

1-1-2017

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Recommended Citation

Hynniewta, Banbetlin Ms; Jose, Tessy Treesa Dr; and G, Anjali K. Ms (2017) "Knowledge and attitude on child abuse among school teachers, in selected urban English medium schools of Udupi District," *Manipal Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, .

Available at: <https://impressions.manipal.edu/mjnhs/vol3/iss1/11>

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Knowledge and attitude on child abuse among school teachers, in selected urban English medium schools of Udupi District

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Abstract

Introduction: Child abuse continues to be one of the primary threats to the child's emotional and social well-being globally. As students spend maximum time in school, teachers need to be trained to recognize physical and behavioural changes associated with abuse in order to confidently determine the cause and plan interventions appropriately. The inadequate knowledge and information lead to gap in the crucial role of teachers in identification and early assistance of an abused child. **Objectives:** The objectives of the study were to assess the knowledge of the school teachers on child abuse, to determine the attitude of school teachers on identification and reporting of child abuse and to find the association between the knowledge and attitude with the selected demographic variables. **Methods:** A descriptive survey design was used to conduct the study. Study was conducted among 100 school teachers from selected urban English medium schools, in Udupi district. The instruments used for data collection were a structured knowledge questionnaire on child abuse and the attitude scale on identification and reporting of child abuse. **Results:** Majority of the school teachers (84%) had average knowledge on child abuse whereas, all the teachers had favourable attitude towards identification and reporting of child abuse. With regard to association between knowledge and selected demographic variables, there was no significant association found except for previous knowledge on child abuse ($p < .05$). **Conclusion:** Child abuse is a global issue and children face abuse in many forms and more awareness will help in combating the issues and problems with abuse. The knowledge of the school teachers needs to be enhanced by conducting awareness program on child abuse.

Key words: Child abuse, knowledge, attitude, school teacher

Introduction

Child abuse, a global issue affects children of all ages, gender, races, ethnicities, in varied socio economic classes and is in the forefront in the line of widespread

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social issues and social problems (Collin-Vezina, Diagneault, Hebert, 2013). Child abuse occurs in many different forms such as physical, sexual, emotional and neglect; whereby irrespective of any form of abuse it has a traumatising lifetime experience for the victim (Habetha et.al 2012).

Deveney (2008) stressed and asserted that child abuse has both short term and long term effects not only in childhood, but also later in life thus, interfering with the child's normal development both emotionally and socially. Consequences are even worse, when the abuse goes unnoticed or continues over a longer period of time. Educators and teachers are in close contact daily

How to cite this article: Hynniewta, B., Jose, T. T., & Anjali, K. G. (2017). Knowledge and attitude on child abuse among school teachers in selected urban English medium schools of Udupi District. *Manipal Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences*, 3(1), 32-36.

with a large number of children for a longer period as the child spends a longer duration of time in the school. So, teachers are able to observe behavioural changes in the child and thus are in a better position to detect and report child abuse, but are not equipped or are not adequately informed (Goldman & Grimbeek, 2011). Beliefs and attitudes of teachers influence the perception of abuse and consequently reporting cases (Feng, Huang & Wang, 2010).

The attitude of teachers toward reporting of child abuse is a key determinant in handling the situation (Walsh *et al.*, 2010). There are many factors that may potentially be influenced by their attitude and perception that may affect the quality of decision making and reporting of child abuse that teachers need to take into consideration (Hinkelman & Bruno, 2008; Walsh *et al.*, 2010). Teachers witness social-emotional problems in their students, such as anxiety, self-harming behaviours, aggression, low self-esteem, and depression, which may be associated with divorce and other family dysfunction, but they also may indicate child abuse (Walsh *et al.*, 2010). Feng, Huang, & Wang, (2010) stated that there is an incongruence between the identification of child abuse and its reporting suggesting inadequate awareness on child abuse. The lack of adequate knowledge and information indicate a gap in the crucial role of teachers in identification and early assistance of an abused child.

A qualitative study was conducted in the Netherlands on the identification of child abuse by the school teachers, other professionals and the ways that they handle the cases. Sixteen school teachers of primary section and 17 public health nurses participated in the study. Data were collected by interview focusing on the areas of knowledge, attitude, and various challenging means and barriers to the identification and reporting of child abuse. After transcription of the data into various themes, the findings revealed that though the teachers and the nurses are aware of child abuse, they were lacking in the areas of specific knowledge, attitude, communication skills, and required effective guidance and supportive direction in relation to detection and reporting of cases of child abuse (Schols, Ruiters, & Ory, 2013).

