

**Awareness and Knowledge amongst School Teachers Regarding Child Abuse- Let's Open the Painful Reality Behind Closed Doors****C. Chrishantha Joybell<sup>1</sup>; Kavitha Ramar<sup>2</sup>; Madhupriya<sup>3</sup>; Nivethitha<sup>3</sup>; Anusha Sugantham<sup>3</sup>; Akansha Sinha<sup>3</sup>; Priyanka Agrawal<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Aim:** The intent of this study was to evaluate the knowledge and the awareness level of the primary and middle school teachers regarding identification of abused children and the various organisations and acts that are functioning to rescue them.

**Methods:** A self-structured questionnaire was used to evaluate 100 primary and middle school teachers randomly in and around the Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu regarding their knowledge and awareness about child abuse.

**Results:** Although 94% of the teachers were aware about child abuse only 50% of them know the method of reporting a child abuse.

**Conclusion:** The current scenario necessitates the requirement of ample resources on child abuse prevention, protection of children from risk of abuse, public awareness, positive parenting and community activities.

**Keywords:** Abuse; Child abuse and neglect- CAN; School Teachers.

**INTRODUCTION**

Child abuse is mistreatment which results in hindered psychological growth and development and puts a child at risk of harm. It violates the basic rights of children and adolescents and manifests itself in different forms such as physical and psychological aggression, rape and sexual abuse which can take place at home, neighbourhood, school, work places and in legal and child protection institutions. Abuse can be transmitted from one generation to other and the people generally responsible for it are parents or other adult members of family.

Reported cases of child abuse are only a partial indication of the extent of abuse as countless cases still go unlisted due to the fear of consequences, lack of information to file a complaint or due to ignorance as many still assume that physical and verbal punishment naturally help to discipline a child. One of the main reasons that make children highly vulnerable to child abuse is their lack of independence due to their young age. Most of

the children depend emotionally and socially on their family members. Institutionalised children depend on their care givers. This scenario makes it difficult for them to report any kind of abuse or request for help.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights any person under the age of eighteen has the right to be honest with strong moral principles and protection from all forms of violence. Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations International Committee on the Rights of Child has always highlighted the importance of child rights and the need to stop violence against them. However, despite the various efforts there is still no effective response to child abuse mainly due to sparseness of information and ignorance about the characteristics of abuse especially if it takes place at home or in a family scenario or even at school.

Children spend most of their time at school and their interaction is most established with the teachers and their peers rather than their

family members. So, this study was mainly aimed to catch up an eagle's eye view regarding the awareness about child abuse among school teachers who enlighten the future generation.

### **Children Protection Agencies and Acts in India**

The child protection agencies functioning in India are UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), Save The Children India, Child Line India Foundation.

The various acts passed for the protection of children in our country includes the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015, POSCO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act 2012, Child Labour Amendment Act 2016.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

100 primary and middle school teachers were randomly selected from 20 private and government schools in and around Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu. The questionnaire was prepared and checked for its reliability. After obtaining ethical committee clearance from the institutional board of SRM Kattankulathur Dental College and Hospital, this study was commenced by the Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry. Prior permission was taken from the head of institutions of the various schools and then the teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire which contained the following set of questions: viz.,

- 1) Are you aware of child abuse?- Yes/ No
- 2) Have you ever seen a case of child abuse among your students? - Yes/ No
- 3) Do you know the mechanism for reporting a case of child abuse? - Yes/ No
- 4) Have you ever reported a case of child abuse among your students? - Yes/ No
- 5) Are you aware of The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015? - Yes/ No

6) Are you aware of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 - Yes/ No

7) Are you aware of "CHILDLINE 1098"? - Yes/ No

8) Can you identify emotional abuse and neglect? - Yes/ No

9) Are you aware of CASE 1 ( Legend 1)? - Yes/ No

10) Are you aware of CASE 2 (Legend 2)? - Yes/ No

11) If such a situation persisted in your surroundings, would you report it? - Yes/ No

12) On a scale of 1-10

To what degree can you pick out signs and symptoms of child physical abuse?

13) To what extent can you recognize the signs and symptoms of emotional abuse and neglect? (On a scale of 1- 10)

14) To what extent can you effectively diagnose a case of child abuse? (On a scale of 1- 10)

15) To what stretch are you willing to get involved in recognising and/or reporting a case of child abuse? (On a scale of 1- 10)

The questionnaire was typed both in English as well as the vernacular language Tamil. The results were tabulated based on the positive and the negative feedback answers received from the teachers.

