

# Knowledge, Attitude and Practices on Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse among Mothers in a Tertiary Setting

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**Abstract:** *Background:* Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a complex and context-bound phenomenon that exists in every society and there is a significant increase in the cases reported. Most of them still remain under the iceberg. Identified cases has brought to the limelight that CSA prevention educational programmes in various settings would have decreased the incidence of child sexual abuse to some extent. In order to develop an effective programme, it is important to understand how parents perceive and respond about child sexual abuse. *Aim:* This study was aimed at understanding the knowledge, attitude and practices of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse in a tertiary setting in the southern state of India. *Methodology:* In a descriptive cross sectional study, 215 mothers were enrolled. A self-administered questionnaire which was developed by the researcher (CVI: 0.8) along with demographic profile sheet to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse was used. *Results:* Both descriptive and inferential statistics were analysed using SPSS software 21.0 version. Chi square test was used as test of significance and p value <0.05 was considered significant. Data analysis was done by descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS 16.0 software and p value of <0.05 was considered to be significant. Among the 215 respondents majority (62.3%) of the participants belong to the age group of 31-40 years with 69.8% of children belonging to the schooler age group (6-12years). A good proportion of mothers have moderately adequate knowledge (73%) and attitude (68.4%) while only (27.4%) have moderately adequate practice regarding prevention of child sexual abuse. There was a significant association between certain demographic variables such as Maternal Age (0.002\*\*), Marital status (0.006\*\*), Place of Residence (0.070\*), Mother's occupation (0.006\*\*) with the knowledge, attitude and practice of mothers regarding prevention of child sexual abuse. *Conclusion:* The present study has identified the gap in CSA prevention education and recommends that in the forthcoming preventive education strategies mothers should be meticulously taught about the multifacets of Child sexual abuse.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Attitude, Practice, Mothers, Child Sexual Abuse

## 1. Introduction

Child maltreatment is a significant global problem with a serious impact on the victims' physical and mental health, well-being and development throughout their lives – and, by extension, on society in general. The WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention distinguishes four types of child maltreatment which are physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional and psychological abuse and child neglect [1]. India the home for the largest number of minors in any country in the world house for more than forty percent of country's population. Abuse is a disquieting everyday reality for as many as half of the country's children [2]. The first ever national study on child abuse in April 2007, conducted by the Ministry for Women and Child development exposed the bad face with 53% children reporting one or more forms of abuse in which 73% of sexual abuse victims belong to the age group of 11 – 18 years. Statistics also revealed a growing concern in India regarding the significant increase in sexual crimes against women. About 60% of violence against women takes place within home with young girls at constant risk of being sexually molested even at the hands of their blood borne relatives[2]. As Child sexual abuse is alarmingly on the peak it is important to understand that it has a serious impact on the victim's physical and mental health, well-being and development throughout their lives. There is an increasing recognition in child protection practices that parents and other adults should be actively engaged in the primary prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA). [1, 3]. Research has brought to the limelight that CSA prevention educational programmes in various settings have decreased the incidence

of child sexual abuse to some extent. In order to develop an effective programme, it is important to understand how parents perceive and respond about child sexual abuse. This current study was intended to understand the knowledge, attitude and practices of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse.

## 2. Approach

A descriptive cross sectional study was done among mothers who have children over six years of age, attending the department of paediatrics in a tertiary hospital in the outskirts of Trivandrum district. Consecutive sampling technique was adopted. Based on previous study findings in which the adequacy of knowledge level was 60 % with an allowable error of 10%, 250 such mothers were surveyed. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board. After explaining the study purpose to the participants an informed written consent was obtained and the tool was administered. The participation was voluntary and the survey was anonymous. Data was kept confidential and no information was leaked out to the public. Mothers were asked to fill a pretested predesigned self-administered questionnaire and the response rate was 86% (N=215).

After an extensive literature review a self-administered tool was developed by the researcher based on the research objectives. Demographic profile sheet which contains data such as age, sex, birth order, socio economic status, educational qualification and occupational status of the mother, caretaker of the child and whom the child stays; along with participants' response to the question about

knowledge, attitude and practice on prevention of child sexual abuse. Responses to the items were based on a two-point scale, 'YES' or 'NO'. The 'YES' response was given a score of 1 and the 'NO' response was given a score of 0. For negative statements reverse scoring was done. Tool validation was done by subject experts and the content validity index was 0.85. Pilot study was done on 25 samples and the study was found to be feasible. Frequency, percentage and mean score of relative indicators were calculated to describe the status of knowledge, attitudes and practice of CSA prevention among parents. Chi Square test was done to identify possible association between parents' knowledge, attitudes and practice with demographic variables and p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Scoring & Interpretation for knowledge, attitude and practice is as follows. The individual scores of knowledge, attitude and practice was taken and score value is interpreted in percentage as follows

- 80-100% Adequate knowledge, attitude and practice.
- 40- 70% Moderately adequate knowledge, attitude and practice.
- 10-30% Inadequate knowledge, attitude and practice.

