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## Child Abuse in Male' City of Maldives

Ameena Adam<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Masters in Sociology, Lovely Professional University, Punjab. Postal Address: Ameena Adam, C/o. M. Amma, Asurumaa Gaolbi, 20257, Male' Republic of Maldives. Email: [amma2912@gmail.com](mailto:amma2912@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Child abuse has been a persistent global issue which needs to be studied broadly. The mistreatment of the children has always taken place throughout the history and among all cultures. It is hard to imagine someone intentionally hurting a child. Children know who their abusers are, and it happens most of the time at home by the parent or some relative. It is difficult for the children to speak about these incidents due to fear of the abusers and their influence over them. Child protection became a cause for alarming the societies of the global North, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ever since the history of child mistreatment and of safety has been documented in the global North. In contrast, the modern history of child abuses and protection in the global South started merely with the adjustment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The present study emphasises the child abuses in Male', City of Maldives and an attempt is made to know the causes for child abuse. The present paper focuses on the causes for child abuse and to recommend the appropriate measures to prevent.

**Keywords:** Parents, Overcrowd, Sexual, Punish, Stigma, Welfare.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The safety of some children nationwide is being threatened gradually through child abuse and neglect. Child abuse is anything which does harm to a child whether it is done intentionally or not, or not providing the child with essential needs. Abuse can be in many forms, either emotional, physical, sexual and also neglect. Each form has its different characteristics. There can be multiple causes of child abuse such as parental, familial or community are the main causes. There is an alarming amount of child abuse cases reported to authorities every year in Male' city. However, reports of the Ministry of Gender and Law, the Maldives Police Service and Human Rights Commission of the Maldives indicate that the majority of the child abuse cases remain unreported. This is mainly due to ignorance and lack of awareness of the parents or guardians.

But there is a social stigma that most of the parents or guardians don't like to report these abuse cases to the governmental organizations due to social identity in a negative way. The most common forms of child abuse are physical and sexual abuse. The families often bring relatives' children from the islands to stay at their house in the name of providing them with education in Male'. However, these children are forced to work as household servants. These children are also abused physically and sexually. Most of the time the abuser turns out to be a family member or a family friend. Similar observations are made by John R. Lutzker and Maxine R. Newman (1986), Helen F. Kristal and Ford Tucker (1975), and Jean Giles-Sims and David Finkelhor (1984). The most surprising aspect of this is that most of the time, at least one of the family members is aware of the abuse taking place but keeps silent due to the embarrassment which would be caused if the authorities found out. There have been many cases where a father has abused his children sexually too. In many instances, the mothers know of the abuse taking place but they do nothing to stop it since they believe that the fathers are protectors of their children. Therefore, an attempt is made to study the real scenario of child abuse in Male' of Maldives and to suggest the necessary steps to solve this problem.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The present study is based on secondary source data collected on issues related to child abuse in Male' city of Maldives from the Ministry of Gender and Law, the Maldives Police Service and Human Rights Commission of the Maldives.

## **3. AREA AND PEOPLE**

Maldives is a South Asian Island country, it is located in the Indian Ocean, situated in the Arabian Sea. It is poised with 26 ring-shaped atolls, which is made up of 1,192 coral islands.

It lies South West of India and Sri Lanka. Maldives is famous for its white sandy beaches, crystal clear water, the blue lagoons and extensive reefs. It is known as one of the world's most geographically dispersed country. The capital, Malé, has a busy fish market, restaurants and shops on the main road, Majeedhee Magu, and 17th-century Hukuru Miskiy which is locally known as Friday Mosque made of carved white coral. The population of Maldives according to 2016 census is around 417,492, the population growth rate is 2%. The official language of Maldives is Dhivehi. Maldives Schools are categorized into three types and they are namely English language primary and secondary schools, Quaranic Schools and Dhivehi language primary schools. The literacy rate of Maldives is 98.4% in the year 2012.

Tourism is the main source of income in the Maldives, and it plays an important role in earning foreign exchange revenues. Tourism began in the Maldives in 1972. At present, there are over 105 resorts located in the different atolls; and more than 800,000 tourists visit the Maldives each year. The fishing industry is next to Tourism in the Maldives.

