

# Sexual Abuse Knowledge and Its Relationship with Self Confidence and Assertiveness Skills among Young Adolescent Girls

Loveena Lobo

Assistant Professor, PG Dept of Social Work, St Aloysius College (Autonomous)

**Abstract:** *Sexual Abuse against girl children is a Human Rights violation seen across the globe. Adolescents may be misinformed or mislead on facts about Sexual abuse having their own perception on the issue. This study investigates the sexual abuse knowledge of adolescent girls and their levels of Self confidence and Assertiveness skills. Respondent's opinion on their reactions to some Sexual abuse situations was also gathered. Four selected High Schools of Mangalore city was the study population. 100 respondents i.e. 25 girl children from each school were identified using simple random sampling method. Descriptive research design, structured questionnaires (self prepared and validated) to assess the knowledge on Sexual abuse and measure the Level of Self Confidence and Assertiveness was used. Semi structured questionnaire to find adolescent's opinion on their responses to sexual abuse situations was used. Nearly half the respondent's knowledge on Sexual abuse was poor. Opinion on their reactions to sexual abuse situations revealed to some extent assertive reactions as well as some runaway reactions. Moderate Level of self Confidence and Assertiveness scores of respondents was seen. Significant association between Knowledge and Assertiveness scores as well as Knowledge and Self confidence scores was seen. Study suggests need to conduct Sexual Abuse awareness & self confidence and assertiveness skills training.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Sexual Abuse, Young Adolescents, Self Confidence, Assertiveness

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence has been globally accepted as a significant developmental milestone and a crucial phase that impacts their mental and physical state. In order to prevent abuse during this crucial phase the adolescent must be aware about Sex and Sexuality.

Medem defines Child sexual abuse as "any sexual act with a child performed by an adult or an older child." Child sexual abuse could include a number of acts, including but not limited to Sexual touching of any part of the body, clothed or unclothed, Penetrative sex, including penetration of the mouth, Encouraging a child to engage in sexual activity, including masturbation, Intentionally engaging in sexual activity in front of a child, Showing children pornography, or using children to create pornography, Encouraging a child to engage in prostitution. (NSPCC)

The number of cases registered for child abuse in India raised from 8,904 in the year 2014 to 14,913 in the year 2015, under the POSCO Act. Sexual offences and kidnapping account for 81% of the crimes against minors. Preventive measures designed to ward off strangers (installing CCTV cameras and providing self-defence training) will be ineffective, as children do not know how to ward off unwanted sexual advances from their known relatives, acquaintances or workplace seniors, who they trust. (Save the Children, 2016)

Sexual abuse can impact the emotional, behavioral, physical health and social development of girl children facing sexual abuse. Adolescents may be misinformed or mislead on facts about Sexual abuse and hence may have their own perception on the issue. Having right knowledge on Sexual abuse is a basic right of every child.

This study was intended to find out if adolescents have the right knowledge on sexual abuse and also to understand how they would respond to sexual abuse situations. Knowledge and safeguarding adolescents from sexual abuse situations is essential. Keeping in mind the consequences of sexual abuse it is necessary for adolescent girls to have adequate life skills to face sexual abuse situations in life. Therefore researcher was also interested to assess their Assertiveness and Self confidence skills. Findings can help in planning appropriate educative sessions and skills training for adolescent children.

## 2. Review of Literature

A study by Anusha U.K et.al (2015) aimed to assess the knowledge regarding sexual abuse among adolescent girls in selected High schools of Mysuru. Study was conducted among 100 adolescent girls in selected high schools. Samples were selected by using simple random sampling method. Data was collected by administering personal proforma and self administered structured knowledge questionnaire which consists of 30 items. Out of 100 samples, 62% of adolescent girls had average knowledge, 27% of adolescent girls had good knowledge and 11% of adolescent girls had poor knowledge regarding sexual abuse. It was found that there is a significant association between level of knowledge regarding sexual abuse and variable like source of information on sexual abuse among adolescent girls. This emphasizes the investigator to implement measures for the prevention of sexual abuse in future.

