

Original Research Article

Assessment of knowledge and attitude about child abuse amongst parents visiting a tertiary care hospital in Bengaluru, India

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Received: 26 February 2020

Accepted: 30 March 2020

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child abuse is one of the problems in our society which still needs to be highlighted for general public in our country. It is a pressing human right issue and public health concern and the efforts to assess the awareness and mass education is very limited. Current study aimed to access knowledge and attitude for child abuse among parents attending a tertiary care hospital.

Methods: The study was conducted amongst parents visiting pediatric OPD at Kempegowda institute of medical sciences, Bengaluru. Total 200 Parents were required to answer a series of questionnaire and then was statically analyzed.

Results: It was seen that majority of parents lack knowledge regarding child abuse, 25% of parents believe that child abuse is just sexual violence, 23% parents thought that stubborn children can only be handled by physical punishment, 46% parents believed that only a girl child can be a victim of sexual abuse and only 19% had firm belief that boys can also be victim, 45% of parents believed that it is necessary to discuss with the child before making important decision concerning them, 35% parents were against the corporal punishment.

Conclusions: There is a need to evolve strategies to protect the children from abuse and the measures should address both boys and girls and minimize impact.

Keywords: Abuse, Child abuse, Knowledge, Parents

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a serious global public health problem with no any social, racial or ethnic boundaries. The WHO consultation on preventing child abuse distinguishes four types of child abuse that are physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional and psychological abuse and child negligence.¹ It can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with. It can affect child's normal social or psychological development leaving the child with psychological scars for lifetime.² It is very important to understand that child abuse is not only physical abuse, but it can be in the form of emotional abuse involving humiliating a child, coercive,

constant belittling, shaming, frequent yelling, threatening, or bullying of the child, making negative comparisons to others, rejecting and ignoring the child as punishment, having limited physical contact with the child (no signs of affection), or any other demeaning acts. 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.³ CSA includes the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of a child for prostitution, other unlawful sexual practices, or pornography.³ It is shocking to know that comprehensive

study on child abuse in India conducted by the ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India in 2007 found that 53% of child respondents had suffered one or other form of sexual abuse. It revealed that it began at the age of 5 year, increased after the age of 10 year with maximum incidence between 12 and 15 year, and then declined, and concluded that children in the preadolescent to adolescent age group constituted a high risk group for sexual abuse.⁴ This makes our country the home of one of the largest populations of child victims of child abuse. A study in New Delhi, among illiterate runaway adolescents, 62% boys experienced domestic violence, 72% reported physical abuse, and 35% reported being subjected to sexual abuse.⁵ 48% of college students in Puducherry reported being mocked because of their physical appearance; 56% reported being beaten during their childhood, with 13.4% of such cases requiring medical treatment; 10% reported being exposed to the private parts of another individual; and 6.4% reported being forced to expose their private parts to another individual.⁶

Studies in other countries have found socio-economic marginalization, poor family interactions, parental dysfunction, and neighbourhood violence to be the most predictive risk factors for childhood maltreatment.⁷ This study focus on knowledge of various forms of child abuse amongst parents and tries to focus on knowledge of parents regarding personal and social life of their child.

METHODS

This study was conducted at Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences, Bangalore (A tertiary care multispecialty hospital in south Bengaluru) from 1st December 2019 to 15th January 2020. Study included parents came at pediatrics OPD. 200 parents gave consent for the study.

With the help of questionnaire, required information was collected after having informed consent of respective parent. Same questionnaire was asked and sometime questions had to be explained, when they were unable to understand in their own language like Kannada, Hindi or English. But at the same time, hints or suggestions were totally avoided.

It was face to face interview and participation was completely voluntarily. A written informed consent was taken from the subjects before their recruitment in the study and those not willing to participate were excluded from the study. No two respondents were from same family. The questionnaire was divided in different sections. The questions in the questionnaire were 13 and were only regarding the parent- child relationship, various form of child abuse, male female differences and child self-esteem.

Statistical analysis

Information gathered was entered in Microsoft excel 2010 version and analyzed by percentage or frequencies and then presented as suitable tabular forms.

RESULTS

Among 25% of parents believe that child abuse is just sexual violence and 40% thought that there are other forms of child abuse also, 55% of parents were not okay to deprive the child of food for more than 8 hours as a punishment. 21% parents disagreed that children can get mental problems like depression and anxiety, 23% parents thought that stubborn children can only be handled by physical punishment, 29% parents disagreed that neglecting a child is a form of sexual abuse (Table 1).

Table 1: Different form of child abuse.

| Questions | Percentage | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| Do you think, child abuse is just sexual violence? | 21 | 19 | 35 | 12 | 13 |
| Is it fine if you do not give food to your child for more than 8 hours as a form of punishment? | 30 | 25 | 30 | 10 | 05 |
| Do you think physical harm can also be form of child abuse? | 9 | 13 | 22 | 23 | 33 |
| Do you think, children can get mental problems like anxiety and depression? | 9 | 12 | 32 | 33 | 14 |
| Is stubborn child can only be handled with physical punishment? | 25 | 14 | 38 | 18 | 05 |
| Do you think, neglecting a child is a form of child abuse? | 11 | 18 | 25 | 33 | 13 |

Table 2: Parent-child relationship.

| Questions | Percentage | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| Is it necessary to discuss with your child before making important decisions in family specially concerning them | 13 | 22 | 20 | 23 | 22 |
| | Never | Rarely | Frequently | Almost daily basis | |
| How often do you fight in front of your child | 36 | 44 | 13 | 07 | |

