

Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School Students

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Abstract: Child Abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligence treatment or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility trust or power (WHO, 1999). "Physical and psychological abuse forces a child running away from home. In school-aged children subtle clinical manifestation may include sudden onset of anxiety, fear, depression, insomnia, hysteria and sudden massive weights loss, or weight gain, school failure, truancy or running away. As children grow older we find more serious delinquency accompanied by self-esteem" (Kempe, 1962). Lynch and Roberts (1982) examined that abused children were found developmentally, educationally and socially below the norms and such children were reported low achievers. The destiny of a nation depends on its children and children are the future of the nation. If we want the future to be bright and optimistic, we have the responsibility to keep our present best. Aim of the present study is to determine the extent of Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School students and to examine whether there exist a significant difference in the mean scores of Child Abuse Awareness based on Gender. In accordance with this purpose the investigator applied Child Abuse Awareness Test (Usha & Remitha, 2009) to 100 Higher Secondary School students (50 boys and 50 girls) in Malappuram district of Kerala. From the study, it was understood that the majority of the Higher Secondary School students have an average level of Child Abuse Awareness. The mean score of Child Abuse Awareness for girls is higher than that of boys and there is significant difference exists between the mean scores of child abuse awareness based on gender. Results show that boys are less aware about child abuse than girls and 26 percent of students are less aware about child abuse. This paper points to the need of creating awareness among children about child abuse and its threats.

Key Words: Child abuse, Child Abuse Awareness, Higher Secondary School Students, Physical abuse, Psychological abuse, Sexual abuse.

I. Introduction

'Child is the father of man' the famous quote by William Wordsworth says adult have to learn many things from children. Childhood is an important phase in human life and child is a future asset of the society. They are like buds, which need to be properly nourished; nursed and cured so that they bloom fully into able human beings who contribute to the development of the society. Childhood is the best time to develop spiritual, intellectual and emotional aspects.

Childhood is the formative period in human life. Children's mind is very soft, receptive and plastic at this tender age. It has to be shaped in a right manner. A child has to enjoy childhood days with parents, teachers, friends and relatives. It is the age with fine and long lasting impressions form in child's mind.

As the child approach adolescence, the period of transition when the individual changes physically and psychologically from a child to an adult, the challenges are multiplied into many more dimensions. At no time do children see more precious to us than the year when they move from childhood into youth; when the world is opening before them, and they and we are dreaming big dreams of what the future will hold for them (Elizabeth, 1992). But the rule of nature has been crippled and this serene state of life is at crisis many times due to perilous child abuse.

Child abuse is one of the most wretched and increasing social problem today. Any child can be abused since all children are dependent on adult in one way or other. Every day in the news we hear reports of one or other kind of child abuse. Exploitation of children is not restricted to the public sphere. Children are too often exposed to different forms of abuse in their own home with regard to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Child abuse – the physical, sexual and emotional abuse, exploitation and neglect of children- has been shown through the World Report on Violence and Health (2002) and the 1st UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children (2006) to be widely prevalent in all societies.

Child abuse consists of any act of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm or threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if the harm is unintentional (Gilbert, et al., 2009). Child Abuse often has profound adverse effects on children's health and development. It

can lead to permanent physical and mental impairments. A large body of research indicates that maltreated children are more likely than others to suffer later from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, poor physical health and criminal activity (Deanna, Pattil & Richard, 1999). Child physical abuse is associated with a wide range of debilitating emotional and behavioural problems that may persist into adulthood and generalize to future relationships including parent-child relationships. It has been linked to aggressive behaviour, emotional and behavioural problems and educational difficulties in children (Finkelhor, 2008).

Need And Significance Of The Study

The child is not a piece of stone that can be curved into any shape nor is a lump of clay that can be moulded into any form. Children have their own dynamic nature, seeking satisfaction. They have their own rights. They need adult care and protection. But now the scenario is changing and child abuse has emerged as a social issue involving a growing recognition of maltreatment as an unnecessary evil. Finkelhor and Korbin (1988) viewed child abuse as the portion of harm to children that results from human action that is proscribed (intentional), proximate and preventable.

Several surveys conducted by different government and non-government agencies revealed that child abuse is rampant in the country and especially in Kerala. The study of child abuse conducted by Prayas Institute of Juvenile Justice (2007) in Collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development revealed that

- Two out of every three children were physically abused.
- Over 50 percent of children in all the 13 sample states were subject to one or the other form of physical abuse.
- Out of 68.87 percent physically abused, 54.68 percent were boys.
- 88.60 percent were physically abused by parents.
- 53.22 percent children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse
- 5.69 percent were sexually assaulted
- Every second child (both boys and girls) reported facing psychological abuse.
- 53 percent of children were abused at home and in their families.
- 65 percent of school-going children faced corporal punishment.

