

Awareness on Child Abuse among Students in Public Schools of Rural Municipality of Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Child abuse is a global issue, all around the world which violates the rights of the children affecting their personal, social and psychological development leaving a lifetime psychological scar. It can happen at home, in organizations, schools or communities by parents, caregivers, neighbors and teachers. School children's self-awareness is very important to prevent child abuse. The study aimed to find out level of awareness of child abuse among students in public schools in the Rural Municipality of Nepal.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 250 students in grade 8, 9 and 10, selected through cluster sampling, using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were analyzed, using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, chi-square and fisher exact test.

Results: The study found out that around half (46.8%) of the respondents had an average level and 28% had an inadequate level of awareness on child abuse with a mean score of 62.3 ± 19.8 . Majority (63.2%) of the respondents considered smoking and drinking alcohol as possible consequences of child abuse, 69.6% stated that sharing problems with parents or close friends is preventive measures and 82.0% were aware of reporting to the police administration if they experience abuse. A significant association was found between the level of awareness and educational level (p-value 0.000).

Conclusion: The students have an average level of awareness about child abuse but significant number of students still lack adequate level of awareness. Hence, awareness raising program on child abuse focusing school students is recommended.

Keywords: Awareness, child abuse, students

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a global issue that violates the rights of the child causing injury, death, emotional trauma or serious harm. Child abuse and neglect are experienced by both girls and boys of all ages, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic status.¹ Globally, 1 billion children aged 2-17 years have experienced physical, emotional, sexual violence and neglect. Similarly 3 in 4 children aged 2-4

years experiencing physical punishment and psychological abuse regularly from their parents and caregivers and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men experienced sexual abuse within 17 years.² Most common abuse in India is physical abuse (72.7%) followed by emotional abuse (47.7%), child neglect (17.4%).³ In the context of Nepal, over 50 % children are experience physical punishment, among them 14 % had severe punishment.⁴ Nearly half (49.8%) children experience moderate

physical abuse followed by emotional abuse (77.3%).⁵ The child abuse results long term effects to the child such as learning disabilities; behavioral disorders; and depression, even death may occur due to the physical harm.⁴ All forms of child abuse are risks to health and increase burden of disease in all parts of the world.⁶ Families with low socioeconomic status have five time higher rates of child maltreatment and neglect.^{6,7} Similarly, 82% children aged 1 to 14 years experienced physical and psychological abuse by their caregiver. The rate of physical and psychological abuse is higher in Koshi province (87.6%) followed by Lumbini (84.2%).⁸ Around 90% of children are aware about their abuser, who were loved and trusted. Most of them delay or never disclose abuse to their friends, family, or the authorities.⁹ Similarly 3 in 4 children aged 2-4 years experiencing physical punishment and psychological abuse regularly from their parents and caregivers and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men experienced sexual abuse within 17 years.² It has been revealed that 30% in Bangladesh¹⁰, 26% in India¹¹ and 27.3% in Nepal¹², had inadequate level of awareness on child abuse among school level students. The abuse may occurs in home, school, orphanage and community irrespective of their age, sex, religion, culture and socioeconomic background by parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, peers, and strangers. Child abuse can be prevented for safe, happy and healthy childhood for all children. The purpose of this study was to find out level of awareness on child abuse among students and to measure association between levels of awareness of students with selected variables.

METHODS

A descriptive cross sectional study design was used to identify the level of awareness of respondents on child abuse. Data were collected from 16th September to 14th October 2024, cluster sampling methods was used for the study. Among 11 public secondary schools of Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West of Nepal, 3 schools were selected randomly with lottery method, then all the students studying in grades 8, 9 and 10 were selected (250 students) for the

study. Data were collected using structured self-administered questionnaire. Questionnaire was developed by researchers after reviewing literature. It was translated in Nepali language and again back-translation was done in English language. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee (IRC), of Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University. The questionnaire was modified after pretesting and getting feedback from experts. The instrument consisted of two parts, part one consists of socio-demographic characteristics and part two is related to students' awareness on child abuse. Awareness < 50% is taken as inadequate, 50 to 75% is moderate and >75% is taken as adequate level of awareness. Data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22 with descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics such as Chi-square test and Fisher's Exact with the level of significance < 0.05.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n= 250)

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Age in completed years		
<14	228	91.2
≥14	22	8.8
Mean age ±SD = 14.11±1.090, Min - 12, Max - 17		
Sex		
Male	123	49.2
Female	127	50.8
Ethnicity		
Brahman/Chhetri	179	71.6
Janajati	39	15.6
Dalit	32	12.8
Educational Level		
Class 8	75	30.0
Class 9	86	34.4
Class 10	89	35.6
Type of family		
Nuclear family	124	49.6
Joint family	113	45.2
Extended family	7	2.8
Single Parent	6	2.4
Marital status of parents		
Married	230	92.0
Separated	10	4.0
Widow/Widower	8	3.2
Divorce	2	0.8

Most (91.2 %) of the respondents were <14 years and around half (50.8 %) were female. Among them, majority (71.6 %) were Brahmin/Chhetri and almost half (49.6%) of the respondents belonged to nuclear family. Almost all (92%) of the respondents' parents were staying together (Table 1).

