

## Knowledge and Attitude of Mothers Towards The Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

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### Abstract

Our nation's one of the extreme serious and upsetting challenges is Child sexual abuse (CSA). Thousands of girls and boys from different age ranges are being sexually exploited in their homes, school, playgrounds, public places and in their so called "safe places". Knowledge and perceptions regarding the same are as pivotal and momentous as the legal provisions available in India towards restricting the child sexual abuse and securing the childhood. The purpose of the present questionnaire-based study was conducted to gauge the knowledge and the awareness amongst mothers of teenage children regarding the Protection of children from sexual offences as the mothers play a very important role during the formative age of the children. As per the statistical analysis of our study 34%, 54%, 12% of mothers have good, average, and poor level of knowledge on prevention of child sexual abuse respectively. 52%, 27%, 19% and 2% of mothers were having negative, positive, strongly positive and strongly negative attitude towards prevention of "child sexual abuse" respectively. The findings from the co relational analysis show that there was a noteworthy positive relationship between the knowledge and attitude of mothers towards prevention of "child sexual abuse" as the 'r' value is 0.284 at p-value 0.004. The study clinched that; mothers do have degree of knowledge towards the prevention of child sexual abuse but also possess some degree of negative attitude towards the same. This can be various awareness programs. The current scenario calls for the requirement of plentiful resources on awareness and application of child abuse prevention, public responsiveness and positive parenting.

**Key words:** Child sexual abuse; Formative age; Gender Neutral; POCSO; Mother

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### Introduction

Although we are living in a refined and revolutionary world of the 21st century, refined and revolutionary in a hopeful way; violence against children, particularly Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), is a remorseless human misfortune that is still too widespread in the community.

As per the definition of child sexual abuse given by WHO, it 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*<sup>1</sup>.

Every year more than 3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States child abuse statistics and facts<sup>2</sup>. According to research by Leiden University and TNO (Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research) carried out in the last decade, every year an estimated 119,000 children experience sexual abuse in some forms<sup>3</sup>. The child sexual abuse involving physical, mental and emotional abuse of a child is widespread across India, impacting children of all ages, socio-economic strata

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and gender. They are abused by family members and acquaintance. However, many cases of child sexual abuse are being unnoticed and are not reported due to the fear of consequences, lack of information to file a complaint or due to ignorance. According to World Health Organization, one in every 4 girls and one in every 7 boys is sexually abused worldwide<sup>1</sup>. As per Childline India Organization the child abuse was on the rise with 4,507,424 calls from children and concerned adults made in 2014- 2015 in India<sup>4</sup>. The 2007 National assessment conducted by the ministry of Women and Child Development authenticates that 57% of boys have experienced one or more forms of sexual abuse. Highest sexual abuse was reported in Assam (57.27%) followed by Delhi (41%), Andhra Pradesh (33.87%) and Bihar (33.27%)<sup>5</sup>.

Protection of Children against Sexual offences Act was passed by the Parliament of India on 2012, and there after it was amended in 2019. The necessity for a new-fangled law arose as a result of various lacunae in the existent laws during those days. POCSO primarily deals with the defilement of child rights specifically where their sexual dignity is compromised. The protection of children against sexual offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years. POCSO Act covers gender neutrality, unnatural sexual offences and is considered as non-compoundable offences<sup>6</sup>.

The types of sexual offences that are included under the POCSO act 2012 are (i) penetrative sexual assault, (ii) aggravated penetrative sexual assault, (iii) sexual assault, (iv) aggravated sexual assault, (v) sexual harassment, (vi) using child for pornographic purpose and (vii) trafficking of children for sexual purpose. The act provides for rigorous punishment, which has been graded as per the gravity of the offence. The punishment ranges from simple to rigorous imprisonment of varying periods with or without fine. An offence is

treated as “aggravated” when committed by a person in position of trust or authority of child such as member of armed or security forces, police officer, public servant<sup>4</sup>.

The protection of Children from sexual offences (amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed with amendments in the punishment especially for child pornography, penetrative and aggravated penetrative sexual offence<sup>5</sup>.

As per National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), the role of parents is to teach their children about boundaries with respect to kinds of touch, the reliable circle, teach the child to say ‘NO’, work on building self-confidence<sup>7</sup>.

Parents and guardians must understand their responsibilities to teach their children how to protect themselves from predators before they leave home to attend school or camp or hang out with friends. Parents need to recognize that the accountability to communicate this critical information belongs only to them and no one else. A mother's involvement helps to extend the teaching beyond the classroom. This creates a more positive learning experience for children and allows children to perform better in school. It also establishes their confidence and ability. Mothers spend more time with their children and, therefore, the children form a better connection with them. It allows the child to feel secure as long as he/she is with the mother. Other appropriate adults can emphasize, and be supportive to the parental process, but the fair amount of responsibility rests on the parents.

This study was primarily aimed to understand regarding the knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse amongst mothers of school going children.

### **Materials and Method**

After obtaining clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee, a questionnaire-based study will be conducted amongst the Mothers of children in South Bengaluru. A semi

structured questionnaire was framed and was validated by two validators, following which it distributed amongst 100 mothers after briefing them through Microsoft team meet about the purpose of the study. A detailed consent form for participation was attached along the questionnaire. The respondent's participation was voluntary and the assessment was anonymous. Data of all the participants were kept private. Respondents were asked to answer a pretested predesigned tool. Tool validation was done by subject experts. Small scale version study was conducted with 20 samples and was found to be practicable with the reliability of 0.8 by using Cronbach alpha. The data were analyzed by using SPSS version 20.

