I still Feel Abnormal: *Self Recovery after being Sexually Abused*

1st Sarmini  
Department of Pancasila and Citizenship Education,  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Law,  
Universitas Negeri Surabaya,  
Surabaya, Indonesia  
sarmini@unesa.ac.id

2nd Wiwit Maharesti  
Department of Social Studies,  
Universitas Negeri Surabaya,  
Surabaya, Indonesia  
wiwit.maharesti@gmail.com

**Abstract**— Sexual abuse towards children may cause psychological, physical, and social trauma. This study focuses on self-recovery attempts of victims after being sexually abused. Phenomenology design referring to Creswell perspective as knife analysis was utilized. The data were obtained by doing an in-depth interview and observation. The subjects are children experiencing sexual abuse in private and family setting.

The study found 2 essential substances which are 1) picture of sexual abused towards children, 2) attempts to recover trauma after being sexually abused. Including a) accepting reality: valuing self sincerely b) opening up a new page of life, c) seeking for a protection, and d) getting closer to God. The researcher recommends further investigation to all people to be cautious toward kids’ predators by giving sexual education from an early age and self-protection attempts to avoid sexual abuse towards children.

Keywords – self-recovery, sexual abuse, children, private setting.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse towards children is considered as human rights and global public health issues affecting emotion, habit, psychological, and physical health in all part of life [1]. Studies related to sexual abuse towards children had been carried out by some scholars from 1970s, and, until now, this challenge is considered as an important issue [2]. About 20% of the population in the world have experienced sexual abuse during the childhood (CSA) [3]. The peak of the sexual abuse and exploitation towards children from 73 countries occurred in 2015 [4]. The report of sexual abuse towards children rate was at its highest prevalence which is 64% in Africa [5].

Many studies have been carried out to study the existence of sexual abuse towards children. In Philadelphia, there was found nurses who took care of children experiencing sexual abuse [6]. In China, mothers find it hard to indicate sexual abuse and harassment symptoms which happen to their children, so a study investigating housewife who experienced sexual abuse was conducted [7]. In Indonesia, children under 18 years old are more susceptible towards sexual abuse and harassment as they cannot physically protect themselves. The suspects can be their relatives, such as parents, family, teachers, neighbors, and peers [8], [9]. Power, violent, and domination showing acts from adults to children are very susceptible as children are considered powerless in a family. [10].

Social, economic, and cultural factors are considered as an intriguing study by some experts. Some children living in LMIC (Lower Middle-Income Countries) are susceptible towards sexual abuse as the other form of violence due to poverty, marginalization, discrimination, and urbanization [11] and human resource quality which is seemingly quite low [12]. A study in Ghana found out that cultural and economic factors become one of the variables in keeping sexual abuse in the territory alive [13].

The lack of religious knowledge has also become one of the factors of sexual offenses against children. Canadian study found a correlation between religion and the risk of child abuse. By involving 24,307 young people in national analysis, the various religious communities in Canada are committed to protecting children from abuse [14]. Through a good understanding of religion, people can prevent sexually violent behavior and minimize the negative effects of stress and trauma experience [15], [16].

Gadjet exposure such as television media, film, music, internet and games have a big influence on displaying more intense pornography which triggers sexual acts to sexual abuse [17]. In addition, increasing use of social media has the potential to encourage sexual activity among teen. Besides, the increase of social media use leads to the sexual activities by adolescence [18].

Sexual abuse against children result in a very severe health consequences, including trau Sexual abuse towards children causes serious health consequences including trauma [19]. Trauma is generally associated with mental health problems and serious disfunctional [19]. Trauma is generally connected to serious mental and functional health. The indication of trauma caused by violence affects risky sexual behavior [20]. Someone who experienced the level of sexual harassment, physical, and emotional extremely high are significantly more likely to experience mental health problems and trauma than the general population [21]. In line with it, it also happens to children experiencing sexual abuse who considers themselves full of flaw and different to their friends [22]. Thus it is hard to understand the motives behind the sexual abuse happened in the past [23]. The trigger of
traumatic memory is, mostly, due to internal stimulations instead of the external ones [24].

