

Research Article

# A Study to Assess the Knowledge regarding Sexual Abuse among School-going Children

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## A B S T R A C T

**Introduction:** Biologically, a human being from the developmental stages of birth to puberty may be referred as a child. Legally, child is usually called a minor, or a person who has not reached the age of majority.

Child sexual abuse is a peculiarly ominous kind of trauma as it creates horrific shame in the victim. Victims of sexual abuse during this stage generally are too immature and cannot express what is happening and don't seek out help.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the study were to assess the knowledge regarding sexual abuse in school-going children and analyse the relation between a child's level of knowledge about sexual abuse and selected demographic variables.

**Methodology:** The research design adopted in this study was non-experimental exploratory research design. A semi-structured tool consisting of two parts was used to collect data. Part A of the tool consisted of questions pertaining to demographic profile of the participants and part B consisted of knowledge assessment questions.

**Results:** Out of 60 students, 83% had good knowledge and 17% had average knowledge. A positive correlation was found between the level of knowledge regarding sexual abuse and educational qualification of parents.

**Conclusion:** The results showed that 17% of the students had average knowledge about sexual abuse and 83% had good knowledge. With this, it can be concluded that there is still a need to educate the children regarding sexual abuse and empower them to protect themselves from this traumatising experience. Hence the study was followed by a health education programme with the help of an educational video by NCERT named 'Komal'.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Sexual Abuse, Children, Parents, Education

## Introduction

A child, when defined biologically, is a human being between the developmental stages from birth to maturity. The legal

term for a child is minor. Childhood sexual abuse is not a disorder or a diagnosis, but a complicated experience. A diverse range of sexual activities is included in the term child

sexual abuse (CSA). These activities comprise intercourse, attempted intercourse, touching genitals directly or through clothing, oral-genital contact, showing children pornography or revealing adult sexual activity, and exploitation of the child for prostitution or pornography.<sup>1</sup>

The highest number of sexually abused children is in India. A child under 16 years of age is raped every 155th minute, a child below 10 every 13th hour and one in every 10 children is sexually abused at any point in life. Children are not yet aware of what is sexual abuse. They are not even aware that they are being abused by somebody.

According to an exploratory study conducted by Carson DK et al. On sexual abuse of children and youth in India from an anthropological perspective, the identification of new cases of child sexual abuse is higher in India. Every fifth person might have faced this issue sometime in life. Around half of the abusers were known to the children. The risk to boys and girls was equal.<sup>2</sup>

Those who have faced sexual abuse during childhood need to be heard and trusted. More harm is done by keeping it secret. Their coping strategies might help them survive but result in various psychosomatic disorders resulting from fear and mistrust. These victims must gather courage and seek support from family, friends, and professionals.

### Objectives

The objectives of the study were to assess the knowledge regarding sexual abuse in school-going children and to analyse the association between a child's level of knowledge about sexual abuse and selected demographic variables.

### Methodology

The research design adopted in this research is a non-experimental exploratory research design. This study assesses the characteristics of the group and the frequency of the occurrence of a particular phenomenon in the natural setting without putting any control or manipulation. The present study was done to explore the knowledge regarding sexual abuse in school-going children and its relation with

the education of their parents. It was conducted from February 2018 to March 2018. The study was initiated after obtaining ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee. The population for the study were school children; the target population was primary school children. The setting was selected as a primary school in an urban area and the sample size was 60. The sample consisted of students between the age group of 10 to 12 years. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling.

### Inclusion Criteria

All children who were attending primary school in a selected primary school.

### Exclusion Criteria

- Children who did not have normal psychosocial development as reported by the teacher or as per the observation
- Children who had experienced sexual abuse in the past

The data collection started after obtaining formal written permission from school administrative authorities and informed consent from the parents of children. Knowledge was assessed with the help of a semi-structured tool consisting of two parts. Part 1 consisted of demographic variables and part 2 consisted of 19 knowledge assessment questions. The findings of the study were analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics.

