning. Therefore, it is crucial to further investigate the psychological effects faced by the victims, as well as to identify the most effective recovery measures to help them reintegrate into society with proper emotional and mental healing.

This study is essential in efforts to help and provide the best services to abuse victims, particularly in healing the trauma they have experienced. The primary objective of this study is to identify the psychological effects faced by children who are victims of sexual abuse. In addition, this study also aims to understand the moral support and rehabilitation received by child victims of sexual abuse from social workers in shelters.

The significance of this study lies in the researcher's desire to identify the psychological effects experienced by children who have been victims of sexual abuse. Second, the study is important because the researcher aims to identify the forms of moral and rehabilitation

support received by child victims of sexual abuse from social workers in shelters. All of these objectives are necessary in order to gain insights from the subjects, which can serve as a foundation for improving the existing support systems to help social workers assist child victims of sexual abuse in rehabilitation institutions, particularly.

Furthermore, this study will indirectly strengthen the roles of responsible parties, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private entities, in evaluating and revising programs, activities, and forms of support provided to children. This evaluation can be tailored to incorporate relevant views and recommendations, in line with the needs of children as outlined by the laws and regulations regarding child sexual abuse crimes. As a result, the findings of this study can have a positive impact on improving the existing support system and enhancing the quality of services provided.

Importance of the Study Area

Based on the study conducted, the selected shelter is recognized as one of the best shelters that accommodates children who are victims of sexual abuse. In addition, this shelter is well-known for its commitment to the welfare of its residents, ensuring that the basic needs and well-being of the children are properly met, especially in terms of facilities, health, and safety provisions.

In light of this, the researcher believes that this study needs to be conducted at this shelter because of its comprehensive and adequate facilities. The researcher aims to investigate the extent to which psychological effects such as trauma, depression, and stress can be addressed, and how well the necessary support and rehabilitation needs for the children can be met effectively. Moreover, the researcher intends to examine the type of support received by the children throughout the rehabilitation process, particularly the support provided by the shelter, so that all these psychological effects can be healed and the impact of sexual abuse on the children can be alleviated.

Literature Review

Clinical studies have shown that the effects of sexual abuse vary between victims (Briggs, Freda, Hawkins, and Russell, 2016; Finkelhor, 2019). The effects experienced by victims can occur over both short and long periods. According to Browne and Finkelhor (2014), the reactions exhibited by victims within two years of the abuse are considered short-term effects. In contrast, reactions that persist beyond two years after the event are classified as long-term effects

Short-term effects of sexual abuse include disturbances in appetite, nightmares, depression, feelings of guilt, disciplinary problems, and running away from home (Azman, 2012). In contrast, long-term effects often involve persistent depression, fear, social isolation, difficulty trusting others, and an increased risk of being re-victimized (Wyatt and Mickey, 2019).

According to a study by Dudley (2020), sexual abuse has a wide range of effects, which are unique to each victim. Some victims experience prolonged trauma, while others manage to cope with it. There are also victims who do not show immediate effects but begin to experience the trauma after some time. Despite the variations, all forms of sexual abuse have a profound impact on a child's development."

This is supported by Kasmini (2006), whose study found that all forms of sexual abuse against children can have negative effects on their development. In general, children who are victims of sexual abuse show significant problems in terms of behavior, cognition, and interpersonal relationships (Finkelhorn, 2019). They are more likely to experience feelings of low self-esteem, poor self-image, worthlessness, guilt, as well as anxiety, stress, and severe depression (Carr, 2000; Gupta, 2011).

The study also found that the effects are more profound when the abuse is recurrent, especially when it is perpetrated by a family member and involves physical violence or coercion (Salina, Fauziah, Suzana, and Zaizul, 2012). However, the impact of sexual abuse does not solely depend on the nature of the abuse itself; abuse by someone familiar, particularly a family member, has a deeper effect compared to abuse by a stranger."

In studies conducted by Tutty (2017), Wanger (2012), and Widom (2015), all three researchers indicated that sexual abuse involving family members, commonly referred to as incest, has far more negative effects on the victim compared to abuse that does not involve family members. According to them, children who are victims of abuse by family members or familiar individuals tend to lose trust in those who are supposed to protect them, fail to receive adequate moral and psychosocial support, and experience deep feelings of guilt towards themselves, in contrast to other forms of abuse or neglect. The symptoms of suffering and psychological disturbances experienced by victims of sexual abuse align with the study conducted by Greenwall (2020), which reported that among 10 victims of childhood sexual abuse, high levels of depression and social isolation were detected. According to Barker (1999), sexual abuse victims often experience low self-esteem as they feel unvalued and unable to live happily with love and affection. Sexual abuse can also lead to more severe consequences if the trauma persists. A study conducted on 22 patients at the Psychiatry Unit of the New Zealand General Hospital found that patients with a history of physical or sexual abuse in childhood exhibited higher frequencies of hallucinations, delusions, and cognitive disturbances (Read and Argyle, 2020).

