

# Knowledge of child abuse among parents of Under 5 Years Children in Kathmandu, Nepal

## Abstract

Child abuse and neglect is a significant global problem with a serious impact on the victims' physical and mental health, well-being and development throughout their lives. Out of the many parental causes of child abuse, the important reason is lack of knowledge regarding it among them. We explored the knowledge of child abuse among the parent of under 5 children in urban setting of Kathmandu district of Nepal. This is descriptive cross sectional study which involved the parents of children under 5 years of age residing in Kalanki area of Kathmandu in order to identify their existing knowledge on child abuse and to explore the relationships between their knowledge scores and some selected variables by interviewing using a semi-structured questionnaire. Out of the total 95 participants, 50.53% had good knowledge and 48.4% had average knowledge on overall child abuse. None of the parents had poor knowledge in terms of child physical abuse, child neglect and child emotional abuse. However, 20% and 10.5% of the parents had poor knowledge on child sexual abuse and general child abuse respectively. The level of knowledge and the variables viz. age group and exposure to different source of information were significantly associated while no significant association was found with their educational status. The parents do have a satisfactory level of knowledge regarding child abuse. However, a significant proportion of parents still had poor knowledge in context of general child abuse and child sexual abuse. A nationwide study of such kind using qualitative tools as well as conducting awareness raising activities especially focusing on the general abuse and abuse of sexual nature is recommended.

Key words: Child abuse; knowledge; parents; association

## Introduction

The issue of child abuse has been recognized as a major social problem prevalent within and outside the homes and among all socio-economic groups of both the developed and the developing nations of whole world [1].

Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all form of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power [2].

It is a broad concept and under it 4 subtypes

can be found out which represent the existing pattern of child abuse globally and they are physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and psychological abuse [1,2].

Despite the absence of reliable global estimates for the prevalence of it as data, especially from low- and middle-income countries, various international studies reveal that approximately 20% of women and 5–10% of men report being sexually abused as children, while 25–50% of all children report being physically abused. Annually, 31 000 estimated homicide deaths occur in children under 15 [3]. But deaths represent only a small fraction of the problem of child maltreatment as every year millions of children are victims of non-fatal

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abuse and neglect [4]. Almost 32% of the victims of child abuse and neglect in the US are under the age of four years [5] which proves that youngest children are the most vulnerable.

Similar is the case in SEAR where high number of victims of rapes and sexual assaults are children under 10 years with family members themselves being the culprit in majority of cases. Physical punishment remains an important strategy justified by parents and teachers and legitimized in educational systems, used to hold power and control over children [6,7].

Nepalese children also are facing abuses in their homes, schools and workplaces irrespective to the sexes they belong to and places they are from. In a study in the schools of Kathmandu, 82% students were found to suffer physical punishments [8]. Likewise, in the study by UNICEF 50% of the children included considered home to be the place where abuse most commonly takes place and 73% of them believed that abusers were the people who were familiar to them. The same study revealed that only 30% (37% in CDR) of the participated key informants believed that community and family have adequate knowledge on child abuse [9].

Out of the many parental causes of child abuse, the first reason is lack of knowledge among them [10]. Parents tend to apply harsh form of disciplinary actions without knowing it actually is an abuse [11]. Due to the absence of knowledge, the parents, especially mothers show reluctance to report cases to authorities concerned with health care or legal protection [12]. If parents have knowledge regarding child abuse, they can detect the signs of it and can prevent its occurrence by educating the child [13].

This study was intended to identify the existing knowledge regarding the issue of child abuse amongst the parents of under 5 years children and also deduce the relationship between selected variables and their knowledge level.

## METHODS

The quantitative method, descriptive cross sectional research design and analytical semi research design were employed for the study. The study was conducted

among 95 parents having children less than 5 years residing in Kalanki area of Kathmandu district from 15th to 31st October 2012. The sample size was determined using formula as  $n = z^2pq/d^2$

Convenient sampling method was used to select the respondents in the study area. Semi structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 10 parents prior to the study who were later not the part of the actual study. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Public Health Department, MMIHS. Participation in the research was voluntary. After clearly explaining the participants about the purpose of the study, ensuring the confidentiality and obtaining the informed consent, interview method was used to collect the data.

The obtained data were entered using Epi info 7 software and analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. The socio demographic data as well as level of knowledge were analyzed using percentage and measure of central tendency as uni-variate analysis while association between knowledge scores and selected demographic variables were found out using chi-square test as bi-variate analysis.

## RESULTS

The results were presented in socio-demographic characteristics, level of knowledge and association between some important variables and level of knowledge on child abuse.

### Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

A total of 95 parents participated in this study out of which 47 (49.5%) were males and 48 (50.5%) were females. The median age of the participants was 30 years (range 19-55 years). 80 (84.2%) parents were literate, 35 (36.8%) of whom had secondary level education. The highest number of participants worked as laborer 37 (38.9%) followed by 22 (23.2%) working as housewives. 76 (80%) participants lived in a nuclear family (Table 1).

