

Teachers knowledge, attitude and legal notions about the persisting problems of child abuse and neglect in Kolkata city, India - A questionnaire based study

¹Deepesh Jaiswal, Associate Professor, Department of Dentistry, ESIC-PGIMSR Medical College & Hospital Joka, Kolkata, India

²Nitish Kalra, Assistant Professor, Department of Dentistry, ESIC-PGIMSR Medical College & Hospital Joka, Kolkata, India

³Divya Chadda, Consultant Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Kolkata

⁴Anirban Shome, Junior Resident, Department of Dentistry, ESIC PGIMSR, ESIC Medical College & Hospital & ODC (EZ), Joka, Kolkata

⁵Preeti Kalia, Private Practitioner, Dentamedics, Kolkata

⁶Ella Kalra, Former Senior Resident, Department of Dentistry, ESIC-PGIMSR Medical College & Hospital Joka, Kolkata, India

Corresponding Author: Nitish Kalra, Assistant Professor, Department of Dentistry, ESIC-PGIMSR Medical College & Hospital Joka, Kolkata, India

Citation of this Article: Deepesh Jaiswal, Nitish Kalra, Divya Chadda, Anirban Shome, Preeti Kalia, Ella Kalra, “Teachers knowledge, attitude and legal notions about the persisting problems of child abuse and neglect in Kolkata city, India - A questionnaire based study”, IJDSIR- July - 2021, Vol. – 4, Issue - 4, P. No. 610 – 617.

Copyright: © 2021, Nitish Kalra, et al. This is an open access journal and article distributed under the terms of the creative commons attribution noncommercial License. Which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Type of Publication: Original Research Article

Conflicts of Interest: Nil

Abstract

Introduction: Child abuse and neglect is a global pathology. Teachers spend many hours a day with children and they should be aware of possible abuse or neglect of a child or young person. The present study seeks to determine teachers knowledge attitude and legal beliefs about child abuse and neglect.

Materials and methods: This study was done in Kolkata city, West Bengal, India and included a questionnaire which was used on a randomly selected sample of 100 teachers. The questionnaire was based on preexisting

models and consisted of four sections. In order to determine the relationship between knowledge attitude and intervening variables chi- square test and Pearson coefficient of correlation was used. A significant difference was assured to exist between groups if the probability of such a difference is found to be less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).

Results: Data analysis showed a significant difference in attitude based questions in relation to their job experience. In regard to the knowledge, there was no significant

difference in the score based on various features of participants.

Discussion: In the present study, teachers showed a low knowledge about risk factors and signs of child abuse and there was improper attitude regarding child maltreatment and many of them are unaware of the governing laws in the country. Thus more awareness programme is the need of time now. Thus more awareness programme is the need of time now.

Keywords: Child abuse, Child neglect, Teachers knowledge, Legal belief.

Introduction

Child abuse can be defined as a state of emotional, physical, economic and sexual maltreatment meted out to a person below the age of eighteen and is a globally prevalent phenomenon [1]. Child abuse and neglect is a global pathology [2]. According to WHO: "Child abuse or maltreatment results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power [3]. Child abuse is a global problem and all communities are faced with various forms of it. Craniofacial, head, face, and neck injuries occur in more than half of the cases of child abuse [4-10]. Some authorities believe that the oral cavity may be a central focus for physical abuse because of its significance in communication and nutrition [11]. So a careful and thorough intraoral and perioral examination is necessary in all cases of suspected abuse and neglect. In a study [12], the lips were the most common site for inflicted oral injuries (54%), followed by the oral mucosa, teeth, gingiva, and tongue. Discolored teeth, indicating pulpal necrosis, may result from previous trauma [13, 14]. Although the oral cavity is a frequent site of sexual abuse in children [15], visible oral injuries or infections are rare. Oral and perioral gonorrhoea in prepubertal children, diagnosed with appropriate culture

techniques and confirmatory testing, is pathognomonic of sexual abuse [16] but rare among prepubertal girls who are evaluated for sexual abuse [17].

