

Awareness Regarding Child Abuse among Mothers Attending a Paediatric Clinic of a Tertiary Level Hospital, Kathmandu

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical as well as emotional maltreatment resulting in harm to the child's health and overall development. Parental awareness plays a significant role in the prevention of child abuse. The objective of this study was to find out the awareness of mothers regarding child abuse.

Methods

This descriptive cross sectional study was carried out among mothers attending a Pediatric Outpatient Department of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital Kathmandu, Nepal. A total of 162 mothers having their children of aged one to 16 years were selected as a sample using non-probability convenient sampling technique. Data was collected by face to face interview using semi-structured interview schedule.

Results

Findings of the study revealed that majority of mothers could state different types of abuse as physical abuse (72.8%), psychological abuse (78.4%), sexual abuse (71.6%), but 53.1% of mothers were aware about neglect, 48.8% of mothers considered that relatives could abuse their child. In total, 49.1% of mothers had moderately adequate, 26.4% had inadequate and 23.9% had adequate level of awareness regarding child abuse. No significant association was noted between the level of awareness and mothers' age, ethnicity, religion and occupation. The level of awareness of mothers was significantly associated with nuclear family type ($p=0.03$).

Conclusion

The mothers are aware of child abuse at moderate level. Conducting awareness programmes in community, regarding child abuse focusing on child neglect is recommended.

Keywords: Awareness, child abuse, knowledge, mother, parent

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical and emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival and development.¹ Child abuse is a common problem worldwide. Even in developed

countries, two in five of the parents/guardians are in the practice of giving corporal punishments.² The most common type of abuse is neglect (64% of cases), followed by physical abuse (16%), sexual abuse (8.8%), emotional maltreatment (6.6%), and other forms of abuse (4%).³ In context of Nepal, approximately 3% children were beaten up hard. Young age of child, absence of father at home

increased the risk.⁴ In the period of six months (January-June 2008), among total victims of rape, 64% were below 16 years of age.⁵ Children face abuses in their homes, schools and workplaces. In context of Nepal, mothers are primary caretaker of children at home. It has been revealed that 90% of mothers had inadequate knowledge and did not understand the meaning of child abuse and so failed to identify the signs and symptoms.⁶ If the mothers have adequate awareness about child abuse they can protect their children from abuse and identify it on time if has occurred. So, lots of negative consequences on children's mental and physical health can be prevented. The purpose of this study is to identify the awareness of the mothers regarding child abuse, and to measure the association between levels of knowledge of mothers with selected variables. The findings of this study may guide the nurses working with mothers to educate them about different aspects of child abuse.

METHODS

Descriptive cross sectional study design was used to assess the awareness of mothers regarding child abuse. It was conducted from May to June 2019 in Pediatric Out Patient Department (OPD) of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) of Kathmandu. Proposal was approved from Rector's Office, Centre for Research, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. Ethical approval was obtained from Institutional Review Committee of Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal. Mothers attending OPD with their children of age group 1-16 years were the study population. Non-probability convenient sampling technique was used until the desired sample size of 162 was achieved. Data was collected in face to face interview by researchers and one research assistant with educational qualification of Bachelor Degree in Nursing, using pretested interview schedule translated in Nepali language developed by the researchers after reviewing related literature related to child abuse and getting feedbacks from experts. The tool consisted of three parts: part one including the questions related to socio-demographic characteristics of mothers (age, ethnicity, religion, family type, education, occupation), part two including the information related to number and sex of child in the family and part three including the questions related to mother's awareness related to child abuse (meaning of abuse and its different types, potential abuser, causes, consequences, preventive measures of child abuse). The mothers were interviewed separately after getting informed consent utilizing their waiting time at the corner of the waiting area.

Table 1. Awareness of mothers regarding concept of child abuse (n=162)

Variables	Responses (%)
Meaning of child abuse*	
Harming child by doing any activity	137 (84.6)
Not providing needed care	51 (31.5)
Relationship of child with abuser might be *	
Parents	68 (42)
Relatives	79 (48.8)
Teacher	76 (46.9)
Siblings	44 (27.2)
Neighbour	115 (71.0)
Stranger	24 (14.8)
Others	4 (2.5)
Don't know	4 (2.5)
Types of abuse*	
Physical	118 (72.8)
Psychological	127 (78.4)
Sexual abuse	116 (71.6)
Neglect	86 (53.1)
Don't know any type	18 (11.1)
Physical abuse is	
Beating, kicking and burning #	143 (88.3)
Scolding in front of friend	1 (0.6)
Threatening	2 (1.2)
Not providing education	7 (4.3)
Don't know	9 (5.6)
Psychological abuse is	
Beating	4 (2.5)
Scolding, threatening and stopping communication #	139 (85.8)
Touching with bad intent	8 (4.9)
Providing drugs	5 (3.1)
Don't know	6 (3.7)
Sexual abuse is	
Involving in hard physical work	2 (1.2)
Ignoring health needs	6 (3.7)
Touching different body parts and involving in sexual act #	144 (88.9)
Keeping at home without guardian's supervision	2 (1.2)
Don't know	8 (4.9)
Negligence is	
Using as child labour	4 (2.5)
Giving physical punishment	5 (3.1)
Involving in sexual act	4 (2.5)
Not providing needed care#	142 (87.7)
Don't know	7 (4.3)

