



Knowledge, Attitude, And Practices Regarding Child Sex Abuse Among School Students

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ABSTRACT

Context/Background: Child Sexual Abuse is a broad term used to describe sexual offences against children. Both genders are at risk of sexual abuse. Very few studies have conducted to assess the knowledge among school students. The study was conducted for documenting knowledge and attitude of child sexual abuse and socio-demographic profile among school children.

Methodology: We enrolled 128 school students after getting permission from school principal. First, we had filled pre-designed semi structure questionnaire about their knowledge and attitude about types of touch and what to do if it happens. Participation in the research was strictly voluntary and all the data were kept strictly confidential.

Results: All the participants were girls (100%). Majority of our participants were of 10 years (95.1%) of age. Current study revealed that very few participants were knowing about good touch and bad touch. Most of the participants didn't know about the private parts of the body and similarly most of the participants didn't know what to do if anything happens to them.

Conclusions: Present study recommends generating awareness about child sexual abuse among children, parents, and general population, via training through well-structured program.

Keywords: Good Touch, Bad Touch, School students

INTRODUCTION

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society as defined by World Health Organisation"¹. It is a broad term used to describe sexual offences against children. For easy understanding, when a person involves the child in sexual activities for his/her sexual gratification, commercial gain, or both. Section- 2(1) (d) defines a "child" – as any person below the age of 18 years is considered as child sexual abuse².

Child sexual abuse is the biggest kept secret in India because of societal denial, ignorance, and silence owing to the discomfort generated out of acknowledgement. It is a global problem that occurs across gender, caste, religious, ethnic, occupational, and socio-economic groups. It is threatening a child's right to protection as defined under different sections of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. CSA directly threatens Article 19 (which describes the child's right to protection from abuse) and Article 34 (which discusses the child's right to protection from sexual abuse specifically) of the Convention³. The family kept girl abuse hidden under the guise of family honour and issue of purity. The

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abuse of boys is often ignored because sometimes we consider it as impossible.

Children are often targets to abuse due to their vulnerability and fear to show the nature of abuse and absence of knowledge about abuse. Child abuse has always been a topic that is discussing normally among population, especially in the Asian region⁴. Child abuse and crimes against children has increases over the years. According to one report 33098 cases of crimes against children were reported during 2011, which was 24% more than 2010. According to another reports 53.22% abused children reported to have faced one or more forms of sexual abuse⁴. Another study found that total 148,185 cases of crime against children were registered during 2019, showing an increase of 4.5% over 2018 (141,764 cases). Moreover, major crime reported under 'Crime against Children' during 2019 were Kidnapping & Abduction (46.6%) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (35.3%) including child rape. The crime rate registered per lakh children population was 33.2 in 2019 in comparison with 31.8 in 2018. (CII-2019)

"The damage is particularly severe in the context of sexual abuse, particularly as the stigma and shame surrounding child sexual abuse in all countries usually leaves the child dealing with the harm in solitude. Loss of confidence and belief in the human beings closest to the child can instil feelings of fear, suspicion, uncertainty, and emotional isolation. He or she may never again feel safe or secure in the company of the parent or family member who perpetrated the violence³.

Surat is a city in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Located at the mouth of the Tapti River, it used to be a large seaport. It is now the commercial and economic center in South Gujarat, and one of the largest urban areas of western India. Surat will be the world's fastest growing city from 2019 to 2035, according to a study conducted by Economic Times. According to the 2011 India census, the population of Surat is 4,466,826. Surat has an average literacy rate of around 88%, higher than the national average of 79.5%, Male literacy around 92% and Female literacy is around 84%.

The whole Surat city has been divided into 7 zones.⁵ Neglect of child sexual abuse has happened in society and community, but in the professional arena as well. Therefore, there is a need of information on child sexual abuse in Surat. With this background, current study had been conducted for knowledge and attitude of child sexual abuse and socio-demographic profile among school children.

METHODOLOGY

In present study, students of 4th and 5th standard of schools within Surat municipal corporation included, as their curriculum had not covered about human anatomy. Out of total schools, present study had en-

rolled two schools after getting permission from head of schools during January 2019. In present study, 128 female students took part, and their primary data were collected on Predesigned semi structural questionnaire by researcher, which was anonymous. Questionnaire was filled by researcher. After that an interactive orientation was conducted, where discussion done about the issues related to child sexual abuse and gave information on UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially on articles about abuse. Author had also given information about good touch and bad touch. The students were encouraged to tell their trusted adults to seek help in case of occurrence of abuse. Author had also emphasized that abuse was never a child's fault.

