

Knowledge and Experience of Child Sexual Abuse among School Children of Kathmandu: A Descriptive Cross-sectional Study

Bibhuti Katel¹, Pushpa Kumari Ghimire¹, Sabitri Kumari Poudel¹, Anand Thapa Magar²

¹ Department of Nursing, Kanti Children's Hospital Nursing Campus, NAMS, Kathmandu, Nepal

² APF Command and Staff College, Kathmandu, Nepal

Corresponding Author:

Bibhuti Katel

Department of Nursing,
Kanti Children's Hospital Nursing
Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Email: bibhukk@gmail.com

Article History:

Received date: June 9, 2026

Revised date: June 25, 2026

Accepted date: July 1, 2026

Published date: August 1, 2026

Online Access



DOI: 10.64772/mjapfn.2.2.63

Abstract

Introduction: Child sexual abuse is a major global public health and social issue affecting children regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Despite its high prevalence and serious long-term physical, psychological and social consequences, it remains largely underreported. This study assessed the knowledge and experiences of sexual abuse among school children in Kathmandu.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 394 students aged 11-18 years from two public secondary schools. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (Ref. No. 799). The sample size was calculated using the finite population calculation formula. The schools were selected purposively, and nine sections from three classes were chosen by lottery method. All students from selected sections were included. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20.0.

Results: Out of 394 participants, 195 (49.24%) of the respondents had moderate knowledge of child sexual abuse, 138 (35.03%) had adequate knowledge and 61 (15.48%) had inadequate knowledge. Among them, 130 (33.99%) reported experiencing sexual abuse, with girls accounting for 103 (79.23%) of cases and 63 (48.46%) occurred in public places. Misconceptions were common, including 210 (53.30%) believing victims are responsible. Sexual abuse experience was significantly associated with sex ($p < 0.001$), while knowledge level was significantly associated with parental education (mother $p = 0.011$; father $p = 0.045$).

Conclusions: Despite moderate to adequate knowledge, children continued to experience sexual abuse, while misconceptions persists and parental education significantly influences child's knowledge of abuse.

Keywords: child sexual abuse; experience; knowledge; school.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a serious violation of children's rights that involves engaging a child in sexual activities that they cannot fully understand,

consent to or resist due to their age.^{1,2} It is a major public health concern resulting in long-term physical and psychological consequences. United Nations Children's Fund estimates that one in eight children worldwide experienced sexual abuse, while global

How to cite (Vancouver Style)

Katel B, Ghimire PK, Poudel SK, Thapa Magar A. Knowledge and Experience of Child Sexual Abuse among School Children of Kathmandu: A Descriptive Cross-sectional Study. Med J APF Nepal. 2026;2(2):48-53.

© The Author(s) 2026 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. (CC BY-NC)



reports indicate a substantial increase in CSA in recent years.³⁻⁵

The prevalence of CSA as per studies in Asia ranges from 3.30% to 42.70% among females and up to 9.10% among males.⁶⁻⁸ In Nepal, studies have reported prevalence rates of 18.40% to 41.30% among school-aged children.^{5,9} Limited evidence on children’s knowledge and experiences of CSA in Nepal highlights the need for further research to support effective prevention and protection strategies.

This study aimed to assess school children’s knowledge and experiences of sexual abuse among school children of Kathmandu.

Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among school children from Grades 8-10 in two purposively selected secondary schools in Kathmandu. The sample size was calculated using Yamane’s formula (1967)¹¹ with a population of 1540, 5% margin of error, yielding 318 participants. After adding 10% non-response, the final sample size was 350. However, 394 students were included after selecting one section per class (Grade 8-10) from one school and two sections per class (Grade 8-10) from other school using the lottery method and including all students from selected sections. Data were collected from 15 January to 12 February 2025 using a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee of Kanti Children’s Hospital, with permissions from schools and written parental consent along with student assent. Confidentiality was ensured using coded identifiers. The tool was developed by the study team, consulted with five experts from relevant fields and subsequently validated. It was translated into Nepali and back translated into English to maintain linguistic accuracy. It was pretested on 10% of the sample with necessary revisions. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20.0. Descriptive statistics were used and chi-square tests assessed associations between variables. Knowledge was categorized as inadequate, moderate and adequate.¹²

