

## A study of parents' Vigilance behaviour towards child sexual abuse

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### Abstract

In this descriptive study, Parents' views about child sexual abuse were investigated. Interviews were conducted with a sample of 40 Indian adults who identified as the parent or caregiver of a child/children aged 8-12. The study explored (1) parents' knowledge & awareness about child sexual abuse, (2) the child sexual abuse precaution they take to protect their children. (3) Their attitudes towards child sexual abuse prevention education in schools and (4) the instruction to the children to save themselves from sexual abuse. Data analysis provided four key themes in these four areas: awareness; precautions for themselves to take, instructions for the children to save themselves from this behaviour, behaviour modification. The findings may be useful in assisting parents and providers of child sexual abuse prevention programs to better understand vigilant behaviour of parents' towards child sexual abuse.

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse (CSA), vigilant behaviour & precautions

### Introduction

Child sexual abuse has been a veiled problem in India, largely ignored in public discourse and by the criminal justice system until it was not acknowledged as a criminal offence by law in India. It is a fact that millions of girls and boys worldwide are being sexually abused within homes and outside. It involves mental, physical and emotional abuse of a child through overt and covert sexual acts, gestures and disposition, when informed consent or resistance by the child victim to such acts is not possible. The term CSA includes a range of activities like "intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral-genital contact, fondling of genitals directly or through clothing, exhibitionism or exposing children to adult sexual activity or pornography, and the use of the child for prostitution or pornography. It can also include activities which do not involve direct touching. In the absence of specific legislation, a range of offensive behaviours such as child sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation for pornography were never legally sanctioned. In the past few years activists, Non-Governmental Organisations and the Central Government's Ministry of Women and Child Development have actively engaged in helping break 'the conspiracy of silence' (HRW 2013) [2]. The movement, headed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, led to the enactment of new legislation called the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) 2012 [4]. According to data compiled in Crime In India (2015) [1] by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 8,800 cases of rape on children were registered across the country under the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act (POCSO). In 2,227 cases, or 25.3 per cent, the offenders were found to be employers or co-workers. This is the first time that NCRB has tabulated data in terms of the relationship of the victim and the accused in cases involving rape. The data also shows that less than two per cent of rapes committed on women in 2015 happened at the workplace. In the case of children, the data reveals that neighbours were the biggest abusers in such cases in 2015-3,149 (35.8%). In over 10 per cent of cases last year, children were subjected to rape by their own family members or relatives and 94.8% children were subjected to rape by

someone known to them. Boys are also frequently abused as girls. Kidnapping and abduction constituted 44.5% of crimes against children last year. The high rate of crime, however, does not necessarily show a deteriorating law-and-order situation but may be the result of police registering more cases. In a state-wise break-up, Tamil Nadu (55%) and Gujarat (over 49%) had the most number of cases of sexual abuse against children at the workplace. In the case of children, Delhi leads the way with 9,489 cases and a crime rate of 169.4. Among larger states, Madhya Pradesh comes close with 12,859 cases and a rate of 42.8.

Yekta, Bagherian & Nezhat (2011) [6] in their study revealed that the level of education of adults were positively associated with their reaction towards child sexual abuse as well as awareness about child sexual abuse level.

Kumar, Noorani, Shivprakash & Sinha (2011) [3] Medical professionals have poor attitude and knowledge towards Child sexual abuse and neglect in accordance with the code of conduct and law.

### Objectives

- To study the vigilance level of parents about child sexual abuse.
- To analyze the precaution measures adopted by the parents for child sexual abuse.
- To study the attitude and behavioural modifications applied by the parents for Child Sexual Abuse.

### Research Questions

- What precautions are taken by the parents to protect their child from child sexual abuse?
- What instructions are given to children by the parents to make them alert about child sexual abuse?
- What would be the attitude of the parents towards child and the abuser if child sexual abuse happens?