## **4. THE PROBLEM**

Child abuse and ill treatment of children is defined as all kinds of emotional or physical mistreatment, sexual abuse, any kind of negligence or exploitation which causes potential or actual harm to the child's wellbeing in any form. According to the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC), Article 19, "States Parties shall

take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child". "Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement".

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum: "Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation"; or "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." This description of child exploitation and negligence precisely speak of parents and other caretakers. A "child" in this description commonly refers an individual who is under the age of 18 or who is not a free minor.

### **Reasons and Effects of Child Abuse**

Child exploitation is one of the major issues which has brought to nation's attention. Several organizations are formed as this is recognized as a serious issue to solve. It has many forms including the physical and mental mistreatment of the children. Referring to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define child abuse "as any act or series of acts of Commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child". Many of children go through different types of child abuse each year. Most of the abuse results from efforts to discipline or control the child. Whenever the child does something wrong or in order to correct the child from being spoiled, the parents use methods of punishment which are often subject to physical harm. Hence, it is of utmost importance that we learn to differentiate between physical discipline and physical abuse. The most common way to separate physical punishment from abuse is by the occurrence or the lack of physical injury. "It is important to recognize that most parents do not want to beat their children. Virtually all parents feel regret after such an incident and most believe physical punishment is not an effective route to increase compliance, learning or respect for the parent" (Durrant, 1996).

Understanding the roots or origins of child abuse is very vital to discourse. In order to solve this issue, the professionals and specialists who have assessed an abused child's surroundings or atmosphere and family history has come up with three central causes for child abuse, which are parental causes, ecological causes and child problems. Parental reasons involve people who are married and have become parents at a very young age and have no anticipated socialization process in taking care of the children. They often neglect the needs of the child due to lack of awareness. Parents who face many problems in everyday life tend to lose control over their anger and as a result physically abuse their children. Moreover, parents who were victims during their childhood tend to be more probable to abuse their own children. Ecological causes involve parents who are drunk usually neglect the needs of their children. And the children also get hurt by their drunkard parents.

The poverty is a major factor in child abuse since the parents face financial problems to save their children. Furthermore, problems in the marriage could affect their children emotionally. There are two

types of parents under this criteria, the parents who are aware of the emotional abuse their child is being subjected to and still fail to stop it and the parents who are abusive, offended by and literally dislike their children. Child problems comprise of disabled children. Parenting a child with special needs is challenging and need the support of both the family and the community. In such cases, a number of parents disregard the needs for the child. It indicates that the parents deny the rights of the child. Each and every form of child abuse, irrespective of the causes, affect the child in some manner. Each form of abuse has its own effects. These effects can be physical, emotional or psychological. The signs of abuse can easily be detected from the short term effects. Wounds or burns which occur after physical abuse and are cured after receiving medical attention is an example of short term effects. Long term effect be slightly more challenging to detect at the beginning. However, these effects shall be seen gradually as the development of the child progresses. If the child has not received any medical attention, these effects can be seen as the child matures into adulthood. For instance, facing difficulty in maintaining relationships with others. If a person is encountered with any kind of abuse during their childhood may be prone to become abnormal to abuse children due to their previous experiences.

### **Measures Taken up by the State of Maldives**

The government of Maldives has signed the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC). There is a Maldives program of public advocacy and partnership for child rights in UNICEF, Family Protection Authority, Ministry of Gender and also NGOs like Advocating Rights of Children (ARC) etc.

The government of Maldives ratified the agreement on the rights of the child and enacted the law on protection of the rights of the child in 1991. International conventions or treaties signed and ratified by the State of Maldives include Agreement on the Rights of the Child, elective procedure to the CRC on the participation of children in armed conflict and elective protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The main challenges faced by the State of Maldives to uphold these Acts as their geographical reality which isolates the inhabitants and complicates the full access to basic services. Nearly half of the Maldivian population is under the age of 14, it has a unique situation regarding children's rights. While many aspects of social services have improved the quality of life. Certain areas still remain of concern such as gender inequality, discrimination and lack of access to basic health and education in the outlying islands. The Ministry of Education is involved in both promoting children's rights in collaborating with UNICEF. An early childhood care project by the name of 'First steps Maldives' aiming to ensure survival and protection of children under the age of 5 was also launched. However, despite significant improvements in health and social welfare still lack progress. The living conditions of the inhabitants are very hard as they do not grow any vegetables or have no access to healthcare. Many children in the islands suffer from stunted growth and the maternal mortality rate remains high. According to statistics of Maldives, 2015, the maternal mortality rate is 68 death per 100,000 births. Furthermore, the limited access to health care and education raises a bigger problem which is lack of awareness. Due to this, children with disabilities are isolated from the society and go through discrimination.

