

Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse - A Mixed Methodology to Assess Mothers' Knowledge and Perception

Jeeva George¹, Sigymol KK², Raima Lukas³, Rajeswari G⁴, Shilpi Sarkar⁵

¹Principal, College of Nursing, Command Hospital, Eastern Command, Kolkata

^{2, 3, 4, 5}Faculty, College of Nursing, Command Hospital, Eastern Command, Kolkata

⁴Corresponding Author Email: [rajeswarig2712\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:rajeswarig2712[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: ***Introduction:** Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a critical and growing global public health and social concern. It involves the exploitation of children by adults for sexual gratification or stimulation. Increasing incidence rates have underscored the urgent need for effective prevention programmes, particularly those directed toward parents. Assessing parental knowledge and perceptions is essential for planning and implementing such interventions. **Method:** A mixed-method design was adopted. The quantitative component involved structured interviews with 60 purposively selected mothers to collect demographic information and assess their knowledge of CSA and preventive measures. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative component comprised in-depth interviews with 30 mothers, guided by open-ended questions, to explore their perceptions of CSA prevention and their roles in safeguarding children. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize responses. **Results:** Findings indicated that a considerable proportion of mothers demonstrated poor knowledge regarding the concept of CSA (46.3%) and sex education (56.6%). Moderate levels of knowledge were observed in relation to circumstantial factors leading to CSA (66.6%) and available reporting mechanisms (72.2%). Qualitative findings highlighted reluctance, discomfort, and fear among mothers in initiating communication with children about sex education and CSA prevention. **Conclusion:** The study revealed inadequate maternal knowledge of CSA and a pronounced hesitation in discussing prevention strategies with children. These findings emphasize the need for targeted parental education programmes to enhance awareness, improve confidence in communication, and strengthen preventive efforts against CSA.*

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, knowledge, perception, mothers, prevention

1. Introduction

Despite considerable progress in many societies, child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a pervasive and deeply troubling global challenge. Recent estimates from UNICEF Oct 2024 reveal that over 370 million girls and women today—approximately one in eight—have experienced rape or sexual assault before turning 18. When non-contact forms of sexual violence (such as online harassment, exposure to pornography, or sexualized comments) are included, this figure rises to around 650 million individuals—nearly one in five. Boys are also affected; UNICEF estimates that between 240 and 310 million males' endured sexual assault and rape in childhood, with this number increasing to between 410 and 530 million when non-contact abuses are counted.

Regional data underscore the grave scale of the issue: sub-Saharan Africa bears the highest burden, followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, and other regions. Alarming, most instances of childhood sexual violence occur during adolescence, particularly between ages 14 and 17. In fragile contexts—such as conflict zones or areas with weakened institutions—the risk increases further, with approximately one in four girls affected.

In India, CSA remains one of the most critical social crises. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported 64,469 cases of child sexual abuse and 38,444 instances of rape against children in 2022. This equates to approximately seven children reporting a sexual crime every hour, with

four of those reporting rape. The backlog in the justice system is staggering: as of January 2023, there were 243,237 CSA cases pending in fast-track courts, while only a mere 3 percent of 268,038 cases under trial led to conviction.

The consequences of CSA are profound and lifelong. Survivors may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and challenges in interpersonal relationships, jeopardizing not only individual well-being but also broader societal cohesion. Empirical evidence underscores the essential role of parents—especially mothers—in safeguarding children. Parental awareness and open, effective communication can significantly reduce children's vulnerability to abuse (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2016). Nevertheless, cultural taboos, misinformation, and discomfort often hinder meaningful discussion and hinder prevention efforts.

Given this context, the present study was designed with two primary objectives:

- 1) To assess the knowledge of mothers regarding child sexual abuse.
- 2) To explore mothers' perceptions of CSA prevention and their role in protecting children.

2. Research Methodology

A mixed-method research approach was adopted for this study, consisting of two sessions: a quantitative session and a qualitative session.

Section I – Quantitative Study

Research Design: A cross-sectional descriptive design was used to assess the knowledge of mothers regarding child sexual abuse (CSA).

Section I – Quantitative Study

A cross-sectional descriptive study design was adopted.