In reality, sexual abuse can have a wide range of effects that vary from one victim to another. These effects can be internal, such as depression, anxiety, and phobias, as well as external, including aggression, running away, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Wilkinson, Croy, King, and Barnes, 2019). Child abuse often also reflects the collapse of affectionate values within the family institution, which should be a safe and nurturing environment. In efforts to assist sexual abuse victims, all parties, including the government, private sector, and NGOs, must play a crucial role in addressing this issue comprehensively. They need to provide moral and rehabilitative support tailored to the victims' needs while prioritizing the victims' wishes and desires, without violating the laws and child protection regulations in place.

Furthermore, a study by Hall and Lloyd (2021), involving 30 child sexual abuse victims in the study *Assessment of Social Workers' Attitudes and Sexual Abuse of Stranded Children*, showed that most victims of sexual abuse struggle to continue their lives. These victims exhibit deep emotional effects such as anger, guilt, sadness, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, feelings of alienation, and personality disorders. This is attributed to the attitudes of social workers, who prioritize the needs and desires of the organization over the actual needs of the victims,

as well as the inadequacy of the moral support provided to victims while in care and protection centers."

A study conducted by Cohen and Mannarino (2019) on the behavioral symptoms and suffering experienced by sexual abuse victims found that the victims exhibited disruptive behavioral symptoms that hindered their development. This was due to a lack of attention from social workers while the children were in rehabilitation homes. A similar study by Greenwald and Offen (2020) involving 10 sexual abuse victims reported high levels of depression and social isolation among them. Additionally, the victims were found to experience hallucinations, hearing disturbing voices. Furthermore, sexual abuse victims also exhibited issues such as delinquency, self-harm, and social difficulties (Walrath, 2021). All these behaviors reflect the significant psychological disturbances experienced by the victims of sexual abuse, stemming from inadequate moral support."

A study conducted by Sakinah (2019) highlighted several negative effects resulting from sexual abuse experienced during childhood. According to this researcher, internal behaviors commonly experienced by victims include depression, sadness, suicidal thoughts, withdrawal, fear, and low self-esteem. External behaviors are often displayed through anger, physical and verbal aggression, lying, and stealing. The findings revealed that sexual abuse victims often report a lack of attention and support from their families and surrounding communities. Furthermore, the inadequacies in rehabilitation support and the actions taken by social workers contribute to this condition. A study by Maureen (2021) found that victims displayed symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, overeating, and behavioral problems such as running away from home. Other common issues shown by victims include tendencies to self-harm, lack of focus, disinterest in studies, and conflicts with family members.

Overall, children who have been abused must be protected from all forms of harm, including torture, abuse, discrimination, and exploitation. A variety of support forms, especially moral support for sexual abuse victims, should be provided to ensure a more secure life for them. This is crucial because the well-being of children, as human capital, will be compromised due to irresponsible actions by others. Therefore, children's human rights must be protected, as they are the future leaders of the nation's social, political, and economic landscape.

Methodology

Focus group discussions were conducted with victims of sexual abuse at a Protection and Rehabilitation Institution. A total of six female children, aged between 13 and 18 years, who were victims of sexual abuse, participated in this study. All subjects involved were selected by the institution to meet the requirements of the study. The duration of their stay at the institution ranged from one to two years.

Four of the six subjects are attending school, with ages ranging from 13 to 18 years, while the remaining two are not attending school. The relationship between the subjects and their abusers is familial. These relationships include uncle, brother-in-law, biological father, stepbrother, stepfather, and cousin. The focus group discussions were used to collect data and gather detailed and transparent information from the victims' subjective experiences regarding the support they received and required. The main objective of this study is to collect

data related to the psychological effects experienced by victims of sexual abuse and to examine the types of support they received. Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the focus group discussions, as they involved the feelings and perspectives of the sexually abused subjects.

The primary goal of the study is to gather data on the experiences and perceptions of the subjects regarding the psychological effects they face and to explore the types of support they received. The focus group discussions concentrated on the following questions: Do the participants feel they received support after being sexually abused? From whom did they receive support? What types of support are needed? What behaviors from others did the victims find most helpful and supportive? The discussions generally revolved around the study objectives, and any information shared by the abuse victims was explored in greater detail to understand the issues raised more thoroughly.

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify patterns of meaning in the data that are relevant to the study objectives. This process involves initial coding to identify items or issues that stand out in the data. Repeated reviews of the basic data were conducted to identify combinations or groupings that reflect patterns or themes. A thematic map was then used to examine the relationships and connections between themes in order to determine the main themes and subthemes. The main themes were further examined to determine whether they align with the research objectives. This process was further supported by obtaining more in-depth and detailed explanations from focus group participants regarding specific issues raised during the session.