### **Maldives National Acts, Child Rights International Network**

The CRC has not been directly unified into the national law. However, under Article 68 of Maldivian Constitution of 2008, courts are required to consider international treaties including the CRC. Maldivian

constitution's chapter 2 contains extensive rights provisions that are applicable to both children and others but also a small number which precisely address children's rights. Although thematic legislation on the protection of the rights of the child is present, The State of Maldives does not have a supplementary children's act. In 2007, the CRC welcomed the Maldives' effort to amend the legislation according to the CRC. However, they also expressed their concern over several aspects of the CRC. The CRC noticed that the major areas of the Maldivian law fell short of the CRC such as a 7 year old girl being held accountable for *Haddu* (Beating punishment to a woman for adultery with a stick in the presence of public and court) offences for which the death penalty could also be possible. Furthermore, serious concerns were expressed in relation to sexual and physical abuse of children, stating that the laws were not adequate to protect children from them and the lack of a legal framework to prevent child labour or the economic exploitation of children. It is noticed that the current legal reform projects in Maldives like the intention of making primary education compulsory by law though it is yet to be conceded. Maldives also conscripted a Juvenile Justice Act nevertheless as of 2010 this legislation has not yet been enacted.

Public Advocacy and Partnerships for children's Rights, UNICEF has stated that the Republic of Maldives has started its foundation work for accomplishing children's rights through current and proposed legislation in Parliament. And certain new child related policies such as disability act, evidence act and education act are under development. However, children's rights are still not being fully met and coordination between government and community based organizations (CBOs) seem to require additional effort. It is highlighted the fact that UNICEF has continued to advocate for human rights and freedom of expression for children and youth in Maldives. They have also provided support to the newly formed Human Rights Commission and provided training on objective and human rights based reporting to journalists in the Maldives. It is observed that the participation of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives in the CRC session is a fruitful action. The willingness of the State of Maldivian to openly discuss the challenges affecting children is greatly appreciated by the committee. Recently, a national database for measuring progress was launched by the name of 'MaldivInfo'. The Maldives government has made great efforts in publishing national data on key development indicators and that it is the first time data have been consolidated to one place and made available so widely to media and general public.

## **5. THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF MALDIVES IN PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE**

The Republic of Maldives has gone to great lengths to reinforce child privileges and nationwide child safety system. After a mapping workout with the motive of identifying laps and gaps in the legal framework overlooking the rights of children, a new Child Rights Bill has been drafted to modify and improve the existing Child Rights Act of 1991. The purpose of this new law is to bring the child protection system of Maldives in line with its obligations under the CRC.

Several new Acts such as the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act have further reinforced the protection mechanism against the abuse of children. A further bill titled the Juvenile Justice Bill, which is expected to be submitted to the Parliament shortly to have a Juvenile Justice and Welfare System. Additionally, in order to modernize, harmonize as well as facilitate better enforcement, the Ministry of Law and Gender is also currently involved in a consolidation exercise, reviewing all child rights and protection related legislations and regulations.

However, there are many complications still remaining in confirming the privileges of the children, as underlined over the high profile case of flogging against a minor in 2013. In the flogging case, the verdict of the Juvenile Court has been appealed by the accused with assistance from the State and ultimately overturned by the High Court, setting precedence for cases of criminal offences and sexual abuse of children. The child involved in the case is now being assimilated under the State Home Care and provided education with the other children who are in conflict with the law.

