

Original Research Article

Parent's Attitude Towards Child Abuse and Neglect: Is It an Alarming Time for the Parents to Act for Their Own Children Safety? - A Questionnaire Study

Tahseen Sultana¹, S. Ojass Kumar²¹Consultant Pedodontist, Hyderabad, Telangana, India²Senior Lecturer, Department of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopaedics, Sri Balaji Dental College, Hyderabad, Telangana, India*Corresponding Author
Dr. Tahseen Sultana.

Abstract: Child abuse or child maltreatment is one of the most prevalent global problems. Today children are no longer safe in schools, on roads and in their very respective homes. Parents play a very important role in providing a secure and stress free life to their kids. The most important factor is mother's attitude and behavior toward this injustice being done to the child. With this background, the present study was conducted to assess the knowledge of mothers regarding the prevention of child abuse, find association between the knowledge of mothers and selected baseline data. Four types of child abuse i.e., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, psychological abuse, and neglect have been identified by World Health Organization (WHO). The study sample consisted of 100 mothers of children studying in Government schools, Hyderabad who agreed to participate in the study. Analysis of demographic variables shows that highest (35%) of the mothers are in the age group of 26-30 years and about 24% of them were in the age group of 31-35 years. Majorities (44%) of the mothers were with 2 children, 41% of the mothers with 1 child, and only 2% mothers with more than 3 children. Among the group majority (52%) of the mothers were having 1 male child and 55% were having one female child. The data also showed that 47% of them have at least one child below 14 years. The study findings revealed that most of the mothers (60%) had excellent knowledge regarding prevention of child abuse, about (34%) of them had good knowledge, about (6%) had average knowledge and none of the mothers had poor knowledge.

Keywords: Mother, child Abuse and Neglect (CAN), Perception.

INTRODUCTION

A child is nothing but a miniature adult below the age of full physical development. It is during this period that the child enjoys his/her childhood. There are no uniform or laid down definitive scales to measure the happenings during this period in words or texts. It should be felt or executed by parents or caretakers. Failure or deviations in parent behavior or attitudes towards the child outcomes as child abuse or neglect (CAN) (Subramanian, E. M. G. *et al.*, 2005).

World Health Organization (WHO) in 1999 has defined child abuse and neglect as every kind of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship, trust or power (Manea, S. *et al.*, 2007).

Failure by a caretaker either deliberately or through negligence or inability, to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care provided that such inability is not solely due to inadequate economic resources or to a handicapping condition is defined as neglect (Zavras, A. L., & Pai, L. H. 1997).

Child abuse, though a globally emerging problem does not have a clear understanding about the extent, magnitude and its growing trends. In India, various and newer forms of child abuse has been emerging mainly due to drastic changes brought about by the growing complexities of life and socio-economic transitions which has a serious impact on physical and psychosocial development of children. Various attempts have been undertaken by Government of India

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to understand the extent, dimensions and intensity of the problem which includes the National Study on Child Abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2005, 2007 showed that the most prevalent form of child abuse was physical abuse (66%) followed by sexual abuse (50%) and emotional abuse (50%) (Thangavelu, S.N. 2016; Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India 2007). This presents an alarming situation to create awareness and educate the parents especially mothers about importance of each child in the family and associated abuse and neglect. The dental professional's may act as the first line of defense for the child patient as 50% of injuries occur mainly in head and neck area which can be easily (Needleman, H.L. 1986). Hence the present study was conducted to assess the perception, attitude, knowledge, and experience about child abuse and neglect in mothers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional survey was carried out on mothers whose children were studying in Government Schools, Hyderabad. Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethical committee of the institute. Two hundred participants were interviewed among which the final sample consisted of 100 participants who met inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample population.

The knowledge of mothers was assessed by a structured questionnaire which consisted of 21 items on child abuse depicting three major areas as follows

- Prevention of child abuse
- Concepts of child abuse
- Signs and symptoms of child abuse

Reliability of the Questionnaire:

Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient formula and test retest method were used to find the reliability of the questionnaire. It was found to be 0.88 indicating the reliability of questionnaire.

Inclusion criteria:

- Mothers of children studying first to tenth class.
- Mothers who understand English or Telugu

Exclusion criteria:

- Women who are not psychologically and physically fit
- Mothers who are not willing to participate in the study.