### **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Just as we cannot hide a burning lamp under the table the truth that 69% of the Indian children being victims of child abuse is finally out. New Delhi, the nation's Capital, has over 83% abuse rate. 89% of the crimes are perpetrated by family members. 70% of the cases go unreported and unshared even with parents/family. 53% of the Indian children face some form of sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup>

As a part of India's Child Protection Policy, Child Sexual Abuse laws have been enacted. The Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Bill 2011 was passed by the parliament of India on May 22nd 2012.<sup>2</sup> Goa Children's Act 2003, is the only specific piece of child abuse legislation.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Table Illustrating the Result of the Study**

| <i>Serial Number</i> | <i>Questions</i>  | <i>Positive Outcome (%)</i> | <i>Negative Outcome (%)</i> |
|----------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.                   | Are You Aware Of Child Abuse?                                     | 94%                         | 6%                          |
| 2.                   | Have You Ever Seen A Case Of Child Abuse Among Your Children?     | 28%                         | 72%                         |
| 3.                   | Do You Know The Method Of Reporting A Case Of Child Abuse?        | 50%                         | 50%                         |
| 4.                   | Can You Identify Emotional Abuse And Neglect?                     | 74%                         | 26%                         |
| 5.                   | Are You Aware Of Juvenile Justice (Care And Protection) Act 2015? | 62%                         | 38%                         |
| 6.                   | Are You Aware Of Pocso Act 2012?                                  | 63%                         | 37%                         |
| 7.                   | Are You Aware Of 'Childline 1098'?                                | 74%                         | 26%                         |

**Table 2: Table Illustrating the Result of the Study**

| <i>Serial Number</i> | <i>Questions</i>         | <i>Positive Outcome (%)</i> | <i>Negative Outcome (%)</i> |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.                   | Are You Aware Of Case 1? | 82%                         | 18%                         |
| 2.                   | Are You Aware Of Case 2? | 51%                         | 49%                         |

In India, there is a toll-free helpline number-1098- which directs to civic authorities who can do the needful in a CAN situation.<sup>4</sup>

Many developing countries have propagandized on this issue of CAN and this raises awareness and concern among the public and professionals.<sup>5-11</sup> All health care professionals including paediatric dentist should have the eye to identify CAN and we are morally and ethically bound to do so.<sup>4</sup>

School teachers have a key part to play in the identification, treatment and referral of suspected cases of CAN. So, this present study was planned and conducted to evaluate their knowledge level of CAN.

94% of the school teachers in the present study were aware of CAN. Nearly 60% of them were aware of the POSCO (Protection Of Children From Sexual Offences) Act, 2012 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and protection) Act, 2015. 74% of them are aware of 'CHILDLINE 1098' and they were able to identify the signs and symptoms of emotional CAN. When they were shown two recently reported cases of CAN in the vicinity, 82% were aware of case 1

(Legend 1) and 51% were aware of case 2 (Legend 2).

86% of teachers in our current study reported that if such a scenario persisted in the surrounding they would wish to report to the concerned higher authorities who would take the necessary action. However, only 50% of them are aware of the appropriate method to report such cases. According to the current global trend one child is being sexually harassed every 2 minutes. One in three girls are sexually molested before the age of 17. One in six boys are sexually molested before the age of 17. 90% of the molesters abuse children they know and the scenario happens within the family, neighbourhood and especially the schools where the kids spend their maximum hours. Everyday six children commit suicide due to child abuse.

This study was mainly planned to educate the remaining 14% of the teachers about their negligence ground for not reporting suspicious case. So, we require a 100% of awareness amongst the school teachers because every single child is valued greatly.

## CONCLUSION

Dental professionals have a pivotal role both in the identification and restoration of normality in a CAN situation. Educating the school teachers escalates the social role of dental professionals.

To effectively identify abuse, it is necessary to observe the abuser-child interaction on varied and repeated occasions. If an abuse is suspected, action has to be taken regardless of who the suspected culprit is within the child's household, child care setting, or elsewhere in the child's circle. It is the caregiver's role to report and the child protection agency's responsibility to investigate reports of any type of abuse. A careful evaluation by a team consisting of a child caretaker, a medical practitioner, a psychiatrist or psychologist, a public nursemaid and a teacher might be necessary as they act as guardian angels of these little ones.

The present study mainly laid its foundation on the fact that, school is the place where children spend most of their time, and this necessitates that teachers have to be completely aware of CAN situation and they should know how to report it through proper channel if such situation persisted.

Moreover, parents and guardians need to be taught to develop strong bonding with their children and learn to express friendliness, love and sympathy. Families have to be encouraged to form relationships with support systems available to them. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to give a framework of strategies and services that will help in prevention of child abuse and will offer remediation and treatment when necessary.

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