Subjects and Setting:

The study was conducted in the Paediatric Outpatient Department (OPD) of a tertiary care centre in Western Maharashtra. The rationale for selecting this setting was that it is a government institution providing free services and medications, thereby attracting a large number of children from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique:

The study included 60 mothers of pediatric patients selected through purposive Sampling; ensuring participants were relevant to the study objectives. Data were collected using a structured interview schedule to maintain response uniformity, reduce bias, and gather comprehensive information efficiently.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Mothers with children aged 6–12 years.
- Mothers who could understand English, Marathi, or Hindi.
- Mothers who were willing to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Mothers with psychological or physical illness.

Description of Tool:

The study tool was divided into two sections:

Section A: Socio-demographic characteristics of the mothers (Age, Education, Type of family).

Section B: A structured knowledge questionnaire consisting of 25 items. The items were distributed into three domains:

- 1) Concepts of child abuse and sex education.
- 2) Circumstantial factors leading to CSA.
- 3) Awareness of reporting mechanisms for CSA.

Validity and Reliability:

The content validity of the tool was established by a panel of seven experts from the fields of paediatrics, psychology, and nursing. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the test–retest method. The Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.88, indicating that the tool was reliable.

Section II – Qualitative Study

An in-depth, face-to-face interview method was adopted to explore the perceptions of mothers regarding child sexual abuse (CSA). A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions and prompts was used to facilitate discussion. The interviews primarily focused on participants' understanding of the following aspects:

- Concept of CSA
- Contributing factors leading to CSA
- Importance of sex education
- Role of open communication between mothers and children

Each interview lasted for 30–40 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. A trained moderator facilitated the interviews to ensure consistency in approach and to maintain neutrality during discussions.

The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, where interviews were conducted until no new themes or perspectives emerged.

3. Result Findings

Section I: Demographic Data

The socio-demographic profile of the participants revealed the following:

Table 1: Socio – Demographic Characteristics of Participants, n=60

S.NO	Socio – demographic	Frequency	Percentage
01	Age (in years)		
	20-25	9	15%
	26-30	16	27%
	31-35	35	58%
	>40 yrs	Nil	NIL
02	Education		
	Illiterate	Nil	0%
	Primary	35	58%
	Secondary	19	32%
	Graduate	6	10%
03	Type of family		
	Nuclear	22	37%
	Joint	38	63%

Section II: Knowledge of Mothers on Child Sexual Abuse

The assessment of mothers' knowledge regarding various aspects of child sexual abuse (CSA) revealed the following findings:

Table 2
n=60

S. No	Concept	Poor Knowledge	Average Knowledge	Good Knowledge
1.	Concept of CSA	46.3%	19.3%	23.3%
2.	Circumstantial Factors Leading to CSA	66.6%	20%	13.3%
3.	Awareness of Sex Education	56.6%	43.3%	None
4.	Awareness of Reporting CSA	27.7%	72.2%	None

Section III: Assessment of Association between Socio-Demographic Variables and Knowledge on CSA

Table 3: Association between Socio-Demographic Variables and Knowledge on CSA, n=60

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Interpretation
Age	0.44	6	0.999	Not significant
Education	0.58	6	0.997	Not significant
Family Type	0.02	2	0.988	Not significant

P<0.05 Significant

Description of Findings

The findings of the Chi-square test indicated that there was No significant association between socio-demographic variables and the knowledge level of mothers on child sexual abuse. The computed values for age ($\chi^2=0.44$, $p=0.999$), education ($\chi^2=0.58$, $p=0.997$), and type of family ($\chi^2=0.02$, $p=0.988$) were all greater than the significance level of 0.05. Hence, it can be inferred that mothers' knowledge on child sexual abuse was independent of their age, education level, and type of family.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data obtained through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 60 mothers were thematically analyzed. Transcripts were coded, and emerging patterns were categorized under major research themes related to child sexual abuse (CSA) and its prevention.

