

Parents' Willingness to Educate Child Sexual Abuse to their Children age 5-15 Years in Karachi, Pakistan

ROZINA JALALUDIN¹, FARHAN AHMED², SHANILA JALALUDDIN³, HINA UROOJ⁴, AMBREEN ASLAM⁵, MEHJABEEN MUSHARRAF⁶

¹Principal & Associate Professor Institute of Nursing Jinnah Sindh Medical University

²Principal Karachi Kings College of Nursing

³Principal Naushahro feroze Institute of Nursing

⁴APPNA Institute of Public Health Jinnah Sindh Medical University

⁵Nursing Lecturer Jinnah Sindh Medical University

⁶Senior Lecturer APPNA Institute of Public Health Jinnah Sindh Medical University

Correspondence to: Farhan Ahmed, Email: farhanahmedzu492@gmail.com, Cell: 03352881734

ABSTARCT

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a foremost public health crisis and is now constantly reported in Pakistan

Objective: This study gazes into perception of parents about the Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) as well as their willingness to educate their children about CSA.

Methodology: The current study employed analytical cross-sectional study design. A sample of 123 parents of school age children (5-15 years) were selected via non-probability convenience sampling technique. Self-developed questionnaire was used. Ethical approval was taken from Institutional Review Board of Jinnah Sindh Medical University and written consent from individual parents. Data was collected and analyzed by using SPSS version 20.

Result: A total of 123 parents with 03 refusals, with a response rate of 97.6%. Out of 123 parents, 88.62% showed willingness to provide education. 62.6% parents perceived close relatives as being the most common abusers. 42.3% of parents highlighted common methods as kissing, hugging and touching private parts. 43.9% perceived a loss of trust on people as a major consequence of victimization, with 71.5% fearing Post traumatic stress disorder and depression as a potential outcome. 64.2% perceived stigmatization as the primary cause for hesitation among those who are unwilling to report such cases.

Conclusion: The study concludes parents are willing to educate their child on CSA, though their perceptions relating to common abusers, methods used, results as well as consequences of abuse vary. In this context, knowledge of effective parent-child communication should be strengthened to promote CSA prevention.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse, Parents' Willingness, Education, Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is one of the developing countries, facing major social dilemmas. The one which is affecting future generations is child sexual abuse. According to NCTSN (national child traumatic stress network) 2009, "Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer." In addition, sexual abuse includes touching and non-touching actions. Touching actions may involve touching of sex parts and sexual intercourse. Non-touching actions may include looking at child with naked body and pornography¹.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a foremost public health crisis and is now constantly reported in Pakistan. It is reported by the NGO name Sahil in 2021 that 30852 children-2068 girls and 1784 boys were sexually abused across Pakistan. Based on another report "Six Month Cruel Number 2021" by Sahil, a minimum of ten children were abused on a daily basis in Pakistan. However, a large number of incidences are not reported for various reasons, including shame, guilt, stigma for the victim and the victim's families and others (2)

According to the World Meter, the total population of the country, as of 2022, is 230,517,506, of which 92,543,258, approximately 40 percent are children under 18. Child sexual abuse is a rapidly growing social and health crisis as it leads to the burden of injuries, mental health issues, negative behavior problems, academic performance deficits, financial burdens and affects quality of life for both the victims as well as society as a whole (3)

ECSA- HC (East central and Southern African Health Community), in 2011, 223 million children globally were sexually abused out of which 150 million were girls and 73 million were boys according to UNICEF report, released in November 2017, at least 15 million young girls have to face forcible sexual abuse across the world annually (4)

In response to this major and urgent health and social concern, many government and private organizations have initiated preventive programs in which resources have been developed for victims, have promoted and raised awareness about

CSA and violence and have launched a helpline for free consultation for survivors and their families.

The media is playing an effective role in this crisis through programs to raise public awareness, the breaking of social norms and myths related to CSA, standing up the victims as well as punishing the perpetrators to help stop this practice in society.

Both literature and Islam teaches that parents are most responsible for educating children about right and wrong and for protecting their children from victimization. According to Collings 2002, perception of a problem may indicate the knowledge level and parental core attitudes and practices to act to prevent such incidences. This study looks into knowledge among parents about the ongoing crisis as well as their willingness to act to educate their children about CSA. Furthermore, research was conducted as to the willingness of parents to report incidences involving their children to the proper authorities.