Literation of preventive efforts has been widely carried out by some experts to avoid sexual abuse towards children. In China, it was carried out by training some pre-school teachers on how to prevent and protect children towards sexual abuse and sexual harassment [25]. Women and children empowerment-based self-defense training is an important feat to hold to protect themselves from the dangerous situation [26]. Sex education suited to children age is essential to be carried out to give a better understanding to the children [27]. Besides, children need to have tactical affectivity to stand against verbal and physical violence [28].

Repressive attempts literation to reintegrate children to sexual abuse experience has also been carried out in several fields. The clinical approach through psycho-education and cognitive strategy which has been adapted victims development rate was also carried out in Germany, the result, the victims had normal function although the sexual abuse is at around 10%-53% [25]. Afterward, measuring live satisfaction after being sexually abused through live satisfaction predictor variable, which include prosperity, hospitality, and carefulness, and lower openness and neuroticism [30]. Empowering law policy and program concerning sexual abuse and harassment handling [31]. Providing victims with religious knowledge and put them in a conducive society by giving social enforcement are expected to give a better feeling of comfort and prosperity [32],[33].

Studies have investigated some issues related to sexual abuse towards children. Widely investigated aspects are for instance factors causing sexual abuse [11],[12]–[18]; the impacts [19]–[24]; preventive actions [25]–[28]; repressive actions [29]–[33], and victims defense strategy focusing on live satisfaction and sexual abuse trauma [30]. However, the studies have not investigated self-recovery attempts after being sexually abused during the victims’ childhood. Most of the literature pointed out adults with more than 18 years old as subjects.

This study focuses on the attempts carried out to self-recover after being sexually abused in a private setting which employs children under 18 as subjects. Creswell phenomenology design was used to dig information up objectively, then the data were served descriptively [34]. Where the researcher tried to give a meaning of informants’ experiences.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilized Creswell phenomenology design referring to Creswell view, as trying to describe general meaning towards some individuals to their several live experience is related to phenomenon concept, self-concept, or their view to their own lives. Techniques of collecting data used were interview and observation. Data analysis technique used in this study consisted of four stages, which are data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The subjects of the study were initialized as “N” (13yo) a child who experienced sexual abuse by his/her father and his/her maternal older sibling and “R” (12yo) experiencing sexual abuse by his/her father. In addition, the third subject was “R” mother (A).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Traumatic Experience Picture: Society views Me Differently

Javanese society, especially Surakarta, Central Java considers shyness culture as an important dimension. Every person willing to do something refers to reluctance culture. Sometimes, they seem to consider themselves differently compared to others (unconfident). In line with it, it also happened to sexual abuse victims, their consideration to themselves as “impure” leads them getting discouraged to socialize. As a result, the victims would alienate themselves from their social lives.

“since the case of sexual abuse prefer to remain silent in the room and locked the door, fearing sister entered a sudden like that time ... do not like to meet other people, to feel shy and insecure ... calculated fetched regarded as a disgrace that defamed the village, until finally expelled citizens ... ”. (N, interview: April 22, 2018)

Quite similar from “N”, “R” became uncommunicative and temperamental,

Feeling shy, afraid, and worried to gossip became a common sense which everyone wants to avoid in Javanese society as such a thing would drive somebody feels uncomfortable. The anxiety of how people would treat them caused an unsafe feeling from getting involved of society. A family becomes the most prominent agent of change. The place where children get involved in the first social community to absorb norms and values and shape personality. If there is a family dysfunction, it will affect the children personality.

The feeling of embarrassed has devoured children confidence with a sexual abuse experience in a private setting. As a result, there would be a psychological disorder such as feeling over-worried, being afraid to be criticized, flattering, or refusal from other people, being reluctant to get involved in a new interpersonal situation, feeling unconfident, feeling incompetent, feeling uninteresting and feeling particularly being lower compared to other people. Then, it leads to avoidance of interacting with others.

The eviction experienced by the subjects shows an inhumane feat among people. The people’ awareness to encourage the victims is particularly low. Sexual abuse is considered as a taboo in a marginal society, and even more, it is worse in Java which its people profess eastern culture. Social sanctions given by society in form of being exiled, gossiped, and evicted give a heavier traumatic burden to the victims.

