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The prevalence of sexual abuse among Sri Lankan 12-year-olds attending government schools in the Colombo district

Piyanjali De Zoysa¹ and Lalini Rajapakse²

¹*Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Kynsey Road, Colombo 8*

²*Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Kynsey Road, Colombo 8*

In Sri Lanka, although the medical profession and the public did not widely recognise child sexual abuse in the past, in the period 1994 to 1995, country wide police data indicate a significant number of reported child sexual abuse cases. Although reliable official survey-based statistics on the type, prevalence and incidence of child sexual abuse was not available in Sri Lanka until recently, some research has been carried out in the country. Most of these studies however have been on special populations such as with children in residential homes. There has been no systematic survey to establish rates of child sexual abuse in the general population. The present study carried out in 2002-2005 was envisaged to fulfill this gap. The Psycho Social Questionnaire (PSQ), a specifically designed questionnaire used in a larger study in which this study was a part of was used to determine the sexual abuse experiences of a representative sample of 1226 (60.8% girls and 39.2% boys) Sinhala speaking 12-year-olds attending government schools in the Colombo district. The PSQ showed good psychometric properties. The prevalence of sexual abuse reported by the sample was 13.1%. Most children who reported sexual abuse had experienced it only once in their lifetime (51.7%) and by only one perpetrator (89.1%). The sexual abuse prevalence rate for boys was greater than that for girls. A similar pattern has been reported in other Sri Lankan studies on child sexual abuse. This may be because, in Sri Lanka, as in most Asian nations, girls are more protected than boys.

Keywords: abuse; sexual abuse

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