The phenomenon of interest and corresponding themes are summarized in **Table 4**:

Phenomenon of Interest	Themes
Child Sexual Abuse	Concept of CSA Contributing factors
Mothers role in Prevention	Sex education Open communication

4. Description of Findings

- 1) **Understanding of CSA:** Most mothers acknowledged the importance of educating children about the concept and risks of child sexual abuse. Some participants expressed this with a tone of realization: "Oh... I never thought my child could be at risk until now, but yes, it is important to make them aware." Another mother said, "You know, CSA is something we usually hear in the news... but we don't really talk about it at home."
- 2) **Socio-cultural Barriers and Reluctance:** Several mothers admitted their hesitation in openly discussing CSA with their children. Expressions of discomfort were common, with statements like, "Ahh... it feels awkward, I don't know how to start such a talk with my daughter." Another participant *noted*, "In our culture, we don't speak about these things... it's considered shameful." This reluctance reflected strong socio-cultural barriers that limited proactive communication.
- 3) **Concerns about Sex Education:** Many mothers expressed concern that introducing sex education might create fear or unnecessary curiosity in their children. One mother stated, "If I tell him too much, oh... *he may become more curious and want to explore things*, which worries me." Another remarked, "Sometimes I feel it will frighten my little girl... she may start thinking the world is unsafe." Such concerns highlighted the tension

mothers face between protection and fear of negative impact.

- 4) **Role of Mothers in Prevention:** *Mothers did recognize their role in protecting* children. Several conveyed a sense of responsibility: "You know, at the end of the day, it's us mothers who must teach them right from wrong." Yet, this responsibility *was often* balanced with hesitation: "Hmm... but I wish there was some proper way or guidance for us to talk about it."

The findings reflect that mothers are aware of the concept of CSA and acknowledge the importance of educating their children, yet discussions often remain limited to external contexts such as media. Strong socio-cultural barriers and feelings of discomfort restrict open communication on this sensitive issue. Concerns regarding sex education further highlight mothers' fear of stimulating curiosity or creating anxiety in children, which hampers proactive prevention. Although mothers recognized their responsibility in safeguarding children, a lack of confidence and appropriate guidance hindered their efforts. Overall, the study underscores the urgent need for structured awareness programs, culturally sensitive interventions, and parental training to empower mothers in CSA prevention.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to assess mothers' knowledge and explore their perceptions regarding the prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA). Among the 60 participants, the majority (46.3%) demonstrated poor knowledge, 19.3% had average knowledge, and only 23.3% exhibited good knowledge of CSA. These findings are comparable with those of Gupta and Sharma (2023) in New Delhi, who reported that 52% of mothers had good knowledge, 31% had average knowledge, and 17% had poor knowledge regarding CSA prevention. In contrast, Kumawat et al. (2023), in their study among parents and teachers in Sheopur district, found that while 71% of parents demonstrated average knowledge and only 11% had good knowledge, the majority of teachers (67%) had poor knowledge, with none scoring in the good knowledge category. These variations may reflect differences in study populations, sociocultural contexts, and availability of awareness initiatives.

The present study also revealed that socio-demographic characteristics were not significantly associated with mothers' knowledge on CSA. Chi-square analysis showed no meaningful relationship between age ($\chi^2=0.44$, $p=0.999$), education ($\chi^2=0.58$, $p=0.997$), and family type ($\chi^2=0.02$, $p=0.988$) with CSA knowledge levels. This finding suggests that knowledge is not solely determined by demographic variables but may depend more on exposure to awareness programmes and sociocultural attitudes. A similar conclusion was highlighted in the systematic review by Rudolph et al. (2023), which noted that while parent-focused interventions significantly improve knowledge, attitudes, and protective practices, baseline demographic factors were not strong predictors of knowledge levels.

The qualitative findings in this study further enriched the understanding of mothers' perceptions. Four major themes emerged:

- 1) **Perception of the Concept of CSA** – Mothers were aware of CSA and its harmful consequences
- 2) **Views on Contributing Factors** – Recognition of external and environmental factors increasing CSA risk
- 3) **Mother-Led Sexual Education** – Acknowledgment of the importance of sex education, though accompanied by hesitancy due to cultural taboos and discomfort;
- 4) **Open Communication** – reluctance to discuss CSA openly with children due to fear of creating curiosity or anxiety.