### 3. Results

Among the 215 respondents majority (62.3%) of the participants belong to the age group of 31-40 years with 69.8% of children belonging to the schooler age group (6-12 years); 79.1% of them have two children in the family and 71.2% of them are Christians. 94.9% of the study participants are married and 3.3% of them are widow. 97.7% of them live in the rural area and 61.9% belongs to above poverty line. Majority (66.5%) of them have had their school level education and 60.5% are home makers as in Table 1

More than 74% of the study participants knew that the problems of CSA exist around the world and that a person who has sexually abused a child will likely repeat the offense (71.6%). Majority (90.7%) of them believed that men sexually abuse children in most cases. And 80.9% of them believe that they usually approach these children through "grooming in". Eighty one percent of the mothers knew that the child who was sexually abused will be 'held back' from disclosing the case by the abuser and 67% of them believed that children are most likely to be sexually abused by people familiar to them as in Table 2.

Concerning attitudes towards CSA prevention education, more than 90.7% of the parents supported CSA prevention education in school is important and 88.4% agreed that these children should be taught about CSA education in schools. There were, however, still 68.4% of mothers showed some concern that CSA prevention education might lead to their children to learn more about 'sex' as in Table 3.

Regarding practices of mothers on CSA prevention, majority (78.6%) have taught their children not to go out with others without parental permission. Most (76.7%) of them have instructed their children not to accept gifts from strangers. In contrast 68.3% of them have not told their children about good touch and bad touch or about being assertive in saying

"No" while some one touches their private parts (68.4%) as in Table 4.

Overall study findings concluded that majority of the mothers have moderately adequate knowledge (73%) and attitude (68.4%) towards prevention of child sexual abuse where as 10.8% of them are not practicing what they know about prevention of child sexual abuse to children as in Table 5.

Further analysis explored the factors that may be associated with mother's knowledge, attitude and practice on child sexual abuse prevention. There was a significant association between certain demographic variables such as Maternal Age (0.002\*\*), Marital status (0.006\*\*), Place of Residence (0.070\*), Mother's occupation (0.006\*\*) with the knowledge, attitude and practice of mothers regarding prevention of child sexual abuse.

**Table 1:** Distribution of participants based on socio demographic variables: (N=215)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Maternal Age</b>		
<20 years	0	0
21-30 years	79	36.7
31-40 years	134	62.3
>40 years	2	0.9
<b>No: of children in the family:</b>		
One	26	12.1
Two	170	79.1
Three	19	8.8
<b>First child's age</b>		
6-12 years	150	69.8
13-18 years	58	27
>19 years	7	3.3
<b>Sex of the first child</b>		
Male	126	58.6
Female	89	41.4
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	153	71.2
Hindu	47	21.9
Muslim	15	7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single parent family	3	1.4
Married	204	94.9
Divorcee	1	.5
Widow	7	3.3
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Rural	210	97.7
Semi Urban	5	2.3
Urban	0	0
<b>Educational status of the mother</b>		
School level	143	66.5
Higher Secondary level	45	20.9
Graduate	25	11.6
Illiterate	2	1
<b>Occupation of the mother</b>		
Daily wages	25	11.5
Service Holder	38	17.7
Business women	22	10.3
Home maker	130	60.5
<b>Socio Economic Status</b>		
APL	133	61.9
BPL	82	38.1

**Table 2:** Knowledge of mothers regarding prevention of child sexual abuse (N=215)

ITEMS	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
The problem of child sexual abuse exists around the world	159	74	56	26
Children are most likely to be abused by familiar people	144	67	71	33
A person who has sexually abused a child is likely to repeat the offense	118	54.9	97	45.2
Child sexual abuse occurs only in the adolescent age	104	48.4	111	51.6
If a child has been sexually abused, there will be no obvious evidence	154	71.6	61	28.4
Females cannot sexually abuse children	160	74.4	55	25.6
Boys are not usually sexually abused	99	46	116	54
The perpetrators usually buy children expensive gifts or give them money for no apparent reason	174	80.9	41	19.1
The child who was sexually abused will be held back from disclosing the episode by the abuser	175	81.4	40	18.6
Men sexually abuse children in majority of cases	195	90.7	20	9.3