Teachers as professionals have the greatest opportunity to see children on a daily basis and to monitor the subtle physical and behavioural changes that may accompany child abuse. They are around children for a large amount of time; they develop a relationship of trust, so that children may be more willing to tell them about their abuse or about that of a child in their class [18]. The victims of child abuse have lower rate of self-confidence, social skills and educational success as well as more disciplinary problems that all these aspects can be detected by teachers better [19]. Notifying child protection authorities of known or suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN), whether mandatory or not, has long been a contested issue for teachers and there is little from the field of educational research to inform understandings of teachers decision making in cases of CAN [20]. In India especially very few studies have been undertaken on teachers knowledge and awareness regarding child abuse and neglect (CAN). This study aims to shed some light on teachers knowledge, attitude and legal notions about the persisting problem of child abuse and neglect in Kolkata city, India.

Materials and Methods

This survey utilized a self-administered structured questionnaire comprising of 31 questions.

Participants

100 teachers of Kolkata city, West Bengal, India participated in this study in December, 2019. Informed consent was taken from them and they were also explained the purpose and method of the study undertaken.

Survey Instrument

The survey was conducted in Kolkata city government schools. The city was divided into east, west, north, south and central divisions and data was collected from randomly selected schools from each region. The questionnaire was based on preexisting models. As there is no standard questionnaire validated for such purpose, this questionnaire was adapted and applied for evaluation of efficacy of the survey.

The questionnaire contained four sections.

- ❑ Section I elicited respondents demographic and background characteristics such as, age, highest degree attained, grade(s) mostly taught, and number of years of teaching experience.
- ❑ Section II consisted of 20 multiple choice questions regarding knowledge about risk factors and signs of child abuse and neglect.
- ❑ Section III consisted of again 8 multiple choice questions regarding their attitude towards child abuse and neglect including questions regarding their attitude towards aggressive behaviour in a child, cigarette smoking, corporal punishment etc.
- ❑ Section IV consisted of 3 questions of notions regarding legal beliefs and reporting of child abuse cases and their notions regarding an agency or court rights in a child abuse case by parents.

The teachers were classified according to years of their teaching experience namely less than 10 years, 10-20 years and more than 20 years and according to their educational background into graduate and postgraduate. The recorded data in each section was then classified into correct and incorrect responses and expressed in the mean of their percentages. The teachers acquiring 50% or less correct answers were said to have weak knowledge, acquiring 50% to 75% to have moderate and more than 75% to have good knowledge.

In order to determine the relationship between knowledge attitude and intervening variables chi-square test and Pearson coefficient of correlation was used. A significant difference was assured to exist between groups if the probability of such a difference is found to be less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).

Results

The survey was conducted with direct questionnaire and in an interview format. This reduced the chances of any bias and compromise in the results. Also the probability of teachers participating in the study increased. In this study 52% had experience of more than 20 years, 42% had an experience of 10 years or more and 6% had an experience of less than 10 years (Table 1). When the experience of the teachers were compared to the different knowledge based questions there was no significant difference found in their amount of experience and correct answers rendered to the questions. But when their experience was compared to the attitude testing questions and legal belief it was found to have a statistical significance. Most of the teachers who participated in the study had completed their post graduation (86%) (Table 1) but their educational background did not have any significant difference to the knowledge based, attitude based and questions on legal belief among teachers.