Table 2: Awareness Regarding Meaning, Risk factors and Place of Child Abuse (n=250)

Variables	Number	Percentage
Meaning of child abuse		
Child abuse is maltreatment that cause harm to the children's development	230	92.0
Types of child abuse *		
Physic abuse	191	76.4
Emotional/ Psychological abuse	180	72.0
Sexual abuse	153	61.2
Child Neglect	121	48.4
Risk factors of child abuse*		
Poor socioeconomic status of family	152	60.8
Lack of education among parents	135	54.0
Alcoholic parents	121	48.4
Single/divorced parents	113	45.2
Presence of disability in the child	102	40.8
Children who have low academic performance	98	39.2
Common places of child abuse*		
Community	180	72.0
Working place	168	67.2
Home	140	56.0
School	136	54.4
Child abuser*		
Peers	207	82.8
Neighbors	149	59.6
Strangers	124	49.6
Relatives	97	38.8
Teachers	84	33.6
Caretakers	80	32.0
Family members	73	29.2
Victims of child abuse		
Both boys and girls	225	90.0

* Multiple Responses

Most (92%) of the respondents knew the meaning of child abuse and three in five (60%) of the respondents said poor socio-economic status is a risk factor of child abuse. Majority of them (72.0%) said the community setting is common place of child abuse, followed by working place (67.2%), home (56.0%) and school (54.4%). The majority of the respondents (82.8%) had said that peers were the abusers, followed by neighbor (59.6%), strangers (49.6%). Most (90.0%) of the respondents said that both boys and girls are victims of child abuse (Table 2).

Table 3: Students' Awareness on Physical and Emotional Abuse (n = 250)

Variables	Number	Percentage
Meaning of physical abuse		
Any intentional act that results in physical injury to a child	197	78.8
Activities of physical abuse*		
Hitting/beating	219	87.6
Shaking	148	59.2
Slapping/punching	140	56.0
Pulling hair or ear	121	48.4
Kicking	110	44.0
Burning	109	43.6
Biting	100	40.0
Possible identification features *		
Injuries on the body	210	84.0
Burn injuries on the feet, hand, buttocks, face	159	63.6
Bite marks	145	58.0
Broken bones	113	45.2
Black spots in the eyes	103	41.2
Meaning of emotional Abuse		
Maltreatment that make scare, humiliate, isolate and ignore a child	194	77.6
Activities of emotional Abuse*		
Threatening and humiliating	182	72.8
Compare the child with other children	152	60.8
Keeping the children locked alone at the room	134	53.6
Expose the children's problem publicly	125	50.0
Constantly criticizing the children	87	34.8
Consequences of abuse*		
Sadness	140	56.0
Deterioration in school performance	138	55.2
Keep separate from others	126	50.4
Violent	123	49.2
Drug/alcohol abuse	112	44.8
Poor peer relationship	106	42.4
Sleeping problem	88	35.2
Feeling of shame/guilt	88	35.2

*Multiple Responses

The majority (78.8%) of the respondents knew the meaning of physical abuse. Four fifth (84.0%) of the respondents said injury on the body is a feature of physical abuse. Similarly, the majority

(72.8%) of them said threatening and humiliating as an activity of emotional abuse. Around half of the respondents said sadness (56.0%) and deterioration in school performance (55.2%) as the consequences of abuse (Table 3).