*Multiple response, # Correct response

The data was analyzed by using SPSS Statistics version 16 with the help of descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard

Table 2. Mothers' awareness about various aspects of child abuse (n=162)

Aspect	Responses (%)
Risk factors*	
Lack of education in parents	125 (72.2)
Single parent	81 (50)
Substance abuse in parents	119 (73.5)
Poor economic status of family	116 (71.6)
Inability to provide adequate time to children	126 (77.8)
Presence of disability in child	96 (59.3)
Possible consequences in future*	
Decreased cognitive and mental development	145 (89.5)
Decreased physical development	93 (57.4)
Decreased self confidence	121 (74.7)
Involving in high risk behaviour	101 (62.3)
Disability	78 (48.1)
Others	3 (1.8)
Mothers' role*	
Participating in child's activity	120 (74.1)
Providing enough time to children	129 (79.6)
Making child aware of good and bad behaviour of others	137 (84.6)
Noticing the changes in child's behaviour	108 (66.7)

*Multiple response

deviation and inferential statistics such as Chi-square tests with level of significance as 0.05.

RESULTS

Among 162 mothers, majority (64.8%) were from age group 21-30 years with mean age of 29.1 years. Nearly half (53.7%) were Brahmin/ Chhetri and majority (86.4%) were following Hinduism. More than half (58%) of mothers were from joint family. Regarding education, 35.2% of mothers had studied upto higher secondary level and only 11.7% of mothers had achieved education of Bachelor level and above. Concerning occupation, nearly two third (64.8%) of mothers were homemakers, one fifth (19.1%) were job holder and 2.5% were foreign employee.

Table 1 shows that 84.6% of mothers considered child abuse as harming child by doing any activities. The most commonly considered potential abuser were neighbour (71%) followed by relatives (48.8%) teachers (46.9%), parents (42%), sibling (27.2%) and strangers (14.8%), Majority (78.4%) of mothers were aware of psychological abuse, 53.1% of mothers could name neglect as type of abuse. Majority of mothers were aware of meaning of physical abuse (88.3%), psychological

Table 3. Mothers' level of awareness on child abuse (n=162)

Level of awareness	Frequency (%)
Inadequate (0-50)%	43 (26.4)
Moderately adequate (51-75)%	80 (49.1)
Adequate (>75%)	39 (23.9)

*Maximum obtainable score was 38, mean score was 23.33 (61.40%)

abuse (85.8%), and sexual abuse 88.9% and neglect (87.7%).

Table 2 depicts the awareness on the risks factors associated with child abuse, where the most commonly considered risks factors were inability to provide adequate time to children (77.8%), substance abuse by parents (73.5%), lack of education in parents (72.2%) and presence of disability in child (59.3%).

Table 2 also indicates that decreased cognitive and mental development was the most commonly considered consequence of child abuse by 89.5% of mothers. Table 2 also shows the awareness of mothers on their role to prevent child abuse, where 84.6% responded as making their child aware of good and bad behaviours of others.

Table 3 indicates that 26.4% of mothers had inadequate, 49.1% had moderately adequate and 23.9% had adequate level of awareness regarding child abuse.

Table 4 shows that the level of awareness of mothers was not statistically associated with age ($p = 0.48$), ethnicity ($p = 0.15$), religion ($p=0.09$) and occupation ($p=0.78$). Whereas, level of awareness was statistically associated with family type ($p = 0.03$).