**Table 3:** Attitude of Mothers Regarding Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (N=215)

Items	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Do you feel that CSA prevention education in school is necessary	195	90.7	20	9.3
Do you feel that my child should be taught about Child Sexual Abuse prevention in schools	190	88.4	25	11.6
Do you feel that body safety rules should be taught to the child at primary level	164	76.3	51	23.7
Do you feel that Child Sexual Abuse prevention education may induce your child to know too much about sex	147	68.4	68	31.6
Do you feel that the child will acquire such knowledge as he/she grows up	75	37.9	140	65.1
Do you feel that CSA cases are very few, so it is unnecessary for children to learn how to prevent CSA	133	61.9	82	38.1
Do you feel that your child should be taught about good touch and bad touch	141	65.6	74	34.4
Do you feel that the child should be taught to say "NO" if someone touch their private parts	156	72.6	59	27.4
Do you feel that the child should be taught to go out with others, even familiar grown-ups only with parental permission	191	88.8	24	11.2
Do you feel that the child should be encouraged to speak the things happening outside home to parents	187	87	28	13

**Table 4:** Practice of mothers regarding prevention of child sexual abuse (N=215)

Items	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Told children not to go with others, even familiar grown-ups, unless they had parental permission.	169	78.6	46	21.4
Told the child not to accept gifts from strangers, unless they had parental permission	165	76.7	50	23.3
Told child that, if a person they did not know wanted them to show him the way to the nearest store they should not go with him	155	72.1	60	27.9
Told my child about Good touch and Bad touch.	79	36.7	136	68.3
Talked with the child about their private parts and said they should not be touched by others	70	32.6	145	67.4
Told them that if someone wants to see/or touch their private parts they should definitely say "No" and leave at once	68	31.6	147	68.4
Told the child that if safety rules are violated it should be told to parents/other trustworthy adults	80	37.2	135	62.8
Provided books of audio visual aids about CSA prevention for children	40	18.6	175	81.4
Told the child to speak the happenings outside to parents and not to keep any secrets.	113	52.6	102	47.4
Told them about CHILDLINE(24x7)	30	14	185	86

**Table 5:** Mother's knowledge, attitude and practice on prevention of child sexual abuse based on adequacy scoring (N=215)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Mother's knowledge</b>		
Adequate	49	22.9
Moderately Adequate	157	73.0
Inadequate	9	4.1
<b>Mother's attitude</b>		
Adequate	59	27.4
Moderately Adequate	147	68.4
Inadequate	9	4.2
<b>Mother's practice</b>		
Adequate	54	25.1
Moderately Adequate	59	27.4
Inadequate	79	36.7
No practice	23	10.8

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate the intricacy on the knowledge, attitude and practice of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse. It has recognized some of the strengths and gaps in parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding CSA. Significant inferences were concluded from the current study. The generalizability of the study findings is limited only to mothers who have children above six years of age.

Majority of the prior studies have shown that the participants have responded as children are most likely to be abused by familiar people(6,7,8) which are congruent with the present study in which 67% of them have responded it clearly. But this result is contradictory to the survey done in Chennai study findings in which 71.8 % of them have said that children are likely to be abused by strangers [5]. There was a common belief among the participants that boys are not sexually abused (54%) and females cannot abuse children

sexually (74.4%); hence mothers usually have a tendency to communicate preventive measures of child sexual abuse to their daughters (P value: 0.081\*). But no association with the age of the child was identified.

Though parents with adequate and moderately knowledge and a positive attitude towards the prevention of child sexual abuse is high in this study as 90%; yet around 36.7% of the mothers have inadequate practice out of which 10.8% of the mother didn't even have the practice of telling their children regarding preventive measures in child sexual abuse ever. A possible reason why so many parents had not explored these key ideas with their children could be due to the fact that parents had not received such education themselves. It can also be due to the fact that they feel such discussions would add on to their knowledge regarding sex. However 65.6% of the mothers felt that children should be taught about good touch and bad touch only 36.7% practiced it. Teaching the child about being assertive and saying "No" was identified as pivotal by 72.6%, but only 31.6% has emphasized its importance to the children.

Regarding CSA prevention education in schools, (90.7%) of the mothers have a positive attitude towards it while 68.4% of them have a concern that CSA prevention education may induce the child to know more about sex which was similar to study findings of (Chen & Chen, 2005) in which 47.3% of parents showed some concern that CSA prevention education might lead to their children learning more 'sex' [4]. As 'sex' is a very sensitive topic, curriculum should be carefully designed to address the needs of the children. The current study also indicates that (81.4%) of them have not provided any audio-visual aids nor have told their children about Child Line services (86%). This can be due to the ignorance of such resources among mothers.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study has shown the knowledge and attitude of mothers on prevention of child sexual abuse was moderately adequate whereas the practice of the mothers was poor. This identifies the gap in CSA prevention education and recommends that in the forthcoming preventive education strategies mothers should be meticulously taught about the multifacets of Child sexual abuse. This can be replicated in other settings so that further generalizability can be enhanced.

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