A study by Qadir et al (2013) emphasizes on the assertiveness level of adolescents with reference to their gender and locality. The samples been taken from schools in Chennai city for urban sample and schools in Cumbum, Madurai District, and Tamil Nadu for rural samples. Random samples of 100 adolescents were chosen of whom 50 were boys and the rest 50 were girls. Out of the 50 boys,

25 were of urban area and other 25 of rural area. The same was done with the 50 girls. The findings of the study revealed same assertiveness level between adolescents irrespective of gender. But in comparison to localities, the study revealed urban adolescents had better assertiveness than the rural adolescents.

A Study was conducted Kouta C, Tolma EL, (2008) among adolescents to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding sexuality, sexual and reproductive health in Cyprus. Random sampling techniques were used and 697 samples have been selected. The results indicated that young adolescents have limited knowledge on sexual health issues and there were gender differences regarding role expectations of sexuality.

A cross-sectional study was undertaken between May and June (2012) in the Kilombero and Ulanga rural districts in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania. Men and women aged 18–49 years were eligible for the study. The questionnaire included socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes about gender roles and violence, and knowledge on health consequences of rape. Study showed that these rural communities have poor knowledge on sexual violence and have accepting attitudes towards sexual violence. The findings have potentially important implications for interventions aimed at preventing violence.

Jayant Ramchandra Kalkute (2007) in his study to assess the knowledge about sexual health among female students of schools of an Urban area. All 245 female students of 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> standard of all three educational streams of two schools were included in the study. Most of the students in age group of 15-16 years (56%). Science students had “adequate” knowledge compared to arts and commerce students ( $P=0.004$ ). Students whose parents 34% were unskilled and semiskilled by occupation had “inadequate” knowledge about sexual health when compared with students whose parents were skilled by occupation ( $P<0.05$ ). Education of parents 40% had positive effect on the knowledge about sexual health of students ( $P=0.062$ ). In post test, the knowledge about sexual health of students was found to have increased significantly when compared to pretest. The mean posttest score was 12.61 which was significantly higher than the mean pretest score of 6.34 (SD 3.23) ( $P<0.001$ ). Students from nuclear families had “adequate” knowledge about sexual health when compared to students from joint families.

R. Shashikumar, R C Das (2012) conducted a cross sectional study on factors associated with adolescent sexuality. Study conducted in two co-educational schools of Goa. Total study sample was 642. It comprised 357 (61.93%) girls and 229 (39.07%) boys. 30.08% girls had reported having sexual experience. Average age of first sexual contact for girl was 14.09 years. 41.09% girls and 53.04% boys have the knowledge regarding sex education.

K. Srivastava, P.S. Bhatt et al (2008) done descriptive study for understanding sexuality among Indian urban school adolescent. Students were selected from class 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. Self-reporting questionnaires were administered matters related to sexuality. The incidence of having sexual contact

was 30.08% for boys and 17.18% for girls. 6.31% boys and 1.31% girls reported having had experienced sexual intercourse. Friends constituted the main sexual partners for both boys and girls. Sexual abuse had been reported by both girls and boys.

Dzimadzi R. (2009) had undertaken a study on knowledge of sexual abuse among female students in Malawi. The sample size was 219 selected through systematic random sampling. The overall prevalence rate of sexual abuse was 41%. Only 55.6% reported their sexual victimization to others Sexual abuse experiences were reported by 55.6% ( $n=50$ ) while 44.4% ( $n=40$ ) remained silent about their experiences. 27.8%, told their friends, 16.7% told their mothers only, 7.8% told family members including sisters, aunts and grandparents. Respondents who did not report sexual abuse provided several reasons. These are the victims’ fear of consequences and lack of knowledge that they were being abused. Respondents indicated they would like to know more about the prevention and control of sexual abuse.

A study conducted by Strauss M.A. (1997) states that among girl students reveals that 83% of respondents had experienced Physical eve teasing, 47% of them had been molested/experienced sexual overtures. 15% had experienced serious forms of sexual abuse including rape. Indeed because of Social stigma and shame attached to the victims, sexual offences remain one of the most misunderstood and under reported crime.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- To assess the knowledge of Adolescents on Sexual Abuse
- To find out the opinion of respondents on their reactions to Sexual abuse situations
- To measure the Self confidence and Assertiveness level of respondents
- To find the association of Knowledge scores with Self Confidence and Assertiveness scores of the respondents.