Instrument of the Study

In this study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument in the qualitative research. As the main instrument, the researcher will distribute and collect questionnaires, conduct observations, interviews, and analyze the data in the field. The researcher will also be directly involved in the situation being studied, such as listening to and observing the phenomena that are central to the research questions. Furthermore, the researcher is responsible for analyzing the events that occur in the environment during the data collection process. Data will be gathered continuously to ensure the accuracy and validity of the study.

Additionally, the researcher will use supporting tools such as digital video recordings, digital audio recordings, and a digital camera. The use of these tools is crucial for recording events in the field, which will serve as references in case of any confusion or missing data during data collection.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher will employ various supporting tools, including observation guides, interview guides, observation forms, and interview forms. The observation guide is used to ensure that the study is conducted in line with the research objectives. The interview guide is designed to ensure that the interviews are aligned with the research goals. Observation and interview forms are used to record the results of the observations and interviews conducted.

For this study, the researcher has decided that interviews with respondents will be conducted face-to-face, and the questions asked will be unstructured. Face-to-face interviews are a data collection method where the researcher directly interacts with the selected respondents. This method provides an opportunity for the researcher to build rapport with the respondents and assess their engagement in the study. The face-to-face interaction also allows the researcher to observe the respondents' emotions and their level of understanding regarding the questions posed.

The interviews conducted in this study are unstructured, where general questions are prepared in advance, while specific questions will be determined based on the interaction during the interview, in line with the research objectives. This approach offers flexibility to the researcher in conducting the interview in a more natural and free-flowing manner, where questions can be asked according to the flow of discussion and the current situation. Therefore, in these interviews, answer categories are not provided, and there are no limitations on the types of responses that can be given by the respondents

Findings of the Study

As stated in the focus group discussion, the narratives of subjects who have experienced sexual abuse in this study reveal that they have endured various impacts as a result of the sexual experiences they went through. The effects felt by the victims of sexual abuse encompass emotional, physical, behavioral, and physiological aspects, all of which are interconnected. Emotional effects were one of the most frequently discussed aspects by the subjects during the interview process. Facing traumatic events is not unfamiliar to victims of sexual abuse. The sexual crimes committed by the abuser have caused various emotional disturbances that disrupt the subjects' thoughts. The constant pressure and emotional turmoil have significantly altered the course of their lives. As a result, many subjects tend to isolate themselves, withdraw, and distance themselves from friends, leading to a loss of trust in those around them.

Depression is a severe emotional disorder that can undermine the stability of the lives of sexual abuse victims. This disorder can significantly affect their overall well-being. According to this study, depression was identified among the subjects, with symptoms such as prolonged sadness, persistent empty thoughts, sleep disturbances (insomnia or excessive sleep), difficulty concentrating, particularly in academic settings, as well as thoughts of death or suicide. The subjects also experienced changes in appetite and body weight. The traumatic experiences they endured in the past have led them to continue facing long-term depression, and they seem to struggle with accepting the reality of what has happened to them. As a result, the subjects are forced to endure depression for an extended period before they are able to recover. Trauma repetition refers to an emotional response to highly frightening or painful events. The sexual abuse experienced by the subjects has left a deep impact, and most of them feel uncomfortable when asked to recount the incidents. This study found that experiences of sexual abuse can trigger trauma repetition. Some subjects also reported experiencing nightmares about the rape incidents after the interviews during the day, indicating the profound depth of the trauma they have suffered.

Self-Esteem and Its Impact. Self-esteem refers to one's feelings about oneself, including self-confidence, self-respect, pride, belief in one's abilities, and independence from others. All

these feelings and attributes combine and are recognized as self-esteem. Based on the observations made by the researcher, high self-esteem is closely related to lower levels of depression. The findings of the study indicate that subjects who experience less depression tend to have higher self-esteem. Characteristics of high (positive) self-esteem include confidence, a sense of worth, the ability to take responsibility, and the capability to express what is considered good. In contrast, low (negative) self-esteem is demonstrated through low self-confidence, insecurity, anxiety, depression, self-doubt, feelings of shame, as well as sadness and frustration. Victims of sexual abuse often suffer from severe physical consequences due to the violence they have endured. These effects can have both long-term and short-term impacts on the victims' physical and emotional health. During the interviews, the subjects recounted past experiences that led to feelings of self-harm while staying at the shelter.

Impact of Sexual Abuse on Victims' Behavior and Physiology. The effects of sexual abuse on the victim's behavior can manifest when the behaviors exhibited are inappropriate for their age. Based on observations and interviews conducted, it was found that the subjects demonstrated both external and internal behavioral components in nearly equal measure. The behaviors displayed were a result of the subjects' beliefs and their responses to the abuse they had experienced. Among the internal behavioral components most frequently shown by the subjects were crying, difficulties in school, poor relationships with peers, speaking only when necessary, being easily startled, quick to lash out, and prone to anger. On the other hand, the external behavioral components often exhibited included outbursts and suicide attempts. Sexual abuse also has profound physiological effects on each victim. According to the interviews, some of the physiological effects experienced by the subjects of the study included physical trauma, sleep disturbances, reproductive health issues, changes in appetite, and chronic health problems. Additionally, the subjects frequently experienced nightmares, disturbed sleep, pain in the genital area, and pain around the diaphragm. Some subjects also reported great difficulty sleeping, with their rest often interrupted by frightening dreams. Despite these various effects, all these issues require proper recovery and support to help the victims heal and return to a normal life.