There have been many activities organized to create awareness about child abuse and its prevention. The Juvenile Justice Unit (JJU) of the Ministry of Home Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF has trained law enforcement officials, magistrates, judges and social workers on justice for children through specific capacity building programs. These programs have been also aimed at the media, with the goal of making the media personnel aware about the CRC and ethical reporting of children in the media with a code of ethics and reporting guidelines.

According to the UNICEF Annual Report, the year 2010 has marked the end of implementing the country program. The main objective of the annual work plan is to convert from responders to tsunami to proper policy support. It is expected that the Data Base for Child Protection in Maldives fortifies the national child protection system.

The short term technical expertise set in the Department of Gender and Family and in the Juvenile Justice Unit has been very useful in building the capability of executing and supervising, evaluating laws and regulations and conveying operation's course of action; to some extent, the progress has also been made in child participation. Children from different parts of the country are referred to while developing the advocacy plan for Child Friendly Schools. Youngsters are crucial in passing on information about the effects of drug abuse and averting HIV. Key restrictions placed in execution and success of results included insufficient resources and frail monitoring throughout all programs. Maldives has experienced substantial political and governance transformation in the past three years and the state of the country in-between affected the work being done by UNICEF at different levels.

There was a child protection program designed for 2008 and 2009, however the child Protection Action Plan (CPAP) was not fully achieved and in 2010 though there were efforts made to achieve the results. The main objective of CPAP is to get reported cases of exposure of children to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation document it, profiled and tracked, children have access to designated protection services.

Societies across all the targeted atolls are familiar with the protecting atmosphere needed for children and the contrivances in place for support. Both the police and judiciary have improved their aptitude to execute child friendly laws and see that offenders receive justified sentences according to the best interest of the child. The main objective of the program was to make sure that the children of Maldives are safe from all the means of abuse.

Furthermore, the database report of child protection was restructured and stretched out to specifically two more atolls. Evaluations were made in association with the Human Rights Commission in order to collect information on child involvement and representation through different segments and policies were established to help increase the contribution in matters affecting them. Regular functioning measures in the area of child protection should be reviewed to improve the management system between the government and responsible organizations.

To cope up with the issue of child abuse some initiatives have been taken up to defend and support the rights of children are increasing the capability of different organizations to study cases of child abuse and gender based violence. In Maldives, various regional initiatives have been taken by South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) which is helpful to maintain relationship between civil society, government and regional bodies. Children are assured the right of entry to schooling, without boundaries on admission and re-admission below the age of eighteen. The State of Maldives has sanctioned protections against child marriages, particularly of the female child, with a strict ground of 18 years for marriage, and clear parental approval and counselling in other situations. There was a report from the Family Court and the Registrar of Marriages, where it stated that there were 23 minors contract legal marriages in 2012, followed by 14 minors in 2013 and 16 minors in 2014. Yet, the Family Court maintains that at the time of marriage, all minors were 17 years of age, and were calculated to be eighteen ensuing the Muslim (Lunar) calendar. The government of State of Maldives is making efforts to gather statistical data on marriage registration to stop child marriages since it is being misused by some orthodox persons.

## **6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Many families are forced to live in small apartments due to shortage of space, housing and overcrowding of Male' city. The apartments contain one or two rooms and are overcrowded. There are 5 to 8 members are forced to share a room and beds due to housing problem. The frustration of poverty and overcrowding are taken out on the children in the form of physical abuse. In few cases there have been incidents where the parents have forced children into prostitution as a means of income source for family.

Furthermore, it is believed that a parent who have been abused during their childhood is more likely to abuse their children. A similar incident took place in Male' when a mother physically abused her child to the point where the child was beaten to death. The child's body was covered with scars and marks which indicated that the abuse had been taken place for a long time. Police investigations later revealed that the mother had been physically and sexually abused by her step father during her childhood.

Using child abuse as a means of disciplining is not uncommon either. Some parents who can be classified as extremely strict, use physical abuse as a disciplining method. Something as small as a complaint from school teachers to disobedience can trigger this 'lesson'. There have also been incidents in Male' where the early marriage and becoming early parenthood has been the cause of child abuse. This leads the parent to believe the child has taken away their freedom, personal career and many more aspects of their lives and this has led to brutal abuse. In addition to this, early marriage sometimes results in parental incompetence among spouses and difference of opinion which in turn lead to problems in the marriage. Such frustrations sometimes are also taken out on children in the form of abuse.

