



KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, PRACTICE OF PARENTS ON CHILD ABUSE -IN PUDUCHERRY POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

Child maltreatment is an umbrella term covering all forms of child abuse and child neglect including physical abuse; sexual abuse; and emotional (or psychological) abuse; by the parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child. The potential risk factors for the abuse ratings depend on parental employment status, alcohol abuse, and family size leading to myriad long-term health consequences, mental health disorders, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and so on. In many Asian cultures, forceful parenting by use of force is looked at as a reflection of parental devotion by balancing disciplinary responsibilities within parenting. Such child abuse can result in immediate adverse physical effects but it is also strongly associated with mental health problems and developmental problems. Assessing abused children is generally tactful and requires more time than evaluating children who have not experienced maltreatment. Accordingly, we present findings from an exploratory questionnaire study featuring awareness by the parents towards child abuse (parents of children between 10-15 years of age) that offers some novel insights in the present paper. As results provided a significant proportion of parents do have a satisfactory level of knowledge regarding child abuse but still have insufficient knowledge, attitude and practice in the context of general child abuse and child sexual abuse. Proper knowledge and awareness by the parents are required for the child welfare to prevent from untoward consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse and neglect has not been the focus of many empirical studies (1) but recently it continues to receive the greatest amount of professional attention and research. The WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention states 'Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting 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' (World Health Organization, 1999). Child physical abuse that causes actual physical harm or has the potential to harm, emotional abuse is a failure of a caregiver to provide appropriate and supportive environments and sexual abuse acts where a caregiver uses a child for a sexual gratification(2).

Child maltreatment is a major social problem prevalent within and outside the homes and among all socio-economic groups of both developed and developing nations worldwide. There are differing legal and cultural definitions of neglect and abuse between countries. In many Asian cultures, forceful parenting by use of force is looked at as a reflection of parental devotion to balancing disciplinary responsibilities. Physical punishment remains an important strategy justified by parents and teachers and legitimized in educational systems, used to hold power and control over children. Parents tend to apply harsh forms of disciplinary actions without knowing it is abuse. Abuse during prenatal, postnatal and pubertal periods are the sensitive periods known to exert maximal effects on the developmental trajectory of specific brain regions(3).

Case series reveal similarities between the experiences in different countries and suggest new hypotheses. However, they are not particularly helpful in assessing the relative importance of possible risk or protective factors in different cultural contexts. Population-based surveys are essential in determining the true extent of non-fatal child abuse. On assessing the adequacy of care, one must be cognizant of the influence of culture both on the care given to the child and the practitioner's perception of the care that is provided with the adequacy of care exists on a continuum from excellent to very poor(4).

This study was intended to identify the existing knowledge, attitude and practice of parents towards their children, regarding the issue of child abuse and neglect and deduce knowledge and awareness to the parents for the welfare of the child to prevent any untoward consequences.

METHOD

A descriptive cross-sectional research design and an analytical semi-research design were employed for the study. A convenient sampling method was used to select the respondents in the study area. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 10 parents before the study who were later not part of the actual study. Participation in the research was voluntary. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent was obtained. The study was conducted among 306 parents with children of 10-15 years residing in the Puducherry population. The sample size was determined using the formula $n = \frac{p(1-p)}{d^2}$ obtained data were entered using Epi info 7 software (open source).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The socio-demographic data as well as the level of knowledge were analyzed using percentages and measures of central tendency as Uni-variate analysis. While association between knowledge scores and selected demographic variables were found using the chi-square test as a bi-variate analysis. Quantitative data is expressed in mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.

RESULT

The study was carried out among 307 participants under various age groups, sex, marital status, employment status and living in various places around Puducherry region, India. It has been observed that about 43% were male and 57% were female. Of most of the study participants about 83% were married, 6% of them were divorced and 95 were separated from their life partners. Among the study participants, most of them fall under the age group between 26-55 years of age. The study participants live in rural (35%) and urban (65%). It is also observed that 36% were unemployed and 39% were employed as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n= 306)

Gender distribution	n (%)
MALE	133 (43)
FEMALE	174 (57)
Marital status	
Married	257 (83)
Divorced	18 (6)
Separated	27 (9)
Rather not Say	4(1)
Age wise distribution	
18-25	3 (1)
26-40	161 (52)
41-55	142 (46)
Place of living	
RURAL	108 (35)
URBAN	199 (65)
Working status	
Employed	121 (39)
Self Employed	72 (23)
Unemployed	112 (36)

Table 2: Knowledge of the parents, Attitude towards the child by the parents and the behaviour of children regarding child abuse

What is child abuse according to parents?	n (%)
Sexual Abuse	181 (59)
Emotional abuse	4 (1)
Neglect	7 (2)
Physical Abuse	12 (4)
All of the above	103 (33)
What is the child helpline number?	
1091	43 (14)
1098	74 (24)
108	28 (9)
Don't know	156 (51)
When will the parents lose control of the child?	
When at work	116 (38)
Misbehaves in front of others	97 (31)
When they don't hear your command	92 (30)
What do the parents do when they hear complaints about their child's abuse?	
keep quiet	29 (9)
lodge a complaint	182 (59)
scold the child	93 (30)
What is the role of parents in tackling child atrocity?	
Sensitize me	31 (10)
Fight for the cause	224 (73)
Ignore	47 (15)
What change do the parents observe after their child is punished for wrongdoing?	
Become aggressive	42 (14)

