

EMPOWERING PARENTS TO EDUCATE GIRLS ON PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE: INSIGHTS FROM ANITA NAIR'S *EATING WASPS*¹

CAPACITANDO OS PAIS PARA EDUCAR AS MENINAS
SOBRE A PREVENÇÃO DO ABUSO SEXUAL:
PERCEPÇÕES DE ANITA NAIR, *EATING WASPS*

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Abstract: Innocence, curiosity, and limitless possibility characterize childhood when developing minds embark on self-discovery. However, among the sunny childhood sceneries, there is a sobering reality that should worry everyone: child sexual abuse is a widespread problem. Numerous children's lives are long-shadowed by these sinister and covert phenomena, which leave lasting effects that go well beyond their formative years. Parents are the primary caregivers and role models to children. They have a unique responsibility to provide comprehensive and age-appropriate education on sexual abuse. In light of the escalating prevalence of sexual abuse incidents globally, it has become increasingly imperative to equip girls with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves. This paper delves into various aspects of parental involvement in educating girls on sexual abuse, including communication, awareness, and prevention strategies. By assuming this crucial role, parents can empower their daughters, contributing to the larger goal of creating a society where girls are safe, protected, and capable of leading healthy lives. Anita Nair delineated this concept in most of her notable works. The present research paper aims to conclude her recent work, *Eating Wasps*.

Key Words: Girl Child protection; Parents support; Educating the caregivers; sexual abuse.

Resumo: Inocência, curiosidade e possibilidades ilimitadas caracterizam a infância quando as mentes em desenvolvimento embarcam na autodescoberta. No entanto, entre os cenários ensolarados da infância, existe uma realidade preocupante que deveria preocupar a todos: o abuso sexual infantil é um problema generalizado. A vida de inúmeras crianças é obscurecida por estes fenômenos sinistros e encobertos, que deixam efeitos duradouros que vão muito além dos seus anos de formação. Os pais são os principais cuidadores e modelos para as crianças. Eles têm a responsabilidade única de fornecer educação abrangente e adequada à idade sobre abuso sexual. À luz da crescente prevalência de incidentes de abuso sexual em todo o mundo, tornou-se cada vez mais imperativo dotar as raparigas de conhecimentos e ferramentas para se protegerem. Este artigo investiga vários aspectos do envolvimento dos pais na educação das meninas sobre o abuso sexual, incluindo estratégias de comunicação, conscientização e prevenção. Ao assumirem este papel crucial, os pais podem capacitar as suas filhas, contribuindo para o objetivo mais amplo de criar uma

sociedade onde as raparigas estejam seguras, protegidas e capazes de levar uma vida saudável. Anita Nair delineou esse conceito na maioria de suas obras notáveis. O presente trabalho de pesquisa visa concluir seu recente trabalho, *Eating Wasps*.

Palavras-chave: Proteção das meninas; Apoio aos pais; Educação dos cuidadores; abuso sexual.

1 Introduction

Sexual abuse is a pervasive and alarming issue affecting individuals across all age groups and genders. However, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, making it crucial to empower them with knowledge and awareness to protect themselves. Educating girls on sexual abuse not only helps prevent victimization but also equips them with the skills to recognize and respond to abusive situations. Parents play a fundamental role in a child's life, serving as their primary caregivers and influencers. They are the first individuals a child turns to for support, guidance, and protection. As such, parents have a unique responsibility to provide comprehensive education on sensitive topics such as sexual abuse. By creating a safe and open environment for discussion, parents can foster trust and help their girl children develop the necessary skills and resilience to navigate and confront potential instances of sexual abuse. Parents' active involvement is vital in shaping their daughters' understanding, attitudes, and responses to sexual abuse. Existing research suggests that child sexual abuse education programs have limited long-term impact, particularly in addressing the complex social and cultural factors that perpetuate this issue. (Lalor, 2004)

Parental involvement emerges as a critical component, as parents are uniquely positioned to tailor educational efforts to their children's needs and foster open communication and trust. (Kenny *et al.*, 2008) By empowering parents, we can create a more holistic approach to sexual abuse prevention that goes beyond traditional classroom-based interventions.

