

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Attitude of Adults towards Educating Children to Protect Themselves from Sexual Abuse in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research was planned to assess attitude of adults towards educating children about sexual abuse prevention.

Study Design: Observational cross-section study.

Place and Duration of Study: The study was conducted on people living in cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan during March-June 2018.

Materials and Methods: Data was collected from 228 people by non-probability convenient sampling. People of both genders with any marital status, above 18 years of age and with minimum high school education or above were considered eligible for this study. A self-designed structured questionnaire was used to collect data which was analysed using SPSS version 23. P value ≤ 0.05 was considered significant.

Results: Majority (94.7%) of the participants, irrespective of their gender (p -value=0.19) and marital status (p -value=0.08), were in favour of educating children about sexual abuse prevention. Around 42% participants tried themselves to educate children on this topic and males' participation in it was observed to be less than females (p -value=0.005). Optimal age to educate children was considered between 5-9 years. A positive response was shown by participants, when the extent and ways of child sexual abuse prevention education were discussed.

Conclusion: Majority of the adults are in favour of educating children to protect themselves from sexual abuse so they are able to recognize and react effectively to potentially dangerous situations.

Key Words: *Child Abuse, Educational Activities, Preventive Measures, Public Health, Sexual Abuse.*

Introduction

Worldwide, child sexual abuse (CSA) is a massive challenge for public health, human rights and social justice.¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) defines it as: "The involvement of child in a 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 "or else that violate the laws or social taboos of society".²

The estimated global prevalence of CSA is 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males.³ About 60% of the child sexual abusers are non-relative acquaintances, 30%

are relatives and only 10 % are strangers.⁴ The highest vulnerable age group among both genders is reported to be the children between the ages of 11 to 15 years and then 6 to 10 years.⁵

CSA has an adverse effect on child's physical, social, spiritual and mental health. Health consequences includes depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, unwanted pregnancy, HIV acquisition, sexual disorientation, and drug addiction.^{1,6}

Like other countries of the world, CSA is a serious problem in Pakistan as well and has recently gained lot of attention. According to a data collected by a non-governmental organization, Sahil, about 11 cases of CSA are reported from across the Pakistan every day.⁷ Almost 17,862 cases of CSA have been reported in the country from 2013 to 2017⁸ and still many remains undisclosed due to the feeling of guilt and shame, fear of perpetrator's threats, lack of trusted confidante, or to maintain the reputation of family.

Worldwide child abuse prevention programs are created to provide knowledge to children to recognize abuse, teach skills that decrease the risk for abuse, normalize the disclosure process and

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Funding Source: NIL; Conflict of Interest: NIL

Received: December 17, 2018; Revised: October 29, 2019

Accepted: October 30, 2019

provide a pathway for children who may be experiencing abuse to report the abuse.⁹ Though several attempts have been taken to develop and implement such programs in Pakistan as well but adults' view regarding its need has attracted very little attention from research point of view. Therefore, this study was planned to assess adults' attitudes towards development of such educational programs in order to protect children from sexual abuse.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the twin cities of Pakistan, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, during March to June 2018. Data from 228 participants was collected using nonprobability convenient sampling after getting approval from ethical committee of Rawalpindi Medical University. Adults of both genders of any marital status above 18 years of age, who were residents of Islamabad or Rawalpindi, were asked to participate in this study voluntarily. Whereas, people with no or less than high school education and those who were reluctant or not comfortable with filling form were excluded.

Data was collected by means of a self-designed questionnaire which was distributed online and in-hand. It included demographic profile (i.e. gender, age, marital status, and education) and a set of questions through which adults' opinions towards CSA prevention education and their participation could be observed. Different ways and extent of protecting and educating children about CSA were suggested and the participants were asked to select the most suitable one/s.

Data was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Chi-square tests were applied to calculate *p* values for determining relation between adults approving educating children about CSA prevention on basis of their gender and marital status. *P* value ≤ 0.05 was considered significant. Descriptive Statistics were used to analyze rest of the data.

Results

Out of the 228 participants, 42.5% (n=97) were males and 57.5% (n=131) were females. Only 40.8% (n=93) of the participants were married (39 males and 54 females) and 59.2% (n=135) were unmarried (58 males and 77 females).

More than 50% of the participants i.e. 115 knew

about a CSA case around them. About 94.7% of the participants agreed that the child must be given education about CSA prevention and among them 75.2% approved CSA awareness through public programs like television shows, school based programs, activities at public places, etc. Both males and females, irrespective of their gender, approve educating children about CSA prevention as *p*-value of 0.08 was obtained after applying Chi-square test. Similarly there is an insignificant association between marital status and approval of CSA prevention education (*p*-value of 0.19) stating that both married and unmarried participants favored it equally. Unmarried females favored educating children the most as 98.7% agreed to it. Whereas, 94.4% of married females, 93.1% of unmarried males, and 89.7% of married males were in its favour. In order to know the age at which children should be given CSA education different age groups were made. Among them the most favored group by participants was children between the ages of 5 to 7 years (by 27% participants), followed by children between 7 to 9 years (24.9%), 9 to 11 years (16.90%), 3 to 5 years (15.60%) and above 11 years (15.50%).

Few questions were planned to assess adults' participation in trying to aware their children (or other children having close relation with them) about CSA by their own. Self-participation of 222 out of 228 participants could be assessed. Only 93 (42%) tried it and among them 77 were satisfied by their way of counseling with majority being females.

It was observed that males' participation in giving children CSA awareness was less (*p*-value= 0.005) as compared to females as only 28 male participants tried to educate children on their own.

According to 89% (n=203) participants, CSA affects both the mental and physical health of the child and only 11% (n=25) participants believed that it affects his/her mental health only.

