

The Silence around Child Sexual Abuse: Review of Researches on Prevalence and Awareness among School Teachers

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse leads to lifelong grave consequences on child's holistic development. The present review paper is a deliberation on awareness of school teachers about child sexual abuse. For the preparation of this review article 3 reports and many research articles have been searched through Delhi University Library System, Google search, and Google scholar. Afterward selected articles and reports were carefully reviewed for the present paper. It was found that the present area is understudied and there is a great dearth of information on this issue in India, particularly. It seems that teachers across world and in India understand the term child sexual abuse, but they have very limited knowledge on laws related to child sexual abuse. In addition, teachers are not acquainted with the knowledge on what can be done to protect children from any form of sexual abuse. Talking about sex with children or sex education is considered a taboo in many parts of the world, hence it is clearly evident that people do not want to talk about child sexual abuse. Teachers can play significant role in protection of children, especially because children spend a major chunk of their waking hours in school. This paper presents the situation of awareness of teachers on child sexual abuse.

Keywords: *Child Sexual abuse, Prevalence of CSA, Teachers*

Introduction

“Prevention is always better than cure but sometimes there is no cure of certain incidences like Child Sexual Abuse”- Unknown

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a universal problem with grave life-long outcomes (WHO, 2014). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society.” 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” (Krug et al., 2002).

Sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual behaviour with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. To be considered ‘child abuse’, these acts have to be

committed by a person responsible for the care of a child (for example a baby-sitter, a parent, or a daycare provider), or is related to the child. If a stranger commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault and handled solely by the police and criminal courts (Chopra, 2015).

The issue of CSA is intricate and challenging to study as lot of silence surrounds this issue. The estimates vary widely depending on the country under study, the definitions used, the type of CSA studied, the extent of coverage, and the quality of data. However, sexual violence is seen to occur in all ages, in all socioeconomic classes, and nearly in all countries with differences in the magnitude (Singh, Pareshker & Nair, 2014). Child sexual abuse is a widespread problem in schools globally. Learners are at risk of sexual abuse by teachers (Simuforosa, 2015).

Children are our present and they are our future too. Though societies would like to believe that they give good status to children, this is far from true. In a traditional society like India, we worship goddess in the form of girl child still we seek boys over girls. In the name of culture, we ask our minors to remain unvoiced in front of their elders. We make them believe that elders

are always right and it's our duty to follow them without any questions. These traditional practices directly impact the mind of our children. They suffer and never have courage to say what they feel to their elders, or stand up if an adult is committing an atrocity. This makes them more and more vulnerable and easy targets to be a victim of child abuse.

Many studies have reported that child sexual abuse happens within families. Majority of abusers are known and trusted people to the child (Chopra, 2015). Thousands of child abuse cases are reported in newspaper every day. It is our responsibility to raise awareness of people about child sexual abuse and about the various preventive measures that can be taken to empower children as well as adults. Here teachers can play crucial role in empowering parents especially mother and children. If she is herself aware about the dimensions of CSA, she can play a critical role in protecting children.

The present study is to review the understanding among the teachers about child sexual abuse globally and child sexual abuse in India. The basic objective of the present paper is to understand teacher's level of awareness about CSA. This understanding can help to make them empowered so that they can directly contribute in this field to safeguard children from Child Sexual abuse.

Objectives

1. To review the literature to find out the understanding and attitude of teachers about child sexual abuse (CSA) in India and globally.
2. To review the various strategies that teachers follow to prevent CSA.

Methodology

The present paper is based on research review used to develop understanding of knowledge among the teachers about child sexual abuse globally and in India. In the preparation of this paper authors had used secondary source of data. For the collection of data, the electronic media was used. Many search engines have been used such as Google, Google scholar, Delhi University Library System, science direct, Taylor and Frances etc. The key words used to search data mainly were child sexual abuse, CSA in India, CSA globally/internationally, CSA and teachers, role of teachers in protection of children and many more. From the pool of

collected articles and reports on the issues related to child sexual abuse, only those articles were selected that were associated with the clear objectives of the present review. Data from each selected article were extracted, analysed and placed into the present research review paper.