Anita Nair has the realm of thought to project societal evil in her style. She has been focused and composed to bring out the truth irrespective of the consequences. Her recent publication, *Eating Wasps*, is a revelation to society in terms of child sexual abuse. Although the novel deals with women's empowerment, the quest for self-identity, and societal evils like acid attacks. This paper is aimed to focus on child sexual abuse. In light of the escalating prevalence of sexual abuse incidents globally, it has become increasingly imperative to equip girls with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves. Although the exact number of children abused online remains unknown, according to INHOPE's 2018 Annual Report, there was a **76% increase** in reports of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) from 2017 to 2018 (INHOPE, 2018), particularly girls, worldwide. Despite efforts to address this problem through education programs aimed at children, the effectiveness of such interventions remains uncertain (MacMillan & Wathen, 2013). Recognizing the crucial role that parents play in shaping children's understanding and response to sexual abuse, this research paper explores ways to empower parents to educate their daughters on

prevention strategies, drawing insights from the literary work "Eating Wasps" by Anita Nair.

2 Literature Review

The plot of *Eating Wasps* tells how many sorts of abuse on women's hearts from childhood to adulthood. Children and women are victims of men's gender politics in their culture, which negatively impacts not only their physical but also emotional well-being, regardless of other factors (Suganya & Vijayakumar, 2023). There are no hard facts concerning the perpetrators and no discussion of any contemporary psychological coping techniques (Kumar, 2017). Children who are sexually assaulted frequently suffer from feelings of guilt and humiliation. They can think that they caused the abuse or that they are somehow to blame for it (Smith *et al.*, 2016). According to the statistics of the UNICEF India EVAC Programme Strategy, although gender-based violence (GBV) can affect both boys and girls, gender norms can result in significantly different protection risks for these two groups because of differences in social status, duties, and expectations. A specialized system for little girls must be maintained. This system must acknowledge and address the unique vulnerability of girls and provide them with specialized skills and services. The report shows that 80% of the victims are girls (UNICEF, 2020).

Nancy Susan Philip, in "A study on the role of parents in the empowerment of their children against child sexual abuse" stated that Child sexual abuse is one of the significant foreboding nightmares of any parent. As much

as they believe that their child will never be a victim, the reality is that any child is vulnerable to it. As the maxim goes, "Prevention is better than cure" (Philip, 2022). Lekha Bahadur Gurung conducted a descriptive study where the researcher brought exciting insights about child sexual abuse and that it is the responsibility of the parents to educate their children regarding child abuse. This social evil is spreading its wings because of child neglect and emotional abuse (Gurung, 2015).

Child sexual abuse, as defined by the Juvenile Justice Act of 1986, refers to the involvement of a child (under the age of eighteen for girls and sixteen for boys) in sexual interactions with an adult who is older than the child and possesses a position of power, control, or influence over the child. This adult may be someone known to the child, such as an acquaintance or even an unknown person. The primary purpose of such interactions is to satisfy the sexual desires of the perpetrator or another individual. To effectively address this issue, it is crucial to comprehend the underlying causes of sexual abuse and recognize its associated factors (Code, 2023).

3 Insights from Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps*

Nair's storytelling is gripping and compelling, weaving multiple narratives that intertwine and unfold throughout the pages. The characters are deeply layered and flawed, making them relatable and engaging. The author delves into the themes of love, loss, trauma, and resilience, delving into the depths

of the human psyche with sensitivity and nuance. One of the central themes explored in *Eating Wasps* is child sexual abuse. Nair depicted societal evil through the character Megha, who is a school-going girl. She is blessed with a beautiful family. Her emotional connection with an outsider makes her get into the trap. However, she has loving and caring parents. She has not always been welcomed for several reasons. Every family has a combination of responsibilities. In the same way, Megha's parents are busy working. Meanwhile, she was emotionally connected to a truck driver named Prem.

Cultural, social, and traditional beliefs that have been passed down through the generations have a significant impact on Indian parenting. Even though India's diversified environment allows for a wide range of parenting approaches, several similar traits frequently characterize Indian parenting. The most common of all diversity is discipline. It takes a combination of affection, authority, and unambiguous expectations to sustain discipline. To promote discipline, parents may combine corrective actions with positive reinforcement. This discipline could be parents' expectations towards their children to be better citizens. Parents expect them to uphold the legacy of the family. That could be an honorary code. It is evident in every family that proper communication between parents and children is missing. Especially the topics related to sexual content is an alien science for the children. Parents hardly had discussions on this topic. However, parents expect their children to behave

honestly. This is precisely what Anita Nair portrayed in her book *Eating Wasps*. Megha was trapped by a truck driver who had a soothing smile and loving words: “No one had called her a doll, ever. I am a bommakutty, she sang under her breath. Megha is a bommakutty, la laa...” (Nair, 2018, p. 27).