Table 4: Students' Awareness Regarding Sexual Abuse and Child Neglect (n=250)

Variables	Number	Percentage
Meaning of sexual abuse		
Any behavior to children for sexual stimulation such as touching in sexual manner or sexual relation with child	220	88.0
Activities of sexual abuse*		
Intentional touching of children's private body parts	205	82.0
Exposing own genitals to children	170	68.0
Scolding the children with vulgar words	106	42.4
Rape / attempted rape	95	38.0
Exploitation through prostitution	94	37.6
Possible identification feature of sexual abuse*		
Experiences bleeding or swelling in their private parts	174	69.6
HIV/AIDS	162	64.8
Having sexual transmitted disease	161	64.4
Unwanted pregnancy	158	63.2
Stay alone	101	40.4
Suddenly refused to go to school	88	35.2
Meaning of child neglect		
Provide inadequate food, shelter, love, supervision, education, and medical care for the children	83	33.2
Activities of child neglect*		
Creating the fearful environment	164	65.6
Ignoring the children's health problems	147	58.8
Ignoring the children's basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing	137	54.8
The children may not be enrolled in school	136	54.4
Permitting a child to use alcohol or other drugs	136	54.4
Identification features of child neglect*		
Frequently absent from school	169	67.6
States that there is no one at home to provide care	140	56.0
Begs or steals food or money	126	50.4
Abuses alcohol or other drugs	121	48.4
Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather	110	44.0
Constantly dirty and has too much body odor	98	39.2

* Multiple Responses

Most (88.0%) of the respondents answered correctly the meaning of sexual abuse and more than four fifth (82.0%) had said intentional touching of children's private body parts is a activity of sexual abuse, followed by exposing own genitals to children (68.0%). Around two third (69.6%) of the respondents said bleeding and swelling in their private parts is a identification

feature of sexual abuse. Likewise, majority (67.6%) said frequent absent from school is a identification features of child neglect (Table 4).

Table 5: Respondents' Awareness on Possible Consequences and Preventive Measures of Child Abuse (n=250)

Variables	Number	Percentage
Possible Consequences of Child Abuse*		
Smoking and drinking alcohol	158	63.2
Poor academic performance/ learning difficulties	154	61.6
Drug abuse	111	44.4
Self-destructiveness	111	44.4
Low self –esteem	105	42.0
Aggressive/Violent behavior	102	40.8
Sleep disorders	98	39.2
Increased probability of becoming an abusive parent	91	36.4
Eating disorders	72	28.8
Preventive Measures of Child Abuse*		
Share your problems with your parents or close friends	174	69.6
Creating awareness regarding child abuse	161	64.4
Avoid going to isolated areas alone	145	58.0
Providing training to teachers and parents about the prevention of child abuse	144	57.6
Avoid talking to unknown persons	136	54.4
Formulation and implementation of the law on child abuse	126	50.4
Enhancing family child relationship	124	49.6
Follow the disciplinary rules	111	44.4
Do not eat sweets or anything given by strangers	111	44.4
Places of Reporting Child Abuse*		
Police Administration	205	82.0
Child protection service	151	60.4
Child helpline	116	46.4
Parents	115	46.0
Local child right committee	111	44.4
Administration of the school	82	32.8
Principal	81	32.4
Ways to Reduce Physical Punishment in School*		
Training to teachers and school personnel to build a positive school climate and violence-free environment	184	73.6
Implementation enforcement of laws to prohibit physical punishment	173	69.2
Awareness programs to change harmful social norms on child-rearing and child discipline	165	66.0
Parents must be regularly informed about their children's progress in class	96	38.4

More than three fifth (63.2%) of the respondents said smoking and drinking alcohol is possible consequences of child abuse. Most (82%) of the

respondents said that the place of reporting child abuse is police administration. Similarly, the majority(69.6%) of the respondents said sharing

problems with parents and friends is a preventive measure of child abuse. The majority (73.6%) of the respondents said training to the teachers and school personnel is necessary to built a violence-free environment in school (Table 5).

Table 6 reveled that less than half (46.8%) of the respondents have average level of awareness and more than one fourth (28%) have inadequate level of awareness on child abuse.

Table 6: Students’ Level of Awareness on Child Abuse (n=250)

Level of awareness	Number	Percentage
Inadequate (≤ 50%)	70	28.0
Average (50-75%)	117	46.8
Adequate (≥ 75%)	63	25.2
Mean ± SD (62.3 ± 19.8)		

Table7: Association between Students’ Level of Awareness with Selected Variables (n=250)

Variables	Level of Awareness		χ ²	p-value
	Inadequate (%)	Average to adequate (%)		
Age in years				
≤14	50 (31.6)	108 (68.4)	2.830	0.092
>14	20 (21.7)	72 (78.3)		
Sex				
Female	40 (31.5)	87 (68.5)	1.565	0.211
Male	30 (24.4)	93 (75.6)		
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	50 (27.9)	129(72.1)	0.001	0.970
Others*	20 (28.2)	51 (71.8)		
Educational level				
Class 8	34 (45.3)	41 (54.7)	2.481	0.000*
Class 9	24(27.9)	62 (72.1)		
Class 10	12 (13.5)	77 (86.5)		
Marital status				
Married	3 (60.0)	2 (40.2)		0.135#
Unmarried	67 (27.3)	178 (72.7)		
Father's occupation				
Agriculture	42 (30.7)	95 (69.3)	1.061	0.303
Others*	28 (24.8)	85 (75.2)		
Mother's occupation				
Agriculture	48 (28.1)	123 (71.9)	0.001	0.971
Others**	22 (27.8)	57 (72.2)		
Type of family				
Nuclear family	33 (26.6)	91 (73.4)	0.235	0.628
Joint Family	37 (29.4)	89 (70.6)		
Parent’s marital status				
Living with spouse	61 (26.5)	169 (73.5)	3.116	0.078
Single	9 (45.0)	11 (55.0)		

