

THE WELL-KNOWN DEVIL OF INCEST: IT'S ALL BEGUN WITHIN THE FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

Incest is a worldwide phenomenon that includes the exploitation of family members who are known and trusted by the victims. In today's globalised and modernised society, children are at significant danger of sexual exploitation regardless of where they stay, with whom they stay, or even in their own home. Family members inside the family institution, as the children's closest and most trusted people, have abused their authority, ability, and trust by manipulating the children to meet their sexual wants and desires. Furthermore, the breakdown of the family institution is one of the key elements that allows and initiates the act of incest. The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that contribute to incest from the victims' perspectives. Hence, this study applies a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences of 16 incest victims from various protection homes administered by the Department of Social Welfare and eight informants from different agencies in Malaysia who were directly engaged in dealing with incest situations. The data reveals four aspects inside the family institution that contributed to the perpetration. The indicators found include the parents' marital status, parenting styles, family dysfunction, and sexual grooming. The way a family works is important for making sure everyone gets along and for figuring out what family members will do or say.

Keywords: Incest, family institution, marriage, divorced, family dysfunction, sexual grooming

INTRODUCTION

Incest is common in Malaysia, as shown by the number of incest cases published in the media. In 2017, an incestuous case between a father and his biological daughter generated outrage in Malaysia. The father was accused of 600 instances of sodomising his daughter (New Straits Times, 2017). The charges include sodomising, rape, and sexual abuse, all of which are punishable under the Penal Code, the Sexual Offences Against Children Act of 2017, and the Child Act of 2001. The charges were read out before Putrajaya's Special Court for Sexual Crimes Against Children. After divorcing his wife in 2015, the father was said to have committed crimes against his adolescent daughter over 600 times in two years.

Furthermore, in November 2020, the Royal Malaysian Police issued a news release on an incest case reported by a 15-year-old girl, after she was seized by the police at *Terminal Bersepadu Selatan* for not having the Movement Control Order Travel Permit (Royal Malaysian Police, 2020). She was on her way to avoid her father. The unlucky girl was raped by her biological father in their own home in Bukit Damansara around February 2020. She lived with her mother until 2019, when her parents split, and then moved with her father after her father got custody. She said after an inquiry that her father raped her virtually every day, except when she was menstruating. Her father would do that repulsive deed extremely early in the morning, when the rest of the family was still sleeping. She was terrified and attempted suicide multiple times by drinking detergent. According to the authorities, her father has one incest case that is still being investigated under Section 376 A of the Penal Code.

Malaysia's incestuous problems are concerning and disturbing. This may be observed in the number of reported cases from yearly, since children represent the majority of sexual abuse victims. According to the Royal Malaysian Police, just one out of every three occurrences of incest is reported to the authorities (Royal Malaysian Police, 2018). In the context of incest and other kinds of child sexual abuse, one out of every ten children, or around 750,000 children, was committed by someone known and trusted by the victims, and in the instance of incest, they were sexually molested by family members (Indramalar, 2019). According to Mohanraj (2017), incest often happens due to a lack of information and awareness among parents or caregivers in detecting the signs of any sexual abuse that has occurred to the children. Most children do not talk openly about sexual matters, so it's important to be able to notice any changes or recognise the signs of sexual abuse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "incest" evokes a wide range of meanings, acceptability, conceptions, and comprehension. The notion and meaning of incest vary among cultures and faiths since each has its own acceptable belief based on social standards, cultural acceptability, or divine revelation (Kassim & Kasim, 1995). As a result, there would be no singular definition of incest that could apply to all faiths or civilizations throughout the globe. However, the underlying notion or essence of incest across the globe may be defined as any sexual intercourse that happens between family members who are not allowed to marry. It is critical to understand that incest is a kind of sexual behaviour that does not include marital bonds. In this case, the victim's biological parents, biological siblings, stepparents, stepsiblings, grandparents, step-grandparents, or parents' siblings are all involved in the incest. Incest is a sort of child sexual abuse, although it is not the same as other forms of sexual abuse. The primary distinction between incest and other forms of sexual abuse is that incest abusers are family members of the children, while child sexual abuse perpetrators might be anybody who is not a family member.