Implications for the Recovery of Sexual Abuse Victims

The findings of this study have significant implications that warrant serious attention for the recovery of subjects who have experienced sexual abuse. First and foremost, institutional staff must make greater efforts to provide competent support services for the children involved. Parents or guardians (who are not abusers) should also be actively involved by the institution in the recovery process of these children. They need to take a more proactive role in a collaborative effort to help restore the well-being of the children. Additionally, the programs and activities implemented should be carefully planned to ensure they meet the needs and desires of sexually abused children, in line with their developmental stages.

This study reveals that the subjects at the selected shelter are in great need of support from various parties to help them cope with their issues and adjust to life within the institution. The physical support provided by the institution has clearly succeeded in offering comfort to the subjects. However, the emotional support that should have been provided is lacking. The institution's isolated environment, cut off from the outside world, limits the subjects' social interactions, as they only engage with peers within the shelter.

The institution must also remain consistently ready to provide formal services, especially in terms of the physical facilities provided. Based on discussions with the subjects, the institution is indeed always prepared with various activities and programs, both planned and ad-hoc. Furthermore, the selected shelter is directly involved in establishing a well-implemented set of rules to ensure the well-being of all subjects living there. These regulations specifically pertain to the relationship between the children and their families or guardians. However, some complaints have arisen due to the lack of clarity in the rules. This has, to some extent, disrupted the comfort of the subjects residing at the shelter. In fact, the subjects themselves appeared confused by the existing rules, making it difficult to implement them consistently. In addition, the institution has provided various needs for the children through the presence of qualified staff. However, this service heavily relies on the staff's knowledge in case management and task execution according to the principles and ethics of social work. This issue is often raised by the children when interacting with the staff during their time at the institution. The connection between the staff's knowledge and the subjects' emotions is highly relevant, as was frequently discussed throughout the interview process.

Overall, based on the study conducted at the selected shelter, it is evident that the institution has successfully provided the best services for the subjects in need. However, these services need to be delivered consistently, balancing the children's physical needs with socio-emotional and moral support to help the subjects navigate their daily lives within the institution. Several drastic measures must be taken to ensure that no subject is left marginalized and that their welfare is maintained. All the subjects interviewed also hope for better programs or activities to be implemented during their time at the institution. The findings of this study suggest that the staff should provide higher quality professional services and improve the connection between parents and guardians (who are not the perpetrators) with the children, to channel the necessary support. The programs or activities conducted should also take into account the specific needs of these abused children, ensuring that their care and rehabilitation objectives are successfully achieved.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the Relationship between Respondents and Perpetrators

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of the subjects are Muslim and of Malay descent, with six subjects in total. The relationships between the victims and their abusers are varied, but most of the victims had familial ties to their perpetrators.

Each subject was abused by a family member, with the abusers being a paternal uncle, a brother-in-law, a biological father, a cousin, a biological father, and a stepfather. In terms of the victims' birth order, two victims were the eldest children, one was the second child, one was the third child, one was the youngest, and one was an only child.

The study also found that the majority of the victims attended counseling sessions, with six subjects participating. Furthermore, most of the victims were still attending school at the time of the abuse, although only one was not in school due to poverty. Detailed information regarding these findings can be referred to in Tables 1 through 4 below:

Table 1
Ethnicity and Religion

Subject	Ethnicity	Religion
1	Malay	Islam
2	Malay	Islam
3	Malay	Islam
4	Malay	Islam
5	Malay	Islam
6	Malay	Islam

Table 2
Relationship with the Perpetrator

Subject	Perpetrator
1	Paternal Uncle
2	Biological Brother
3	Cousin
4	Brother-in-law
5	Biological Father
6	Stepfather

Table 3
Sibling Position and Number of Siblings

Subject	Position	Number of Siblings
1	dest	2 siblings
2	Second	3 siblings
3	Only Child	-
4	Youngest	2 siblings
5	Eldest	3 siblings
6	Third	4 siblings

Table 4
Schooling

Subject	Schooling Status
1	Attending School
2	Attending School
3	Not Attending School
4	Attending School
5	Not Attending School
6	Attending School

Data Analysis on Psychological Effects

Based on the findings from the focus group discussion, it was found that the subjects exhibited various symptoms as a result of sexual abuse. The symptoms observed involved aspects of cognition, emotion, behavior, and physical effects. All of these symptoms are interrelated. The following explains the condition of each subject based on the information obtained from the FGDs (Focus Group Discussions).