Many of the teachers answered correctly to the question what is child abuse and neglect (51%) but only 35% knew about the types of child abuse and neglect. The mean knowledge score among teachers was moderate (51.9%). Only 38% could answer correctly that evidence of repeated skin injuries can be a sign of child being abused and neglected and 75% of them thought that calling the parents and speaking to them and in case it was not helping then reporting it to the local authorities was the step to be taken in such a scenario. But 52% of the teachers did not think that unduly afraid or a very passive

child may be a sign of a child being abused and only 38% believed that fear of school is related to child abuse and neglect. Many of the teachers (78%) recognised narcotic drug use in parents as one of the risk factors in child abuse and neglect and 69% of the respondents believed that domestic and familial problems also can lead to child abuse and neglect. But only 12% thought that the children who were abused may be showing more aggressive behaviour towards their friend. The knowledge regarding the community awareness of child abuse and neglect was also less among the participating teachers (32%). But an overwhelming 100% response was given by the teachers on more parent teacher interaction to make a child aware of sexual abuse or any other form of abuse (Table 2).

In the attitude section it was found that many of the participants believed that using of bad language (71%) to modify a child's behaviour was permitted and also believed that in case of obscenity shown by a child physical or severe verbal punishment was permitted (70%). But many believed that physical punishment should not be given to a child on minor offence like doing the homework on time (88%). 67% believed that carelessness in supervising a child's education could not be called child abuse and only 47% thought that on cigarette smoking physical punishment was permitted. 41% believed that it was ok to punish a boy physically but a girl should not be punished physically. But when asked about whether more awareness programmes were required on child abuse and neglect they all agreed to it (Table 3). In the present survey it was seen that 62% of teachers believed that agency should not have the right to remove a child from his parents though 55% believed that court should have the right to do so in recognising abusive behaviour in parents. Only 14% out of the 100 teachers who participated in the study believed in counselling and reporting of all suspected cases of child abuse and neglect (Table 3). The

mean percentage of the knowledge, attitude and legal belief score according to the years of teaching experience and educational background is given in Table 4.

Discussion

Teachers are pivotal to student perceptions of learning, facilitating or inhibiting student learning [18]. School teachers have been considered a key group of potential reporters of child abuse, insofar as they are able to make daily observations of children and compare current behaviour with the norms and/or past behaviour [19]. Thus in the present study the focus is on the teachers as a group that has close relation with children but has been disregarded in most studies about child abuse [20]. Since teachers are not isolated from the society, their beliefs and attitudes are affected by the attitudes governing the whole society but considering their special job field, they are expected to have a better knowledge in aspects related to the children health [21].

In the present study, teachers showed a low knowledge about risk factors and signs of child abuse and this insufficient amount of knowledge, like what have been found in other performed studies done by Yanowitz K.I. et al. in 2003 [22] had been found to be the main cause of low rate of child abuse diagnosis and reporting by teachers. There is a lack of academic and on-job trainings about child abuse among teachers and these are the most important causes affecting teachers knowledge and their capability in regard to the diagnosis of child abuse. In a similar study by McIntyre in 1990 [23] most of the studied teachers asserted that they had never suspected to a child abuse case among their students. Considering the high rate of child abuse (1,000,000 children in the world), it seems that the victims are present in the classes but they are not recognised. In Indian society physical punishment from a parent on showing tantrum or disobedience is a common phenomenon and thus it was reflected in the teachers

answers. Though parents failure to take care of a child's medical health, dental health and giving of inappropriate food and drink was considered neglect by most of the teachers.

In this study most of the participants disagreed on physical punishment for minor offences like doing homework which is in accordance to a study done by Garrusi B in 2007 [20] and accepted physical or severe verbal punishment in cases of obscenity. However in some other study by Kenny, M.C in 2001 [24] teachers believed that punishment is necessary for controlling students. But 71% in this study accepted of using of bad language to modify a child's behaviour as appropriate showing that the teachers do not take the harmful effects of their inappropriate behaviour toward their students [25] especially in regard to emotional aspects, so serious and in most cases they consider their abusive behaviour as a kind of applying disciplinary regulations [26, 27]. There was no exact knowledge among teachers in the present study about their obligation to report suspected or recognised cases of child abuse and neglect and they were unaware of the government laws regarding it [28, 29]. In a 2007 data given by the government of India [1] more than one third of the country's population, around 440 million, is below 18 years and 40 percent of these children are in need of care and protection, which indicates the extent of the problem. But there has been hardly any work on

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Frequency
Years of teaching experience	
Less Than 10 Years	6
More Than 10 Years	42
More Than 20 Years	52
Educational Background	
Graduate	14
Post graduate	86

professionals knowledge and attitude about child abuse and neglect in India and this present study is a small effort to add to the limited information available in the subject. Failure of teachers as professionals to report child maltreatment may leave hundreds of thousands of children and their families without needed interventions and at increased risk of further maltreatment.