Celbis et al. (2019) defined incest as a sexual relationship and intercourse between a man and a woman, a man and a man, and a woman and a woman who are religiously, ethically, and legally forbidden from marrying. According to Finkelhor (1978), incest is any sexually related conduct between family members, including sexual fondling, sexual solicitation, sexual exhibition, mutual masturbation, oral-genital or anal genital contact, and sexual intercourse. He underlined that family members include not just single parents and children, but also in-laws, step-relatives, and cousins. Incest, according to Bronson (1989), is a sexual connection between an adult and a kid with whom the adult has a familial bond. However, the nature and extent of the familial ties were not specified. Apart from that, Bronson (1989) did not regard a kid's sexual conduct with another child in the same household to be an incestuous act since it defied the concept of incest. While Becker (1994) defines incest as a sexual act between family members other than a husband and wife that may or may not entail intercourse.

Children are still young, weak, and susceptible to several characteristics such as age, strength, physical size, and development status, hence, they are more likely to be sexually exploited by their caregivers or adults (Finkelhor & Williams, 1990). They are readily targeted because they are unable to fight back, defend themselves, express unhappiness, and disagreement, and are easily influenced by being provided incorrect information, particularly with sexually related material (Murray, 2010). Victims are often gullible and readily convinced into enabling offenders to do improper acts in which some of them are used as inappropriate media and means of showing attention and care. This persuades and manipulates them into believing that sexual relationships and sexual activities are one method for them to demonstrate their love to other family members. Most of the time, the victims of incest are exploited by the offender, who would encourage them to have sexual intercourse in order to show that it is the best method to enhance the links and relationships between them (Darlington, 2005). Children who lack enough information and awareness about sexual problems are more likely to fall victim to criminals' schemes.

According to Yusof et al. (2015), it is impossible to collect an accurate number of incest instances since victims do not disclose them, although according to police records, only one out of every three incidents is recorded. Furthermore, many unreported incestuous activities are not acknowledged and remain behind closed doors. Therefore, the number of real incidents is likely to be larger. Because not all incest cases registered with the Department of Social Welfare are reported to the Royal Malaysia Police, the number of documented instances may vary. From 2021 to 2022 (until May), the Royal Malaysia Police kept track of how the victim was related to the suspect and how old the victims were.

Table 1: Incest victims' relationship with suspects

| Ties | 2021 | 2022 (Until May) | Total |
|------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Father | 87 | 24 | 111 |
| Stepfather | 65 | 31 | 96 |
| Foster father | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grandfather | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Step grandfather | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Uncle | 50 | 20 | 70 |
| Step uncle | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Elder brother | 37 | 14 | 51 |
| Younger brother | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Stepbrother | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Brother-in-law | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| Adopted brother | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Son | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Cousins | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Nephew | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 267 | 98 | 365 |

Source: Royal Malaysian Police (2022)

Table 2: Classification of incest victims by age

| Age | 2021 | 2022 (Until May) | Total |
|----------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Under 6 years | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| 6-9 years | 16 | 4 | 20 |
| 10-12 years | 46 | 17 | 63 |
| 13-15 years | 97 | 38 | 135 |
| 16-18 years | 68 | 23 | 91 |
| Above 18 years | 20 | 17 | 37 |
| Total | 250 | 102 | 352 |

Source: Royal Malaysian Police (2022)