### Results

Out of 60 children, 21 were male and 39 were female. 17% of the students had average knowledge and 83% had good knowledge regarding sexual abuse (Figure 1).

A positive association was found between the level of knowledge regarding sexual abuse and the educational qualification of parents.

Table 1 shows the association between the educational level of fathers and the knowledge scores of children regarding sexual abuse. The calculated chi-square value is more than the table value at df-2 hence there is a highly association.

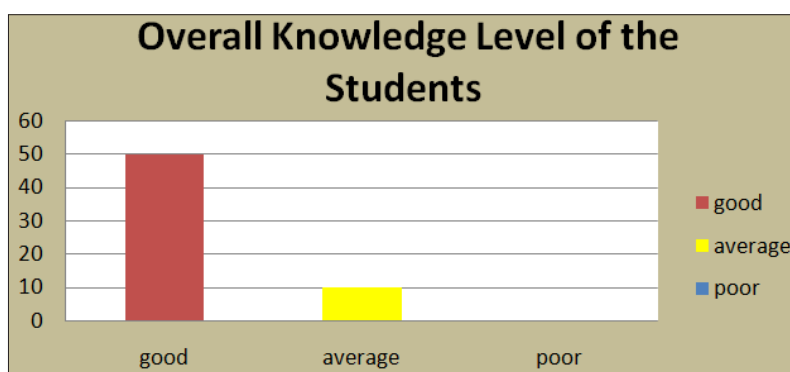


Figure 1. Knowledge Level of the Samples (n=60)

**Table 1. Association between Knowledge of Children regarding Sexual Abuse and Education of Father**

Qualification of Father	No. of Children grouped as per Knowledge Scores of Children		Total No. of Children	Chi-square	P value
	Good knowledge	Average knowledge			
Illiterate	03	08	11	30.47	<0.00001
Secondary	23	01	24		
Higher secondary	24	01	25		
Total	50	10	60		

Df = 2, Table value X<sup>2</sup> = 13.82

**Table 2. Association between Knowledge of Children regarding Sexual Abuse and Education of Mother**

Qualification of Mother	No. of Children grouped as per Knowledge Scores of Children		Total No. of Children	Chi-square	Pvalue
	Good knowledge	Average knowledge			
Illiterate	06	06	12	12.27	0.002161
Secondary	25	03	28		
Higher secondary	19	01	20		
Total	50	10	60		

Df = 2, Table value X<sup>2</sup> = 7.82

Table 2 shows the association between the knowledge of children regarding sexual abuse and the educational qualification of their mothers. The calculated chi-square value is greater than the table value (7.82) at df = 2, hence there is a highly significant association between them.

### Discussion

The findings of a study done by Jagdish GS et al.<sup>3</sup> showed that out of 180 children, 90.6% had moderately adequate knowledge regarding sexual abuse, whereas, in the current study 83% had good knowledge and 17% had average knowledge. Hence the results of both studies are in agreement.

Sharma Y et al.<sup>4</sup> did a study that found that the majority of parents lacked knowledge regarding children's education and protection (POSCO and RTE). Most parents were in favour of having better career prospects for the male child. Parents were also asked about the physical, emotional, and mental health of a child. Majority of the parents were of the opinion that children should be distinguished based on academic performances. The study also recommended various measures to combat child abuse.

### Conclusion

Children are the prospective citizens of tomorrow. Sexual abuse is a serpent that is engulfing their freedom and childhood. Knowledge regarding sexual abuse is a way of empowering the children to protect them against this monster. This study proves that educated parents can empower their children better.

Sexual abuse is a social problem that has a long term and direct impact on the psychological health of the child. For such type of problem which is going to have a chronic impact on an individual and in turn on the society, a preventive healthcare approach is the only solution. This approach includes education to the children regarding sexual abuse. A similar approach was adopted by the researcher i.e. after conducting this study; the study group was formally educated regarding sexual abuse with the help of a documentary named 'Komal'.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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