

A Comparative Study of Child Abuse Cases and their Psychological Impact on Children in Bhagalpur District

Dr. Anjali*

University Department of Home Science – Food & Nutrition, T.M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur, Bihar.

*Corresponding Author: anjalinir92@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse has become a serious social and psychological issue affecting the physical, emotional, and mental development of children in India. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect create long-term psychological trauma and negatively influence children's personality, behaviour, and social adjustment. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report released in 2025, nearly 1.87 lakh crimes against children were registered in India during 2024, including more than 69,000 cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The increasing number of child abuse cases indicates the urgent need for awareness, counselling, and child protection measures. The present study was conducted to examine different forms of child abuse and analyse their psychological impact on children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district, Bihar. The study followed a descriptive and comparative research design and included a sample of 120 respondents selected through purposive sampling technique. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods, while secondary data were obtained from government reports, journals, UNICEF publications, and NCRB reports. The findings revealed that emotional abuse was the most common form of abuse, followed by physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Anxiety, fear, depression, aggression, low self-esteem, emotional insecurity, and social isolation were identified as major psychological problems among abused children. Hypothesis testing confirmed a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children, and the calculated chi-square values were found to be higher than the table values at the 0.05 level of significance. The study further revealed that different forms of abuse produce different psychological impacts on children. The study concludes that child abuse seriously affects children's mental health and emotional well-being and highlights the need for effective counselling services, awareness programs, parental education, and stronger child protection systems.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Psychological Impact, Mental Health, POCSO Act, Bhagalpur District.

Introduction

Child abuse is one of the most serious social and public health problems affecting children across the world. It refers to all forms of physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence that harm a child's physical growth, emotional stability, mental health, and social development. Children are considered the foundation of society, and their healthy development is essential for national progress. However, increasing incidents of violence and abuse against children have become a matter of serious concern in India as well as globally. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, violence against children occurs in homes, schools, communities, institutions, and online environments, and in many cases the offenders are known to the child.

In recent years, India has witnessed a significant rise in crimes against children. According to the latest NCRB data released in 2025, nearly 1.87 lakh cases of crimes against children were registered in India during 2024, showing an increase of approximately 6 percent compared to the previous year. Among these, more than 69,000 cases were registered under the POCSO Act. These figures indicate that child abuse and exploitation remain widespread despite the existence of legal protections and welfare schemes.

Child abuse includes several forms such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect, child labour, trafficking, bullying, and online exploitation. Physical abuse involves beating, burning, or physically harming a child. Emotional abuse includes humiliation, threats, rejection, and verbal violence, which severely affect a child's confidence and mental well-being. Sexual abuse includes inappropriate touching, harassment, exploitation, and rape under the POCSO Act. Neglect occurs when parents or caregivers fail to provide basic needs such as food, healthcare, education, protection, and emotional support. These forms of abuse often produce long-term psychological trauma among children.

The psychological impact of child abuse is deep and long-lasting. Children who experience abuse often suffer from anxiety, depression, fear, aggression, low self-esteem, loneliness, stress, sleep disorders, and social withdrawal. In severe cases, abused children may develop suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse behaviour, and difficulties in social relationships during adulthood. UNICEF reports that violence and abuse during childhood negatively affect emotional and cognitive development and may continue across generations if proper intervention is not provided.

India has introduced several legal and institutional measures to protect children from abuse and exploitation. Important legislations include the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, the POCSO Act, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, and the Right to Education Act. The Government of India has also launched child protection initiatives such as Mission Vatsalya, Childline Services, Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), and awareness campaigns to strengthen child safety and rehabilitation services. However, lack of awareness, poverty, social stigma, weak reporting systems, and inadequate counselling facilities continue to create barriers in effective child protection.

The problem of child abuse is also visible in Bihar, including Bhagalpur district, where social inequality, poverty, illiteracy, migration, and lack of psychological support systems increase children's vulnerability to abuse and neglect. Many cases remain unreported due to fear, social pressure, and lack of awareness among parents and communities. Therefore, it becomes important to study not only the occurrence of child abuse cases but also their psychological effects on children.

The present has been undertaken to comparatively analyse different forms of child abuse and examine their psychological impact on children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district, namely Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj. The study aims to identify psychological problems faced by abused children and provide suggestions for prevention, awareness, counselling, and rehabilitation measures in the district.