Regarding governmental activities against child abuse, more than half of the mothers (59.3%) believed that no single activity was carried out by the government against it, while 16.7% were ignorant about the asked question. Nearly a quarter (24.1%) of mothers agreed that there are some activities conducted by the government against child abuse but however they were ignorant about the types of activities. Most of the mothers (90.1%) wanted to suggest the government to carry out awareness programmes about child abuse, while only few (3%) wanted to suggest other methods like provision of CCTV at school and including the content of child abuse in curriculum.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, majority (84.6%) of mothers considered child abuse as commission of any activity that harms the child, but only 31.4% of them thought that omission of needed care is

Table 4. Association of mothers' level awareness on child abuse with selected variables (n=162)

Selected Variables	Level of awareness			P-value
	Inadequate (%)	Moderately adequate (%)	Adequate (%)	
Age				
< 30years	23 (14.2)	48 (29.6)	19 (11.7)	0.48
≥ 30 Years	20 (12.3)	32 (19.8)	20(12.3)	
Ethnicity				
Brahmin Chhetri	20 (12.3)	41 (25.3)	26 (16.0)	0.15
Other	23(14.2)	39(24.1)	13 (8.0)	
Family Type				
Nuclear	11 (6.8)	39(24.1)	18 9(11.1)	0.03
Joint	32 (19.8)	41(25.3)	21 (13.0)	
Religion				
Hindus	40 (24.7)	70 (43.2)	30 (18.5)	0.09
Non Hindus	3 (1.3)	10 (6.2)	9 (5.6)	
Occupation				
Home Maker	26 (16.0)	53 (32.7)	26 (16.0)	0.78
Working outside	17 (10.5)	27 (16.7)	13 (8.0)	

also a child abuse. More than two third of mothers perceived that neighbour could be the possible culprit for abuse of their child, followed by relatives (48.8%) and teachers (46.9%). More than two third of mothers were aware of types of abuse as physical abuse (72.8%), psychological abuse (78.4%) and sexual abuse (71.6%). This findings is contradicted by a study conducted in a community of New Delhi which revealed that 90% of mothers had inadequate knowledge regarding sexual abuse.⁷ Similar contradictory findings in India was noted by a study of Rajendra⁸ indicating that 43% of mothers could correctly state the different types of child abuse. In present study, 53.1% of the mothers were aware of neglect as a type of abuse.

However, , in a study from Western Saudi Arabia by Helmyl and Aljiuad and team⁹, 72.3% of mothers perceived neglect as important problem. In this study, majority of mothers (77.8%) were aware that inability to provide adequate time to the children can increase their child's vulnerability for being abused, whereas only half of them (50%) believed that rearing the child by single parent is also a risk factor for child abuse. Most of the mothers (89.5%) agreed that decreased cognitive and mental development can be the consequence of child abuse in abused child. Similarly major proportion (84.6%) of mothers agreed making child aware of good and bad behaviour of others can be the important role of mother in protecting child from abuse while only (66.7%) believed that noticing the changes in the child behaviour is also

an effective role of mother in protecting their child from abuse. Most of the mothers (90.1%) wanted to suggest the government to carry out awareness programme regarding child abuse as an act to root out the prevailing child abuse problem in the society. Similarly, (87%) agreed to punish the abuser as an effective programme, 72.2% suggested rehabilitating the abused child.

In overall, 23.9% had adequate level of awareness; a quarter (26.4%) had inadequate and remaining 49.1% had moderate level of awareness regarding child abuse. This is somewhat similar to the finding of study by Thangavelu¹⁰ in India where 15% samples had inadequate awareness, 85% sample had moderately adequate awareness and another similar findings was noted in study from Mangalore India¹¹, where majority of mothers had average knowledge, likewise, other study from Nepal¹² showed that 77.8% mothers had average level of awareness about child abuse. However, in contrast, a study by Jacob¹³ conducted among 100 mothers in selected residential areas of Delhi revealed that only 3% of mothers had poor level of knowledge, 37% of them had average awareness. Another contradictory finding was noted by Gurung and Bhattarai¹⁴ in Nepal where 50.53% of parent had good knowledge and 48.4% had average knowledge.

In present study, awareness of mothers was not found to be influenced by any of socio-demographic variables except family type (p=0.03). Findings from other studies^{8,15,16} had also identified no significant association between level of awareness

and socio-demographic variables. Finding from Rajendra⁸ and Thapa and Pun¹² have supported the finding of present study about association of level of knowledge with mother's family type. Mothers from nuclear family were found to have greater awareness than others. The reason for better knowledge among mothers of nuclear family might be because they might have migrated from rural areas to city area for job and education purpose leaving their joint family at their native place. They might be autonomous and exposed to different sources of information during mobility.

CONCLUSION

The mothers are aware of physical, psychological and sexual abuse but few are aware about neglect. Nearly half of mothers think that relatives can be the potential abuser. Most of the mothers are aware of meaning of sexual abuse. Inability to provide adequate time to the children was the most commonly considered risk factor for child abuse. Level of awareness regarding child abuse among the mothers of a child is average. The mothers from nuclear family background tend to have greater level of awareness than the mothers from joint family.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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