Results

Among the 394 respondents, 229 (58.12%) were aged 15-18 years and 218 (55.33%) were female. Among them, 192 (48.73%) belonged to the Brahmin/Chhetri ethnic group and 334 (84.77%).were Hindu. Most participants were studying in Grade 9, 142 (36.04%), followed by Grade 8 138 (35.03%) and Grade 10 114 (28.93%). More than half 231 (58.63%) lived in nuclear families. Parental education was predominantly at the

secondary level, reported by 212 (53.81%) of mothers and 254 (64.47%) of fathers. Maternal illiteracy 91 (23.10%) was higher than paternal illiteracy 36 (9.14%).

Regarding knowledge, 194 (49.24%) demonstrated a moderate level of knowledge, 138 (35.03%) had adequate knowledge and 61 (15.46%) of them showed inadequate knowledge. Although 280 (71.07%) correctly understood that sexual abuse is not limited to rape or attempted rape, however majority respondents 210 (53.30%) incorrectly perceived that victims themselves are responsible for the abuse. Additionally, 233 (59.14%) thought that children are mostly abused by unknown or outsider (Table 1).

Table 1: Knowledge of child sexual abuse (n=394).

Variables	Responses	
	Yes/ n (%)	No* n (%)
Sexual abuse refers to the act of rape or attempt to rape only	114 (28.93)	280 (71.07)
Children are abused only by adults	75 (19.04)	319 (80.96)
Only girls are the victim of sexual abuse	105 (26.65)	289 (73.35)
Children are mostly abused by the people who belong to outside their family	233 (59.14)	161 (40.86)
Most of the time children are sexually abused when they are alone, outside the home	219 (55.58)	175 (44.42)
Only young children are victim of sexual abuse	49 (12.44)	345 (87.56)
Boys are not sexually abused at all	93 (23.60)	301(76.40)
Children from reputed families are not victim of sexual abuse	64 (16.24)	330 (83.76)
The perpetrator of the sexual abuse is always male	96 (24.37)	298 (75.63)
In sexual abuse the victim is often responsible for the event	210 (53.30)	184 (46.70)
There is no legal punishment if the sexual activities are performed with the consent or agreement of the child	95 (24.11)	299 (75.89)

(Note: *is the correct response)

Among 394 respondents, 130 (33.99%) reported experiencing sexual abuse. Non-contact abuse as inappropriate facial gesture was the most common 276 (70.05%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Incidence and characteristics of child sexual abuse experienced by the students.

Variables	n (%)
Experience of abuse (n= 394)	
Yes	130 (33.99)
No	264 (67.01)
Types of abuse experienced (n= 130)	
Forced to look their private part	11 (8.46)
Asked to undress and show them genitals	7 (5.38)
Asked you to look at pornographic pictures, films or photos	21 (16.15)
Made facial expression such as winking, throwing kisses licking lips	91 (70)
Used vulgar words or made vulgar comments	55 (42.30)
Fondling	25 (19.23)
Forced you to fondle	6 (4.61)
Tried to rape you	12 (9.23)
Forcefully made physical relation	3 (2.30)
Requested/demanded for vulgar communication or show private part on social media	20 (15.38)
Place of abuse (n= 130)	
Home	25 (19.23)
School	21 (16.15)
Public Place	63 (48.46)
Not mentioned place	26 (20)

Table 3: Perpetrator related variables (n=130).