According to the age distribution of incest victims, children aged 13 to 15 years old have the largest number of victims, followed by those aged 16 to 18, 10 to 12 years old, 6 to 9 years old, and under 6 years old. This pattern is impacted by physical appearances and biological changes in the body. When the girl enters adolescence, her body form changes, increasing the

offenders' sexual urge. Puberty is defined by the Malaysian Ministry of Health as changes in primary and secondary sex characteristics caused by hormones, with several changes appearing, including changes in the penis and testes of males, changes in the breast, vagina, and ovaries of females, and the growth of pubic and underarm hair. The age range of 10 to 19 years is often referred to as the "sexual awakening era" (Thanenthiran, 2018). This is due to the many changes and experiences faced by young people as they explore their sexual identity, sexual curiosity, and various sentiments of love, as well as their proclivity to experiment with their bodies with sex. So, at this point, the children or teenagers are no longer able to protect themselves and are more likely to be abused.

When family members are confronted with marital conflict, financial stress, load, unemployment, or family dysfunctionality, there is a chance that the violation occurrences will be injected into certain scenarios of life situations (Esher, 2011). All these familial characteristics may contribute to sexual abuse. Busy working couples will not have enough time to spend together, and they will, of course, want something or someone to satisfy their sexual desires and requirements (Mausert-Mooney, 1992). As a result, without thinking rationally, their biological or stepchildren often become a tool for indulging their terrible desire. To fulfil their physical pleasure, some of them may employ persuasion, intimidation, force, or so-called power. Some people think that sex may reduce their tension and put them in a pleasant mood throughout difficult life situations. According to Albury and Byron (2014), people who struggle with emotions and situations are more likely to be exposed to or voluntarily expose themselves to sexual behaviours in a variety of ways to enjoy themselves.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences of incest victims as well as key personnel responsible for addressing and managing incest cases after their discovery. The sample size of this study consists of 16 incest victims from various protection homes administered by the Department of Social Welfare, (*Taman Seri Puteri Batu Gajah*, Perak; and *Rumah Kanak-Kanak Rembau*, Negeri Sembilan) as well as eight key persons from various responsible agencies (*Taman Seri Puteri Batu Gajah*, Perak; *Rumah Kanak-Kanak Rembau*, Negeri Sembilan; *Taman Seri Puteri Kota Kinabalu*, Sabah; *Taman Seri Puteri Cheras*, Selangor; Children Division, Department of Social Welfare; and Sexual Women and Child Investigation Division, (D11), Royal Malaysian Police); and non-governmental organisations (Monster Among Us, Selangor) that have been directly involved in managing incest cases in Malaysia. The essential figures were police officials, social workers, therapists, and protectors who dealt with incest cases. All of the informants are from the states of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Sabah, and Sarawak, which had the greatest number of recorded incidents of incest in Malaysia. As a result, the study may gather generalisations about topics based on the real-life experiences of experts and the incest victims themselves.

The qualitative technique helps the researcher to comprehend, explain, investigate, discover, and clarify events, perceptions, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and values, as well as the experiences of those participating in the study (Kumar, 2011). According to Patton and Cochran (2002), using the qualitative technique allows the researcher to collect and access rich information from respondents by offering questions concerning the WH questions, which are 'what', 'why', 'where', 'when', or 'how', rather than asking 'how many' or 'how much'. As a result, using a qualitative technique through in-depth interviews, this study was able to gain insight input from informants in terms of the underlying variables leading to incest instances.

Primary data for this research was gathered via in-depth interviews with both incestuous victims and important individuals. The semi-structured interview methodology, which had been established and verified, was used to conduct the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews in this study not only saved money but also helped the researcher create rapport throughout the interview process. Most significantly, informants have the ability to communicate their sentiments and feelings in their own unique ways, resulting in a mutual understanding between researcher and informant. It allows for the true experiences of incest victims during the catastrophe, as well as the experiences of essential people dealing with incest situations. Aside from that, it gives the researcher a lot of information and time to do an in-depth interview because there were no hard questions asked.