Present study had followed strict professional and ethical standards at each stage of research in view of sensitivity of this topic and young age of the respondents. All measures were undertaken to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Present study had not asked anything which reveals personal identification. In case the respondents wanted to speak to the researchers after the study suitable measures were taken to protect their identity and ensured privacy and comfort, within the available setting. Their participation was strictly voluntary. Students had given choice to stop answering the questionnaire at any time in between if they wished to. All students were informed about the background and purpose of the study. They were made aware of the support systems, which were in place in case they wanted to discuss the study further. After data collection, all the data were entered in MS Excel spreadsheet and analysed with the help of MS Excel. Qualitative data were explained with frequency and percentage.

RESULTS

In current study, total 128 female student were included, where majority were 10 years old (95.1%), followed by 11 years old (4.9%). More than half (55%) participants were belonging to nuclear family, while 45% belongs to Joint family.

A KAP questioner on sexual abuse had found that majority of students (92.2%) were not knowing about good and bad touch while 5.4% students know about good and bad touch and 2.4% students don't know anything. Though none of the students were aware about private parts of the human body and poor knowledge about human anatomy, different type of touch among participants and what to do in case of anything occurred them.

Current study reported that most of participants (97.6%) didn't knew about what to do in case of bed touch, while only 2.4% were knew about what to do if someone do bed touch to you. In this study, when participants were asked about their safe circle, only 3 participants (2.4%) reported that they knew about safe circle.

DISCUSSION

In India, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 (which regards any sexual activity with a child below 18 years of a crime) describes various forms of sexual offenses⁶. It defines an array of sexual activities like fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, exhibitionism, involving a child in prostitution or pornography, or online child luring by cyber-predators^{7,8}. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, it is extremely difficult to access this population of victims of CSA for research. It is also affected by socio-cultural traditions and often goes unreported, as a culture of privacy, fear of indignity, and social humiliation prevent the disclosure of such crimes. Certain forms of CSA, namely, like touching, fondling of child's genitals, or breasts are falsely perceived as minor types and ignored more often. Indians are contributing around 19% (440 million) of the world's population of children.

Survey conducted by United Nations International Children Education Fund during 2005–2013 found that CSA in Indigenous girls was 42%. Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) of India conducted study in 2007, in which they had interviewed 125,000 children in 13 Indian states. They revealed that the prevalence of all forms of child abuse was extremely high (physical abuse [66%], sexual abuse [50%], and emotional abuse [50%]). In this survey, it had been found that boys were equally affected and more than 20% were subjected to severe forms of sexual abuse that included: sexual assault, making the child fondle private parts, making the child exhibit private body parts, and being photographed in the nude. It had been revealed that majority of the abusers were people known to child or in position of trust and responsibility. Several reports indicate that neighbors, friends, close relatives, and acquaintances, and employers at workplaces were commonest abusers^{9–15}.

Numerous studies had been conducted to study the knowledge of child sexual abuse among teacher, health care professionals, lawyers and police. Present study had been planned for creating awareness among those who suffered this catastrophic in their life. A study by Mathews et al had reported that teachers with training (at either or both preservice and in-service levels) had higher confidence in their ability to identify indicators of child sexual abuse, and higher self-rated knowledge of the indicators of child sexual abuse¹⁶. It had been recommended that child mal-treatment was a cyclic disease, so it should be prevented, identified, and reported with utmost urgency as abused children often become abusive parent¹⁷. It was very well documented that teachers (98%) had better knowledge than the other group¹⁸.

There were many studies who have focused the parent's knowledge about child sexual abuse. A study conducted by Simi Mohan et al had found good proportion of mothers who had moderately adequate

knowledge (73%) and attitude (68.4%), while only (27.4%) had moderately adequate practice about prevention of child sexual abuse. They had also reported significant association between certain demographic variables such as maternal age ($p=0.002$), marital status ($p=0.006$), place of residence ($p=0.070$), mother's occupation ($p=0.006$) with the knowledge, attitude, and practice of mothers about prevention of child sexual abuse.

CONCLUSION

Child sexual abuse is one of the most fundamental violations of children's rights. Children would be protected by adults and systems, including parents, families, teachers, community, and the State. Current study found poor knowledge about basics of anatomy as well as perception about touch and what to do if someone do that. Present study recommends generating awareness about child sexual abuse among children, parents, and general population, via training through well-structured program. We need to emphasis role of teachers and doctors to prevent it to happening as both these professionals are first to look for victim. Our teachers should be aware about touch and its perception and capable of doing needful by including this issue in training curriculum of Teachers. Present study had been conducted as part of pilot project; hence small sample size was limitation. This study was not financed by any institute or organization. All the cost was born by researcher.

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