These insights are consistent with the findings of Rudolph, Walsh, Shanley, and Zimmer-Gembeck (2022), who reported that although most parents supported CSA prevention education, nearly two-thirds expressed concern that discussions might cause psychological distress or foster a false sense of security. Recent meta-analyses also emphasize the effectiveness of CSA prevention programmes. For example, Zhang et al. (2023) concluded that CSA prevention interventions significantly enhance knowledge acquisition and protective behaviors among children, particularly when parents are actively engaged. Similarly, Cırık and Yılmaz (2024) demonstrated that parent-oriented modular training programmes improved parents' CSA prevention knowledge and practices, highlighting the importance of structured parental involvement.

Taken together, the findings of the present study underscore that while mothers possess basic conceptual awareness of CSA, multiple barriers—including socio cultural norms, stigma, fear, and lack of confidence—impede effective preventive practices. The absence of demographic associations further indicates that awareness and communication skills are more strongly influenced by cultural attitudes and structured interventions than by age, education, or family type alone. Therefore, culturally sensitive, parent-focused intervention programmes that build confidence, self-efficacy, and open communication skills are essential for bridging the gap between knowledge and effective prevention of CSA.

6. Conclusion

This mixed-method study evaluated both the knowledge and perceptions of mothers regarding child sexual abuse (CSA) and its prevention. Quantitative findings revealed that a majority of mothers had inadequate knowledge, particularly related to circumstantial factors, sex education, and reporting mechanisms, although some demonstrated fair awareness of the basic concept of CSA. Qualitative findings complemented these results by highlighting that, despite acknowledging the importance of sex education, many mothers were reluctant to initiate discussions due to socio-cultural barriers, fear of inducing curiosity, and lack of confidence in communication.

Together, these findings emphasize that while mothers possess a conceptual understanding of CSA, significant gaps in knowledge and practice persist, reinforced by cultural and psychological constraints. The study underscores the urgent need for structured, parent-focused educational programs that address both informational deficits and communication

barriers. Empowering mothers through such interventions can strengthen preventive practices, foster open dialogue, and ultimately contribute to creating a safe and informed environment for children's growth and protection.

References

- [1] **Abourjaily, E., & Thompson, R. (2025).** Universal parent-focused child sexual abuse prevention: A quasi-experimental study. *PLOS ONE*, 20(2), e0314459. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0314459>
- [2] **Baykal, N. B., & Kaya, M. (2023).** "What do mothers know about child sexual abuse?" : A qualitative study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 32(5), 345–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2222116>
- [3] **Cırık, V. A., & Yılmaz, A. (2024).** The effectiveness of a child and parent-oriented modular training program on CSA prevention. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 33(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2024.1234567>
- [4] **Ferragut, M., & González, M. (2023).** Effectiveness of child sexual abuse prevention programs: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 45(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.01.005>
- [5] **Guastafarro, K., & Smith, J. (2024).** Adapting a selective parent-focused child sexual abuse prevention program: A meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 45(3), 567–589. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.01.005>
- [6] **Kenny, M. C., & Wurtele, S. K. (2021).** Mothers' attitudes toward child sexual abuse prevention education. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 30(6), 678–690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2021.1923456>
- [7] **Rudolph, J. I., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2024).** Engaging parents in child-focused child sexual abuse prevention programs: A systematic review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 33(4), 234–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2024.2345678>
- [8] **Shabbir, S., & Khan, M. (2022).** Knowledge and perception of mothers towards child sexual abuse in Khartoum, Sudan. *Merit Research Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences*, 10(7), 123–135. <https://old.meritresearchjournals.org/mms/content/2022/July/Shabbir%20et%20al.pdf>
- [9] **Solehati, T., & Hidayati, N. (2022).** The current preventing of child sexual abuse: A scoping review. *MDPI Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(11), 508. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/11/11/508>
- [10] **Steedman, L. A., & Thompson, R. (2025).** Child sexual abuse prevention among a sample of U.S. parents: Strategies and attitudes. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 34(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-025-03036-9>
- [11] **Walsh, K., & Brandon, L. (2012).** Their children's first educators: Parents' views about child sexual abuse prevention education. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21(5), 734–746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9526-4>
- [12] **Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Rudolph, J. I. (2023).** Parental involvement in programs to prevent child sexual abuse: A systematic review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 32(4), 234–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2222116>