A report in Mathrubhumi Newspaper reveals that “Sexual abuses against children are increasing in Kerala. 449 cases were reported within four months from January 2015 to April 2015 and among these more cases are from Malappuram district (70 cases). The number of cases is increasing year by year. In 2013, 1002 cases were reported. In 2014 it increased to 1380. More sexual abuses are done by those who are close to the children. Three cases are reported in the District in which daughters gave birth to the child of their own father. Boys are sexually abused in unnatural way also (Mathrubhumi News Paper, June 30, 2015).

On 7th July 2015 at Kottakkal in Malappuram district, parents of a 6th standard student were arrested. The parents are earned money by using their eleven year old daughter by prompting her for sexual abuse. The child is sexually abused by about 40 persons. Parents have been earning money for one and half year by using their daughter (Madhyamam News Paper, July 7, 2015). On October 1, 2015 a seventeen year old girl was sexually abused at Manjeri in Malappuram district (Madhyamam Newspaper, October 1, 2015). These reports point out the prevalence of the child abuse in Malappuram district.

Abused children showed less confidence and low self-esteem and decline in the intellectual functioning due to their attachment disturbance and subsequent lack of emotion competence in many situations (Erickson, 1989). Child in the basic unit of the building block of the society. it is our duty to protect our children from Child Abuse. Most of the cases of Child Abuse remain unreported for various reasons such as fear of being accused, parental desire to curb publicity, fear of relation by the offenders or his friends and fear of police procedures. The lack of awareness and fear among the children amplify the intensity of Child Abuse. It is felt that abuses and its threats can be overcome through proper awareness about different types of Child Abuse. So the investigator intended to test the child abuse awareness among Higher Secondary School students in Malappuram district of Kerala. The study examines whether there exists any significant difference in the mean scores of Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School students based on gender.

II. Review Of Related Literature

Child abuse is an infringement of a child’s basic human rights (Kellog, Parra & Menard, 2007), which occurs across cultural and societal boundaries, despite variations in its incidence, form and definition. It is common in developing and developed countries (Finkelhor, 2000). In 1974, the US congress passed The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. They defined child abuse as “the physical mental injury, sexual abuse, negligence or maltreatment of the child, under the age of eighteen , by a person who is responsible for child’s welfare which indicate that child health and welfare is threatened thereby”. The main four different categories of

child abuse are physical abuse physical and emotional neglect, emotional abuse and sexual exploitation (Gilbert et al, 2009).

Physical abuse is an act of another party involving contact intended to cause of feelings of physical pain, injury or other physical suffering or bodily harm. It is the inflicting of physical injury upon a child. This may include burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child. It may however, be the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age (WHO, 1999). Emotional abuse is also known as verbal abuse, mental abuse and psychological maltreatment. It includes acts or failure to act by parents or caretakers that have caused or could cause, serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental trauma. Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles. It includes pedophilia, incest and rape (Kempe et al, 1962). Neglect implies the failure of the parent to act properly in safeguarding health, safety and wellbeing of child. Child Abuse Awareness is the degree of information or knowledge about child abuse and understanding of different ways of responding in certain situations which may lead to the occurrence of abuse.

There are number of studies related to child abuse. WHO (2013) conducted a study of childhood abuse experiences among 1277 students of high schools and universities indicates that a high reported prevalence of physical abuse (21%), emotional abuse (10.8%), sexual abuse (12.6%), physical neglect (20%) and emotional neglect (30.6%). Both male and female affected sexual abuse. A study of child abuse awareness conducted by Usha & Remitha (2009) reveals that boys and girls significantly differ in their awareness about child abuse. Girls have more awareness than boys. Rural and Urban students also differ significantly in the awareness of child abuse. Gafoor & Gifty (2013) conducted a study Child Abuse in relation to Anxiety in Idukki District indicates that 97.7% children undergo severe or mild form of abuses. Teacher is the most frequent abusers in the total Child Abuse. The study reveals that the majority of abuses take place also within the family environment except sexual abuse from neighbours. All types of child abuses except sexual abuse and child labour ,more among in boys than girls. There is significant and positive relation between child abuses of all types, except child labour, and student's Anxiety.

Objectives Of The Study

Objectives of the present study are:

- To know the extent of Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School students for the total sample and relevant subsample based on gender.
- To test whether there exists significant difference between mean scores of Child Abuse Awareness of Higher Secondary School students based on gender.

Hypothesis Of The Study

The study was designed to test the following hypothesis:

- There will be significant difference in the mean scores of Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School students based on gender.

