

(Farasat and Saleem, two friends in the class, are sitting in the college library, reading a newspaper.)

Farasat: Oh, my goodness! Another incident of child abuse this week!

Saleem: (taking the newspaper from Farasat) Good heavens! What has happened to our city?

(both the students are sitting pensively, meanwhile their class teacher enters the library and happens to sit at the same table where both of them are sitting.)

Teacher: Assalam-o-Alaikum. (Both the students say: Wa-alaikumussalam, Sir.) Both of you seem quite dejected. Is everything all right?

Farasat: *(hands over the newspaper to the teacher and points out the particular news.)*

Teacher: Oh! I see. This is not the place to discuss, come to my room and have a cup of tea. We will discuss the matter there.

(the teacher's room, where the teacher and both the students are sitting, taking tea.)

Teacher: *(addressing them)* Well, child abuse is taking place more frequently nowadays.

Farasat: Sir, kindly tell us, in detail, about the menace of child abuse.

Teacher: Well, child abuse means maltreatment of a child. Child abuse can be categorized into four categories: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse. Abuse can occur within the family, in the community or in an institutional setting. The abuser may be someone known to the child or a stranger, and can be an adult, or another child.

Saleem: Sir, recent tragic incidents faced by children, leading to mass protest, are very grave examples of child abuse.

Teacher: Saleem, you are quite right.

Saleem: Sir, such incidents of child abuse are very tragic. How can we overcome them?

Teacher: Well, child protection issues always evoke a passionate public outcry. At the same time, child protection is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. However, every child and young person have the right to grow up in a safe and supportive

family and to have opportunities that assist them to reach their full potential. One of the ways this can be achieved, is through supporting the families to provide for the physical, social, and emotional needs of children and young people.

Farasat: Sir, but the family system is not as strong in our country as it used to be in the past.

Saleem: Sir, in such situations what are other factors that can be helpful in protecting a child from abuse?

Teacher: All religions, as well as the Constitution of our country, can play an important role in this regard.

Saleem: Can you kindly explain further, Sir?

Teacher: Well, Islam cares about childhood and Muslims regard children as gifts and a trust from Allah. Therefore, it pays particular attention to the rights of children and to the proper manner of raising them so that they can be equipped to face the difficulties of life.

Farasat: Sir, what exactly are the basic rights of children in Islam?

Teacher: They have the right to be fed, clothed and protected until they reach adulthood. The child has the right to good education and a stable environment.

Saleem: Is our government also responsible for child safety?

Teacher: Yes, as I have pointed out earlier, the Constitution of Pakistan, under Article 25, guarantees the protection of children, mothers and the structure of family.

Farasat: Has the government taken any practical step towards the safety of children?

Teacher: A Child Protection and Welfare Bureau has also been set up by the Punjab Government. Moreover, Pakistan, in 1990, ratified the UN Resolution regarding the rights of children. A report has to be sent to the UN in this regard after every five years.

Saleem: Sir, as we observe in media as well as in our everyday life that a lot of children around the world suffer daily from violence, exploitation, and abuse. How can they be treated in such an inhuman way and what is happening in our world?

Teacher: Saleem, do you know that some of the greatest threats to child safety are to children living in extreme poverty? The most predictable result is malnutrition. It has led to stunting in our new generation.

Saleem: Oh! I see.

Farasat: Sir, what are the other threats?

Teacher: Lack of access to quality education is another threat to child safety.

Saleem: Sir, how can we counter this threat?

Teacher: Improving education decreases both the poverty and the child mortality rates of a country. Karem De Crow, the famous American lawyer, author, activist and feminist of 20th century said ".....Where girls are educated, the economy and standards of living rise."

Farasat: Sir, armed conflicts are taking place in many parts of our world especially in Muslim countries. People are also migrating from such areas. Are there any threats to the children living in such areas?

Teacher: Well, Farasat, you have pointed out towards a very important aspect of the whole matter. Children are also migrating from such areas. Refugee and migrant children face specific issues of their own. When they move to safer countries, often as they seek asylum, they are exposed to potential kidnapping. Many of such children become slaves, soldiers and drug traffickers. Stronger child protection policies are crucial to fight against child trafficking.