Creswell views this phenomenon as a life learning in a society. Everyone has their own issue. Most other people perception would affect the way how people treat others. For children experiencing sexual abuse in a private setting, family functions do not run as it should.
be. The male members in a family should become the protector of the female ones. However, problems faced by children in a private setting still commonly exist and hard to avoid including sexual abuse towards children. Most of the victims become a minority group due to stigmatization. From the bottom of the heart of the children, they want to become normal children, exactly like their peers who live freely, are free to play, to express, to gain the achievement, and to fill their childhood with sweet memories.

B. Self-Recovery after being Sexually Abused

Sexual abuse experience during childhood causes trauma. After getting such trauma, the victims should deal with critical phase both psychologically, physically, or socially. To pass the phase, the victims self-recover to not to getting too deep into the trauma. Self-recovery attempts which have been carried out were: 1) accepting reality; valuing themselves sincerely 2) opening up a new page of living, and 3) getting closer to God.

1) Accepting Reality: valuing themselves sincerely

In the beginning, Javanese people put sincerity as the last attempt if rational attempt does not work. Experiences influence mentally, psychologically, and through a change of habit. Good experiences give happiness sense yet bad experiences are not easy to forget. Sexual abuse towards children is one of the bad experiences. People should live along with their painful memories. Accepting and valuing themselves no matter what condition they face along with its consequences could lead them to become more sincere. Thus, people would be able to draw wisdom wisely.

“...various efforts have been made to stay at home. But, people no longer accept ... there is no fear or sadness from the moment the mother does not cry, and is not beaten by the father again. Whatever has happened ‘I Love my self’, patience and God always accompanies ... expresses it even though sometimes it still feels abnormal if the past ... " (N, interview: 22 April 2018).

It is in line with “R" opinion, "... however the future must be better and mother's pride ... the puppet show is able to tell whatever it wants to tell. Besides that, while sharing experiences ... said mother, there is no patience that does not produce results, sincerity and everything will be fine ... "(R, interview: 27 April 2018)

Based on the above findings, sincerity becomes essential dimension of people lived in Surakarta. Javanese people are known possessing character of being themselves as it is. In this context, Javanese people believe that everything happens in the world is God disposal.

“Not afraid” statement can be interpreted that the subjects have accepted themselves. Thus, they can accept every consequence in their life. Their efforts in fighting against their fear do work. It can be indicated based on their statement “I love myself”, being sincere to face reality makes the subjects wiser to act.

Having courage to perform on stage shows that the subjects can stand against the unconfidence critical phase. The statement “some experiences” shows openness to share their experience, both bitter and sweet experiences. Someone with sexual abuse experience commonly needs a while to accept themselves. The statement “I still feel like not normal” implies the great burden they have that sometimes comes to the surface. Being sincere of how society treats them leads the victims to be stronger individuals.

Creswell pays much attention to the occurrence of trauma which usually is uneasy to overcome. However, with the cooperation of some parties, especially from people around the subjects, it would minimize long lasted trauma. Through self-valuing, victims could forget the bitter memory and grab wisdom from it. Self-acceptance and consequence understanding leads the victims to get wiser to take actions.

2) Opening up new Page of Life: Future-oriented

Opening up new life is a changing point for a better future. Closing the old page of life could possibly lighten the burden. However, the past is a stepping stone to move forward. The wisdom that was drawn from the past could be used as a reference to act wiser in taking any actions/decisions.

Initially very sad because of the expulsion. But, now grateful, leave the neighborhood "germs heart and soul "can break the chains of sadness ... and is not beaten by the father again. Whatever has happened ‘I Love my self’, patience and God always accompanies ... expresses it even though sometimes it still feels abnormal if the past ... "(N, interview: 22 April 2018).

In line with the opinion of R.

"... Leave the past to make himself more at ease, the new environment provides a new spirit ... "(R, interview: April 27, 2018)

Based on the presented data, the eviction done by the people was considered as the participant’s new page of life. Moving out from home is one of the options to press the bitter memory of the victims. Opening up a new page of life, in this context, was carried out to find a peace.

Gratitude expression becomes as if the greatest award towards a self-achievement. Gratitude is the simple form of sincerity, ignoring all obstacles and orienting only on the future leads the victims to become encouraged to achieve something. The role of society in the recovery process is very essential. Their utterance "willing to be a psychologist" shows that the victims have a hope and dream.