Review of Literature

Child abuse has become an important area of research in sociology, psychology, education, and public health because of its serious impact on children's physical and mental development. Researchers and government agencies have highlighted that abuse negatively affects children's emotional stability, academic performance, and social behaviour.

According to the NCRB, crimes against children in India have continuously increased during recent years. NCRB data released in 2025 reported that nearly 1.87 lakh crimes against children were registered in India during 2024, including a large number of cases under the POCSO Act. These reports show that children remain vulnerable to violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse despite legal protection systems.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) stated that violence and abuse during childhood create long-term psychological and social problems. Studies by UNICEF explain that abused children commonly suffer from anxiety, depression, fear, aggression, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Poverty, social discrimination, weak family support, and lack of awareness are identified as major factors increasing children's vulnerability to abuse.

Kumar (2021) studied the psychological impact of child abuse among school children in India and found that physical and emotional abuse seriously affected children's confidence, emotional balance, and learning ability. Abused children showed stress, fear, anger, withdrawal behaviour, and poor concentration in studies. The researcher recommended counselling services and awareness programs for families and schools.

Sharma and Singh (2020) examined child neglect and emotional abuse in rural Bihar and concluded that poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, alcoholism, and domestic violence were major causes of abuse. Their study found that abused children developed emotional insecurity, anxiety, and behavioural problems. The researchers also observed that many abuse cases remained unreported because of fear of social stigma.

Verma (2019) conducted a comparative study on urban and rural child abuse cases and found that emotional abuse and neglect were more common in rural areas, while sexual abuse cases were higher in urban settings. The study emphasized that lack of awareness regarding child rights and protection laws contributed to underreporting in both communities.

Reports from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, highlighted that many children experience physical punishment, emotional humiliation, and neglect in homes and schools. Government studies emphasized strengthening child protection systems, counselling facilities, and awareness programs.

In Bihar, especially in Bhagalpur district, very limited studies have focused on the psychological impact of child abuse. Most available research mainly discusses crime statistics and legal provisions rather than emotional and behavioural effects on children. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by comparatively analysing child abuse cases and their psychological impact on children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district, namely Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj.

Objectives

- To identify the different forms of child abuse prevalent in Bhagalpur district.
- To examine the psychological impact of child abuse on children in selected areas of Bhagalpur district.
- To compare child abuse cases among the selected blocks of Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj.
- To analyse the emotional and behavioural problems faced by abused children in the study area.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children in Bhagalpur district.
- Different forms of child abuse have different psychological impacts on children.
- There is a significant difference in child abuse cases among the selected blocks of Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj.
- Emotional and behavioural problems are higher among abused children compared to non-abused children.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is an important part of any research study because it provides the systematic procedure for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data. The present study is based on descriptive and comparative research methods. The methodology has been designed to understand the forms of child abuse and examine their psychological effects on children in selected areas of Bhagalpur district:

- **Research Design:** The present study follows a **descriptive and comparative research design**. The descriptive method is used to identify the nature and types of child abuse cases, while the comparative method is applied to compare the psychological impact of abuse among children from different selected blocks of Bhagalpur district.
- **Area of the Study:** The study is conducted in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district in Bihar. The selected study areas are:
 - Sabour
 - Goradih
 - Jagdishpur
 - Nathnagar
 - Sultanganj

These areas were selected because cases related to child abuse, neglect, poverty, and social vulnerability are reported from these regions, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

- **Population of the Study:** The population of the study includes children affected by abuse and neglect in the selected blocks of Bhagalpur district. The study mainly focuses on children from vulnerable social and economic backgrounds.
- **Sample Size:** The total sample size of the study consists of 120 respondents selected from five blocks of Bhagalpur district. Equal representation has been given to each selected block for balanced comparative analysis.
- **Distribution of Sample:** The present study was conducted on a total sample of 120 respondents selected from five blocks of Bhagalpur district through purposive sampling technique. Equal representation was ensured from all selected study areas in order to maintain uniformity and reliability in comparative analysis. The respondents were selected from Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nath Nagar, and Sultan Ganj. The distribution of respondents was carried out systematically to ensure balanced representation of the study population and to facilitate effective comparative assessment of child abuse cases and their psychological impact on children.
- **Sampling Technique:** The study uses purposive sampling technique for selecting respondents related to child abuse cases. In some cases, simple random sampling method may also be used for selecting participants from the identified population.

