



“Awareness and Practices Regarding Prevention of Physical, Emotional and Sexual Abuse Among Parents of School Children: An Observational Study”

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Abstract: Introduction. Child abuse is a pervasive public health problem worldwide, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual maltreatment that can profoundly affect children's growth, development, and overall well-being. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), up to 1 billion children experience some form of violence each year, highlighting the magnitude and urgency of this issue. Parents, as primary caregivers, significantly influence children's safety and well-being. However, research demonstrates that many parents lack adequate awareness regarding the different forms of abuse and preventive strategies. **Methods.** A non-experimental Cross-sectional analysis was conducted among 224 parents in selected schools at Thrissur district, Kerala, India. The data was collected using baseline data sheet and pre-validated awareness questionnaire and structured practice checklist. **Results.** The mean score on awareness and practice regarding prevention of child abuse among parents were moderate levels in awareness 6.02(1.71) and poor in practice 10.76(5.33), indicating that 75.4 % of participants have moderate awareness regarding prevention of child abuse and 78.1 % of participants have poor practice regarding prevention of child abuse. It means that basic understanding and involvement in prevention of child abuse. The correlation between awareness and practice is mild positive correlation, obtained r value is 0.45, P value of 0.001 This indicates that as parents awareness regarding child abuse prevention increases, their level of practice also significantly improves and significant association found between awareness and practice on prevention of child among parents and various baseline variables such as age, and Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training. **Conclusion.** Interventions and awareness programmes can be designed to strengthen the awareness and practice regarding prevention of child abuse among parents

Keywords: Awareness, Practice, Prevention of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, Parents of school children.

Introduction

Child abuse is a widespread public health problem worldwide, that can have a significant impact on children's development, growth, and general well-being. It includes physical, emotional, and sexual maltreatment. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that up to 1 billion children are victims of violence annually, emphasizing the magnitude and urgency of this problem.¹ Child abuse occurs in multiple forms: Physical abuse - hitting, beating, or otherwise injuring a child. Emotional abuse - verbal hostility, rejection, humiliation, or neglecting a child's emotional needs. Sexual abuse – exploitation or coercion of a child for sexual purposes. Regardless of its forms, child abuse can result in long-term consequences, including psychological trauma,

developmental delays, educational difficulties, and increased vulnerability to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation⁴.

Parents serve as the primary line of defense against child abuse, playing a vital role in recognizing early warning signs, adopting preventive measures, and ensuring a safe home environment. However, research shows that cultural norms, misconceptions, lack of education, and inadequate exposure to child protection information all contribute to a wide range of parental awareness and preventive practices. A study conducted in Chennai found that although most of parents were aware of the different forms of abuse, only half adopted preventive measures, revealing a gap between awareness and practice¹². Similarly, a study conducted in



Bengaluru found that many parents underestimate the effects of emotional and physical abuse, viewing child abuse primarily as sexual violence¹⁴.

Programs to raise awareness about child abuse in Indian homes and schools are especially important. Even though there are legal frameworks like the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 and other child protection policies, their efficacy is restricted if parents are not aware of preventive measures.

Despite global and national efforts, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children remains a persistent and serious concern. Research indicates that child abuse is widespread, with approximately 1 in 4 adults reporting experiences of physical abuse and 1 in 5 reporting sexual abuse during childhood⁶. The long-term effects are profound, impacting children's physical health, psychological well-being, social functioning, and educational outcomes. Victims of abuse are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, substance use, risky behaviours, poor academic performance, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships^{1,2}.

In India, the Study reported that a significant proportion of children experienced various forms of abuse, yet parental recognition and reporting, especially of emotional and sexual abuse, remained low. The necessity for focused research to evaluate parental awareness is emphasized by this underappreciation in community settings⁴. As primary caregivers, parents play a important role in protecting children's safety and well-being. However, studies show that many parents are not sufficiently informed about the various types of abuse and how to avoid it. Many caregivers lack confidence in spotting warning signs of sexual abuse, fail to identify emotional abuse, and view physical punishment as a suitable form of discipline⁸. Furthermore, parents' capacity to protect children and react appropriately to suspected abuse is further limited by their lack of familiarity with child protection laws like the POCSO Act. Parental readiness is even more important because of the new risks brought about by the growth of social media and digital environments.