III. Methodology

The present study follows survey as the design. The study was conducted on a sample of 100 Higher Secondary School students in Malappuram district of Kerala. Out of these 50 were Boys and 50 were Girls. The sample was selected using Random Sampling Technique giving due representation to gender

For the present study the investigator adopted Child Abuse Awareness Test (Usha & Remitha, 2009) was used. The test consists of 36 items under four major dimensions of child abuse i.e., physical violence, physical and emotional neglect, emotional abuse and sexual exploitation. In the test; for questions from 1 to 12 have four options ie . A, B, C, D and for questions from 13 to 36 have options Yes/No in which the participants were asked to tick in the appropriate box

For the present study the investigator determined the extent of Child Abuse Awareness based on the mean scores and Mean Difference Analysis was used to test the significant difference between the mean scores of Child Abuse Awareness for the classificatory variable gender. Percentage analysis is also used to determine the level of Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School students.

IV. Results And Discussion

As per the objectives of the study the classification of the sample into High Child Abuse Awareness group, Average Child Abuse Awareness group and Low Child Abuse Awareness group were done on the basis of conventional procedure of σ distance from the mean. Students with a score of Mean + σ and above were treated as students with High Child Abuse Awareness group, those with scores of Mean - σ and below were

treated as students with Low Child Abuse Awareness group and those having scores in between Mean + σ and Mean - σ were came under Average Child Abuse Awareness group. Percentage analysis is used to find out the percentage of students under the above three groups. The data and results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Data And Results Of Percentage Of Students In Three Levels Of Child Abuse Awareness

Variable	Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Child Abuse Awareness	High	18	18%
	Average	56	56%
	Low	26	26%

Table 1 reveals that, out of 100 higher secondary school students, 18 students have High Child Abuse Awareness, 56 students have Average Child Abuse Awareness and 26 students have Low Child Abuse Awareness. The percentage given above indicates that 18 per cent of students are with High Child Abuse Awareness, 56 percent of students with Average Child Abuse Awareness and 26 percent of students having Low Child Abuse Awareness.

Mean Difference Analysis

The test of significance for the difference between mean scores of boys and girls was calculated for the variable Child Abuse Awareness. The data and the results of the test of significance is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Test of Significance of Difference Between Mean Scores of Child Abuse Awareness for Boys and Girls

Variable	Boys			Girls			Critical Ratio (C.R)	Level of Significance
	N ₁	M ₁	σ_1	N ₂	M ₂	σ_2		
Child Abuse Awareness	50	22.6	4.342	50	28.02	2.972	8.30	0.01

Table 2 reveals that the boys and girls differ significantly in their Child Abuse Awareness, as the t-value (8.30) is greater than 2.58, the critical limit for significance at 0.01 level of significance. As high mean score is associated with girls, they are found having more awareness about Child Abuse than boys. This result substantiated the hypothesis of the study.

V. Findings And Recommendations

Results of the present study indicate that most of the Higher Secondary School students in Malappuram district of Kerala are having an average level of Child Abuse Awareness. 18 percent of students are having a higher level of Child of Abuse Awareness and 26 percent of students are less awareness about child abuse. Considering the Child Abuse Awareness level of subsample based on gender, it is revealed that there exists significant difference between the mean scores of child abuse awareness among boys and girls. Girls showed more awareness which implies that boys need to attend more awareness programmes to equip them against Child Abuse. The result reveals that Boys and Girls are dissimilar in their awareness with respect to different types of child abuse.

This paper focuses on Child Abuse Awareness among Higher Secondary School Students. Ungar, Barter & Mc Connel (2003) examined that the youth who have been abused or witnessed abusing, employ five disclosure strategies. viz., using self harming behaviours to signal the abuse to others, not talking at all about the abuse to prevent intrusive interventions by others, seeking help from peers, seeking help from mandated service providers, and seeking help from informal adult supports. The main impediments to disclosure to a family member were fear of not being believed, shame and fear of causing trouble to the family. The main impediment for not seeking services were ignorance of the existing functioning of protective agencies, wish to keep the secret, lack of awareness of being abused (Crisma, Bascelli, Paci & Ronito, 2004). Lack of proper support and professional help to the victim and their family can sometimes cause greater psychological harm and trauma (Oz & Balshan, 2007). These studies shows the impact of child abuse and the importance of awareness about child abuse. Every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and safe. It is our duty to protect our children from these evils. They have to enjoy their life in all respects and to develop cognitively, emotionally and socially. For this children are to be provided with proper guidance and awareness about child abuse and its threats and also they are to be provided the measures to be taken whenever they are abused.

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