#### **Methodology**

Four selected High Schools of Mangalore city comprised the study population. Sample size was 100 respondents i.e. 25 girl children in the age group of 13- 15 years (high school) from each school were selected using simple random sampling method. Descriptive research design was used for the study.

#### **Tools of Data Collection**

- Structured questionnaires to assess the knowledge on Sexual abuse, Level of Self Confidence and Assertiveness of respondents were administered.
- Semi structured questions to gather the socio demographic profile of the respondents and find the opinion of respondents to Sexual abuse situations was used.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Majority of the adolescents (83%) of the study belonged to nuclear families, 11% belonged to extended families and 5% were from joint family. Most parents were pre university graduates (48%). Source of information on sexual abuse was mostly obtained from friends (43%) and Mass media

sources(38%).About 13% respondents agreed to having some kind of sexual abuse experience in their life.65% respondents attained ‘Menarche’ at the age of 11-12years.82% felt that Educational programmes on sexual abuse is very important.

**Table 1.1:** Respondents Knowledge Level on Sexual Abuse

Knowledge level of respondents	Percentage
Good	12
Average	42
Poor	46
Total	100

N=100

Girl children must have right knowledge on Sexual abuse which is essential as they may be misinformed or mislead on facts about Sexual abuse and hence may have their own perception on the issue. Researcher investigated adolescent girls knowledge on Sexual abuse by obtaining their responses on questions related to what constitutes sexual abuse and the misconceptions related to it. Findings reveal that majority (46%) have Average knowledge on Sexual Abuse. Similarly many respondents of this study have poor knowledge on Sexual Abuse (42%) which is an area of concern and indicates the need to conduct awareness sessions for these students on sexual abuse in order to keep them adequately informed to face sexual abuse situations appropriately. Only 12% of the respondents had good knowledge on sexual abuse. Study findings by Anusha et.al, (2015) reveals that majority of adolescents have average and good knowledge of sexual abuse and only small percent have poor knowledge but this study shows that nearly half have poor knowledge scores and agrees with Kouta C,Tolma EL,(2008) study findings that young adolescents have limited knowledge on sexual health issues.

#### 4. Adolescent Views on Reactions to Sexual Abuse Situations

Respondents of the study were asked five open ended questions on how they would react if they encountered some sexual abuse situations.

**1) If a known family member tries to make sexual advances against you?**

About 48% of the respondents said that they will let their Parents/family members know about it.38% said that they would attempt to run away from the site to a safer place and remaining 14% said that they will retaliate and make use of their defenses.

**2) In a crowded Public place if an unknown person touches my private part**

About 44% said that they would slap the abuser and make other people know his behavior.20% said that they will inform Family member/peers/persons beside them and 20% said that they would scream/yell at the abuser while 16% of the respondents said that they would try to move away from the abuser.

**3) If a male person passes vulgar comments on your body**

It was interesting to note that 36% opined that they will escape from that place or ignore as though it is not

aimed at them.24% respondents said that they will firmly tell the abuser that they don’t approve it and inform higher authority, 21% said that they will inform their people to take action on him, while 9% said that they will comment back in retaliation.

**4) If a male person shows his private parts to you:**

51% of the respondents said that they will inform their immediate adults/authority around them about the abuser. While nearly half of the respondents (49%) said that they will ignore and move away from the situation.

**5) If you are forced/threatened to watch Sexual activities/Pornography by an adult male person in your family/ relatives:**

About 68% of the respondents opined that they will firmly decline to watch it and will tell the abuser that she will inform parents. It was surprising to note that 32% said that they will view these activities out of fear if they have no scope to escape the situation.

The above responses of respondents to questions on how they would react to sexual abuse situations have revealed to some extent assertive reactions from the respondents however some runaway reactions are also seen among the respondents where the respondents try to escape from the sexual abuse situations. There is a need to empower adolescent girls how to handle such situations in life. All abuse situations must be reported so that perpetrator can be brought to task and such incidents are not repeated.