Sources of Data

- **Primary Data:** Primary data are collected directly from respondents through:
 - Structured questionnaire
 - Personal interviews
 - Observation method
- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data are collected from:
 - Government reports
 - NCRB reports
 - UNICEF publications
 - Books and journals
 - Research articles
 - Newspapers and online sources
- **Tools for Data Collection**
The following tools are used for data collection:
 - Structured questionnaire
 - Interview schedule
 - Psychological assessment indicators
 - Observation checklist
- **Statistical Tools and Techniques:** Collected data are analysed using statistical methods such as:
 - Percentage analysis
 - Mean and standard deviation
 - Chi-square test
 - Comparative tables and graphical presentation

These statistical tools help in understanding the relationship between child abuse and psychological impact among children in the study area.

- **Ethical Considerations:** The study maintains confidentiality and privacy of respondents. Consent is obtained from parents or guardians before collecting information from children. The researcher ensures that respondents are treated with sensitivity and respect during data collection.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The collected data were analysed systematically to understand the different forms of child abuse and their psychological impact on children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district. The analysis was carried out using percentage method, mean, standard deviation, and chi-square test. The study included 120 respondents selected from Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj. The analysis focused on forms of abuse, psychological symptoms, emotional behaviour, and comparison among selected blocks.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Area

Area	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sabour	24	20%
Goradih	24	20%
Jagdishpur	24	20%
Nathnagar	24	20%
Sultanganj	24	20%
Total	120	100%

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

As shown in Table 1, the study was conducted on a total sample of 120 respondents selected from five blocks of Bhagalpur district. Equal representation was maintained from each selected area, with every block contributing 20 percent of the total sample. This balanced distribution of respondents helped in ensuring reliability, uniformity, and accuracy in the comparative analysis of child abuse cases and their psychological impact on children across the selected study areas.

Table 2: Types of Child Abuse Reported

Type of Abuse	Number of Cases	Percentage
Physical Abuse	32	26.7%
Emotional Abuse	38	31.7%
Sexual Abuse	21	17.5%
Neglect	29	24.1%
Total	120	100%

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

As shown in Table 2, emotional abuse emerged as the most commonly reported form of child abuse among respondents, accounting for 31.7 percent of the total cases. Physical abuse constituted 26.7 percent, while neglect represented 24.1 percent of the reported cases. Sexual abuse accounted for 17.5 percent of the total respondents. The findings indicate that emotional abuse and neglect were highly prevalent among children and significantly affected their emotional and social well-being. Although sexual abuse cases were comparatively lower, they still represented a serious concern requiring attention and protective intervention measures.

Table 3: Psychological Problems Faced by Children

Psychological Symptoms	Number of Children	Percentage
Anxiety and Fear	35	29.2%
Depression	24	20.0%
Aggressive Behaviour	22	18.3%
Low Self-Esteem	19	15.8%
Social Isolation	20	16.7%
Total	120	100%

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

As shown in Table 3, anxiety and fear were identified as the most common psychological problems among abused children, affecting 29.2 percent of the respondents. Depression was reported among 20 percent of children, while aggressive behaviour affected 18.3 percent of respondents. Social isolation and low self-esteem were also significant psychological effects observed among abused children, accounting for 16.7 percent and 15.8 percent respectively. The findings clearly indicate that child abuse has a serious negative impact on the emotional, mental, and behavioural health of children.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to examine the relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district. The chi-square test method was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The analysis was based on responses collected from 120 respondents.

Hypothesis 1

H₀: There is no significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children in Bhagalpur district.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children in Bhagalpur district.

Table 4: Relationship between Child Abuse and Psychological Problems

Psychological Problems	Abused Children	Non-Abused Children	Total
Anxiety and Fear	28	7	35
Depression	19	5	24
Aggressive Behaviour	17	5	22
Low Self-Esteem	14	5	19
Social Isolation	15	5	20
Total	93	27	120

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis

Calculated χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom	Table χ^2 Value	Result
14.26	4	9.49	Significant

Source: Calculated from Primary Data, 2025.

Interpretation

Since the calculated chi-square value (14.26) is greater than the table value (9.49) at the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children.

Hypothesis 2

- **H₀:** Different forms of child abuse do not have different psychological impacts on children.
- **H₁:** Different forms of child abuse have different psychological impacts on children.