## Level of knowledge of parents regarding child abuse

Forty eight participants (50.5%) had good knowledge on overall child abuse, other 46 (48.4%) parents had average knowledge and only one (1.05%) had poor knowledge. No participants had poor knowledge on child physical abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect. 34 (35.8%) parents had good knowledge on child sexual abuse. However a notable proportion, i.e. ten (10.5%) parents in context of general child abuse and 19 (20%) parents in context of child sexual abuse had poor knowledge. (Table 2)

## Association between selected variables and level of knowledge regarding child abuse

There was observed a significant association between age group of parents and their level of knowledge since the P value is less than 0.05 (0.032). Similarly, a significant association was also observed between exposure to different sources of information ( media, friends, relatives, personal experience and others) and the level of knowledge of parents. However, no significant association between the educational status of parents and their level of knowledge on child abuse since P-value was more than 0.05 (0.171). (Table 3)

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the age of the respondents ranged from 19- 55 years and majority belonged to age group 26-30 years which is in contrary to the finding of the study [12] where the respondents age ranged from 18-45 years and majority belonged to age group 18-25 years. Another study [10] found that 32 (64%) respondents belonged in the age group of 21-30 years which is somewhat similar to the finding of this study. We found that majority, i.e. 80 (84.2%) parents were literate. This finding matches the findings of two other studies [10, 14] where in one 81% of the parents were literate and in other 48 (96%) respondents were literate. Thirty seven (38.95%) participants of this study worked as laborer and 22 (23.2%) of them were housewives which is in contrast to the findings of other two studies [10,12] in which majority of respondents i.e. 55 (55%) and 32 (63%) respectively were housewives . This could be

because of the difference in the sample population between this study and the two above mentioned studies.

Of total, forty eight (50.53%) participants in this study had good knowledge on overall child abuse which is contrasting to the results of the study [10] where only 2 (4%) respondents had adequate knowledge on it. Majority of parents, 68 (71.6%) had good knowledge regarding child neglect and 34 (35.8%) of them had good knowledge on child sexual abuse. These findings are contrary to the findings of the study [10] as it revealed that only 9 (18%) participants had adequate awareness on child neglect and 4 (8%) of them had adequate awareness on child sexual abuse. However, in this study, a notable proportion of parents still had poor knowledge in context of general child abuse 10 (10.5%) and child sexual abuse 19 (20%).

The findings of this study revealed that there was significant association between age group of parents and their level of knowledge on child abuse. Contrastingly, the study [12] where they found out that there was no significant association between these two variables which could be because while performing the chi-square test, there were many cells whose expected count was less than 5 thereby causing the p-value to be greater than 0.05.

Also, no significant association between education status of respondents and their level of knowledge on child abuse was found. Similar results were presented in the study [12] where these variables were not associated. However, contrasting results was found in the study [10] where there was an association found between the knowledge level and educational status of respondents.

Likewise, the current study revealed that there was an association between exposure to different sources of information and knowledge regarding child abuse. However, no literatures were found that either support or contrast this finding of the study.

There were few limitations to this study. The study was limited to the samples taken from the parents of under 5 children of Kalanki area, thus the findings cannot be generalized to whole Kathmandu district.

The time available for this study was very short due to which non probability sampling method had to be adopted for selection of the study population instead of probability sampling method. Also, the sample size of the study was just 95. It could have been done on more samples for larger generalization.

## CONCLUSION

This study found out that the knowledge of parents regarding child abuse was satisfactory. However,

a significant proportion of parents still had poor knowledge in context of general child abuse and child sexual abuse. Awareness raising activities by using media sources as a prime source on these lagging segments can aid to increase their knowledge and understanding. This study provided a new perspective to the underexplored area of child abuse and opened the door for a large scale study to get the actual scenario of its knowledge as well as its occurrence throughout the nation.

## TABLES

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the respondents (n=95)**

Sex wise distribution of respondents	
Variables	n (%)
Male	47 (49.5)
Female	48 (50.5)
Total	95 (100)
Agewise distribution of the respondents	
19-25	13 (13.7)
26-30	42 (44.2)
31-35	21 (22.1)
36-40	12 (12.6)
41-45	5 (5.3)
51-55	2 (2.1)
Total	95 (100)
Education status/Occupation	
Literate:	80 (84.2)
Primary (1-5) including literate without schooling	28 (29.5)
Secondary (6-10)	35 (36.8)
Higher education (11 and above)	17 (17.9)
Total	95
Occupation:	
Housewife	22 (23.2)
Private employed	14 (14.7)
Government employed	2 (2.1)
Laborer	37 (38.9)
Others	20 (21.1)
Total	95

**Table 2: Level of knowledge of parents regarding child abuse**

Overall child abuse		General child abuse		Child physical abuse	
Level of knowledge	n (%)	Level of knowledge	n (%)	Level of knowledge	n (%)
Good knowledge	48 (50.5)	Good knowledge	14 (14.7)	Good knowledge	71 (74.7)
Average knowledge	46 (48.4)	Average knowledge	71 (74.7)	Average knowledge	24 (25.3)
Poor knowledge	1 (1.1)	Poor knowledge	10 (10.5)	Poor knowledge	0
Child sexual abuse		Child neglect		Child emotional abuse	
Level of knowledge	n (%)	Level of knowledge	n (%)	Level of knowledge	n (%)
Good knowledge	34 (35.8)	Good knowledge	68 (71.6)	Good knowledge	55 (57.9)
Average knowledge	42 (44.2)	Average knowledge	27 (28.4)	Average knowledge	40 (42.1)
Poor knowledge	19 (20.0)	Poor knowledge	0	Poor knowledge	0

**Table 3: Association between selected variables and level of knowledge regarding child abuse**

Association between age of respondents and level of knowledge			
Age group	Good knowledge (n)	Average and below knowledge (n)	p-value
19-29	26	15	0.032
30-39	20	24	
40 and above	2	8	

## Association between education status of respondent and their level of knowledge

Education status	Good knowledge (n)	Average and below knowledge (n)	p-value
Illiterate	9	6	0.171
Primary (1-5) including literate without schooling	11	17	
Secondary (6-10)	16	19	
Higher education (11 and above)	12	5	

## Association between exposure to various information sources and level of knowledge

	Good knowledge (n)	Average and below knowledge (n)	p-value
Below average (<2 sources)	13	37	< 0.05
Average and above (>=2 sources)	35	10	

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