Variables	n(%)
Gender	
Male	80 (61.53)
Female	11(8.46)
Not mentioned	39 (30.01)
Was the perpetrator known	
Yes	45 (34.61)
No	52 (40)
Not mentioned	33 (25.38)
Perpetrator identity	
Within family	2 (1.53)
Within school	21 (16.15)
Official employee	5 (3.84)
Stranger	10 (7.69)
Not mentioned	92 (70.76)

Most perpetrators were male 80 (61.53%). Among identified perpetrators, 21 (16.15%) were from the school (Table 3).

The children were reluctant to share the experience of sexual abuse as only 49 (37.69 %) reported (Table 4).

Table 4: Response towards the exposure of sexual abuse (n=130).

Variables	n (%)
Shared about the experience of abuse	
Yes	49 (37.69)
No	39 (30)
Don't remember	14 (10.76)
Not mentioned	28 (21.53)
Reason of not sharing*	
Fear of retaliation	3 (2.30)
Fear of not being believed	21 (16.15)
Unknown about reporting mechanism	5 (3.84)
Feeling that it won't make a difference	8 (6.15)
Feeling of embarrassed	10 (7.69)
Not mentioned	83 (63.84)

* Multiple response

Parental education was significantly associated with children's knowledge of CSA. Respondents of parents with higher education were more likely to have adequate knowledge than those with illiterate parents with mother ($p = 0.011$) and father ($p = 0.045$). A significant association was observed between sex and experience of sexual abuse ($p = 0.000$). Female students reported substantially higher rates of abuse 103 (47.25%) than male students 27 (15.34%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Association of knowledge and experience of CSA.

Variables	Knowledge Level					Experience			
	Inadequate n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Adequate n (%)	χ^2	p value	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	χ^2	p value
Age									
11-14	32 (52.46)	82 (42.27)	52 (36.69)	3.941	0.139	46 (27.88)	119 (72.12)	3.361	0.067
15-18	29 (47.54)	112 (57.73)	87 (63.31)			84 (36.68)	145 (63.32)		
Mean -14.66 SD-1.129									
Sex									
Male	25 (14.20)	98 (55.68)	53 (30.11)	5.423	0.66	27 (15.34)	149 (84.66)	44.842	0.000
Female	36 (16.51)	96 (44.04)	86 (39.45)			103 (47.25)	115 (52.75)		
Mother's education									
Illiterate	11 (12.09)	52 (57.14)	28 (30.77)	13.083	0.011	33 (36.26)	58 (63.74)	1.269	0.530
Till secondary level	40 (18.87)	106 (50.00)	66 (31.13)			71 (33.49)	141 (66.51)		
Bachelor and above	10 (11.99)	36 (39.56)	45 (49.45)			26 (28.57)	65 (71.43)		
Father's education									
Illiterate	4 (11.11)	21 (58.33)	11 (30.56)	9.753	0.045	14 (38.89)	22 (61.11)	5.261	0.072
Till secondary level	44 (17.32)	131 (51.57)	79 (31.10)			91 (35.83)	163 (64.17)		
Bachelor and above	13 (12.50)	42 (40.38)	49 (47.12)			25 (24.04)	79 (75.95)		

Discussion

The study revealed nearly half of respondents had moderate knowledge of CSA (49.24%), consistent with findings from Nepal (52.10%) and India (62%).^{12,13} Misconceptions persisted with 53.30% blaming victims and 59.14% identifying only strangers as perpetrators. However, most correctly recognized attempted rape as CSA (71.10%), higher than a previous Nepali study (59.70%), possibly due to increased awareness via social media and education programs.⁵ Despite this, 24.11% lacked knowledge of legal provisions, consistent with earlier findings (37.90%) indicating the need for strengthened CSA and legal awareness education.¹⁴

The prevalence of CSA in South Asia, including Nepal remains substantial, although official figures likely underestimate the true burden due to underreporting. Nepal Police records indicate an increasing trend in registered cases, rising from 211 in 2019-2020 to 281 in 2021-2022.¹⁰ In the present study, 33.30% of respondents reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse, which is comparable to findings from Rajbanshi (41.30%).⁹ Nearly half of CSA incidents occurred in public places (48.46%) and

16.15% at school, consistent with previous findings (48.30% and 16.20% in public place and school respectively), indicating these as common settings for abuse. Females accounted for most reported cases (79.23%), contrasting with earlier study reporting higher prevalence among boys (73.43%).¹⁵ This difference may reflect increased awareness and reporting among girls, possibly due to CSA-related educational initiatives.