Table 3: Male and female differences.

| Questions | Percentage | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| Do you think only girl children are victim of sexual abuse? | 19 | 15 | 20 | 33 | 13 |
| Does career choices (Academic or otherwise) of male child matters more than that of female child? | 42 | 14 | 22 | 16 | 06 |

Table 4: Offending a child self-esteem.

| Questions | Percentage | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| Do you think, is it okay to verbally offend, yell, humiliate or create the feeling of unworthiness in a child as form of punishment? | 44 | 12 | 21 | 21 | 02 |

Table 5: Knowledge regarding the law.

| Questions | Parameters | Frequency |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| How much do you know about POCSO act? | Very well | 2 |
| | Know about basic guidelines | 26 |
| | Heard the name | 51 |
| | Don't know anything | 21 |

Table 6: Corporal punishment.

| Questions | Percentage | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| Are you in favor of corporal punishment? | 13 | 22 | 16 | 28 | 21 |

Among 20% parents agreed that they fight very frequently in front of their children and 36% of parents totally avoid in front of children. 45% of parents believed that it is necessary to discuss with the child before making important decision concerning them (Table 2).

Among 46% parents believed that only a girl child can be a victim of sexual abuse and only 19% had firm belief

that boys can also be victim, 22% of parents do not give importance to career of female child, but 56% of them do not agree with the same (Table 3).

Among 23% parents had opinion that it is okay to verbally offend or humiliate the child as a form of punishment (Table 4). Only 2% parents were well informed about POCSO (Protection of Children from

Sexual Offence) act, those were highly educated parents and 21% parents didn't have any clue (Table 5).

Among 35% parents were against the corporal punishment and 21% of parents were strongly in favor of corporal punishment (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The enormity of the child sexual abuse problem has been described as 'one of the most discouraging discoveries of our era' CSA is a global child health problem and has been associated with long term adverse effects on both physical and psychological health.⁸⁻¹⁴ Parental educational and occupational background and the income of the family are found to be directly related to the issue of child trafficking for sexual and commercial purposes. United Nations reported that in case of sexual abuse close family members are mostly responsible and it happens within the family.

Child abuse is common in India across all strata of society. Most children do not report the matter to anyone. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India in 2007 organized a comprehensive study to look into the prevalence and pattern of child abuse in India. The study was conducted in 26 districts from 13 states in India and the child respondents consisted of 12,447 children in the 5-18-year age group who belonged to five categories viz. children in family environment, children in schools, children in institutions, children at work and street children. The sample consisted of 3163 school going children with 25.48% adolescents in the 15-18-year age group. It was found that overall 52% of boys and 47% of girls in the 5-18-year age group had experienced one or other form of sexual abuse and the prevalence rate varied from state to state and also with the categories of the respondents.⁴

This study shows that only 40% of parents have clear idea about other forms of child abuse rather than sexual abuse alone. Out of remaining, 25% believe that sexual abuse is the only form of child abuse. This shows the extent of lack of knowledge among parents. Less than half (47%) of the parents think that a child can also get mental problems like anxiety and depression. We should understand their environment. They require special approach to understand their problems. Every time giving punishment cannot be the solution and moreover, by doing this, we are actually harming to them. In this study, 38% of the parents were not actually in the position to answer whether physical punishment is the only option to deal with stubborn child or not.

Creation of feeling of unworthiness in a child or frequent yelling or humiliation or neglect as a form of punishment may offend a child self-esteem and, in that way, they lose their self-confidence. Low intelligent quotient, motor problems like cerebral palsy, increased intensity to reactions, poor impulse control, less social

responsibility, more prone to later crime or drug abuse; there are the known long-term effects of child abuse or neglect. Every child is not the same. They have their different priorities and it is very important for care givers to consider their opinion specially before making any important decision concerning them. More than one-third of the parents in this study do not think so. Prioritising male child was the harsh reality of this society since ancient age, but things are changing gradually. In this study, more than half of the parents do not prioritise male child career than their female child. On the other hand, only one-third of the parents think that a male child can also be a victim of sexual abuse.

This study clearly shows that not even one third of the parents know the basic guidelines and provisions given in existing law regarding child sexual offence. Basic education to all the children, prevention of child exploitation, health care to working children should be in this priority. Laws for protection of children against all forms of abuse and exploitation should be enforced. This is a very sensitive issue and we as a society has to understand the problem and its consequences. Until we do not realize the current situation, authors cannot achieve this goal of child abuse free society.

Paediatrician can contribute by recognising, responding to and reporting child abuse cases. Authors can work with the community, NGOs and administrators in government to reach out to the neglected, deprived and abused children for their comprehensive needs that include education, health aspects protection and rehabilitation. In case of child abuse, prevention is the best cure. As a paediatrician, we interact with the parents on daily basis and we can use this opportunity to explain them the important facts and help the society to come out from the problem.

CONCLUSION

As a parent or guardian, it is very important to understand child and their world. More studies need to be conducted among parents and children. Considering multifarious negative effects of such abuse, awareness spread program is need of the hour to prevent such trauma and help this children. Strategies to protect children from sexual abuse should address both boys and girls. School centred awareness programs for parents and teachers should be planned and implemented.

Funding: No funding sources

Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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Cite this article as: Shankar P, Agrawal A, Akash BK, Kumar M. Assessment of knowledge and attitude about child abuse amongst parents visiting a tertiary care hospital in Bengaluru, India. *Int J Contemp Pediatr* 2020;7:1105-9.