A survey was conducted by Wenjing, Jingji, and Feng (2013) in China, to assess the knowledge, attitude, and the training education regarding child sexual abuse among 245 preschool teachers. The study was done by administering questionnaire containing 16 items. The findings showed that teachers have limited knowledge on child abuse preventive measures ($M=4.86$, $SD=2.12$). With regard to the attitude, majority (66%) of teachers believed that prevention program regarding child sexual abuse is needed. Fifteen percent of the teachers had attended training program regarding child sexual abuse and most of the teachers (85%) expressed their willingness to participate in training program on prevention of it. The association between training program, knowledge, and attitude revealed that the teachers, who had attended training program had better knowledge ($M=5.81$, $SD=2.11$) and positive attitude ($M=2.20$, $SD=1.02$) in comparison to the knowledge ($M=4.68$, $SD=2.08$) and attitude ($M=1.61$, $SD=0.93$) of the teachers, who did not attend any training program on prevention of child sexual abuse.

Objectives

1. To assess the knowledge of the school teachers on child abuse
2. To determine the attitude of the school teachers on identification and reporting of child abuse
3. To find the association between the knowledge and attitude with the selected demographic variables.

Materials and Methods

A descriptive survey design was used to conduct the study. The sample consisted of 100 school teachers, teaching in selected urban English medium schools, in Udupi district. Simple random sampling was used to select the subjects. The instruments used were developed by the researcher. The researcher used the following instruments for collecting the data.

Tool 1: Demographic proforma was used to collect the data regarding the characteristics of the participants. The items included in the tool were age, gender, educational qualification, marital status, number of children, total years of teaching experience, previous knowledge on child abuse, and the source of information.

Tool 2: Structured knowledge questionnaire on child abuse consisting of twenty-four multiple choice questions covering knowledge on child abuse in general, sexual, and physical abuse, neglect and emotional abuse, prevention and reporting of child abuse was used to collect the data regarding the knowledge. The maximum score was 24 and the minimum was zero. Scores were interpreted as good, average, and poor with the score range of 17 to 24, 9 to 16 and 0 to 8 respectively.

Tool 3: Attitude scale on the identification and reporting of child abuse assessed the attitude of teachers with regard to child abuse identification and its reporting. It was a five point likert scale of 18 items with positive and negative statements on the identification of the child abuse and the reporting of the same. Reverse scoring was done for the negative statements. The scoring is 90 as the highest score and 18 as the lowest score. Score was categorised as favourable attitude (55-90) and unfavourable attitude (18-54).

For ensuring the content validity, the instruments were given to seven experts from fields of psychiatry, clinical psychology, psychiatric social work, child health nursing, psychiatric nursing, and community health nursing. Modifications were made according to the opinion and suggestion of the experts. The reliability of knowledge questionnaire was determined by using split-half method and Spearman-Brown prophecy formula and found to be reliable ($r = .87$) and Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the attitude scale's reliability and was found reliable ($r = .81$).

Procedure for data collection

Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional ethics committee. Permission was taken from the Director of Public Relations and the authority of the respective schools. Permission was also obtained from the institutions and concerned authorities. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants through participant information sheet and the informed consent was taken from all the subjects before administering the research instruments.

Results

The collected data was coded in a master data sheet and analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 by using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage; and the association was computed using Fisher's exact test.

Table 1: Distribution in Frequency and Percentage of Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
N=100		
Age in years		
22- 40	59	59
41-58	41	41
Gender		
Male	11	11
Female	89	89
Education		
PUC	4	4
BA BEd	18	18
BSc BEd	17	17
MA BEd	28	28
MSc BEd	10	10
MSc MEd	2	2
Graduate and Others	21	21
Marital status		
Married	91	91
Unmarried	9	9
Total years of experience		
1-10	48	48
11-20	29	29
>20	23	23
Previous knowledge on child abuse		
Yes	87	87
No	13	13

The findings presented in Table 1 shows that among the 100, who participated in the study, majority i.e. 89% were females and most of them i.e. 59% were of the age group 22-40 years. With regard to education, most of participants i.e. 28% had education as MA BEd. Data on marital status show that majority i.e. 91% were married and no data of divorced or separation were

found from both the group. Most of them i.e. 48% had 1 to 10 years of teaching experience. Majority i.e. 87% had previous knowledge on sexual abuse.