Discussion

International status: A global perspective on CSA and awareness among teachers

Child sexual abuse is a global concern. The prevalence of CSA was found to be high in India as well as throughout the world. A major section of children globally attends school every day. Hence schools can play an important role in the prevention of sexual abuse. Teachers and other professionals working in schools and educational settings see the same group of children regularly. They are likely to be the professional in the community, outside of the family home, with whom the child has the closest relationship. Research suggests that teachers are the trusted adult, located outside of the family and peer networks, most likely to receive a disclosure of sexual abuse. Besides a disclosure of abuse, schools also have a unique role in the identification of safeguarding concerns and the initiation of an intervention (Children's Commissioner, 2017)

Goldman in 2007 conducted a study on Australian primary school student-teachers knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse and its mandatory reporting, and reported that student- teachers have a significant knowledge of their roles as teachers, without gender or age differences. Goldman reported that teachers usually were not self-reliant in identifying the cues of CSA among children and were also unable to respond appropriately when they found or suspected CSA.

Prevalence of CSA

In a study conducted in Zimbabwe it was found that children faced child sexual abuse by teachers. This study was done on total 19 people through qualitative methods. The study indicated that child sexual abuse in schools is widespread and that teachers are among the perpetrators of this abuse. Findings from the study reveal that girls are more defenseless to sexual abuse than boys and male teachers sexually abuse learners more than female teachers (Simuforosa, 2015).

Ruto (2009) reported that children in Kenya are prone to abuse as according to the findings of study 58 of every 100 children have been sexually harassed while 29% boys and 24% girls are reported to have been forced into unwanted sex. The main perpetrators of the violence were mentioned as peers while the home featured as the most unsafe place.

In a similar study conducted by Gwirayi (2013) in Zimbabwe reported that child sexual abuse is a social and public health concern locally and worldwide because it is associated with numerous and serious short-and long-term devastating consequences. The study found an overall prevalence rate of 56.3%, with no significant gender differences. Both non-contact and contact forms of sexual abuse were prevalent. Both adults and peers were reported as perpetrators. Perpetrators were reported to be familiar people, which is consistent with the observation that the home was reported as the major place where abuse was perpetrated.

In a qualitative study of child sexual abuse in Kenya, it was found that “Teachers, who comprise the main adult population in schools, have a mandate to protect children. Yet 16.1% girls affirmed they had been propositioned by teachers. While the majority of these girls (66.7%) indicated they declined the “love proposals” and some 15.9% girls simply ignored, there was a disturbing 17.4% who yielded to the love proposal and entered into a relationship with the teacher.” (Ruto, 2009).

Awareness on Child Sexual Abuse among teachers

Ping & Jing-qi (n.d.) in China conducted a qualitative research of awareness on child sexual abuse in elementary school teachers and reported that almost all the selected teachers have never communicated with their students on CSA. All the selected teachers stated that for the prevention of CSA in the school there should be CSA prevention education imparted in the school only. Authors concluded their research by stating that “the awareness of CSA among elementary school teachers is not good, therefore, we should enhance training for these teachers”.

Similar study was conducted by Zhang, Chen & Liu (2015) in Beijing, China on 245 preschool teachers to examine their knowledge, attitude and training on CSA prevention. They found that Chinese preschool teachers had limited

knowledge on CSA prevention. Less than 5% of teachers ever attended CSA prevention training programs. Authors concluded that there is urgent need to develop appropriate prevention training programs for preschool teachers in China to protect children from CSA in schools.

Flåm, and Haugstvedt (2013) conducted a study in Norway and reported about caregivers’ awareness of children’s first signs of sexual abuse. Authors found that interaction is the key to find out about the clues of CSA. They also stated that “trusted caregivers scaffold opportunities for the child to disclose about the CSA”.