Having a child of special needs is also a risk factor on the subject matter of child abuse. Physically or mentally challenged children are more prone to mishandling than other children. In Maldives, the parents who are separated or the children with single parent of the society consider to be burden and their dependence on the parents often leads to child exploitation. Ignorance is also an issue where the parent or guardian refuses to acknowledge the fact that their child has been abused. They either do not believe the child or do not believe the accused party is capable of doing it. In addition, embarrassment or the fear of losing the reputation among the society is another big issue.

The most of the affected families prefer to ignore the issue of their child abuse due to social identify or honour. This makes them not to report to the concerned authorities about the issues related to child abuse. This makes not to have right statistical data related to child abuse issues. It is observed that there is a tendency not to respond to the issues related to child physical abuse since they feel that it is not their issue. There are many cases which often remain unreported due to social stigma and lack of awareness about child rights. However, some child abuse cases are reported in the Police department by either a parent, neighbours or other civilians.

## 7. CHILD ABUSE CASES FROM THE CONCERNED AUTHORITIES AS FOLLOWS

### (a) Ministry of Gender and Family Protection Authority, The Republic of Maldives

The Ministry of Gender and Family, the Government of State of Maldives is the main statutory body that is working for the issues related to gender and family protection. This organisation takes the responsibility of resulting up the reports of child abuse, with cases of sexual abuse. The act specifies verdicts of up to 25 years in jail for those who convicts the sexual offenses against children.

**Table 1**  
**Number of Reported Child Abuse Cases (Under 18 Years)**  
**During 2009 - 2016**

<i>Type of Abuse</i>	<i>Year wise cases and percent</i>								<i>Total</i>
	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	
Neglect	75 (6.12)	102 (8.33)	156 (12.7)	141 (11.51)	116 (9.47)	120 (9.80)	227 (18.54)	287 (23.44)	1224 (100)
Physical Abuse	76 (6.23)	69 (5.66)	96 (7.88)	159 (13.05)	110 (9.03)	139 (11.41)	245 (20.11)	324 (26.60)	1218 (100)
Emotional Abuse	30 (3.86)	93 (11.96)	146 (18.79)	59 (7.59)	170 (21.87)	65 (8.36)	72 (9.26)	142 (18.27)	777 (100)
Sexual Abuse	133 (9.73)	67 (4.90)	87 (6.36)	295 (21.59)	44 (3.22)	300 (21.96)	98 (7.17)	342 (25.03)	1366 (100)
No. of Deaths	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (25)	3 (75)	4 (100)
Total	314	331	485	654	440	624	642	1,098	4589

*Source:* Ministry of Gender and Family, the Republic of Maldives.

Table 1 shows the number of child abuse cases lodged is 314 which includes, child neglect 75 (6 percent), physical abuse 76 (6 percent), emotional abuse 30 (4 percent) and sexual abuse 133 (10 percent). There were no death cases reported in 2009.

There is an increase in child neglect and emotional abuse while there is a decline in physical abuse and sexual abuse in 2010. Child neglect cases are increased from 75(6 percent) to 102 (8 percent) during 2009-2010. Emotional abuse cases are increased from 30 (4 percent) to 93 (12 percent) during 2009-2010. It is increased by 8 percent. And there is a decrease in physical abuse from 76 (6 percent) to 69 (6 percent) and sexual abuse cases from 133 (10 percent) to 67 (5 percent) during 2009-2010. However, the number of total cases is increased from 314 to 331 during 2009-2010.



The total number of reported cases is 485 in 2011, it includes child neglect 156 (13 percent), physical abuse 96 (8 percent), emotional abuse 146 (19 percent) and sexual abuse 87 (6 percent). It is observed that there is an increase of cases from 485 to 654 during 2011-2012. This shows a significant increase in the total number of cases when compared to 2009 and 2010. It is noticed that sexual abuse cases are increased drastically from 87 (6 percent) to 295 (22 percent) during 2011-2012. It is increased by 16 percent. Physical abuse cases are increased from 96 (about 8 percent) to 159 (13 percent) during 2011-2012. There is a slight decrease in Child neglect from 156 (13 percent) to 141 (12 percent) and Emotional abuse cases from 146 (19 percent) to 59 (8 percent) during 2011-2012. Although a number of neglect and emotional abuse cases is decreased slightly but there is an increase in number of physical and sexual abuse cases in 2012.