FINDINGS

According to the findings of this study, the biggest cause of incest is familial institution. The imbalance or disintegration of a family structure has been revealed to be the fundamental source of many social ills, including violence, sexual and domestic abuse, and the growth of incest cases. Among the sub-themes that have evolved are the state of marriage, parenting techniques, dysfunctional families, and sexual grooming. All of the subthemes' components are the underlying factors that not only disrupt the family structure but may also result in incest.

According to the findings, the family institution is the most important factor in determining the future and growth of its members. It is critical to create and practise an appropriate parenting style, a strong family bond and relationship, and good communication and participation in order to prevent or impede any undesirable occurrences or abuse. According to the survey, family institutions are now in extremely bad health. Because each family member has an inclination toward independence, the inter-family ties diminish, and the family structure may finally disintegrate. This is exemplified below:

"Our family institution nowadays is very loose; everyone is too busy with their own lives, so there will be less interaction and less communication, mutual activities among family members are diminished, thus loosening the relationship between them. That makes the failure to consider their family members as family" (PDRM, female).

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MARITAL STATUS

Marital status is the first sub-theme to arise from the family institution. Both parents must be physically and emotionally present for the sake of their children's well-being. Parents have an important role in shaping children's behaviour, thinking styles, and capacity to discriminate between right and wrong in a family structure. If one parent is missing, the family's structural arrangement becomes uneven. Incest has been discovered in households when the parents are not together; either the pair is divorced, or they are married but live apart. Most of the youngsters were sexually abused since their parents were divorced and they did not live with their original parents.

"I stay with my mother and my step-father. [...] My stepfather raped me" (Anis, 17 years old, abused by stepfather).

"I did not know where my mother lives because my mother and my father are divorced [...] I stay with my stepfather [...] He raped me" (Syuhada, 14 years old, abused by stepfather).

" My father and my mother are divorced, and my mother is currently in prison [...] So I stay at my grandparents' house with my stepfather and my other three siblings" (Mimi, 17 years old, abused by stepfather and uncle).

The primary authorities with expertise in dealing with incest problems also support the association between the marital status of parents and instances of incest. According to the findings, the majority of incest instances involve victims whose parents are divorced or separated from one another. As a result, the children live apart, and they do not see or treat their family members on a daily basis.

"Usually, when we receive incest cases, the family is having problems such as divorce, taking drugs, and so on" (JKM 4, female).

But what makes me afraid is that incest happens when our family institution has collapsed. A lot of incest cases involve divorced parents and their children living separately with other family members. For example, when the parents are divorced, and the child is staying with her mother, the father will not see the child as his child anymore" (PDRM, female).

Another issue is that the children may be vulnerable to sexual assault despite never having met a divorced parent. Instead, the parents may be cohabiting, or the children may have been adopted as youngsters and subsequently returned to their birth parents.

"We stayed at uncle's house after my father was caught by the police because he was a drug addict, and he used to beat me and my brother until my brother's hand broke [...] My uncle uses some kind of oil that makes me pass out and brings me to his bedroom" (Syafira, 15 years old, abused by an uncle).

"We live together, but my mother pursues her studies in Sabah, so she lives there. [...] My mother will come back here when she is on leave... My father started to sexually abuse me after my mother left us" (Ziana, 17 years old, abused by father).

PARENTING STYLE

Aside from the parents' marital status, "parenting style," or how the parents raise, shape, nurture, and educate their children, will impact their way of thinking and understanding about sexual assault. Evidence reveals that, in certain cases, parents' incapacity to maintain privacy and gender boundaries amongst their children has aggravated victimisation. According to the findings of the study, some children, regardless of gender, had to share their beds with their siblings, and other children did not even have their own bedrooms; they had to sleep together in the living room. When parents cannot afford to set aside enough or suitable rooms for their children, they may sleep in the same room as their children. As a result, the inability to set adequate boundaries and privacy has affected the exposure to sexually related concerns.

"Okay, based on my experience with my previous client that involve with incest cases, usually their family institution has collapsed, for example, is divorced, or in the case which did not involve divorce, the parenting style of the parents is not proper and not suitable. [...]" (JKM 4, female).