A study conducted by Goldman and Girmbeek (2015) in Australia reported that Teachers in many countries are mandated by law, professional codes, or education authorities to report child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse. However, teachers may not receive adequate preparation for such sensitive interventions, as pre-service teacher education degrees provide very few or no compulsory courses on child protection and crucially related, lifelong health and well-being issues. The results suggest that most did not learn about mandatory reporting or child sexual abuse, and others cited sparse and sporadic public media as their primary information source. These findings, building on previous evidence about inadequate or nonexistent pre-service mandatory intervention courses in primary teacher education, may guide the design of appropriate training responses enhancing educational professionals’ knowledge, competencies, skills, and efficacies as mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse.

Chen and Chen (2005) stated that “It is very important to understand and improve public awareness of CSA prevention”. They found that more than 80% of parents approved of school CSA prevention education. However, at the same time, 47.3% of parents expressed some concern that this education may induce the children to learn too much about ‘sex’.

Walsh and Farrell (2008) reported that Child abuse and neglect are serious social problems that make extraordinary demands on teachers’ knowledge and professionalism. Yet the field of education has been slow to develop a discipline-specific knowledge base about child abuse and neglect for teachers and teacher education

programs and there is a paucity of empirical research about teachers' knowledge in relation to child abuse and neglect. "Parents and teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge about how to recognize early warning signs that can indicate the sexual abuse of a child" (Sanderson, 2004).

The above researches reflected that children are the most vulnerable section of the society and almost every second child has faced child sexual abuse. Hence to protect children from CSA, schools and teachers can play a significant role. But in some of the incidences even teachers themselves are the perpetrators. To avoid such incidences, it is important to impart knowledge among teachers on child sexual abuse and also about laws and punishments related to child sexual abuse.

National Status: An Indian perspective on CSA and awareness among teachers

CSA is an extensive problem, and for reasons not hard to understand, vastly underreported. It has adverse effects on the psychological, physical, behavioral, and interpersonal well-being of the victim. Hence, stringent measures should be taken for the prevention and control of this hidden public health issue (Singh, Parsekar and Nair, 2014). A review study revealed that "perpetration of CSA is a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in the interplay between individual, family, community, and societal factors. The results of review indicated poor physical, behavioural, social, and mental health outcomes for victims of CSA in India" (Choudhry, et.al; 2018).

Kacker and Mohsin (2007) conducted a study based on well-designed methodology, covering 13 states (two states from each of the six geographic zones in the country) including states with the highest and the lowest crime rates against children. The sample was purposive and included 12,447 children, 2324 young adults and 2449 stakeholders representing five different evidence groups: children in the family, at the workplace, in schools, on the streets and in institutions. The study reported widespread sexual abuse prevalent in all the states surveyed. 53 % (n = 12,447) reportedly experienced some form of sexual abuse. Half of sexual abuses reported were committed by "persons known to the child or in a position of trust and responsibility" (Kacker and Mohsin, 2007).

Child Sexual Abuse is present globally and in India CSA is rampant. In 2007 in a report by ministry of MOWCD it was reported that 53.22% children having faced some kind of sexual abuse in their life. It was found that the Child Sexual Abuse is understudied and there is a great dearth of information on this issue in India, particularly.

Carson, (2013) reported that the findings of several studies state that 18–20 % of CSA occurs in the family and around 50 % in institutional settings. Further, there is regional and rural–urban variation in the rates and extent of CSA in the country. Girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, although boys too reported a high percentage of victimisation and are subject to greater social stigma. The study suggests that although sexual exploitation and abuse is strongly correlated to poverty, it occurs in families across the socioeconomic and religious spectrum. However, factors that facilitate CSA, such as poverty, overcrowding, extended family living arrangements, abundance of street children, and lack of recreational facilities in families are by no means exclusive to India (Belur and Singh 2015).

Belliappa and Ghosh (2015) reported that the high incidence of child sexual abuse tends to occur concurrently with high levels of physical and emotional abuse in India. Authors stated that in India there are progressive laws that address different forms of abuse, which children could face both within and outside schools. Educational interventions which address CSA must acknowledge the links between different types of abuse and view CSA as one of the many forms of gender oppression and violence.