This study is significant because it addresses existing knowledge gaps by assessing parents' awareness and preventive practices related to physical, emotional, and sexual child abuse. The development of focused educational programs and community interventions targeted at enhancing parental capacities can be informed by identifying areas of inadequate knowledge and suboptimal preventive behaviors. The findings may also support healthcare professionals, educators, and policymakers in

designing culturally appropriate strategies that promote positive parenting, early recognition of abuse, timely reporting, and access to support services.

This study supports initiatives to make homes and communities safer by providing baseline data on awareness and practices among parents of school-age children. It also adds to the larger field of child protection research. By equipping parents with the information and abilities needed to stop abuse and lessen its terrible effects, the study ultimately seeks to improve child safety and wellbeing.

Statement of the problem

A study to assess the awareness and practices regarding Prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among Parents of school children in a selected school at Thrissur district

Research Question

What is the level of awareness and level of practices regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among parents of school children?

Objectives

1. Assess level of awareness regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among parents of school children
2. Assess level of practice adopted by parents for the prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among school children
3. Determine relationships between parental awareness and practices related to the prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among school children
4. Find association of awareness and preventive practices regarding physical, emotional and sexual abuse with the selected base line variables among parents of school children

Operational definitions

1.Awareness

It refers to the level of knowledge and understanding possessed by parents of school-aged children about the identification, risk factors, warning signs, reporting mechanisms, and preventive strategies related to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, as measured by structured awareness questionnaire.

2.Practices

It refers to the specific actions, behaviours, and measures adopted by parents to protect their children from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. This includes supervising children, setting boundaries, teaching safety rules, promoting open communication,



recognizing early warning signs, and reporting suspected abuse are measured using a structured preventive practice checklist.

3. Prevention of Physical, emotional and sexual abuse

It refers the deliberate actions, strategies, and behaviours adopted by parents or caregivers to protect children from harm and reduce the risk of physical emotional and sexual abuse.

4. Parents of school children

Whose refers to the biological, adoptive, or legal guardians who are responsible for the care, upbringing, and decision-making for children enrolled in primary school (grades 1–7, typically aged 6–12 years).

Assumptions

Parents may have some knowledge and preventive practices on physical, emotional and sexual abuse

Hypotheses

H1: There is significant relation between awareness and practices regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among parents of school children

H2: There is significant association of awareness and practices regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among parents of school children with the selected baseline variables.

Materials and Methodes

Research Approach-Quantitative

Research Design -Non-experimental -cross -sectional survey design

Variables

Dependent variables

Awareness and practices regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse

Baseline variables

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Type of family
- Area of residence
- Age of the child
- Gender of the child
- Number of children
- Birth order of the primary school child
- Attended any classes regarding prevention of child abuse

Setting

Selected Schools at Thrissur District

Population

Parents of school children

Sampling criteria

Inclusion criteria

Parents who

- Have children with age between 6-12 years
- Willing to participate in the study
- can understand and read English or Malayalam

Exclusion criteria

- Parents who are suffering from serious mental or physical illness

Sample and sampling Techniques

Sample size: In this study the sample consist of 224 parents from Selected Schools at Thrissur District. The sampling technique used in the study was convenient sampling technique. The sample were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria

Development of tool

The tools were prepared on basis of objectives of the study and the following method used for the development of tool include extensive review of researches and evidences, discussion with subject experts (nursing faculty, psychiatrist, psychologists and psychiatric social worker) and observation and personal experience of the researcher

Technique

Self-report

Description of the tools

Tool 1-Baseline Data Sheet

Questionnaire to assess the baseline data of parents include eleven items

Tool 2- Structured Awareness questionnaire regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse

The awareness questionnaire includes ten questions with multiple choices, used to assess the awareness regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse

Tool 3- Structured Checklist for practice regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse

The practice checklist contains fourteen -item scale used to assess the practice of parents regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among children

Content Validity

Investigator developed the instruments with review of literature of relevant topic and discussion with the experts. A total of 5 experts from various specialties participated in the validation process. The experts assessed relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of each item in the tool. Baseline data Sheet, Structured Awareness Questionnaire and Structured Practice check list. The Content



Validity Index (CVI) was calculated by determining the Item-Level CVI and Scale-Level CVI. The S-CVI values obtained were 0.97 for the Baseline Data Sheet, 0.91 for the Structured Awareness Questionnaire, 0.92 for the Structured Practice checklist indicating content validity. The required changes were made based on professional advice. The overall validity and quality of the study's instruments were improved by these changes, which guaranteed improved clarity and relevance.

Reliability

Structured Awareness Questionnaire demonstrated internal consistency, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.71. The practice checklist was tested using the test-retest reliability analysis, which produced a reliability coefficient of 1.00.

Pilot study

Pilot study will be conducted in 25 parents in selected school from Thrissur district. It revealed the appropriateness of the methodology used and comprehensibility and clarity of tool. It was found that the collected data were amenable to statistical analysis and thus the study is feasible.

Ethical considerations

The study obtained ethical approval from the institutional ethical committee of Amala institute of medical sciences, Thrissur, Kerala, India (10/EC/FAC/26/AIMS-26) and permission from the school authorities. Parents were given with an information sheet explaining the nature and purpose of the study and their written consent was obtained which was completely voluntary. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured

Method of data collection

Permission was obtained from the school authorities and the Subjects was identified and selected from schools based on sampling criteria. Necessary explanations was given to the subjects and informed consent was obtained. Data was collected using structured tools

Statistical analysis

All data were collected and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and the collected data were cleaned before analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Results were presented as frequencies and percentages for Quantitative variables was summarized using mean and SD. Pearson's correlation was used to find the relationship between awareness and practice regarding prevention of child abuse. The chi-square and Fishers exact test were used to find association of awareness and practice with baseline variables.

Result

Table 1 Distribution of Parents based on the Baseline data (n=224)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age of the Parent		
26–30 years	21	9.37
31–35 years	56	25.00
36–40 years	76	33.93
41–45 years	44	19.64
Above 45 years	27	12.05
Relationship with the child		
Father	46	20.53
Mother	178	79.46
Type of family		
Nuclear	112	50.00
Joint	96	42.85
Extended	16	7.14
Area of residence		
Municipality	28	12.5
Corporation	92	41.07
Panchayath	104	46.42
Education		
Primary school	8	3.57
Secondary school	26	11.60
Higher secondary	38	16.96
Diploma	24	10.71
Graduation	119	53.12
Post graduate and above	33	14.73
Occupation		
Government employee	8	3.57



Private employee	56	25.00
Self-employed	16	7.14
Daily wage worker	36	16.07
Homemaker	85	37.95
Unemployed	23	10.27
Monthly Family Income		
Below ₹10,000	5	2.23
₹10,001–₹20,000	53	23.66
₹20,001–₹30,000	88	39.29
₹30,001–₹50,000	67	29.91
Above ₹50,000	11	4.91
Number of Children		
One	117	52.23
Two	94	41.96
Three and above	13	5.80
Class of the Child		
1st–4 th standard	126	56.25
5 th –7 th standard	98	43.75
Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training		
Yes	26	11.60
NO	198	88.32
Source of Information		
School teachers	18	8.04
Health professionals	12	5.36
Television	22	9.82
social media	26	11.61

Newspapers	8	4.91
Friends/Relatives	11	4.91
NGO programmes	0	0
Multiple sources	127	56.70

Table 1 shows that 33.93% of the participants were aged 36–40 years. Majority of the participants (79.46%) were mothers of the children. Half of the participants (50%) belonged to nuclear families, while 46.42% were from panchayat areas. More than half of the participants (53.12%) were graduates, and 37.95% were homemakers. A total of 39.29% of the participants had a monthly income between ₹20,001 and ₹30,000. More than half (52.23%) had one child, and 56.25% of their children were studying in Grades 1–4. The majority of the participants (88.32%) had no prior exposure to child protection training. More than half of the participants (56.70%) reported multiple sources of information regarding child protection.