That is what I discovered, so what we can see is that the family institution is weak, and the parenting style is so wrong. It should be the girl who sleeps in the bedroom and the boy who sleeps outside, because the girl should be protected and given privacy as they have what we call sexual attraction and the tendency to be victimized" (JKM 4, female).

Furthermore, the parents' failure to exercise a suitable parenting style and give adequate seclusion and boundaries due to tiny dwellings and limited rooms has been connected to poverty or economic troubles.

"Economic issues can contribute to the issues of incest because once the rooms are small and cramped, or if they only have one room, or if the room is only being used by the parents, the children are exposed to victimisation [...] Let's say in a family, they have seven members, all of whom need to share the same bedroom. What happens after that? Their children will witness all the activities in the room, including the sexual activities between their parents, so the sexual activities cannot be covered" (JKM 5, female).

"This is due to poverty. For example, their house is small, the space is also small, they have limited rooms, so they need to share rooms. Even the elder siblings had to share rooms with their parents, sleep on the same pillow and mattress, and in my opinion, these are the leading factors of incest" (JKM 2, female).

Furthermore, the failure of parents to provide a good example as well as nurture and teach good values to their children so that they can distinguish which actions are good and which are not has been identified as a contributing factor to incest. The inability to be a good role model for their children, the failure to raise their children effectively, and the failure to provide them with basic sexual information are all parts of a poor parenting style. This is due to the fact that most parents are individualistic, lack awareness in raising and supervising their children, are incapable of properly handling the family, are too preoccupied with themselves, and lack a work-life balance.

"I believe that maybe the children are wearing indecently because their parents did not ever teach them how to wear appropriately, and maybe the children did not bother about what they wear since they are at their own house, with the family members, it is not wrong, so they feel safe. So, it is logical for the children to wear singlets, shorts or sexy attire. And maybe the parents did not nurture the proper way to wear an attire even if they are in their own house" (JKM 4, female).

"In my opinion, the most important people are the parents. It goes back to the parents. Although the children are the ones who do the wrongdoing, it is the responsibility of the parents to teach their children from the beginning, religious education, and the right way of behaving. So, when they teach all of these at the beginning, then this case will. I did not say that this case will not happen, but if it happens, the numbers will not be as high as now" (JKM 3, male).

FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

Family dysfunction has been highlighted as one of the elements that contribute to incest victimisation because it impairs family bonds and relationships. These include being selfish and individualistic, being in denial, missing communication and connection, being reckless and irresponsible, and even seeing their family as a sexual object since they no longer perceive them as a family.

"It is the family, most importantly, the family institution, other than religious teaching. Nowadays, we tend to be individualistic, so that is why incest happens. [...] Our family institutions nowadays are very loose; everyone is too busy with their own lives, so there will be less interaction and less communication; mutual activities among family members are diminished, thus loosening the relationship between them. That makes them fail to consider their family members as family anymore. [...] A lot of incest cases involve families that have been divorced and their children live separately. For example, when the parents are divorced and the child is staying with her mother, the father will not presume the child as his child anymore. [...] Nowadays, even male siblings view their sisters as sexual objects and may be sexually attracted to them. So, this is due to the absence of family relationships among them" (PDRM, female).

"Another factor is the parents' lack of concern towards their children. Like in the previous case, the victim was a disabled person. She is an OKU. She was not able to think well and differentiate good from bad. She is a slow learner. So how come the parents were not aware that the girl was victimized? Thus, it shows that the parents did not care at all" (JKM 5, female).

According to the experience of significant authorities, the majority of family members contest the fact that the criminals are among them. Unfortunately, some family members are still in denial since they did not believe their relatives were capable of such crimes. They are watchful and observant, but they did not believe it at first, or they did not believe that the sexual assault was committed by someone with a good reputation. Some of them are aware of sexual abuse yet continue to protect the perpetrator.