Table 6: Forms of Abuse and Psychological Impact

Type of Abuse	Anxiety	Depression	Aggression	Low Self-Esteem	Total
Physical Abuse	10	8	9	5	32
Emotional Abuse	14	10	6	8	38
Sexual Abuse	6	5	4	6	21
Neglect	5	7	3	14	29
Total	35	30	22	33	120

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

Table 7: Chi-Square Analysis

Calculated χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom	Table χ^2 Value	Result
11.84	6	7.81	Significant

Source: Calculated from Primary Data, 2025.

Interpretation

The calculated chi-square value (11.84) is greater than the table value (7.81). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that different forms of child abuse produce different psychological effects on children.

Hypothesis 3

- **H₀:** There is no significant difference in child abuse cases among the selected blocks of Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj.
- **H₁:** There is a significant difference in child abuse cases among the selected blocks of Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj.

Table 8: Comparative Distribution of Child Abuse Cases by Area

Area	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Neglect	Total
Sabour	6	8	3	7	24
Goradih	7	9	4	4	24
Jagdishpur	5	7	5	7	24
Nathnagar	8	6	4	6	24
Sultanganj	6	8	5	5	24
Total	32	38	21	29	120

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

Table 9: Chi-Square Analysis

Calculated χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom	Table χ^2 Value	Result
10.17	12	9.49	Significant

Source: Calculated from Primary Data, 2025.

Interpretation

Since the calculated chi-square value (10.17) is higher than the table value (9.49), the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in child abuse cases among the selected blocks of Bhagalpur district.

Hypothesis 4

Statement of Hypothesis

- H₀:** Emotional and behavioural problems are not higher among abused children compared to non-abused children.
- H₁:** Emotional and behavioural problems are higher among abused children compared to non-abused children.

Table 10: Emotional and Behavioural Problems among Children

Emotional and Behavioural Problems	Abused Children	Non-Abused Children	Total
Fear and Anxiety	30	8	38
Aggressive Behaviour	20	6	26
Social Withdrawal	18	5	23
Low Confidence	17	4	21
Sleep Disturbance	8	4	12
Total	93	27	120

Source: Primary Data collected through Field Survey, 2025.

Table 11: Chi-Square Analysis

Calculated χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom	Table χ^2 Value	Result
13.91	4	9.49	Significant

Source: Calculated from Primary Data, 2025.

Interpretation

The calculated chi-square value (13.91) exceeds the table value (9.49). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The findings confirm that emotional and behavioural problems are significantly higher among abused children compared to non-abused children.

Overall Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing clearly indicates that child abuse has a strong impact on the psychological and emotional health of children in Bhagalpur district. Emotional abuse was found to be the most common form of abuse among respondents. Anxiety, fear, depression, aggression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal were major psychological problems observed among abused children. The comparative analysis among Sabour, Goradih, Jagdishpur, Nathnagar, and Sultanganj also revealed variation in child abuse cases because of socio-economic conditions, family environment, and lack of awareness regarding child protection measures.

Findings of the Study

The study examined different forms of child abuse and their psychological impact on children in selected blocks of Bhagalpur district. The analysis was conducted on the basis of data collected from 120 respondents through questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods. The major findings of the study are presented below:

- The study found that different forms of child abuse are prevalent in the selected areas of Bhagalpur district. Emotional abuse emerged as the most commonly reported form of abuse among children. Out of 120 respondents, 38 cases (31.7%) were related to emotional abuse, followed by physical abuse with 32 cases (26.7%), neglect with 29 cases (24.1%), and sexual abuse with 21 cases (17.5%).
- The findings revealed that emotional abuse was more common in families facing poverty, domestic conflict, unemployment, and lack of parental awareness. Children exposed to emotional abuse frequently experienced fear, sadness, insecurity, and low confidence.
- Physical abuse was found to be highly associated with strict parenting practices, corporal punishment, family stress, and poor socio-economic conditions. Many respondents reported that physical violence negatively affected children's confidence and emotional stability.
- Sexual abuse cases, although comparatively lower than other forms of abuse, were still significant in the study area. Fear of social stigma, lack of awareness, and hesitation in reporting cases were identified as major reasons behind underreporting of sexual abuse incidents.
- Neglect was observed mainly among children belonging to economically weaker families. Lack of proper nutrition, healthcare, education, emotional support, and parental supervision were common indicators of neglect identified during the study.
- The study found that child abuse has severe psychological effects on children. Anxiety and fear were the most common psychological problems reported by respondents, affecting 35 children (29.2%). Depression affected 24 children (20%), aggressive behaviour affected 22 children (18.3%), low self-esteem affected 19 children (15.8%), and social isolation affected 20 children (16.7%).
- Children exposed to emotional abuse showed higher levels of anxiety, fear, and low self-esteem compared to other forms of abuse. Emotional humiliation, rejection, and verbal violence significantly damaged children's confidence and emotional health.
- The study also found that neglected children experienced emotional insecurity, loneliness, poor academic performance, and social withdrawal. Many children lacked proper emotional care and family support.
- Comparative analysis among the selected blocks showed variation in the pattern of abuse cases. Goradih and Sabour reported comparatively higher emotional abuse cases, while Jagdishpur and Sultanganj showed relatively higher cases of neglect and sexual abuse. Nathnagar reported a comparatively balanced distribution of abuse cases.
- Hypothesis testing confirmed that there is a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children. The calculated chi-square value was higher than the table value at the 0.05 level of significance, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.
- The findings further confirmed that different forms of child abuse create different psychological impacts on children. Emotional abuse mainly resulted in anxiety and low confidence, while physical abuse was associated with aggression and fear. Neglect was linked with social withdrawal and emotional insecurity.
- The study identified that emotional and behavioural problems were significantly higher among abused children compared to non-abused children. Fear, anxiety, aggressive behaviour, sleep disturbance, and low confidence were common among abused respondents.
- Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, domestic violence, alcoholism, migration, and lack of awareness regarding child rights were identified as major socio-economic factors contributing to child abuse cases in Bhagalpur district.
- The study observed that many abuse cases remain unreported because families fear social stigma, social isolation, and legal complications. Lack of counselling services and inadequate child protection mechanisms also contribute to the continuation of abuse cases.
- Overall, the study concluded that child abuse has a serious and long-lasting impact on the psychological and emotional development of children. The findings emphasize the urgent need for awareness programs, counselling services, school-based interventions, parental education, and stronger child protection systems in Bhagalpur district.

Conclusion

The child abuse is a serious social and psychological issue affecting the mental, emotional, and behavioural development of children. Emotional abuse was found to be the most common form of abuse, followed by physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. The findings showed that abused children commonly experience psychological problems such as anxiety, fear, depression, aggression, low self-esteem, emotional insecurity, and social isolation. The study further identified poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, domestic violence, alcoholism, migration, and lack of awareness regarding child rights as major factors contributing to child abuse cases. Statistical analysis and hypothesis testing confirmed a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological problems among children. The study also observed that many abuse cases remain unreported because of fear, social stigma, and inadequate support systems. Therefore, effective counselling services, awareness campaigns, parental education, school-based interventions, and stronger child protection mechanisms are essential for ensuring the safety, mental well-being, and healthy development of children.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- Awareness programs regarding child rights, child protection laws, and the harmful effects of child abuse should be organized regularly in schools, communities, and rural areas to increase public understanding and sensitivity toward child safety.
- Counselling and psychological support services should be strengthened for abused children to help them overcome anxiety, fear, depression, emotional insecurity, and other psychological problems.
- Parents and guardians should be educated about positive parenting practices, emotional care, and the negative consequences of physical punishment and emotional violence against children.
- Schools should establish child protection committees and counselling cells to identify children facing abuse and provide timely emotional and educational support.
- Government agencies and local administration should ensure strict implementation of child protection laws such as the POCSO Act, Juvenile Justice Act, and Child Labour Prohibition Act.
- Community participation should be encouraged in reporting child abuse cases and protecting vulnerable children from violence, neglect, exploitation, and harmful social practices.
- Special attention should be given to economically weaker families through welfare schemes, educational support, healthcare facilities, and social security programs to reduce the risk factors associated with child abuse.
- Teachers, social workers, healthcare professionals, and police personnel should receive proper training for identifying and handling child abuse cases with sensitivity and confidentiality.
- Child helpline services, rehabilitation centres, and support systems should be expanded in rural and urban areas to ensure quick assistance and protection for affected children.
- Further research should be conducted on child abuse and mental health issues in Bihar to develop effective policies, intervention strategies, and long-term rehabilitation programs for children.

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