Usually, Megha goes to school by car. After getting attracted to the truck driver's smile and most caring words, she convinced her parents to permit her to go by the truck along with schoolchildren. The truck made Megha sit on his lap. Her brother complained to her mother about this. Her mother starts behaving like a typical Indian mother, frightening Megha with her words and declaring an ultimatum that does not sit on anybody's lap: “‘Why?’ Megha asked meticulously. Mummy paused. Then she said, ‘Because I am your mother, and I say so’” (Nair, 2018, p. 29).

Megha followed her mother's advice and decided not to sit on the truck driver's lap. However, the truck driver started playing with her emotionally. He is taking care of everyone in the truck and barely notices Megha. This hurts her badly. She was unable to concentrate on her studies. She experienced heaviness in her heart and pain in her stomach. Finally, she realized that the truck driver was not happy with the way she behaved while coming to school as the driver expected her to sit on his lap. She apologized to him by saying sorry,

'Sorry, Uncle, She said in a small voice.

Really? he asked.

Megha nodded. Really. God Promise.

Kiss me then, he said quietly.

She leaned forward to peck his cheek.

No, no, he whispered. Here, he pointed out his lips.
(Nair, 2018, p. 31)

There, the story takes a new diversion. Until now, Megha is the happiest child in the class. The luckiest in the family. One incident changed her life. She does have access to explain what has happened to her. When the same thing was repeated to her, she offended him by biting his hand when he held her. She does not report this incident to anyone, either in the family or in the school. However, the perpetrator used this opportunity to display it as an act of sympathy. He created a scene in which Megha is involved in a fight with another girl in the truck while coming home from school. When he intervenes to calm the situation, Megha is rude and bites his hand. The story became a talk among the children and went to Megha's class teacher. The class teacher called Megha's parents and explained the same thing. Megha's mother was so upset about her behavior with the truck driver and forced her to apologize to him. When Megha tried to say something, the entire family did not allow her to say anything. She pleaded with her parents not to send her school on the truck. Her father agreed to her request but told her to board the truck for one last time to apologize to the truck driver. She tried and finally agreed to travel by the truck for the last time,

I am sorry, Uncle, ' she said, looking him in the eye.

“Are you sorry? He asked.

She bit her lip. Yes,' she lied.

"Then show me you are sorry," he said, pulling her to the back of the truck. He pulled down the tarpaulin flap with his other hand and rolled up to the truck's roof. (Nair, 2018, p. 38)

4 Discussion

Megha has to experience an ordinary childhood like the other children, but one act of innocence throws her into utter distress. She believed the false love was affection. She is unable to behave as healthy as earlier. She is unable to enjoy her childhood as much as her friends. She is undergoing stress and trauma. Kumar and Krishan, in a study, found that Megha's sexual experiences have permanently harmed her psychology (Kumar & Krishan, 2023). The reasons behind the sexual abuse of Megha have several facets. It encompasses communication, addressing girls' concerns and dispelling myths, providing accurate information about sexual abuse, and creating a safe and non-judgmental environment for disclosure.

Growing frank and open dialogues is one of the most essential parts of parental engagement in teaching girl children about sexual assault. Girls should feel free to talk to their parents about delicate subjects like sexual abuse in a protected environment. Parents may foster open communication and build trust by starting these talks early. This gives females the confidence to voice their worries, ask questions, and look for advice. If Megha had been educated on these grounds, she would not have been prone to abuse if her mother explained about the CSA. Megha would be able to understand the trap in the first attempt.

Daughters should get accurate and age-appropriate information about sexual abuse from their parents. This includes outlining the several types of abuse, including verbal, physical, and emotional abuse, in addition to the idea of consent. Girls should be taught the difference between proper and unacceptable behavior and the importance of having the autonomy to set personal limits and say "no". If either of Megha's parents had done this, she might have been saved from the biggest problem of society.

Girls should feel comfortable sharing any experiences or worries they may have about sexual assault in a safe, accepting setting that their parents provide. Girls should feel confident that their experiences and feelings are valid and will be supported and listened to. Parents must take the necessary actions to protect their daughter's safety and well-being and respond to disclosures with compassion and empathy. This involves getting expert assistance and filing incident reports as needed. Suppose Megha has been given this kind of support system by her parents. She would not be a victim of sexual abuse.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of the research paper was established in the discussion. Parents play a crucial role in preventing sexual abuse among the girls. Parental participation is critical in preventing sexual abuse of girl children in particular. Parents may equip their daughters to protect themselves and face the world confidently by implementing prevention

techniques, encouraging open communication, and giving correct information. Parents' unwavering support and ongoing communication help to create a safe culture where girls can have open conversations at home to flourish without having to worry about being sexually abused.

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