### Methodology

Descriptive study method was applied in order to approach the goals of the present study. A structured interview focussing on

Knowledge, Precautions, Attitude and Instructions related to child sexual abuse was conducted with the help of a questionnaire including open ended questions prepared by the researchers. A sample of forty parents from Chandigarh was identified by using convenient sampling technique. Forty parents were interviewed to collect the data. Participants were mainly female (90%), with ages ranging from 30 to 48 years. All the participant parents possess university degree. Responses given by parents were coded in questionnaire by the researchers and content analysis technique was used to prepare the results.

### Results & Discussions

Results are discussed under four different headings in order to know the knowledge & awareness level of parents about child sexual abuse, precautions they use to take to protect their children in order to avoid the situation like child sexual abuse, attitude of the parents if they find themselves in such kind of situation and instructions given to the children to be alert about that kind of situation. Results of the interview are as follows:

#### Knowledge & Awareness

- Most of the parents explained their relationship with the children liberal but disciplined and they think their child talk to them openly.
- All parents were aware about the issue and they know about the issue from various sources and most of the female parents explained that they have also faced child sexual abuse in their childhood if not complete but a sense of insecurity & uncomfotability in the touch was there.
- Three male parents also told their experiences of facing child sexual abuse in their childhood.
- Out of 40 parents, 35 parents were strongly agreed that most of the times a 'male' is an 'abuser' and a 'girl' child is a 'victim'.
- All the parents reported that this can happen at any place therefore they try to secure their child. They are also aware that child sexual abuse is a legal punishable offence.

#### Precautions

- To ensure the safety of child at school they are to remain in regular contact with school personnel. They also ensure to have CCTV cameras in the school and a female teacher in the school bus.
- While the interview when the behavioural signs which can be shown by the child who is facing sexual abuse- parents reported various responses which should be kept in mind while taking precautions for the child-
  - Inappropriate sexual behaviour of child towards toys & objects.
  - Unaccountable fear in child about particular people and place.
  - Unusual aggression.
  - Unexpected crying.
  - Sudden deviation from the normal behaviour.
  - Use of adult words in the language.
  - Sudden/ unusual pain in the body.
  - Absent minded.
  - Lose of interests in favourite activities.

According to parents, child might be showing above kind of behaviour if he/she is facing some critical situation like child

sexual abuse and that would be parents own duty to protect the child from the situation & take immediate actions against the abuser irrespective of the relationship with the person.

#### Attitude

Asking about the attitude & behaviour modification they adopted to protect their child, parents explained the things as under-

- Child will not be forced to go with someone they don't like & not comfortable.
- Ensure the separate dressing room should be provided in public functions.
- Legal steps will be taken against the guilty.
- Child should be praised for telling.
- Maintain a healthy relationship with the friends of the child.
- Think beyond 'stranger danger'.
- Open talk with the family.
- Social boycott of the person showing unusual behaviour towards child & taking legal actions in the extreme cases "no matter who is the abuse".
- Immediate contact number will be always provided to the child of some trustworthy person available.

#### Instructions

While asking about the instructions which the parents give to their child to protect themselves; parents told about the many usual instructions like-

- Not to talk to strangers,
- Do not eat anything outside and from anyone,
- Do not take any electronic gadgets from strangers etc.

Out of that they told that if still child face some unusual touch or behaviour from someone, they should report it to teacher or the parents as soon as possible without any hesitation. Empowering them to say 'No' if anyone touch them unusual which they don't like.

#### Conclusion

Over the past three decades, public awareness of child sexual abuse has been raised, partly because of increased media attention to serious incidents of sexual victimisation. In the current study, it was clear that child sexual abuse is not a unknown phenomena it prevails in all the sections of the society. Parents' views about child sexual abuse have an impact upon child's personality and their ability to engage in discussions with their children on sensitive topic like child sexual abuse; helps the children to share their problems with parents lesser the chances to become a victim. This study has revealed several key factors which should include in awareness programme on child sexual abuse. Parents in this study were clearly at ease with the subject matter and ready to be involved in the process of sexual abuse prevention education at home and at school. The challenge for school authorities and programme organisers in schools is to partner with parents to capitalise on their strengths as their children's first teachers, and to secure their support for protection of their children.

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