Research shows that the burden of CSA falls on the country and families financially and emotionally. It also affects the physical wellbeing of the child. The child then requires physical, mental and behavioral services (10). If there is a history of substance abuse or becomes an addict later in life, then the child has an increased risk of psychiatric and physical illness. These services will be required throughout their life (11,12)

Effects can also be seen on relationships with family, school performance and overall quality of life. All dimensions of life are affected and the healing process can take years. In case of developing countries like Pakistan where basic health care facilities are not accessible to citizen, emphasis should be placed on teaching prevention. Literature articulates that effective communication skills and monitoring strategies work effectively in some countries (13,14)

The question arises who is most appropriate educator to guide the child about this sensitive issue. Literature supports parents as the first teachers of the child as they facilitate the learning process (10). They guide a child on how to act and behave in the culture. Different studies show that parents maintain the most important role in early teaching about child sexual abuse as they can ensure safety via effective communication and through close observation (11,12).

In Pakistan parents lack the ability to deal with CSA as they are not trained. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness and are constrained as it is considered taboo to speak of such a subject. Emphasis needs to be placed on placing parents in a position to provide effective teaching to prevent the cases of CSA by providing them with the necessary awareness and training (5).

Rationale: Discussion on child abuse still a taboo in Pakistan despite the fact that child sexual abuse is a major issue in Pakistan, which is increasing day by day. Up to 4139 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in 2016 (5). Children of all ages are victims of sexual abuse, but the most vulnerable age group among both girls and boys is 11 – 15 years. The most vulnerable include street children, refugee children, economically active children and those confined in detention centers/jails.

According to a Unicef-funded study on “The State of Children in Pakistan” by the Children’s Complaints Office (CCO), Islamabad, the existing laws suffer with weak implementation and a very few cases are reported by families to save family “honor”. The overall criminal justice system discourages victims to report cases and fight long legal battles in courts. Most cases of child abuse, particularly CSA remain under cover and go unreported in Pakistan.

This study aims to explore parents’ willingness to educate 5-15 years old children regarding sexual abuse. This study will explore the perception of parents regarding child sexual abuse and its reporting. Moreover, this study will provide recommendations for preparing the parents for increased willingness for CSA education.

Research Questions

- What are the perception of parents related to child sexual abuse and its prevention practices?
- What is the proportion of parents of children 5-15 years of age willing to provide education regarding child sexual abuse (CSA)?
- What is the association of demographic factors with the willingness of parents to report CSA?

METHODOLOGY

This analytical cross sectional study conducted among the parents of (5-15) years children in Karachi. Sample size was calculated using OPEN EPI software on 95% confidence level, at an anticipated frequency of 80% and bound of error of 7% (11), the final Sample size came out to be 126. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, all the parents of the public and private school children during three months period and parents who were willing to take part in the study were included. Data was collected through self-developed questionnaire that has been translated into Urdu was utilized for this study.

RESULTS

A total of 123 parents with 03 refusals, with a response rate of 97.6%. The mean age of the parents was 36.81 ± SD 7.045 and they have child age is around 9.33 ± SD 3.380. Majority 70.7% of parents were female, 42.3% was up to primary level and 81.3% having their house hold income is less than 50000 PKR as shown in Table-1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics (n=123)

Variables	N (%) Mean (SD)
Parents	
Age of the parent	36.81 (7.045)
Education of Parent	
Primary	52 (42.3)
Matric	18 (14.6)
Intermediate	22 (17.9)
Graduation and above	31 (25.2)
Household monthly income	
Less than 50,000	100 (81.3)
50,000 – 100,000	17 (13.8)
101,000-200,000	6 (4.9)
Relationship with child	
Father	28 (22.8)

Mother	87 (70.7)
Guardian	8 (6.5)
Children	
Gender	
Male	73 (59.3)
Female	50 (40.7)
Type of school	
Public	18 (14.6)
Private	105 (85.4)
Age of the child	9.33 (3.380)

Out of 123 parents, 62.6% parents perceived close relatives as being the most common abusers as shown in Figure 1. 88.62% showed willingness to provide education as shown in Figure 2. More than 80% parents were willing to report children’s sexual abuse as shown in Figure 3.