Teacher: Farasat, do you know that another threat towards child safety can be found in areas of armed conflict?

Farasat: Sir, can you tell us about it?

Teacher: There are several concerns for children who live near war-zones. These concerns arise due to many child casualties resulting from explosive weapons because children, living in such areas, see such weapons as toys. Explosives limit access to safe places for children and their families. Children as young as eight join military groups, either forced to escape poverty, defend their community or only revenge.

Saleem: Sir, how can we cope with such situations?

Teacher: Well, it can be changed by starting disarmament and demining processes. Moreover, International Organizations like UNICEF and UN can play their part by working to release children from armed groups and help them return home. It will be interesting to know that many of the threats to child safety are inseparably linked, which may be the key to solve these daunting issues.

Farasat: Sir, but these threats are growing.

Teacher: Well, Farasat, you are right. But there is hope. The first step to resolve these

problems is gaining knowledge about them. Individuals should share this information with others and strive to eradicate threats to child safety. Through enlightenment and effort, it is possible to create a world in which children only need to focus on one thing: living happily.

Saleem: Sir, what are the roles of parents, teachers and media under such circumstances?

Teacher: Every segment of society has a role to play in this regard. Parents should get their children educated. Rather they should consider it the top priority of their life. Educating a girl child is actually educating a nation. Government for its part, should impart free and compulsory education to every child. Teachers can play a very important role in the reporting about child abuse. They can teach the youngsters about how danger may lurk among people they love and trust. They can also alert a child's parents in this regard.

Farasat: Sir, but where does media stand in society for the protection of child's rights?

Teacher: Well, media is also equally involved in the efforts taken to eliminate child abuse and to promote conducive environment for child safety.

Farasat: What else can be done in this regard, Sir?

Teacher: Well, government should strengthen the existing institutions, such as families of children in vulnerable circumstances, social welfare departments, and law enforcing agencies. If a child comes to education institution with bruises or sexual abuse, the teacher should be able to report this to the relevant authority that is social welfare, which will investigate further before reporting to the law enforcement agencies and ultimately to court, if necessary.

Farasat: Sir, another issue which we haven't discussed so far is child health. In my opinion, child health is as important as any other aspect considered for child protection so far.

Teacher: Farasat, you are right. As you know the health of a child is of prime importance for parents in particular and for a nation in general. A child's physical and mental health, both are important.

Saleem: Sir, how can we ensure child health?

Teacher: A child should be given balanced diet, adequate shelter, immunization, and a healthy living environment in order to protect his or her physical health.

Farasat: What about a child's mental health, Sir?

Teacher: It is necessary in this regard that a family supports a child by providing

unconditional love, opportunity to play with other children, safe and sound surroundings, appropriate guidance and instructive discipline. Moreover, family should nurture a child's confidence and self-esteem. The availability of encouraging teachers and supportive caretakers should also be ensured for a child's protection.

Well, both of you have asked so many questions about child abuse and how to protect it. But you, perhaps, have forgotten to mention the role of social media in this regard.

(Saleem and Farasat both raise their hands out of astonishment.)

Oh, sorry Sir, we really forgot to talk about social media.

Farasat: Sir, as you are aware, social media is very active nowadays. Recently, a wave of child abuse has arisen. People are using social media for expressing their views about these tragic incidents. What is your view about the role of social media and its influence on children's lives with reference to child abuse and protection?

Teacher: Social media is quickly evolving in front of our eyes and it is almost impossible to reject and hide from this new form of media.

Saleem: Our whole class is already extensively using social media. Almost all the classmates are connected with one another on Facebook etc.

Teacher: Certainly, social media is an important part of socialization within peer groups. It is now also used for the marketing and motivation of people so that they can become a part of a larger community. Social media is undeniably changing the way one communicates and how one finds and shares information.

Farasat: Sir, both of us use Twitter and Facebook. It is very interesting and has become a sort of hobby for us.

Teacher: With these advances in technology, one can share things about oneself and the world.

Farasat: Sir, we have made a lot of friends through Facebook and prior to social media we had to communicate and share personally with our friends.