Well behaved and don't repeat again	91 (30)
Become afraid of you	81 (26)
Getting detached from you	93 (30)
Does the Child hide things from the parents?	
Yes	196 (64)
No	111 (36)
What is the awareness in society?	
Yes	93 (30)
No	213 (69)
How do the parents make their child to get disciplined?	
Sit and talk to them	109 (35)
By punishing	126 (41)
Bashing	69 (22)
How long do the parents spend their quality time with the children?	
30 mins	188 (61)
One hour and above	29 (9)
Don't spend	86 (28)
Do the parents Talk to the child about sex?	
Better it's from me than someone else	72 (23)
Think rather it's not the right age	184 (60)
No, I am shy	45 (15)
Do the parents teach their children about Good touch and bad touch?	
Yes	195 (63)
No	111 (36)

A questionnaire was framed and validated and was used to assess the knowledge of the parents towards child abuse. The attitude of the parents towards the child regarding child abuse and the behaviour that has been observed among the children by the parents are shown in Table 2. It is observed that 59% of the parents believe that child abuse and sexual abuse are the same and most of them (51%) are not aware of the child helpline number. Although 59% of parents come forward to lodge complaints when they hear about child abuse and (73%) of parents opted to fight for the cause, they failed to hear the complaints of their children due to work schedules. When the child misbehaves in public (41%) the children are being punished which may render the children to hold their thoughts themselves. This is supported by the fact that 64% of the child hide facts from their parents. It is also observed by the fact that only 9% of parents spend more than 1 hr with their children. Parents (60%) discuss child abuse or good touch/bad touch (63%) which gives a clue that parents want children to be aware of sexual abuse.

DISCUSSION

As of 2018, Surveys indicate that corporal punishment remains legal in at least 60 countries for juvenile offenders, and at least 65 countries in schools and other institutions but is legally acceptable in the home in all but 11 countries. In India, corporal punishment is banned in schools, daycare and alternative childcare institutions. However, there are prohibitions of it at home. The National Policy for Children 2013 states that Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools in the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE Act). Article 17 states: "(1) No child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment. Whoever contravenes the provisions of sub-section (1) shall be liable to disciplinary action under the service rules applicable to such person."

In 2014, the Ministry of Human Resources Development issued guidance ("Advisory for Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools under Section 35(1) of the RTE Act 2009") which sets out the national law relevant to corporal punishment in schools, the international human rights

standards, steps that may be taken to promote positive child development and not resorting to corporal punishment, and the role of national bodies in implementing the RTE Act, stating: "This advisory should be used by the State Governments/UT Administrations to ensure that appropriate State/school level guidelines on prevention of corporate punishment and "promote positive engagement to impart discipline to provide children with a good learning experience"

CHILD NEGLECT AND ABUSE

Definitions of neglect vary among States and across different disciplines, agencies and professional groups. (e.g child protective services, court systems, health care providers), as well as among individuals. Neglect is a serious problem as Chronic failure to meet a child's needs and provide loving care is often significant and can result in cumulative negative effects that become increasingly detrimental to the child over time(5) .Research has shown that the type of time spent with children is positively related to children's educational and cognitive outcomes(6).

Spending quality time with children is essential for their healthy growth and development. Most families see that 'family time' may often end up in members watching TV in silence, busy reading or on the phone out of sheer exhaustion. Such a phenomenon may result in a total lack of parent-and-child bonding resulting in several behavioural problems and other insecurities which may affect a child into his or her adulthood years by breakdown of family bonds leading to confidence in strangers who may take advantage of such a child's vulnerable position. Emotional Distress in child makes them feel not important and loved by their parents anymore and suffer from insecurity, lack of trust and unstable self-esteem. According to a World Economic Forum (WEF) report nearly 62 % of parents in India on average spend about 12 hours a week to help children with their studies. This high percentage in Academic Performance could be due to the increasing competition among students to score better marks which also means to pressure them.

Children who are often deprived of attention by their parents are often more inclined towards virtual media and other forms of entertainment as a form of escapism from their loneliness and Dependence on social media. Such kids may spend their days on phones and end without any other form of physical or mental development. This may lead to a lack of empathy, the ability to make small talk and listen and severe isolation and depression and may turn out to be harmful for the child including aggression, theft and bullying to vent out their feelings.

Followed by neglect, a study by UNICEF shows there are 30 different forms of physical and verbal abuse that Indian parents use on children as young as 0 to 6 years as part of disciplining efforts. "The various forms of violence against children include physical violence (burning; pinching; slapping; beating with implements like sticks, belts, rods) verbal abuse (blaming; criticizing; shouting; use of foul language); witnessing physical violence (towards one parent; towards siblings; outside the family) and emotional abuse (restricting movement; denying food; discrimination; instilling fear)".A child who is abused is more likely to abuse others as an adult so violence is passed down from one generation to the next. It is therefore critical to break this cycle of violence, and in so doing create positive multi-generational impacts.

During the pandemic, young children are more likely to experience violence, abuse and neglect as families struggle to cope, which could have a lifelong impact on them."

CONCLUSION

This study found out a significant proportion of parents do have a satisfactory level of knowledge regarding child abuse but still insufficient knowledge, attitude and practice are noticed among parents in the context of general child abuse and child sexual abuse. A nationwide study and awareness program is recommended for parents. Effective prevention approaches include supporting parents in teaching positive parenting skills and enhancing laws to prohibit violent punishment. Some aspects of flexible scheduling and remote work can improve work-family balance for employees, specifically by increasing the actual time parents spend with children. Some simple ways of spending quality time with your children at the weekends by cooking or baking together, working on homework, sports, watching a movie, going on a shopping trip, reading a book and so

on. All of these are good recreational activities and will promise a good, strong and true bond with your children so that they can confide in you whenever they want and prevent children from untoward consequences and their well-being

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