Stress

The following are the feedback (comments) provided by the respondents (subjects) as well as the observations made by the researcher.

Table 5

Excerpts from the Interview with Subjects Regarding Stress

Subject |	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	**"I feel like my life is shattered. I don't know how to face others after what has happened."** **"I feel that my life has turned dark and broken, and I don't know how to face society anymore."** "Who wouldn't be sad. I'm truly living in fear. It's just me and father. I'm so terrified. My home is in a rural village area. Even though there are neighbors, they're far away. I feel so stressed. Thoughts of wanting to do come to mind. I don't want to live anymore	The subject displayed a gloomy facial expression and appeared to sigh, speaking in a low tone.
2	"I don't know why I was treated that way. It's as if I lost my way, with no one willing to help." "The happiness I hoped for turned into the most dreadful tragedy that happened to me."	The subject lowered their head, their eyes appeared vacant, and they showed signs of distress.
3	"My heart is too broken to forgive. What I went through is beyond what my mind can accept."	The subject displayed a tense expression and showed intense feelings of disappointment. Their tone of voice grew louder, carried by a sense of anger.
4	"I feel so lonely, it feels like no one understands what I'm going through." "I have never been satisfied with the life I've lived. They were so disrespectful. They should have protected me, not treated me like this. I feel like a prostitute now. They did this to me, even conspiring with their Thai friends." "Until something happened that had a very deep impact on me."	The subject appeared to be frozen with a blank expression, as if trapped in a feeling of sadness and unable to share more.

5	"I am afraid to face others, I feel like they will see me differently." "The father I respected, who should have protected his child, is the one who destroyed his child's happiness and life. I hate a person called a father."	The subject lowered their head and avoided eye contact, expressing deep feelings of shame and anxiety.
6	"I hope no one else will go through what I've experienced. I don't want them to feel what I felt." "Yes, he (my father) was the one who took care of us siblings, but he is also the one who destroyed my life and my siblings' lives." "If you want to know, it is very difficult for me to face the people around me."	The subject spoke in a soft tone, showing signs of tension in their body. The respondent displayed a slightly disappointed facial expression and a voice that trembled.

Based on the findings of the study regarding the stress experienced by the subjects due to sexual abuse, all six subjects faced highly stressful situations while recounting their experiences. According to the feedback provided by the subjects, it was found that two out of six subjects reacted by crying while narrating their painful experiences. This occurred because they could not bear the emotional stress they were enduring.

Meanwhile, the others showed expressions of regret and spoke in a relatively higher tone when sharing their experiences. Based on the researcher's observations, the stress experienced by all six subjects was at a serious level. The researcher has also classified the stress faced by the subjects as being at a critical level.

Depression

Below are the feedback provided by the subjects and the observations made by the researcher:

Table 6

Excerpts from the Interview with Subjects Regarding Depression

Subject |	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	"I feel sad about what happened. I don't know why he (uncle) could treat me like an animal." "I have hated him my whole life. I want to kill him. Because of him, my life is dark."	The respondent shows a disappointed facial expression and a trembling voice.
2	"I feel like I am no longer useful." ii) "I am not a perfect person anymore."	The respondent is crying while expressing their feelings.

3	i) "I feel so sad about what happened. At first, I kept it a secret from everyone, I was so scared. Especially since I didn't get my period. When I first found out, I became quiet, I started isolating myself, I became depressed. I was so afraid. During that time, I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about what would happen if my aunt found out. Then my boyfriend wanted me to abort if I was really pregnant. Where would I get the money for that? Everything was just crazy."	The respondent cries while expressing these feelings, with a tone indicating they are holding a grudge.
4	"My brother is still free. The police can't find him, he ran away. That's why I can't go on holiday. When others get to go home, I feel so sad. I mean, someone else did wrong, but I have to suffer." ii) "I became quiet, started distancing myself from my friends. Because my friends go back to their families, tell their stories. Here I am, stuck. The feeling of disappointment is there. Sometimes without realizing it, I become easily angered, upset, and quick to snap. Especially when I remember what my brother-in-law did to me. Not once, but every night he hurt me. And then his friends from Thailand took turns." iii) "If anyone is around me, I get scared. Scared about what will happen after I leave here. I keep thinking about where I will go, and thinking about everything that comes after, so I just don't want to talk to anyone. I can't trust the staff here. I realize I am becoming more withdrawn, I prefer to stay silent and not socialize. I don't know what to do around them." iv) "I often wake up at night. I'm afraid to sleep. It feels like someone is always beside me."	The respondent shows a disappointed facial expression and a trembling voice.
5	"I feel so ashamed, and my life has been destroyed in an instant. What sin did I commit to deserve this from this wicked man?" (with a raised voice and an angry facial expression) ii) "I just can't accept what happened to me. I feel like I don't want to be in this world anymore. I hate him. It would be better if I didn't have a father. I'm ashamed because other people's fathers aren't like that. If a troubled kid goes astray, that's different. But my own father is the one who ruined us. Not just me, but thankfully it was exposed. I can't imagine if he hadn't been caught. Maybe my two younger siblings would've been victims too. Life is hard enough for us."	The respondent shows an angry facial expression and a high-pitched voice.