**Table 1.2:** Respondents Level of Assertiveness

Level of Assertiveness	Percentage
High	07
Moderate	59
Low	34
Total	100

N=100

Assertiveness is a tool for expressing confidently and a way of saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in an appropriate way Assertive behavior helps individuals feel better about them by encouraging them to stand up for their own basic human rights even in sexual abuse situations. Results of this study reveal that most of the adolescent girls have moderate level of Assertive skills. However it is seen that 34% have low assertive behavior. It indicates the need to have practical Life skills sessions for girl children to enhance their assertive behavior. Above results agree with findings of Qadir.A. et al (2013) that urban adolescents had better assertiveness scores than rural adolescents.

**Table 1.3:** Respondents Level Of Self Confidence

Level of Self confidence	Percentage
High	09
Moderate	62
Low	29
Total	100

N=100

Self confidence implies believing in one’s own abilities and capacities. In this study Self confidence refers to confidence of adolescent girls in facing different life situations of day to day events including sexual abuse situations. The Self confidence level of respondents as measured by administering the self confidence questionnaire revealed that

most of the respondents (62%) have moderate level of Self confidence while 29% have low self confidence scores. About 9 % have high self confidence scores. Dzimadzi R. (2009) in his study on knowledge of Sexual abuse among female students in Malawi, found that one of the reason respondents did not report sexual abuse is due to the victims' fear of consequences and lack of knowledge that they were being abused. Though a quarter of the respondents have low Self confidence it implies that young girls should be helped to strengthen their self confidence to face life's challenges particularly Sexual abuse situations.

**Table 1.4:** Association Of Knowledge Scores With Self Confidence & Assertiveness Scores

Variables Associated	p value	Result
Knowledge & Self Confidence scores	$\chi^2 = 0.029057$	$p < 0.05$ sig
Knowledge & Assertiveness scores	$\chi^2 = 0.001227$	$p < 0.05$ sig

The above results indicate the association of Knowledge scores with Self Confidence and Assertiveness scores.

Association of Knowledge and Self Confidence scores of respondents revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected and Research hypothesis was accepted (i.e. there is significant association between Knowledge scores and Self confidence scores of respondents). Knowledge on Sexual abuse and Self confidence skill are dependent.

Association of Knowledge and Assertiveness scores of respondents revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected and Research hypothesis was accepted i.e. there is significant association between Knowledge scores and Assertiveness scores of respondents. Knowledge on Sexual abuse and Assertiveness skill are dependent. Study by Prasad Vimala (2009) revealed that assertiveness training programme can prevent abuses in young adolescents as it increases their awareness and courage to stand up for their right.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

About half of the respondents overall knowledge on Sexual abuse was poor. Opinion of respondents to questions on how they would react to sexual abuse situations revealed to some extent assertive reactions from the respondents however some runaway reactions are also seen among the respondents. Moderate Level of self Confidence and Assertiveness scores of respondents was seen. Findings showed significant association between Knowledge and Assertiveness scores as well as Knowledge and Self confidence scores. Children deserve the right to personal safety as well as to learn strategies to protect themselves. They have the right to report the abuse and hence sexuality awareness, removal of misconceptions and guidance on how to deal with sexual abuse situations must be part of regular training at high school level for adolescent girls . Study implicates the need to conduct Programmes on Sexual Abuse awareness as well as sessions to strengthen their life skills such as self confidence and assertiveness to protect themselves from sexual abuse situations and hence ensure their right to protection. Thus, Knowledge on sexual abuse

along with training on life skills like assertiveness and Self Confidence will help adolescents to encounter, negotiate, judge and act wisely in sexual abuse situations.

Further research such as Comparative studies on knowledge of Sexual Abuse among rural and urban young adolescents can be undertaken on a larger population to get a broader understanding of this issue. Experimental studies to assess effectiveness of programmes on sexual abuse awareness & skills training as well Studies using focused group discussions with different groups of adolescent girls to study how they will handle sexual abuse situations can be conducted.

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### Author Profile



**Dr Loveena Lobo** is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at St Aloysius College (Autonomous) Mangalore. She has 16 years of teaching experience for the post graduate students of social work as well as research work.