#### Inclusion criteria:

Mothers of children below the age of 18 years of age.

#### Exclusion criteria

Fathers and other guardians of the children were excluded.

### **Results**

Total 100 numbers of mothers participated in the study among them most of the samples were housewife (84%) ages between 21-30 years (62%), under metric (38%), belonging to Hinduism (93%), having a nuclear family (67%) and two numbers of children (47%) with previous source of knowledge on prevention of child sexual abuse (88%) from mass media. (Table 1) Data analysis on mother's knowledge towards the prevention of child sexual abuse shows that maximum mothers having average, good, poor (54%, 34%, 12%) level of knowledge respectively. (Figure-1). Data on mother's attitudes towards the prevention of child sexual abuse find that maximum mothers having negative, positive, strongly positive, and strongly negative attitudes (52%, 27%, 19%, 2%) respectively. (Figure 2). The findings from co relational analysis show that there was a significant positive co-relationship between the "knowledge and

attitude" of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse as the "r" value is 0.284 at p-value 0.004.(Table 2)

**Table 1.** Showing Socio-demographic data

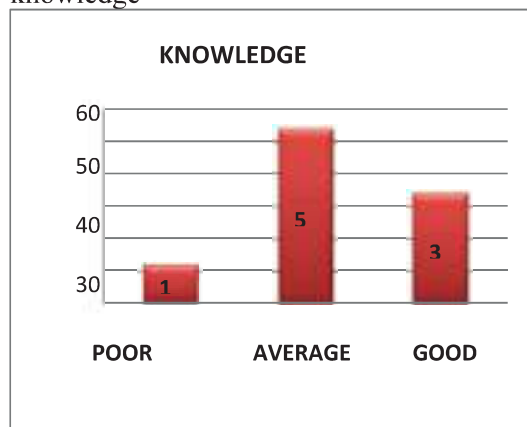
<b>Age in (Yrs)</b>	<b>%</b>
21-30	62
31-40	36
41-50	2
>50	Nil
<b>Education</b>	
Illiterate	14
Under metric	38
Metric	36
Graduate and above	12
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	93
Muslim	5
Christian	2
Others	Nil
<b>Number of Children</b>	
1	46
2	47
3	7
>3	Nil
<b>Type of Family</b>	
Nuclear	67
Joint	33
Extended	Nil
<b>Occupation</b>	
Government job	8
Private Job	2
Self-employee	6
Housewife	84
<b>Previous source of knowledge on child sexual abuse</b>	
Book	1
Internet	11
Mass media	88

### **Discussion**

In the present study mother's knowledge towards prevention of "child sexual abuse" shows that mother's having average, good, poor (54%, 34%, 12%) level of knowledge respectively which is consistent with two studies done by Alzoubi (2018) and Chen J (2007) which stated that majority of

mothers were having adequate knowledge about child sexual abuse and its prevention practices.<sup>1,4</sup> In the current study, another one aspect is the attitude of mothers towards child sexual abuse prevention shows that majority of the mothers having negative, positive, strongly positive and strongly negative attitude (52%, 27%, 19%, 2%) respectively which is contrast with one study done by Melkwa (2016) the study findings reveal that 379(98.7%) of parents had a positive attitude towards playing a greater role in child sexual abuse prevention.<sup>9</sup> The findings from co relational analysis shows that there was significant positive co-relationship between the “knowledge and attitude” of mothers on prevention of “child sexual abuse” as the ‘r’ value is 0.284 at p-value 0.004 the study result is similar with another study by R. Punithavathi (2016) Correlation between the knowledge and attitude is a moderately positive correlation as the ‘r’ value is 0.503 shows statistically significant.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1.** Percentage distribution of knowledge



### Conclusion

The study concluded that, mothers are having some knowledge towards the prevention of child sexual abuse but also possess some degree of negative attitude towards the same which can be enhanced through information booklets and different

awareness programs. Knowledge and attitude of mothers in preventing child sexual abuse has an important role. As per the current research findings, awareness of mothers is very essential about different aspects of child sexual abuse which includes types, “signs and symptoms” of child sexual abuse, and probable convicts. More attention should be focused on those who have a low socio-economic status and have lower educational background. All the efforts must be made to develop their knowledge and perception about the prevention of child sexual abuse. Hence there is a need for further research on this subject with larger samples which would generalize the understanding. It can be more beneficial if Child sexual abuse prevention will be added in the school curriculum and different awareness programs can be arranged at the school level to prevent child sexual abuse. Mass media communication like TV and newspaper can be introduced in the organization which gives support in child sexual abuse cases can add to the utilization of these services.

### Recommendations:

1. Both parents and children have to be exposed to online and offline modes to encourage them to know about their rights and the laws available for their protection.
2. More and more group discussions, panel discussions need to be arranged to educate and create awareness among the parents, teachers and the children.
3. Awareness campaigns, skits, drama, short movies using the social media can go on a long way.
4. Help line numbers have to be developed so that the children and parents and easily reach out without hesitation.
5. Create more awareness about already existent helpline numbers.
6. Encourage parent-children loving and friendly environment.

**Limitations of our study**

Our study was conducted in a cosmopolitan city with most of the mothers who are educated and belong to upper middle class and higher class. This population represents only a part of Indian Population. Thus, it's not the representation of complete Indian Population. Such studies have to be extended to the rural population and uneducated classes and evaluate their knowledge, and awareness and work towards improving the awareness of available legal resources which ultimately can reduce the incidents of CSA.

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**Ethical statement:** This study was approved by the institutional ethical committee and the prior consent was taken before the collection of samples.

**Conflict of interest:** The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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