	"I find it hard to sleep. Whenever I close my eyes, I keep thinking about what happened. At night, I feel scared."	
6	"On the surface, he seemed like someone to be admired. No one would have suspected that he was capable of such actions. But this is what happens when a person wears the mask of a devil." (with a slightly shouting tone) "Since this happened, I don't like mixing with people anymore. I feel safer being alone. I prefer staying far away from my friends. It's a little comforting being by myself." "I am so sad thinking about my fate. Why did it have to be me who became the victim of this cruelty?" "I always ask myself why I was given a father like him." (while looking down) "I often blame myself for not being able to protect myself."	The respondent's voice becomes slightly louder when telling this, and their face shows a deep sense of disappointment.

Based on the findings of the study regarding depression experienced by victims of sexual abuse, it is evident that all six subjects faced depressive situations when the incidents occurred. According to the interviews, two of the six subjects expressed feelings of guilt towards themselves. One subject mentioned feeling ashamed as their life had been destroyed in an instant. Another subject reported experiencing sleep disturbances, often waking up during the night, and feeling intense fear and trembling at night. One more subject shared their sadness at the thought of their aunt finding out about the incident, fearing their aunt would feel disappointed by what had happened.

Therefore, the researcher's observations indicate that the depression experienced by all six subjects can be classified as being at a critical level, as some victims constantly blame themselves and frequently wake up during the night.

Repetition of Trauma

The following are the responses given by the subjects as well as the observations made by the researcher:

Table 7

Excerpts from Subject Interviews on Trauma

Subject	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	i) "I can't be alone. I always need to have someone with me. After the incident, I became afraid. I constantly feel like someone is trying to grab or hug me. I always have a fear of men in my heart. But now, it's a bit better. Just a little, but mostly, I'm still scared. In the past, I couldn't even focus on studying. I kept thinking about it." ii) "I'm really scared. When I leave, I don't even know where to go. I'll just go back home. He'll do it to me again." iii) "All I can do is cry every day. I can't think of what I should do. I hate continuing my life."	The respondent shows a regretful expression while recounting these experiences.
2	i) "However, the feelings of sadness and anger still remain inside me. I also often have nightmares. I don't want to socialize with others because I feel that people will find out what happened to me." ii) "My brother repeatedly did the same thing almost four times, but I was still too scared to speak up because I felt it would pose a threat to my safety." iii) "Honestly, I am quite afraid to talk to men because I feel that I will be in danger when facing someone of the opposite gender."	The respondent displays a sad expression and remains silent for a moment before continuing the conversation.
3	i) "He (my cousin) told me not to speak about what he did to me. He said that everything he did was to prove his love and affection for me. He even warned that if I told anyone, he would leave me just like that." ii) "But that's what happened, right? It got exposed. I became scared because he threatened to spread all the nude pictures and videos he had. He said he would embarrass me when he gets out."	The respondent shows a regretful expression and speaks in a rather raised voice. This also reflects that the respondent is unable to accept what has happened to them.

4	**i)** "After he had committed the act three times, I became extremely fearful every time I had to meet him." **ii)** "I am also afraid of being alone. What's even worse is that I can't face any men because his (my uncle's) face automatically appears in my mind."	The respondent showed a slightly tense facial expression, as they were unable to express the emotions they had been carrying inside.
5	i) "I am afraid of the rain. When I hear it raining, I have to run into my room and sit next to the cupboard. Then, I cover my ears tightly. I don't know why. If you want to know, I was abused by my father. It was raining heavily at that time." ii) "Despite this, I still cannot forget the vile actions my father committed against me."	The respondent displays a fearful expression when recounting these events.
6	i) I'm right, if you read a newspaper article about a boy being raped. I quickly felt like getting angry immediately. I imagine, the boy who was raped in that newspaper letter, he must feel the same way I do. ii) I am ashamed if the community knows that I was treated like this by my own stepfather" -	The respondent showed his sad face when narrating the experience

Based on the findings of the study regarding the trauma experienced by sexual abuse victims, two subjects expressed a desire to avoid interacting with others and wanted to isolate themselves completely from the surrounding society. One subject felt threatened if they were to disclose the truth to others. Another subject frequently relived the traumatic event, even experiencing it in their dreams, while one more subject felt endangered when facing individuals of the opposite gender. From the researcher's observation, it can be concluded that the trauma experienced by the subjects is at a critical level. This is particularly evident in one victim who feels threatened when interacting with individuals of the opposite gender or when considering revealing the truth about what happened to them.