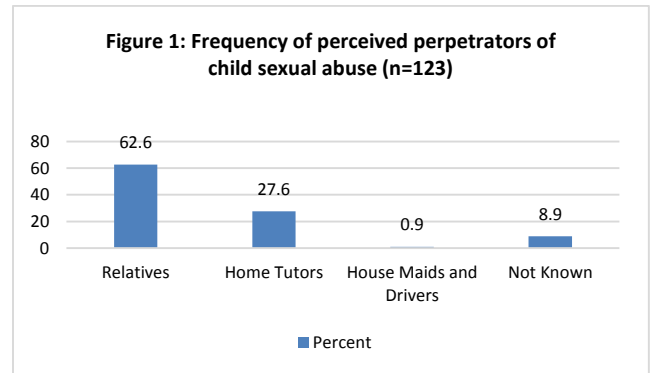


Figure 1: Frequency of perceived perpetrators of child sexual abuse (n=123)

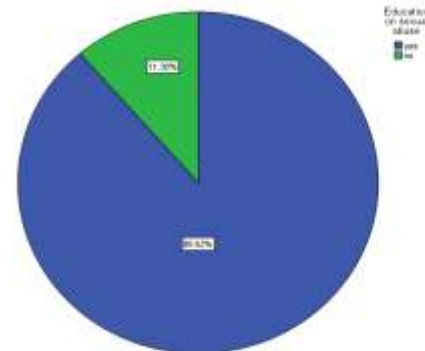


Figure 2: Percentage of parents willing to give education on sexual abuse to their children (n=123)

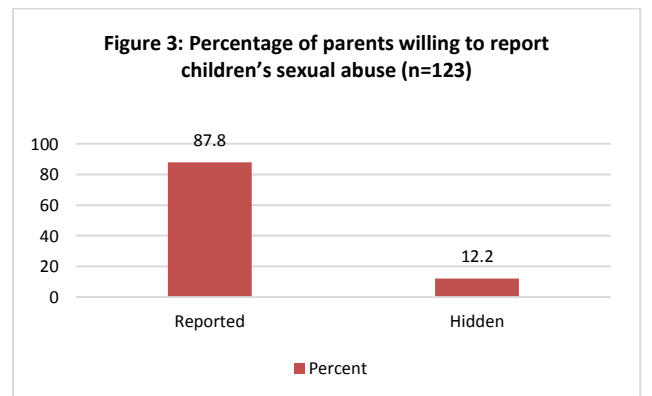


Figure 3: Percentage of parents willing to report children’s sexual abuse (n=123)

Description of parental perception includes 42.3% of parents' highlighted common methods as kissing, hugging and touching private parts. 43.9% perceived a loss of trust on people as a major consequence of victimization, with 71.5% fearing Post traumatic stress disorder and depression as a potential outcome. 64.2% perceived stigmatization as the primary cause for hesitation among those who are unwilling to report such cases. More than 80% of the participants were willing that their children should be taught in either schools or by parents at home then via Television and media. Alongside this, Parents when asked about the ways to prevent child sexual abuse, spreading awareness among both the child and parents gained the most attention as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Description of parental perceptions on child-abuse related variables (n=123)

Variables	N (%)
Most Common Methods of sexual abuse	
Kissing, hugging and touching private parts	52 (42.3)
Intercourse	34 (27.6)
Making pornography	15 (12.2)
No understanding	22 (17.9)
Social hazards of sexual abuse	
Social stigma and isolation	43 (35)
Lack of trust on laws	54 (43.9)
Low self esteem	17 (13.8)
No understanding	9 (7.3)
Health hazards of Sexual abuse	
PTSD and depression	88 (71.5)
STDs and infections	22 (17.9)
No understanding	13 (10.6)
Reasons of hiding the sexual abuse	
Stigmatization	79 (64.2)
Poor law and order situation	38 (30.9)
No understanding	6 (4.9)
Methods of preventing the sexual abuse	
Child awareness	53 (43.1)
Parental awareness	28 (22.8)
Capital punishment for abuser	30 (24.4)
No understanding	12 (9.8)
Education on sexual abuse should be given by	
• Parents	
Yes	112 (91.1)
No	11 (8.9)
• School	
Yes	109 (88.6)
No	14 (11.4)
• Electronic Media	
Yes	80 (65)
No	43 (35)
• Print Media	
Yes	78 (63.4)
No	45 (36.6)

Table 3: Relationship of different variables with the parent's willingness to reporting children's sexual abuse (n=123)