"A lot of incest cases are known by the mother, even it has happened for such a long period, but she refuses to report or deny the fact that her husband is a sexual abuser. Maybe she believes that her husband would not dare to do such act or, they know it already, but insists to defend the husband" (JKM 1, female).

"When the daughter told her mother about the sexual abuse, the mother did not believe her until the other siblings said that they had also been sexually victimized. Then the mother believed, and made the report" (PDRM, female).

"When I was dealing with incest cases at the district level, there was a case where the mother was in denial. She did not believe that her husband, who works as a high-ranked public servant, dared to rape his daughter, and decided not to lodge a report" (JKM 5).

"I tried to tell my mother about this, but she did not care at all" (Dila, 16 years old, abused by father).

SEXUAL GROOMING

Sexual grooming has been identified as a component in the commission of incestuous actions. According to the findings, the majority of incestuous relationships do not develop immediately. Perpetrators frequently use false information to manipulate victims. They manipulate victims for their own gain and superstitious beliefs, claim that touching the victim's private parts is safe, claim that a sexual relationship will help them support themselves and their families, and ask victims to give them massages in exchange for physical contact.

"Previously, we had a case from Perak, where the father was so-called a shaman. What happened is that the father made his daughter the medium of spiritual worship to get money. We call it 'tarik duit'. Both father and daughter need to have sex with each other, so when we ask the daughter if it is real, she admits that it is. After they have sex, there will be some amount of money appearing under the pillow. She also said that if she could satisfy her father more, then more money they could get, and if her father was not satisfied with the sex, then less money they could get" (PDRM, female).

"For example, when the father performs an unsafe touch on the private or unnecessary part of his child, the father will say that it is okay to do so since this is a "fatherly" touch, the normal touch of a father towards his child, so here the father has manipulated his daughter since she did not know the sensitivity of that private part. Incest does not begin with raping; rather, it begins with building trust with the children" (JKM, female).

"There was a time when I stayed with my father, I have not slept with him, even since I was little I did not sleep with him... so during that time, I was watching tv, and my father called me and said 'adik (girl) come here... adik (girl), let's sleep with abah (daddy), you never sleep with me', and then he hugs me... he said that 'It's has been a long time since I have hugged you' then, that thing happened" (Maria, 17 years old, abused by father).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nowadays, family institutions are being challenged. The number of reported incest cases each year proves this. Even though Malaysia's incest statistics did not show a significant increase in the number of instances, incest continues to occur, and the figures remain disturbing. Children raised in a broken family structure will surely have an influence on the next generation. Even when the most confidence is put into families, incest may occur when children are placed with loved ones who have been entrusted with their care. It is known that family institutions are deteriorating nowadays as children have a high potential to be abused by their own parents or family members. Some of them were even sexually exploited and groomed when they were very young.

As a result, in order to avoid incest, family empowerment must be promoted and practised. When a family is empowered, everyone in the family contributes to understanding one another; physically and emotionally supporting one another; educating one another; protecting one another; having good interaction and communication; understanding the need to live in harmony; and creating a safe and stable home. Family empowerment promotes children's safety and well-being while allowing the family institution to handle any possible concerns with suitable solutions (Becona et al., 2015).

In other words, incest has occurred as a result of family dysfunction since the family structure has been shattered and the family members are unable to work collectively. Kheswa (2017) revealed that family dysfunction has become a substantial risk factor for child sexual abuse, especially in families with stepparents. According to a key person representing the Royal Malaysian Police, because everyone is too busy with their own lives today, there is less interaction and communication. Mutual activities among family members have decreased, and this has resulted in a detached relationship between them and less consideration as family members. This emphasizes the need to avoid incestuous relationships.