Teacher: So, you will be well aware that these social media sites offer adolescents new ways to approach communication and entertainment and the long term effects are still unknown. Therefore, parents should be more aware of this new media and what it offers, both good and bad, for our children.

Saleem: Sir, you have referred to the long term effects of social media but what urgently

required is to find out the impact of social media on a child's life with reference to child abuse. This is the need of the hour keeping in mind the recent tragic incidents of child abuse.

Farasat: Sir, media is regularly reporting incidents of child abuse. Social media, for its part, is extensively used by its users for sharing their views.

Teacher: It should be known that social media can affect the mental health of teens. Those teens who use social media tend to be more antisocial and aggressive.

Saleem: This is an eye opener for us.

Teacher: You must also be alert about paedophiles who use the internet to lure young people.

Farasat: Sir, what is the role of parents in such a situation?

Teacher: Parents can use technology that blocks access to bad content on the internet but must be aware that this technology does not replace their supervision or guidance.

Saleem: Sir, what else can they do to protect their children?

Teacher: Wise parents will learn how to protect their children by immersing themselves in the media and taking advice from many resources aimed at protecting children, while allowing them to reap the rich benefits in a safe environment.

Saleem: Sir, media is also reporting increasing incidents of juvenile delinquency along with those of child abuse.

Farasat: Sir, what has gone wrong with our society? Where are our traditions? Has our family system broken?

Teacher: Well, you should know that committing crimes by those people who have not reached adulthood or the age of maturity, is considered juvenile delinquency.

Saleem: Sir, what are the main causes of juvenile delinquency?

Teacher: Poverty, illiteracy, family issues such as broken homes through abandonment or divorce, outside influences in the forms of drug use, hardship of physical or mental disability faced by a teen, peer pressure, influences and the negative role of mass media and technology due to the exposure of teens to everything through social media.

Farasat: Sir, which one of them is the main cause?

Teacher: Poverty. Actually it is the poverty which drives them into criminal acts for survival. Most of our youth commit crimes due to poverty.

Farasat: Sir, is there any other cause?

Teacher: Juveniles detention in jail with adult criminals is another cause.

Saleem: Sir, how can the situation be changed in favour of juvenile delinquents?

Teacher: Juveniles should not be tried with criminals because juveniles are immature and their decision making capability is not fully developed. Their imprisonment with adults is the cause of a bigger risk to society.

Farasat: Sir, is there any treatment for the victim of child abuse?

Teacher: Yes, there is treatment such as counselling and psychotherapies for such victims. The most important is emotional support and caring behavior from the family. It should never blame the child for this type of mishap. A psychologist can perform very well in this regard otherwise it can create a lifelong effect on the abused child. It can hinder his/her academic performance as well as social skills, for example, academic achievement, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships and its impact can last for the whole life. After proper treatment, the victim can perform very well in every field of life and live a happy and healthy life. The treatment for such kind of trauma may be received from the hospitals.

Farasat and Saleem: Sir, thanks a lot for this valuable information.

Teacher: I hope that both of you have fully grasped all the aspects of this sensitive and vital issue. You must keep in mind a hadith of Hazrat Muhammad (ﷺ) who said, "He is not one of us who does not have mercy on our young ones and does not respect our elders".

(Farasat and Saleem say Allah Hafiz and leave the teacher's room)

NOTES

Words Explained:

pensive:	thinking deeply, often of sad or melancholic things
good heavens:	used informally to express surprise, anger
explosive:	a substance that can explode
asylum:	any refuge
migration:	moving from one place to another

self-esteem:	self-respect
immersing:	absorbing deeply
kidnapping:	taking somebody away or detaining illegally
malnutrition:	inadequate nourishment
bruises:	injuries (to body tissue) without breaking the skin but make a mark on it
adult:	grown-up
paedophiles:	a person sexually attracted to children
juvenile:	childish or related to young people
delinquency:	failure to perform one's duty

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. What type of news was there in the newspaper?
2. Why did Farasat and Saleem become sad after reading the news?
3. Describe the four categories of the child abuse.
4. How can we overcome child abuse?
5. What are the basic rights of children in Islam?
6. What are the threats to the children living in war-zones of the world?
7. How can parents, teachers and media perform their duties to eliminate this evil of child abuse from the society?



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