Variables	Reporting of children's sexual abuse		P value
	Yes	No	
Age of parent			0.465
22 – 31 years	28 (22.8)	2 (1.6)	
32 – 41 years	55 (44.7)	10 (8.1)	
42 – 51 years	25 (20.3)	3 (2.4)	
Age of child			0.277
Less than 10 years	70 (56.9)	8 (6.5)	
More than 10 years	38 (30.9)	7 (5.7)	
Sex of child			0.090
Male	67 (54.5)	6 (4.9)	
Female	41 (33.3)	9 (7.3)	
Education of parent			0.249
Matric	63 (51.2)	7 (5.7)	
Intermediate	17 (13.8)	5 (4.1)	
Graduation and above	28 (22.8)	3 (2.4)	
Monthly household income of parent			0.180
5000 – 50,000	90 (73.2)	10 (8.1)	
51,000 – 100,000	14 (11.4)	3 (2.4)	
Greater than 100,000	4 (3.3)	2 (1.6)	
Relationship with child			0.757
Mother	29 (23.6)	3 (2.4)	
Father	79 (64.2)	12 (9.8)	

A Chi-square test was used to see the association of different demographic variables with the willingness of a parent to report the child's sexual abuse, none of the attribute was found significant, the reason was that the overall willingness is very high and very few parents think that the sexual abuse of children should be kept hidden as shown in Table 3.

Among the participants, 64.2 percent were fathers. Table 2 illustrates that 91 percent of all parents within the study have a willingness to teach their children about CSA.

DISCUSSION

This study identifies the strengths and gaps in parents' perceptions of perceived perpetrators, health hazards, and methods of preventing the revelation of and reasons for hiding CSA as well as level of willingness to educate their children about the issue.

The results are in line to those of various national and international research (6, 7). This is an encouraging signal that the veil which has up until modern times in part concealed the crisis in conservative Pakistan has finally begun to be lifted.

This study demonstrates that parents indeed have awareness about CSA and methods employed by perpetrators to victimize children. The results further illustrate that parents today are taking the issue seriously to ensure their children are safeguarded from falling victim, whereas in the past parents were unwilling to discuss the subject. The openness of parents to have discussions which were previously considered taboo provides Pakistan a great opportunity to address the issue and have a significant impact in putting an end to CSA.

The main objective of present study is to identify the willingness of parents to educate their children about child sexual abuse as well as their perception of what qualifies as child sexual abuse. According to the WHO and UNICEF, methods of child sexual abuse include kissing, hugging, touching of private parts, intercourse and making child pornography. In this study, 82.1% of participants were able to correctly identify these methods as those which are utilized by child sexual abusers.

Furthermore, 92.7% of participants of the present study were able to identify social stigma, isolation, loss of trust in people and reduced self-esteem as social hazards of CSA. Additionally, 89.4% parents correctly perceived PTSD, depression and STDs as well as infections as being common health risks. Previous research revealed that 87% of victims reported a loss of trust on people and suffered depression (8). Another study revealed that children who have experienced sexual abuse are more vulnerable to recurrent psychological trauma, such as persistent fear and depressive disorder (9, 10).

The present study revealed that 88% of parents had a positive attitude towards schools raising awareness among children about the issue. Previous research noted that awareness via school programs are an important factor in preventing child sexual abuse. Although schools were identified as potentially having an important role in helping children prevent child sexual abuse, of even greater importance is the role parents can and should play. Positively, the present study findings revealed a willingness among 91% of parents to educate their children about CSA. Among the participants, 64.2 percent were fathers. Previous studies within south Asia have demonstrated a significantly higher willingness among mothers as compared to fathers to educate their children about CSA (7, 14)

CONCLUSION

Overall, the research findings indicate that a significant majority of parents have an understanding of what constitutes child sexual abuse and have a willingness to educate their children. However, despite the significant willingness, the proportion of parents hesitant and lacking understanding is still significant enough to warrant additional focus.

This study was conducted in an urban setting of a single city, which should be considered before generalization. Research is

required on larger scale, particularly in rural areas as well as among families of all social and economic backgrounds.

The findings present a great opportunity to the government and institutions to begin intervention strategies through education programs to prepare parents to address the issue. In light of growing willingness to address the issue, additional research is needed to focus on strategies which can be most effective in prevention of CSA from taking place. Furthermore, research is needed to assess teachers' perceptions and willingness toward education of child sexual abuse in public and private settings.

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Author contributions:

Rozina Jalaluddin: Data collection and manuscript writing and coordinating whole project

Farhan Ahmed: Discussion and conclusion, data collection

Shanila Jalaluddin: Literature review and discussion, manuscript writing and editing.

Mehjabeen Musharraf: Data Analysis

Ambreen Aslam: IRB, approval preparation and manuscript review

Dr. Hina Urooj: Idea conceived for the proposal development

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