RESULTS

The data collected were analyzed based on the objectives of the study. The data was presented under three variables:

- Section I: Description of Demographic variables
- Section II: Knowledge of mothers regarding Prevention of child abuse.
- Section III: Association between knowledge on Prevention of child abuse and demographic variables

Description of demographic variables

Mothers in the age group of 26-30 years constituted the highest variable (35%) on analyzing the demographic variables followed by mothers aged 31-35 years (24%). Most of the parents (44%) reported having 2 children followed by 41% having 1 child and only 2 % having more than 3 children. In terms of gender, 55% of mothers were having one female child and 52% were having one male child. Children less than 14 years of age were seen in 47 percent of the population.

Majority (82%) of mothers were found to be having knowledge about prevention of child abuse through various sources. But 18% of mothers were unaware as they did not receive any information regarding the same. Newspapers were found to be the best method to create awareness among mothers. Other methods included television, internet, and various school programs.

Knowledge of mothers regarding prevention of child abuse

The level of knowledge of mothers was assessed by questionnaire method. The findings showed that 60 % of mothers had excellent level of knowledge, 34% have good knowledge and none of the mothers showed poor knowledge (Table 1). The overall mean of the knowledge score of mothers on prevention of child abuse is 16.72 ± 2.947 . The mean value of the knowledge score of mothers on concepts of child abuse is 6.71 ± 1.662 . Mean value of knowledge of mothers on signs and symptoms of child abuse is 1.78 ± 0.413 , and knowledge of mothers on prevention of child abuse is 8.25 ± 1.457 . There is no significant association found between the knowledge scores of mothers with the selected demographic variable.

TABLES

Table 1: Knowledge score and grading of mothers on prevention of child abuse

N=100

Knowledge score	Grading level of knowledge	Frequency	%
17-21	Excellent	60	60
12-16	Good	34	34
7-11	Average	6	6
<7	Poor	0	0

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that most of the mothers (60%) had excellent knowledge regarding

prevention of child abuse, about (34%) of them had good knowledge, about (6%) had average knowledge and none of the mothers had poor knowledge. This is in accordance with study done in china to assess the Chinese parent's knowledge, attitudes and communication practices with their children about child sexual abuse. The results revealed that more than 95% of parents agreed that educative programs should be encouraged at elementary schools to prevent child sexual abuse. Moreover the parents were willing to have their children participate in such programs. The basic knowledge about characteristics of perpetrators and non-physical consequences of child sexual abuse were lacking in many parents. It was concluded that future prevention programs should include community wide efforts to educate adults to ensure that parental advice is accurate and hopefully effective (Chen, J. *et al.*, 2007). A similar study was conducted in India to assess the awareness and views on child abuse and neglect in urban and rural areas. The results showed that the awareness responded from urban samples seemed to be more knowledgeable than the rural sample in the area of rights of their child (Marquet, V. A.T. *et al.*, 2007).

The present study showed that mothers' attitude toward child abuse was negative as most of the mothers (60%) had good knowledge about child abuse. They disagreed with physical or emotional child abuse and neglect. A similar study has been conducted by Agha Bakhshi *et al.*, (2005). Which showed those mothers' attitudes toward child abuse was moderate. But the findings of study done by Qasem *et al.*, (1998) were not consistent with the results of the present study. It showed that 60% of parents agreed that physical punishment is a method of discipline (Qasem, F. S. *et al.*, 1998). Threatening and frightening of children and forcing them to completely do their parents' commands, are considered as child abuse and parents should be given the necessary knowledge about it (Barnett, D. *et al.*, 1991; McGee, R.A., & Wolfe, D.A. 1991). Mothers' educational level was also related to their negative attitudes toward child abuse as shown by Luster and McAdoo abuse (Luster, T., & McAdoo, H. 1996). Agha Bakhshi *et al.*, (2005) found similar results in their study and showed that mothers' educational level plays an important role on the desirability of their attitudes (Agha Bakhshi, *et al.*, 2005).

A child's overall development needs strength and support in all forms from the parents. Parents on other side unknowingly abuse their own children due to lack of awareness and inability to differentiate between discipline and abuse. Most of the situation they ignore to take preventive measures where their children could be a victim of child abuse. Thus the present study affirmed the need for making mothers aware about child abuse and how it can be prevented.

There were few limitations to this study.

- The study was limited to the samples taken from Government Schools, Hyderabad
- The study could have been done on more samples for larger generalization.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the knowledge of parents regarding child abuse was satisfactory. However, a significant proportion of parents still had poor knowledge in context of general child abuse and child sexual abuse.

CONDUCTING

Various awareness raising activities especially focusing on the general abuse and abuse of sexual nature and nationwide surveys is recommended as the the actual scenario and occurrence throughout the nation is still found to be under the wraps. It is in the home, that mothers must start tackling the problem of child abuse. Interventions are needed to bring about change in the ways family members behave towards children in the home.

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ETHICAL ISSUES

None to be declared.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study.

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