Adults' views regarding extent of educating children are shown in Table I.

Different ways were suggested to prevent CSA and among them the most favored one reflected the importance parents' attitude towards their children which enable them to share things openly with them. The details of other ways are further mentioned in Table II

Table I: Extent of Educating Children about CSA

Options for extent of CSA education:	No. of Participants that agree with Statement	Percentage
Taught to avoid strangers.	160	70.1%
Know about private body parts and who can touch them.	150	65.7%
Know about good touch and bad touch.	164	71.9%
Report if someone shows child some inappropriate thing.	188	82.4%
Report if someone tries to take child to some room alone.	166	72.7%
Report if someone asks child to sit with them always.	135	59.1%
Inform if someone asks child to touch their private body parts.	168	73.6%

Table II: Ways of CSA Prevention

Better way/s of protecting child from CSA among following:	No. of Participants that agree with Statement	Percentage
Parents should never leave their child unattended.	110	48.2%
Only parents should give CSA education to their children.	58	25.7%
Parents should develop friendly and trustful attitude towards their children so that they can share things openly with them.	203	89.4%
Parents must be always available to listen to their child and must believe what he/she says.	173	76.1%
Workshops for parents, in which they are taught to educate their child in appropriate way.	133	58.4%
Awareness through advertisements/programs on television.	80	35.4%
Awareness through activities/programs conducted in day-care centres/schools/parks	113	49.5%
Book/ Text about CSA awareness in age appropriate way should be added in their school syllabus.	64	28.3%
Strict laws must be made and actions must be taken against abuser.	187	82.3%

The counseling about CSA prevention education can leave multiple impacts on the child's mind. According to 87.7% participants it enables the child to deal with

potentially abusive situations. About 83% believed that it can lead to considerable decrease in number of cases reported and according to 76.8% CSA prevention education can lead to earlier disclosure of CSA cases by victims. Whereas, adults' concern about CSA education leading to negative impacts are mentioned in table III. This table also explains the concerns of individuals disapproving CSA education.

Table III: Concerns Regarding Impacts of CSA Prevention Education

	No. of Participants that agree with Statement	Percentage
It can develop insecurity in child's mind.	154	79.3%
It can develop a negative mind of child towards the society.	143	73.6%
It can lead to misunderstanding of people's intention by child.	131	67.4
It can lead to child learning too much about sex.	124	63.8%
CSA education in public, creates immorality/obscenity in the society.	90	46.1%

These negative impacts could become serious concern, only if the education is done in inappropriate ways. Thus, this sensitive issue of educating the child about sexual abuse must be dealt carefully as it attracts individual, religious, institutional, and societal concern.

Discussion

The results of the present study shows that majority of participants approve teaching children about CSA prevention especially during the time period when they are attending elementary school i.e. 5 to 11 years old. Their participation in giving CSA prevention education to children on their own, interest in suggesting ways and extent of educating children shows their concern towards contributing to safety of children.

A research conducted on mother's knowledge and perception about CSA in Jordan showed that 74% of mothers who were part of study, stated that educating children about CSA can prevent it.¹⁰ Similarly another study conducted in China also showed that 89.8% of parents supported CSA prevention education for their kids.¹¹ A randomized controlled trail on elementary students in US

concluded that children in younger grades gains better knowledge about CSA and ability to recognize, refuse and report unsafe touches while being enrolled in a CSA prevention program.¹² This study also justifies our result in which most participants are in favour of educating children between 5 to 9 years of age.

In our study, importance of parental role in preventing CSA is also observed (refer to Table II). Rudolph J *et al.*, also suggested in their study that parents can protect their children from CSA directly through the strong external barriers provided by their availability, supervision, monitoring, and involvement; and indirectly by promoting children's self-efficacy, competence, well-being, and self-esteem, which will help them become less likely targets for abuse and more able to respond appropriately and disclose abuse if it occurs.¹³ A study conducted in Australia showed that the presence of a guardian can decrease the risk of CSA by 86% which also reflects the importance of parent's/guardian's role.¹⁴ About 75.2% of our participants were in favor of educating children about CSA prevention in public including in schools and only 25.5% believed that only parents should give such education to their children (Table II). A study conducted in China also showed that 87.3% of parents were willing to let their children acquire CSA prevention knowledge in schools.¹¹ School based prevention programs are reported to play a crucial role in preventing CSA as it potentially reaches all children. Studies showed that such programs had proved to show an improvement in knowledge, disclosure, and protective behavior at risk situations.^{12,15}

In our study about 35% participants considered media as an effective tool in preventing CSA. From past few years, media is playing an active role in CSA awareness. Many articles, advertisements, serials, talk-shows, movies, are based on this topic but it hasn't shown any effect on decreasing CSA rate. A study conducted in USA by Rheingold AA *et al.*, focusing on independent effect of media in preventing CSA, concluded that media campaigns might have increased knowledge of CSA at the time of intervention but it alone had no significant effect on preventing CSA.¹⁶

To date, there are abundant studies that show the importance of educating children about CSA

prevention. The knowledge about CSA, attitudes, self-efficacy to take action, and awareness are all key capabilities related to creating conditions of safety for our children.

Our study includes educated people as they are more open towards new change and more willing to children about new things as compared to people with little or no education. Thus there is need of further study in which opinions of people with little or no education are considered and compared with those of people who have received higher education. Also the opinions of people belonging to low socioeconomic status should also be assessed as CSA is more prevalent in such areas.

Conclusion

Majority of adults are in favor of educating children about CSA especially during the time period when children are attending elementary school. Adult's interest in suggesting ways and extent of educating children shows their concern towards contributing to safety of children by preparing them to deal with potentially harmful situations.

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