Viewed from Creswell points of view, the traumatic experience of the subjects becomes the self-exploration to view the self-concept. The subjects give meaning to their bitter experience as the part of life that should be gone through. As the time passes, the subjects tried to adjust toward the situation. Then, they were able to think logically and to act rationally. Opening up a new page of life is essential to carry out in order to rise up from misery. Thus, the victim could get their normal life back.

3) Seeking for Self-Protection

Culture of shyness is one of the essential dimensions embraced by Javanese people. They often keep their feeling locked and do not lay it out at all. The ones
experiencing sexual abused also do the same thing, they find it hard to tell it to other people. A trust to other people is significantly faded. However, as the time lapses, the victims would start being open to others with whom they trust and the ones who won’t personally judge them for what they had been through. They did it as an attempt to get a self-protection. “N” laid that out to his/her mother as he/she felt the pain in the genital area.

“...finally ventured told the mother, initially very scared mother angry. After telling you feeling more calm ... when examined at the hospital also told the doctor bu. Then the doctor gives advice bu ... "(N, interview: April 22, 2018). The same thing was done by “R” who finally told everything to a psychologist in a hospital. "... happy to chat with her aunt (psychologist) because it can be any story, constantly asked to answer questions on a sheet of paper ... "(R, interview: April 27, 2018)”. It is fortified by “R” mother statement. "... the case was first reported to the police station Jebres, then R 6th grade. When asked his father disetubuh R nurut fear. The trial lasted 7x within a period of 10 months in 2017. The court verdict father was sentenced to 10 years in prison ... "(A, interview: April 27, 2018)

The above statements show that by telling your feeling to the others, it could give you a peace. Psychologist becomes one of the essential dimensions for the victim. Types of treatment and the method used in it could open up what inside the victim’s mind. Thus, they could lay it out. The utterance “I am happy I could tell anything” shows that there is a trust to the others to find a solution and to decrease the depression level. Realizing that they experienced sexual abuse, the subjects came to a police station reporting it to get a law protection and fulfillment of children’s rights.

Shall we pay attention through Creswell points of view, the victims and their family could value their experience. Reporting it to the police so that hopefully they could stand in courts was considered as the right thing to do in order to reduce the repetitive violence. Through the law enforcement process, the perpetrator would be punished so that he/she could never do such a thing again. Feeling relief as finally, justice can stand with them and protection could finally be gained.

4) Getting closer to God

Javanese people embrace their religious principle; remembering and believing, surrendering, being submissive and discipline. They remember and believe that there is a “being” that rules everything in the world. Being submissive and discipline to the God mean that they always do the best and lay all the outcome to the God. Mankind is expected not to give up so easily and they always do the best and lay all the outcome to the God and their God. Javanese people consider religion as a lifeline shown through their practice to fulfill the human basic need. Values and norms existing within the religion reign all order in all aspects of life. In social life, spiritual teachers are considered as the capable people to provide religious values. Thus, any intervention in religious activities affects the victims’ change of habit and behavior. Creswell pays attention to subjects understanding to the sexual abuse experience that reaching a better life quality always comes along side its great burdens and consequences. There will be outcomes from anything that was done and it would be paid equally as it was done.

IV CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, this study finds two important substances, which are 1) picture of sexual abuse to children, 2) traumatic recovery attempt after being abused including a) people seeing me differently, b) accepting reality: valuing themselves sincerely, c) opening up a new page of life: future-oriented, d) seeking for protection, and e) getting closer to God.

A family becomes the most prominent agent of change in a primary socialization which shapes children personality. The family function which runs as it should be could shape the children personality to become the better individual and vice versa. The cautiousness to children predators should be escalated by providing sexual education from the early age and the self-protection attempts to prevent sexual abuse to children.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher expresses gratitude to the subjects who were willing to be cooperative, willing to share the information, and willing to participate in the research process so that this study could be well finalized.

REFERENCES

Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, volume 226

H. F. Fong, C. E. Bennett, V. Mondestin, P. V. Scribano, C. L. Rumble, R. F. Febrianto, M. N. Larasati, C. Hamilton, B. B. Mathews and D. Collin-


J. Creswell, Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, 2013.