The Figure 1 presents that majority (84%) of the school teachers had average knowledge on child abuse and 10% and 6% have good and poor knowledge respectively. All the teachers (100%) had favourable attitude towards identification and reporting of child abuse.

Figure 1: Knowledge Scores of the School Teachers on Child Abuse

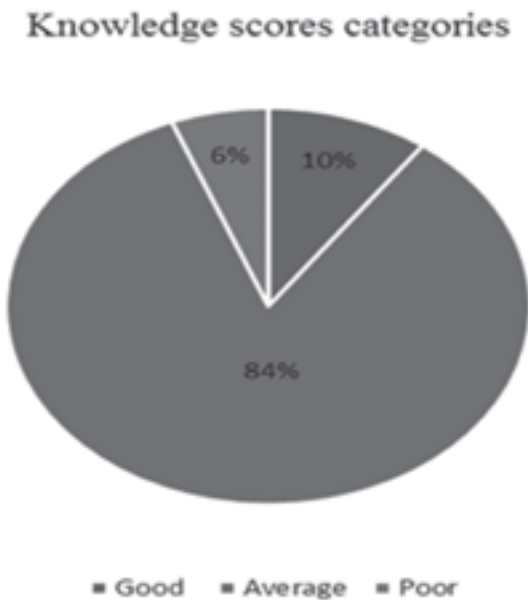


Figure 1: Pie Diagram Showing Knowledge of the School Teachers on Child Abuse

Table 2: Fisher Exact Test Computed between Knowledge and Selected Demographic Variables

N=100

Sample characteristics	Knowledge categories			Fisher's exact value	p value
	Poor (0-8)	Average (9-16)	Good (17-24)		
Age in years					
22- 40	4	48	7	0.734	.771
41-58	2	36	3		
Gender					
Male	-	11	1	0.366	.000*
Female	6	73	9		

Sample characteristics	Knowledge categories			Fisher's exact value	p value
	Poor (0-8)	Average (9-16)	Good (17-24)		
Education					
PUC	-	3	1	19.611	.091
BA BEd	1	17	-		
BSc BEd	1	15	1		
MA BEd	-	25	3		
MSc BEd	-	8	2		
MSc MEd	-	1	-		
Graduate and Others	4	15	3		
Marital status					
Married	6	75	10	0.693	.771
Unmarried	-	9	-		
Total years of experience					
1-10	4	39	5	1.501	.992
11-20	1	25	3		
>20	1	20	2		
Previous knowledge on child abuse					
Yes	3	75	9	5.904	.040*
No	3	9	1		

*p < .05

Fisher exact test was used to determine the association between the knowledge and selected demographic variables and findings are shown in Table 2. No significant association was found between knowledge and the selected demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, education, and years of experience. Since, all the teachers had favourable attitude, no association was found out between attitude and the selected demographic variable.

Discussion

The present study findings show that there is inadequate knowledge among the school teachers in relation to child abuse, as 80% of the subjects had only average knowledge on child abuse. This supports the findings of the study conducted by McIntyre's (1987) on the

awareness of the teachers on symptoms of child abuse and neglect. The findings showed that the percentage of awareness on the signs and symptoms neglect was 30, physical abuse 21, 19 in emotional abuse, and four on awareness in sexual abuse. This also support the survey findings conducted by National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPA) among 568 (34% response) of teachers in 40 schools nationwide across the United States on their knowledge and attitudes and beliefs and also the prevention of child abuse (Abrahams, Casey & Daro, 1992). The survey findings show that two-third teachers indicated about the insufficient knowledge provided by the school authority on child abuse, its identification, reporting, and prevention. It also reported that among the 90% teachers, who had suspected cases of child abuse only few i.e. 23% had directly reported the cases to the protective child services, while two-third teachers attributed to the insufficient knowledge on detection and reporting of child as a major obstacle to the identification of child abuse, neglect, and its reporting.

Sources of support: None

Conflict of interest: None declared

Source of support in form of grants: None

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