Data Analysis on Coping Mechanisms

In this section of the data analysis regarding coping mechanisms, it includes items such as denial and withdrawal:

Table 8
Excerpts from Subject Interviews Regarding Denial

Subject	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	"I just keep quiet and continue my schooling as usual, pretending that nothing happened to me."	The respondent shows a slightly tense facial expression as they are unable to express what is hidden in their heart.
2	No statement provided regarding this item.	None.
3	No statement provided regarding this item.	None.
4	No statement provided regarding this item.	None.
5	No statement provided regarding this item.	None.
6	"I prefer to stay silent, I don't like telling anyone what happened. I go to school as usual, acting like nothing happened."	The respondent shows a sad expression and extreme tension. The subject shared what was hidden in their heart, shedding tears in the process.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher observed that only two subjects provided feedback regarding the denial item. These subjects stated that they chose to remain silent and continue their activities as usual in order to convince themselves that nothing had happened to them. The remaining subjects did not provide any feedback on this item, which suggests that they did not deny what had occurred to them and were willing to accept the reality of the situation. Therefore, based on the researcher's observations, the level for this item can be classified as critical, even though only one subject commented on this item.

Withdrawal

Below are the responses provided by the subjects along with the observations made by the researcher:

Table 9

Excerpts from the Interview with Subjects Regarding Withdrawal

Subject	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	No statement was provided regarding this item.	None
2	"I want to completely isolate myself from others."	The respondent shows a tense facial expression and appears unable to accept the reality of what has happened to them
3	"I feel that life is better when I'm here, even though I am still traumatized by the incident."	The respondent shows a gloomy and sad expression.
4	"So, the best way for me is to isolate myself from the outside world."	The respondent shows a facial expression of despair.
5	"I would rather distance myself from interacting with individuals of the opposite gender because if I face them, the incident will replay in my mind."	- The respondent shows a fearful facial expression when sharing their experience.
6	No statement was provided regarding this item.	None

Based on the findings above, it shows that only two subjects did not provide feedback regarding this withdrawal item, while the other four subjects provided responses. Among the feedback provided by these four subjects, two of them stated that they wanted to completely isolate themselves from society and the outside world. One subject felt that their life was more perfect when staying at the Social Welfare Department (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat) even though they were still traumatized by the incident, while another subject said they would rather distance themselves from individuals of the opposite gender as it allowed them to slightly forget the event that had occurred to them.

Therefore, from the researcher's observations, the level of this item can be categorized as critical. This is because most of the subjects, while recounting the event, displayed facial expressions that suggested feelings of hopelessness, and some even showed signs of fear when sharing their experiences.

Data Analysis on Forms of Support

Table 10

Excerpts from Interviews with Subjects Regarding Forms of Support

Subject	Comments (Feedback)	Researcher's Observations
1	"I don't have any support from my family or friends. I feel alone in facing this problem." "Certainly, my mother has been a great help, but because I am somewhat afraid of individuals of the opposite gender, I tend to interact less with men. The Social Welfare Department has also been supportive in providing counseling services."	The respondent displayed a somber and disappointed facial expression, indicating feelings of loneliness and a lack of social support.
2	"Other family members and neighbors have also been very supportive and have given me the strength to continue with my life." ii) "My aunt has been a great help and gave me the strength to report this incident to the authorities." I have support from my best friend, who always listens to my problems and gives advice."	The respondent showed a small smile and nodded, indicating a sense of relief and gratitude for having someone who provides support
3	"I feel safe here, and I have been able to adapt to the environment here." "My mother has given me a lot of strength. The neighbors who are close to our family have also been very helpful, and has provided a comfortable shelter for me to continue living a more peaceful life." "I often talk to my mother about what happened. Although she doesn't say much, I feel more at peace after speaking with her."	The respondent's face became calmer, and their expression conveyed love and affection when talking about the support from their mother.
4	"Everything happened with the help of my teacher. I am very close to her, and she is the only one I can confide in to express all the feelings I've kept inside." "Yes, staying here, they have provided me with valuable advice and have been helping me heal from the disappointment I've carried for so long. At least now, I am able to socialize with friends who share similar experiences as mine." "I feel like there is no support at all. I only rely on myself."	The respondent displayed an expression of stress and disappointment, reflecting feelings of isolation and a lack of support.
5	"My sister immediately went to the police station to make a report. After that, I was also	The respondent showed a worried and anxious expression, as if feeling very isolated without

	sent to the Social Welfare Department to receive the services provided." "After being here (at the Social Welfare Department), various counseling services were provided, and eventually, I felt that the intense fear began to diminish. However, I still have a slight phobia towards men." "I don't know who I can trust. I try to seek support from anyone, but I feel like they don't understand."	sufficient support
6	"The support from the social worker has helped me a lot, but I still feel there is a gap in fully opening up."	The respondent displayed a slightly relieved facial expression, but there was still a sense of doubt or lack of trust in the support they received.