** Government service/ Non-government-service, Self- employed, Foreign employment, * Dalit & Janajati χ²Pearson’s Chi Square Test, # Fisher’s Exact test, *p value significant at <0.05 level

Table 7 showed that there is statistically significant association between level of awareness on child-abuse and education of the respondents (P-value 0.000) but age, ethnicity, occupation marital status is not statistically significant with level of awareness.

DISCUSSION

In this study, one fourth (25.2%) of the respondents had an adequate level of awareness of child abuse. This finding is consistent with a study conducted in India, showed that 7.0 % students had an adequate level of awareness on child abuse.¹³ Similarly, a study of Nepal found that only 15.9% students had an adequate level of awareness.¹¹

In the present study, most (76.4%) of the respondents said physical abuse is a common type of abuse followed by emotional abuse (72.0%). These, findings are consistent with a study conducted in India revealed that majority (68.2%) of the students reported physical abuse as the common type of child abuse followed by emotional abuse (22.6%) which was very few.¹⁴

The findings of this study on awareness of different types of child abuse revealed that physical abuse (76.4 %), emotional abuse (72.0 %), sexual abuse (61.2%) and child neglect (48.4 %) had an adequate level of awareness. However, a study done in India revealed the higher awareness level than this study, where physical abuse (95.3%), emotional abuse (96%) and child neglect (85.5%) had adequate level of awareness on meaning and activities of different types of child abuse.¹⁵ A study, in Nepal also revealed that less than half (43.9%) were aware about child sexual abuse¹⁶, which might be due to the difference in setting, sampling technique and sample size.

The present study findings revealed that 15.2% had adequate level of awareness. Similar finding were found in India, that 10% had adequate awareness about sign and symptoms of different types of child abuse.¹⁴

The findings of this study revealed that majority (63.2%) of the respondents reported smoking and drinking alcohol as the possible consequences

of child abuse followed by poor academic performance (61.6%) and drug abuse (44.4%). These findings are inconsistent with a study¹⁷, showed that psychiatric disease (94%) followed by memory loss (92.6%) and drug addiction (88.6%) as the consequences of the child abuse. Regarding the victim of child abuse, almost all (90%) identified that both girls and boys can be the victims and most (85.8%) of the respondents reported the peers are the abuser for child abuse. The findings are inconsistent with a study of Bangladesh, which revealed the most (86%) of the respondents reported, that girls are the victim of child abuse. Regarding perpetrators, majority (70.5%) of the respondents reported the parents as the child abuser.¹⁷ Another study conducted in Egypt revealed that half (50%) of the students stated that strangers followed by friends (29.0%) and family members (17.4%) as the sexual abuser.¹⁸

Regarding reporting, child abuse, most (82%) of the respondents stated, that they would report the police administration after the incident, followed by child protection center (60.4%) in case of experiencing the abuse. These, findings are inconsistent with a study conducted in Egypt, which revealed that most (83.2) of the respondents said share to the parents if suspected abuse.¹⁸

In this study, one fourth (27.6%) of the respondents had an adequate level of awareness regarding preventive measures of child abuse, which is supported by a study of India, where around one third (30.8%) had an adequate awareness on preventive measures.¹³ Similarly, majority (69.6%) reported to sharing with parents or close friends followed by creating awareness on child abuse (64.4%). This result is consistent with a study conducted in Bangladesh, which revealed that majority (60%) of the respondents stated that increasing awareness among peoples, followed by enforcing of laws (26%) is necessary for the prevention of child abuse.¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the respondents were aware on physical, emotional and sexual abuse but only one third of them were aware on child neglect. Similarly, most

of the respondents stated children are abused by their peers. Likewise, majority of them were aware that they should report child abuse to the police administration if they experienced it. Most of the students received information regarding child abuse by radio. Levels of awareness on child abuse among students are average however, significant number of students still lacks an adequate level of awareness. Significant association is found between level of awareness on child abuse and the educational level of the respondents.

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