It is observed that there is a drastic change in number of abuse cases in 2013 compared to 2012 due to intervention by the government in this issue. There is a decrease in number of abuse cases from 654 to 440 between 2012 and 2013. But there is an increase in emotional abuse from 59 (8 percent) to 170 (22 percent) between 2012 and 2013 compared to other variables. It is also noticed that there is a significant change in sexual abuse cases from 295 (22 percent) to 44 (3 percent) between 2012 and 2013 since the government has been sensitising the society about child abuse and its bad affects. There is a decrease in number of Child neglect cases from 141 (12 percent) to 116 (9 percent), and physical abuse cases from 159 (13 percent) to 110 (9 percent) between 2012 and 2013.

It is alarming that there is an increase in total number of child abuse cases lodged in 2014 compared to 2013. It indicates that the government is not consistent in monitoring this issue. There is a significant decrease in Emotional abuse cases that are lodged in 2014 compared to 2013. There is a slight increase in Child neglect and Physical abuse cases in 2014 compared to 2013.

The total number of abuse cases lodged in 2015 is 642 and it indicates that there is an increase in child abuse cases compared to 2014. The cases related to Child neglect, Physical abuse and Emotional abuse have increased from 120 to 227, 139 to 245 and 65 to 72 respectively during 2014-2015. There is a death case lodged in 2015.

It is noticed that there is an increase in child abuse cases from 314 to 1095 between 2009 and 2016. And the child neglect cases are increased from 75 to 287 during 2009-2016. There is increase in Physical abuse cases from 76 to 324, Emotional abuse cases from 30 to 142, Sexual abuse cases from 133 to 342 during 2009-2016. One death cases was reported in 2015 and 3 death cases were lodged in 2016. It is observed that there is an increase in loading cases related to child abuse though the Republic of Maldives is taking appropriate measures to save the children from this issue. The increased figures related to child abuse may be lessened by strengthening the concerned agencies like Ministry of Gender and Family, Maldives Police Service and Human Rights Commission of the Maldives by the government of Republic of Maldives.

### **(b) The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, Republic of Maldives**

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) was established in 2003 as an autonomous statutory body created by the Declaration by the President of the Republic of the Maldives with the right to sue and be sued. The HRCM has a nine member committee including a Chairperson. Till the ratification of the present Human Rights Commission Act on 18th August 2005, making the HRCM a constitutionally recognized autonomous body. The HRCM works under regulations circulated under powers vested with

the President of the Republic of Maldives in Article 42 (e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives to determine the powers, duties and responsibilities of the HRCM.

**Table 2**  
**Child abuse Cases Lodged at HRCM During 2010-2016**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
2016	29
2015	63
2014	57
2013	30
2012	31
2011	48
2010	12
Total	270

*Source:* The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM), 2017.

The cases related to child abuse are investigated with the combined effort of Ministry of Gender and Family, Republic of Maldives; Human Rights Commission of Maldives and a special unit of Maldives Police Service – the Family and Child Protection Department. In most cases, the HRCM acts as an advisor or liaison office between authorities. However, the HRCM does have the authority to take the initiative, investigate and intervene in the cases on its own without any request or report being lodged officially. Although HRCM has this authority, it does not intervene in any case. Mostly they just investigate the cases which are officially reported to the HRCM or on the request of Maldives Police Service or Ministry of Gender and Family. Table.2 shows that the number of cases lodged at the HRCM is not so significant compared to the recorded cases in the Male' area. The highest number of cases lodged is 63 in the year 2015. The lowest number of cases recorded is 12 in the year 2010. It indicates that the lodged cases are increased during 2010-2016. However, there is a decrease from 63 to 29 between 2015 and 2016.