Based on the findings of the study, various forms of support were provided by individuals or specific parties to the subjects involved. Some respondents reported receiving support from family members and friends, such as support from their mothers or close friends. They described this support as something that brought them a sense of calm and helped them cope with the trauma they had experienced. However, there were also subjects who reported a lack of support, both from their family and friends, which led them to feel isolated and more dependent on themselves.

The researcher's observations indicate that most subjects who received support showed some relief and were more willing to share their feelings. In contrast, subjects who lacked support exhibited expressions of loneliness and regret. Overall, the support provided by close individuals and external parties, such as friends or social workers, appears to play a crucial role in the recovery process for victims of sexual abuse. However, some subjects also expressed the lack of support, which caused them to become trapped in feelings of isolation and sadness.

Discussion

Findings on Psychological Impact

From the three research questions, which include the psychological impact experienced by child victims of sexual abuse and the forms of support needed by these victims, the findings of this study indicate that the subjects largely focus on the psychological effects, including stress, depression, and trauma experienced by the victims when confronted with the event. Additionally, the ways in which the respondents adjust to the situation are also revealed. Regarding the first research question, which concerns the psychological impact, the observations made by the researcher classify the effects of stress, depression, and trauma as being at a critical level. The findings also show that most subjects cried, displayed regret on their faces, and had a slightly elevated tone of voice when describing the events that occurred to them. All six respondents who experienced stress, depression, and trauma did so due to feelings of fear, disappointment, a sense of being threatened, repetitive memories of the

event, and excessive self-blame. This is because the events that occurred to them had a profound impact, leading them to believe that there was no point in continuing their lives.

Findings on Coping Mechanisms

Regarding the findings on coping mechanisms employed by the subjects, including the items of denial and withdrawal, the researcher has classified both items as being at a critical level. This is because, although only two subjects provided feedback regarding the item of denial, the responses had a significantly negative impact on the subjects. Based on the statements given, these respondents were willing to pretend that nothing happened to them and continued their schooling activities as usual. This issue should be taken seriously as it could pose risks to the individual's future well-being.

Regarding the withdrawal item, there were subjects who expressed a desire to isolate themselves from society and the outside world. This shows that by doing so, they attempt to forget the events that happened to them. However, this can have a negative impact on their lives because it suggests they are pretending to themselves and assuming the events never took place.

Findings on Forms of Support

The findings on forms of support indicate that, based on the researcher's observations, this item was classified at a minimal level. This is because all six subjects expressed satisfaction with the support they received from various parties. The findings reveal that all six subjects stated that their family members provided significant support and strength in helping them cope with the challenges they faced. Additionally, the subjects hope that all parties involved will not take sexual abuse lightly and will provide effective services to victims affected by such incidents.

Conclusion

This study highlights the profound psychological effects experienced by children who are victims of sexual abuse and the importance of rehabilitative support in their healing process. In terms of psychological effects, victims of sexual abuse often experience severe emotional stress such as depression, trauma, anxiety, and prolonged fear. Many subjects in this study reported feelings of fear and anxiety, particularly when faced with situations that remind them of the abuse they endured, such as interactions with individuals of the opposite sex or situations that bring back memories of the trauma.

Additionally, this study shows that the coping mechanisms employed by child victims of sexual abuse are significantly influenced by the support they receive. In this context, support from family, friends, and institutions such as is crucial in helping children overcome trauma and rebuild their lives. However, some also reported a lack of support from close ones, which led them to feel isolated and more dependent on themselves. Therefore, strong and continuous social support plays a key role in their rehabilitation process.

Through this study, it is evident that when child victims of sexual abuse receive the appropriate and adequate support, they are more likely to undergo a better recovery process. On the other hand, if they do not receive sufficient support, the psychological effects they experience can become more severe and prolonged. Therefore, it is important for society and

authorities to provide a safe space and comprehensive support for victims of sexual abuse, so they can live a better life without the fear of being trapped in lingering trauma.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that the support provided to child victims of sexual abuse is a crucial aspect in ensuring that they not only recover physically but also heal emotionally and mentally. Furthermore, more efforts should be made to raise awareness and educate society so that sexual abuse can be prevented, and victims can receive the protection and support they need.

Future Research

This study has several limitations in its design that may influence how the findings are interpreted. The primary objective of this study was to understand the experiences and obtain the perspectives of respondents regarding the support they received from institutions and the types of support they needed. However, this study focused solely on children who were victims of sexual abuse. Future research should also include children who are victims of other forms of abuse, such as physical abuse and neglect.

The findings of this study may differ if such research were conducted. Therefore, future research is recommended to broaden its scope by including children who have been subjected to various types of abuse in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding.
In this context, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population as it only involved participants from a single case. Therefore, it is suggested that future research expand to cover all types of abuse, allowing the data collected to be generalized to a broader target group. Additionally, future studies should involve a diverse range of ethnic groups to facilitate comparisons between different ethnicities. Another recommendation is for future research to adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, to gather more detailed and holistic data regarding the support received by victims of sexual abuse.

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