Most perpetrators were male (61.53%), consistent with previous findings (65.50%). Only 7.69 % of abuse cases involved strangers, compared to 54.10% of the same study,¹⁵ possibly due to the high proportion of respondents (70.76%) who did not disclose perpetrator identity. Digital forms of CSA were also reported with 15.38% of respondents experiencing online demands for vulgar communication or exposure of private body parts, comparable to Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN-Nepal) findings (7.99%), highlighting the growing risk of online sexual exploitation.¹⁴

Forced sexual relations were reported by 2.30% of respondents, similar to previous findings (4.40%).¹⁵ Despite the low prevalence, CSA remains concerning due to its significant psychological impact as

suicidal ideation reported by 73.70% and skipping school 19.83% in another study.^{5,14} Disclosure was limited (37.70%), lower than previously reported (54.60%). Fear of not being believed identified as a major barrier (16.20%) consistent with earlier study (18.50%), highlighting persistent challenges in reporting abuse.¹⁵

Parental education demonstrated a significant association with children's knowledge of CSA. Nearly half (49.45%) children whose mothers had academic level of bachelor's degree or higher demonstrated adequate knowledge of CSA ($p = 0.011$). Similarly, 47.12% of fathers with a bachelor's degree or higher had children with adequate CSA knowledge ($p = 0.045$). Comparable results were observed in an Indian study, where mothers' education level significantly correlated with children's CSA knowledge ($p = 0.002$), and fathers' education showed a highly significant association ($p < 0.001$).¹⁶

The findings underscore the need for comprehensive awareness and educational programs targeting children, parents, and the wider community to improve knowledge, reduce stigma, and strengthen prevention and reporting of abuse.

Our study is limited by inclusion of only two purposively selected schools, reducing generalizability. Furthermore, the sample size in this study was calculated using Yamane's formula which is a prevalence-based estimation method for descriptive cross-sectional study. This limits the adequacy of the sample to reliably detect true associations.

Conclusions

The study found that although many children had moderate to adequate knowledge of child sexual abuse, a considerable proportion had experienced abuse and were reluctant to disclose it. Misconceptions such as victim-blaming and the belief that children from reputed families are not at risk were common. Parental education was significantly associated with children's knowledge.

Source of Funding: None

Acknowledgement: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Author's Contribution and ORCID iDs

Bibhuti Katel: conceptualization, methodology, literature review, data curation, writing draft, review and editing

 : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4370-0627>

Pushpa Kumari Ghimire: conceptualization, methodology, literature review, data curation

 : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8468-5056>

Sabitri Kumari Poudel: methodology, data curation

 : <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5696-056X>

Anand Thapa Magar: methodology, review and editing

 : <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7955-3616>

References

- Mathews B, Collin-Vézina D. Child Sexual Abuse: Toward a Conceptual Model and Definition. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2019 Apr;20(2):131-48. DOI: [10.1177/1524838017738726](https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017738726)
- Adolescent health. WHO; 2023. Available from: <https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/adolescent-health>
- National Statistics on Child Abuse. National Children's Alliance; 2024. Available from: <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/media-room/national-statistics-on-child-abuse/>
- Fry D, Krzeczowska A, Ren J, Lu M, Fang X, et al. Prevalence Estimates and Nature of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Lancet Child Adolesc Health*. 2025 Mar;9(3):184-93. DOI: [10.1016/S2352-4642\(24\)00329-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(24)00329-8)
- Sharma A, Magar KR. Awareness on Sexual Abuse among Adolescents in Baglung District of Nepal. *Janapriya J Interdiscip Stud*. 2018 Dec 31;7(1):14-25. DOI: [10.3126/jjis.v7i1.23046](https://doi.org/10.3126/jjis.v7i1.23046)
- Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence: Child Sexual Abuse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2024. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/types-of-violence/child-sexual-abuse>
- Pereda N, Guilera G, Fornis M, Gómez-Benito J. The Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Community and Student Samples: A Meta-Analysis. *Clin Psychol Rev*. 2009 Jun;29(4):328-38. DOI: [10.1016/j.cpr.2009.02.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.02.007)
- Selengia V, Thuy HNT, Mushi D. Prevalence and Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse in Selected Countries of Asia and Africa: A Review of Literature. *J Soc Sci*. 2020;8(9):146-60. DOI: [10.4236/jss.2020.89010](https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.89010)
- Rajbanshi L. Prevalence of Sexual Abuse among School Children. *J Chitwan Med Coll*. 2012;1(2):69-71. Available from: <https://www.cmc.edu.np/images/gallery/Original%20Articles/yFOVC20.pdf>

10. Addressing Sexual Violence in Nepal. Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD); 2023. 16 p. Available from: <https://fwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sexual-violence-1.pdf>
11. Yamane T. Statistics: An Introductory Analysis. 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row; 1967.
12. Basnet R, Gautam S, Maharjan S. Awareness of Child Sexual Abuse among Secondary School Students in Kathmandu District. Soc Inq J Soc Sci Res. 2020 May 10;2(1):104-27. DOI: [10.3126/sijssr.v2i1.28910](https://doi.org/10.3126/sijssr.v2i1.28910)
13. Anusha UK, Saraswathi KN, Nair NP, Williams S. A Study to Assess the Knowledge regarding Sexual Abuse among Adolescent Girls in Selected High Schools at Mysuru. Int J Nurs Educ Res. 2015;3(3):294. DOI: [10.5958/2454-2660.2015.00011.3](https://doi.org/10.5958/2454-2660.2015.00011.3)
14. Shakya A. A Study on Online Child Sexual Exploitation in Nepal. Nepal: Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN-Nepal); 2020 Jul. 106 p. Available from: <https://cwin.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/a-study-on-online-child-report-layout-final.pdf>
15. Shrestha S, Baskota S, Karki U, Poudel L, Bhandari N, Gurung M, et al. Child Sexual Abuse among School Children of a Municipality: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study. J Nepal Med Assoc. 2021 Aug 1;59(239). DOI: [10.31729/jnma.6865](https://doi.org/10.31729/jnma.6865)
16. Ojha R. A Study to Assess the Knowledge regarding Sexual Abuse among School-Going Children. Int J Youth Adolesc Health. 2021 Dec 18;8(4):28-30. DOI: [10.24321/2349.2880.202117](https://doi.org/10.24321/2349.2880.202117)

Bios

Bibhuti Katel is a nursing officer and lecturer at Kanti Children's Hospital Nursing Campus, NAMS. She is committed to providing quality education with more than twenty years of clinical and academic exposure.

Email: bibhukk@gmail.com

Pushpa Kumari Ghimire is an Assistant Professor at Kanti Children's Hospital Nursing Campus, NAMS. She has been serving continuously as the trainer and academician for last twenty-one years.

Email: pkghimire94@gmail.com

Sabitri Kumari Poudel is the Chief Hospital Nursing Administrator at Kanti Children's Hospital. She has vast experience of administrating the hospitals for last twenty-six years.

Email: savitripaudel200@gmail.com

Anand Thapa Magar is faculty in the APF Command and Staff College. He has been serving as the academician and the security officer for last twenty-three years.

Email: dnanapa36@gmail.com