### (c) Maldives Police Service, The Republic of Maldives

**Table 3**  
**Statistics of Child Abuse cases lodged at Maldives Police Service during 2010-2016**

<i>Offense Type</i>	<i>Year wise cases and percent</i>							<i>Total &amp; Percent</i>
	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	
Physical Abuse	44 (5.79)	78 (10.23)	115 (15.13)	105 (13.82)	66 (8.68)	194 (25.53)	158 (20.79)	760 (100)
Sexual Abuse	179 (10.07)	275 (15.48)	279 (15.70)	259 (14.58)	233 (13.11)	273 (15.37)	278 (15.65)	1776 (100)
Child Neglect	2 (0.63)	12 (3.79)	60 (18.98)	67 (21.20)	29 (9.17)	86 (27.21)	60 (18.98)	316 (100)
Grand Total	225	365	454	431	328	553	496	2852

*Source:* Maldives Police Service, the Republic of Maldives.

Maldives Police Service has taken a very strong step in taking action against child abuse cases. There a special branch of Maldives Police Service for the investigations in Male' the capital city of Maldives. Similarly sub-branches of Maldives Police Service are established in all islands to deal with social issues. The data related to emotional abuse and child abuse deaths are not found with records of Maldives Police Services.

Table 3 indicates that the total number of lodged child abuse cases is drastically increased (533) in 2015. However, the number of reported cases fluctuating between 2010 and 2014. It is interested to notice that the number of child neglect cases is only 2. There is a drastic change in child negligence cases reported in 2015 is 86. It is observed that the sexual abuse cases are not decreased but it has always been in a constant way and the variation is very less. There are 194 physical abuse cases reported in 2015 which needs to be tackled by the respective organizations.

The data related to lodged child abuse cases from the Maldives Police Service, and the Ministry of Gender and Family are not comparable due to some irregularities in dealing with this child abuse issue. For instance, there are 342 sexual abuse cases, 287 child neglect cases, and 324 physical abuse cases are reported in the year 2016 as per the records of the Ministry of Gender and Family, Republic of Maldives. But there are 278 cases of sexual abuse, 60 cases of child neglect and 158 cases of physical abuse are found with the records of Maldives Police Service in the same year of 2016. It indicates that there is a discrepancy in case wise reported figures and there is a communication gap between these two high authorities involved in preventing and investigating child abuse issue to solve. There is a need for coordination between these two authorities to address the issue of child abuse in Male' city. The combined efforts should be made by the Ministry of Gender and Family, and the Maldives Police Service to make appropriate measures to save the girl child in Male' city as a social responsibility. It may not be difficult to the government of Republic of Maldives to solve this social issue in an efficient way since the Maldives is a small populated country.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The main causes of child abuse in Male' is the lack of awareness and poverty. Most of the children are unaware and unable to identify strange and inappropriate behaviours from outsiders. The innocence of children is taken as an advantage of and the abuse stays hidden from people's observation. The children from poor families are prone to child abuse due to their socio-economic conditions. There is an increase in child abuse cases though there are enforcement agencies initiated by the government of Maldives to prevent this social issue. There is a lack of coordination among the formal agencies which are supposed to tackle the issue of child abuse.

The government should introduce a policy to teach the students at primary school level about the adverse effects of the child abuse as a part of the curricula. The school children should be sensitised about the child abuse practices as lessons in their early age. The system of modern education should be made use of in preventing the issue of child abuse. Awareness campaigns related to this issue are required to organise to sensitise the communities about the evil effect of child abuse. The parents should be actively participated in the awareness programs of child rights. The governmental organizations related to child rights, academic institutions, academicians, community and religious leaders, Non-Governmental Organizations and the community should consider this issue as a severe social concern and to actively participate in controlling the child abuse practices in the Male' city. The toll free call centre shall be maintained by the department of child welfare and its allied agencies as per the requirement to protect and save the children from different issues in the society. The importance of the child rights has to be addressed by the government of Maldives

through its concerned agencies which shall save the children from this evil abuse since there has been a bad effect on their future lives. It is required to make special constitutional safeguards by the government of Maldives to prevent the issue of child abuse and to save children to prosper society.

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