Conclusion

In the present study, several reasons have been consistently found to influence teachers to ignore legal mandates to report suspected child abuse and neglect, including inability to recognize signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect, misunderstanding of State child abuse and neglect reporting laws and fear of negative consequences resulting from the report. Teachers have a responsibility to report suspected abuse, not only because it is required by law, but also because it is a teachers job to educate and protect students. A child suffering from chronic abuse will not receive adequate education, because he has other, more basic needs that are not being met. These concerns may easily be allayed through increased availability of training programs, implementing educational programs that emphasize potential consequences of reporting and programmes to able to identify a child abuse and neglect when they come across one.

Table 2: Verification of knowledge of child abuse and neglect

Serial number	Questions	Correct	Incorrect
1.	what is child abuse and neglect	51	49
2.	types of child abuse present	35	65
3.	evidence of repeated skin or other injuries	38	62
4.	unduly afraid or a passive child	48	52
5.	Child is undernourished and is given inappropriate food or drink	75	25
6.	not taking care of a child medical or dental health	77	23
7.	Fear of school	35	65
8.	Children with aggressive behaviour toward their friends	12	88
9.	Sleeping in the class	31	69
10.	Educational failure	63	37
11.	Criminal behaviour by children	43	57
12.	Children in poor families	56	44
13.	Children whose parents use narcotic drugs	78	22
14.	Familial problems in parents	69	31
15.	Parents with lower educational levels	45	55
16.	Sexual abuse is less in boys	42	58
17.	Parents have right to hit their child	33	57
18.	Action to repeated signs of injury in a child	75	25
19.	Community awareness about child abuse	32	68
20.	Parent teacher interaction on child sexual abuse	100	0

Table 3: Attitude Testing Expressions

Serial number	Questions	Correct	Incorrect
Attitude Testing Expressions			
1.	Children with aggressive behavior should be punished	56	44
2.	Form of punishment given to a child not done homework	88	12
3.	Its ok to punish physically a boy	59	41
4.	Cigarette smoking physical punishment is permitted	53	47
5.	Using bad language to modify childs behavior is permitted	29	71
6.	In case of obscenity physical or severe verbal punishment is permitted	30	70
7.	Carelessness in supervising childs educational statue	33	67
8.	Need for more awareness programme on child abuse and neglect	100	0
Legal belief and reporting child abuse cases			
1.	Should an agency have the right to remove a child from abusive parents?	38	62
2.	Should court have right to remove child from abusive parents?	55	45
3.	Which all cases should be reported?	14	86

Table 4: Knowledge Attitude and Reporting Level In Teachers

Criteria	Mean Percentage (M.P) knowledge based questions	Knowledge Level	M.P based questions	Attitude level	M.P Legal belief	Reporting Level
Teaching experience						
Less than 10years	50.8	Moderate	43.7	Weak	44.44	Weak
More than 10 years	52.9	Moderate	52.67	Moderate	32.53	Weak
More Than20 yr	47.21	Weak	60.09	Moderate	37.17	Weak
Educational background						
Graduate	49.29	Weak	51.79	Moderate	42.86	Weak
Postgraduate	49.94	Weak	56.69	Moderate	34.5	Weak