One of the studies conducted on children in Tripura India reported that one fifth of children from small town of Agartala have experienced physical, psychological and sexual violence in some form. Study also stated that early intervention, specially awareness generation, is required in order to prevent children from being abused (Deb and Walsh, 2012)

Kumar et al. (2017) conducted study in Kerala (India) on abuse in a school environment. In their study they found that prevalence of sexual abuse during one year of study (21.0%, 23.8%). CSA was reported as occurring 'sometimes' rather than 'many times.' Various factors significantly increase the likelihood of

abuse - male gender, low SES, regular use of alcohol and drugs by family member at home, and having other difficulties at school. Children tended to report abuse less frequently if they liked attending school and if they always felt safe at school.

Mujawar (2018) conducted a study in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India titled "A cross-sectional study to assess knowledge regarding child sexual abuse among teachers of selected schools of Aurangabad city". The data in the study was collected from 100 teachers using semi structured questionnaire on knowledge regarding child sexual abuse and found that 61% teachers were having good knowledge about CSA, 38% teachers were having average information about CSA and only 1% teachers were having poor knowledge about CSA in selected school of Aurangabad. In this study author stated that "high school teachers are aware of the sign and symptoms of the child sexual abuse, and thus this knowledge can be used to prevent the CSA" (Mujawar, 2018).

Indhumathi (2019) conducted an intervention study on teachers and primary school girls in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India and reported that all primary school going girls (sample 200) have improved in their understanding of CSA and 'good touch' and 'bad touch' after they received intervention. Similarly, teachers (sample 30) of primary grades also reported significant improvement in their knowledge related to CSA and about preventive measures for CSA after intervention.

Cynthia and Tower in 2003 stated that "there are many reasons why educators are so vital in identifying, treating, and preventing child maltreatment. First, they have close and consistent contact with children. Second, educators have a professional and legally mandated responsibility for reporting suspected maltreatment. While educators facilitate children's learning, children cannot learn effectively if their attention or energy is sapped by the conflicts inherent in being maltreated. Third, school personnel have a unique opportunity to advocate for children, as well as provide programs and services that can help children and strengthen families. It is important to realize that a positive relationship with a supporting adult may enhance the resilience of children who have been abused." Schools and teachers have a key role to play in the fight

against abuse; we should not forget that the problem must be confronted on many levels. Ultimately, the greatest challenge may lie in attempting to alter social attitudes and conditions that foster or tolerate sexual abuse of children (CAPS, n.d.).

Effects of child sexual abuse on the victim(s) include guilt and self-blame, nightmares, insomnia, fear of the abuser or things associated with the abuse (including objects, smells, places etc.), lower self-esteem, sexually transmitted diseases, chronic pain, self-injurious or suicidal tendencies, depression, stress disorders, personality disorders or other psychiatric problems etc. Hence, it is very important that we prevent CSA (Chopra, 2015).

Conclusion

Almost every day, safety of millions of children is threatened in our nation and across the world. There is an urgent and immediate need to protect children from Child Sexual Abuse, which is the most heinous crime against children. As is being reflected by studies on victims of CSA, it has lifelong and grave consequences for the child. In order to protect children from CSA, we have the responsibility to enable and empower various stakeholders (especially teachers) as well as children.

It seems that teachers across the globe and in India comprehend the term child sexual abuse, but they have no or very less information on laws related to protect children from CSA. Also, the teachers' lack understanding about identifying indicators of CSA and how to help victim or how to report suspected maltreatment.

Many cases of CSA remain unreported due to cultural and social reasons, and it is clearly evident that people do not want to talk about child sexual abuse. Teachers can play significant role in protection of children, especially because children spend a major part of their waking hours in school. After the implementation of POCSO act (2012), teachers now have even more legally mandated responsibility for reporting suspected maltreatment.

It is reflected that even in some cases teachers themselves become the perpetrators of CSA. In such cases it is even more important to impart knowledge to teachers about the issues and laws related to CSA. Their understanding on this will lead to more safe and secure environment in the schools for children. It will also help to identify

cases of CSA and will enable a better childhood to have more research in this area.
for school going children. There is a great need

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