Individualism, being busy with one's own life, lack of communication and connection, and abandoning their duties and obligations to love and protect one another, as well as seeing their family members as sexual objects, have weakened family relationships, which has fostered the act of abuse. Tragically, parents or other adults who are accountable for their children's sexual behaviour agree to it for personal benefit, money, or passion. According to Holborn and Eddy (2011), sexual abuse is more likely to occur in a dysfunctional family that fails to provide safety and security, moral support, and spiritual direction than in a dynamic family with a loving and nurturing culture.

Interfamily relationships, parenting styles, parenting style alliances, border functions, labelling roles, child socialization, and emotional support are all important components of a successful and dynamic family structure (Mrazek & Bentovim, 1983). According to the findings of this research, family institutions are the major source of incest cases since the offenders were family members. Children from dysfunctional families are more vulnerable to sexual assault (Wilson, 2019). According to Sedlack et al. (2010), the key risk factor for child sexual abuse is the family institution, since children who live with married biological parents are less likely to suffer sexual abuse than children who live with stepparents, single parents, or foster parents. Incest occurs as a consequence of an imbalance and the breakdown of their relationship, family structure, and bond.

The findings of this research show that individuals nowadays are more isolated, interact less, and prioritise their own needs above those of others. Overworked parents, stressful relationships, poor parenting skills, denial, and neglect are all causing harm

to children. While incest occurrences have been used to exemplify how a family may break apart, the increasing number of documented incest cases shows how vulnerable the family structure is.

Children are the most vulnerable individuals in a divorce. According to the findings of this research, the lack of parental love and affection generated marital problems between parents, resulting in an imbalance in the family structure. The dynamics of inter-family contact have been influenced by the parents' divorce or the absence of a spouse. Schmidt (2001) and Salleh (2018) observed that remarriage or the addition of a stepfather to the household might promote sexual worries in female youngsters. After all, the daughter is not the person he nurtured from infancy, which may lead to sexual attraction owing to physical similarities between the two female children.

Because the couple split and did not remarry, the surviving spouse will see the children as their primary method of fulfilling their sex needs now that their previous partner is no longer accessible. This is known as emotional incest, and it occurs when a kid replaces a parent, most often the father, and behaves as their emotional spouse; this connection ultimately leads to sexual abuse (Moncher, 2018). The findings of this research show that incest is common in families going through divorce or separation because it has a detrimental influence on the quality of the siblings' and parents' relationships.

As a consequence of the divorce or separation, the children are compelled to live alone with their mother or father, or they may be moved to relatives or even a foster home. One informant, for example, said that she grew up in a troubled family, with both of her parents divorced and her mother imprisoned at the time, leaving her to live with her grandparents and her three other siblings. She was raped on several occasions by her stepfather and uncle since she did not have her mother to protect her.

Many cases of incest include a split family in which the children are being abused by someone they haven't seen in a long time and are living with other family members. Incest has been connected to family dissolution, according to Karbeyaz, Toygar, and Çelikel (2016). As a consequence of their extended separation, they may no longer see one another as family members. When they came back together after being separated for a time, they would no longer view the family members the same way, which would break the customary boundaries between the parents and the children.

Wilson (2019) gives evidence for this, stating that children who are suffering parental separation and live in a chaotic environment are at a high risk of sexual assault. According to Wilson (2019), sexual abuse is common when one parent is given custody, either by the parents themselves or by people who enter the child's family after the divorce, such as stepparents. The main individual from the Royal Malaysian Police agreed that if there is a divorce and the child must spend substantial time with one parent, the father would tend to sexualize the child since he no longer regards the daughter as a part of his family.

Finally, parents must address sexually relevant issues at home in order to allay their children's curiosity and fears. The talk should take place in a controlled setting and language, and it should be repeated on a regular basis in order to foster strong connections among family members. Furthermore, there would be no barriers or restrictions for them to speak out about any bad sexual occurrences. Here, the children will gain knowledge about sexually relevant items, become more aware of the dangers of sexual abuse, and learn how to safeguard their private parts or genitals from potential abusers.

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