References

1. Kacker L, Varadan S, Kumar P. Study on Child Abuse: India 2007. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.
2. Schnitzer P, P Slusher, M.V. Tuinen,,: Child maltreatment in Missouri, combining Datafor Public Health Surveillan. Amr. J. Prev. Med. 2004; 27 (5): p379-384.
3. World Health Organization (1999): Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention;Geneva, http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/neglect/e
4. Jessee SA. Physical manifestations of child abuse to the head, face and mouth: a hospital survey. ASDC J Dent Child. 1995;62:245-249
5. Jessee SA, Rieger M. A study of age-related variables among physically abused children. ASDC J Dent Child. 1996;63:275-280
6. Malecz RE. Child abuse, its relationship to pedodontics: a survey. ASDC J Dent Child. 1979;46:193-194
7. Needleman HL. Orofacial trauma in child abuse: types, prevalence, management, and the dental profession's involvement. Pediatr Dent. 1986;8:71-80
8. O'Neill JA Jr, Meacham WF, Griffin JP, Sawyers JL. Patterns of injury in the battered child syndrome. J Trauma 1973;13:332-339
9. Skinner AE, Castle RL. 78 Battered Children: A Retrospective Study. London, England: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children; 1969
10. Tate RJ. Facial injuries associated with the battered child syndrome. Br J Oral Surg. 1971;9:41-45
11. Vadiakas G, Roberts MW, Dillely DC. Child abuse and neglect: ethical issues for dentistry. J Mass Dent Soc. 1991;40:13-15

12. Naidoo S. A profile of the oro-facial injuries in child physical abuse at a children's hospital. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2000;24:521-534
13. Kittle PE, Richardson DS, Parker JW. Two child abuse/child neglect examinations for the dentist. *ASDC J Dent Child.* 1981;48:175-180
14. Blain SM, Winegarten T, Barber TK, Sognaes FR. Child abuse and neglect: II. Role of dentistry [abstract]. *J Dent Res.* 1979;58(spec issue A):367
15. Kellogg N. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect. The evaluation of sexual abuse in children. *Pediatrics* 2005;116:506-512
16. Chizoma Linda Egu, M.A., and David J. Weiss, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 2003; 12(4): p465474
17. Shumba A. The nature, extent and effects of emotional abuse on primary. School pupils by teacher in Zimbabwe. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 2002; 26: p783-791.
18. K Walsh, Bridgstockb R, Farrell A. Case, teacher and school characteristics influencing teachers detection and reporting of child physical abuse and neglect: Results from an Australian survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 2008;32: p983993.
19. West R. Teacherstudent communication: A descriptive typology of students interpersonal experiences with teachers. *Communication Reports*, 1994;7(2):p109119.
20. K Sundell. Child-care personnel's failure to report child maltreatment: some swedish evidence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 1997;21(1): p 93-105,
21. Garrusi B. How do teachers diagnosis and percept child maltreatment. *Journal of Social Sciences* 2007; 3(4):p245-249
22. Ferrari A.M.. The impact of culture upon child rearing practices and definitions of maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect.*2002;26: p793-813
23. Yanowitz K.I., J.R. Tribble. Teachers `Beliefs about the effects of child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 2003;27:p483-488.
24. McIntyre T. The Teacher's Role in Cases of Suspected Child Abuse. *Education and Urban Society* 1990; 22 (3):p300-306.
25. Kenny M.C. Child abuse reporting: teachers `perceived deterrents. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 2001;25:p81-92.
26. Tite R. How teachers define and respond of child abuse: the distinction between Theoretical and reportable cases. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 1993;7: p591 603
27. Shumba A. The nature, extent and effects of emotional abuse on primacy. school pupils by teacher in Zimbabwe. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 2002;26:p783-791
28. Ashton V. The relationship between attitudes toward corporal punishment and the perception and reporting. *Child Maltreatment* 2001; 25:p 389-399.
29. Badger L.W. Reporting of child abuse, influence of characteristic of physician practice and community. *South Med. J* 1989; 82: p 281-286.