Table 2 Distribution of parents as per awareness score (n=224)

Grade of Awareness	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Good	8-10	32	14.3
Moderate	5-7	169	75.4
Poor	0-4	23	10.3

Table 2 depicts that 75.4 % of participants have moderate awareness regarding prevention of child abuse and 10.3% of participants have poor awareness regarding prevention physical, emotional and sexual abuse

Table 3 Distribution of parents as per Practice score (n=224)

Grade of Proactive behaviors	Score Range	Frequency	Percent
Good	23-28	9	4.1
Moderate	17-22	40	17.8
Poor	0-16	175	78.1

Table 3 depicts that 78.1 % of participants have poor practice regarding prevention of child abuse and 17.8% of participants have moderate practice regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse



Table 4 Mean and standard deviation of Awareness and practice score(n=224)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	25 th quartile	75 th quartile
Awareness	6.02	1.71	6.08	5.09	7.07
Practice	10.76	5.33	10.24	5.12	15.36

Table 4 shows the awareness and practice scores revealed that participants demonstrated moderate levels in awareness 6.02(1.71) and poor in practice 10.76(5.33). Indicating that basic awareness and poor involvement regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, but needs to strengthen awareness and practice.

Table 5. Correlation between Awareness and practice on prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse among Parents(n=224)

Variables	Correlation coefficient (r)	P value
Awareness and Practice	0.45	<0.001

Table 5 shows that the obtained r value is 0.82. This indicates that as parents awareness regarding child abuse prevention increases, their level of practice also significantly improves. The P value of 0.001 shows that this relationship is moderate positive correlation statistically significant.

Table 6. Association between Awareness on prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and selected Demographic variables among Parents (n=224)

Category		Awareness			Total	
		Good	Moderate	Poor		
Age	25–35 years	14	58	5	77	$\chi^2 = 46.87$ $p < 0.001$
	36–45 years	12	102	6	120	
	Above 45 years	6	9	12	27	
Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training	Yes	15	6	5	26	$(\chi^2): 54.29$ $p < 0.001$
	NO	17	163	18	198	

Table 6 shows that a significant association was found between age, Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training and Awareness on prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse at 0.05 level

Table 8 Association between practice on prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and selected Demographic variables among parents (n=224)

		Practice			Total	
		Good	Moderate	Poor		
Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training	Yes	6	20	0	26	Fisher–Exact Test $p = 0.0001$
	NO	2	12	184	198	

Table 8 shows that a significant association was found between Previous Exposure to Child protection training and practice on prevention of child abuse at 0.05 level

Discussion

This study shows that parents have moderate awareness and poor practice regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. It indicates that basic understanding and poor involvement of prevention of child abuse but need to be strengthened. In addition, parent's awareness regarding child abuse prevention increases, their level of practice also significantly improves, which is explained with similar studies carried out Puduchery¹⁵, Western Rajasthan²⁰. This study also found an association between awareness and practice on prevention of child abuse among parents and demographic factors such as age, Previous Exposure to Child Protection Training which aligns to a previous study conducted on Pudhuchery¹⁵.

Conclusion

This research highlights that most parents possessed a moderate level of awareness regarding prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, their preventive practices were predominantly poor. The significant positive correlation between awareness and practice suggests that improving parental knowledge can lead to better implementation of child abuse prevention strategies. The significance of focused educational interventions was further highlighted by the significant associations found between awareness and practice and parental age and prior exposure to child protection training. These results highlight the necessity of parent-focused training programs and organized, evidence-based



awareness campaigns that address the prevention of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Increasing parental awareness and converting it into practical preventive measures can be vital in lowering the prevalence of child abuse and enhancing the safety and wellbeing of children.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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