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Conscientizing Children on Child Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

Being a kid doesn't always mean being carefree. For some children childhood is not the golden period that is idolized and glorified, rather it is a period of intense pain, hurt and betrayal. This hurt, pain and betrayal are caused by child sexual abuse- the most heinous social problem. Child sexual abuse is a form child abuse in which an adult or an older adolescent uses a child for sexual gratification. It has a wide range of adverse physical and behavioural health conditions. A truly comprehensive approach to preventing sexual abuse of children is educating and enlightening children about such issues. This study was therefore an attempt to sensitize children on sexual abuse and to find out the difference in their awareness level after conduction of an awareness programme. Using a sample of 50 children in the age group of 12-14 years from St.Teresa's Girls High School, Ernakulam, the study was conducted with the aid of a self designed questionnaire; an electronic information package and a leaflet which helped educate the children on child sexual abuse and personal safety. The results revealed significant difference in the awareness of child sexual abuse before and after the awareness programme on various aspects of sexual abuse and personal safety. Types of sexual abuse, good and bad touch, personal safety, stranger safety and on how to react in specific threat situations were some of the areas wherein the children needed to be educated.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

'The child is the symbol of innocence, but also of innocence betrayed.'
-Gottfried Helnwein

Childhood- the period of innocence is viewed as a happy and carefree one and children themselves perceive it as an enjoyable time with no cares about the world. Childhood experiences influence the ways in which one feels, thinks, acts, and responds throughout one's life. For some children childhood is not the golden period that is idolized and glorified, rather it is a period of intense pain, hurt and betrayal. This hurt, pain and betrayal is often caused by sexual abuse- the most heinous social problem.

Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or an older adolescent uses a child for sexual gratification. It is defined as physical violation of a child's body through any sort of sexual contact or a psychological violation of the child through verbal or non-verbal behaviour. It can take place within the family by a parent, step parent, sibling, or any other relative, or outside the home by a friend, teacher, caretaker, or favorite uncle! Most often child sexual abuse is a gradual process and not a single event. The majority of victims are sexually abused by a family member or by a family friend or someone outside the family who the victim knows and trusts.

Child sexual abuse is neglectful, disrespectful, and hurtful because it violates a child's basic rights to be protected, nurtured, and guided through childhood. It scars the victim for life. It leaves deep physical and psychological scars, which often have indelible and irrevocable ramifications. The consequences of abuse are traumatic and distort the development process. The abuse affects the victims not only while they are young but throughout their lifetime with a wide range of adverse physical and behavioural health conditions. Research evidence suggests that the initial effect is that of fear often accompanied by depression, restlessness, bedwetting, refusal to go to school, feelings of guilt, phobias and nightmares. No child is psychologically prepared to cope with repeated sexual stimulation.

The Internet and mobile phone technology have also become a source of sexual abuse of children. Internet is also a means by which adults ask children for pictures of themselves or other grown adolescents with the intension of luring them into sex. Children report being very disturbed by unwanted exposure to such material. The number of complaints regarding cyber crimes in Kerala has been on the increase over the last two years, states the Director General of Police. The modern era is clotted with inappropriate content displayed for all to view, leading to disastrous consequences.

Children below the age of 15 years are most vulnerable to abuse. It is found that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18years. The study by ECPAT International notes that child sexual abuse in India begins as early as 5years, increases dramatically during pre-pubescence and peaks at 12 to 16 years.

A report, "Trafficking in Women and Children in India by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), highlights that in addition to Goa, Alleppey and Ernakulam districts of Kerala seem to be catching up in the field of child sexual abuse.The study conducted by Ministry of Women and Child Welfare found that 40.70% of children of Kerala had faced one or more types sexual abuse.

Against this background, the lack of specific provisions for child sexual abuse in our criminal law is a serious lacuna. It is only recently, on March 2011, a bill seeking to prevent sexual abuse of children with provisions for stringent punishment has been approved by the Union Cabinet. The punishment has been proposed as at least 5-10 years in jail and a minimum of rs.50, 000 according to the severity of the abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a hush- hush affair and sexual abuse is simply not even mentioned. Parents and teachers, the two pillars that children usually look up to for support, come like a cropper when they need to discuss sexual abuse.

Equipped with insufficient information, and sometimes information of the wrong kind, children remain vulnerable to the threat posed by the abusers. Educating children about child sexual abuse, is the need of the hour. It is keeping these points in the background, the researcher recognized the need to primarily educate children about the issue and enable them to keep themselves safer.

Overall objective

The overall objective of the present investigation was to sensitize children on child sexual abuse and to find out the difference in their awareness.

Methodology

A sample of 50 subjects in the age group of 12-14 years was selected from St.Teresa's Girls High school, Ernakulam. Simple random sampling was adopted. The tools used were an electronic information package on child sexual abuse. A self designed questionnaire was distributed before and after the awareness programme to measure the difference in the awareness of children. A leaflet which contained all the important points regarding sexual abuse was prepared. The obtained data was tabulated and statistically analyzed using critical ratio.

Results
The results that emerged from the study are discussed under the following sections:

A. General information of the respondents
The genral information of the respondents are furnished in the following table.

Table No. 1 General information of the respondents

Statements	Responses in % (n=50)
Age -12 -13 -14	 14 56 30
Religion -Hindu -Christian -Muslim	 56 30 14
Members in family -3 -4 -5 and above	 22 54 24
Order of birth -1 -2 -3	 62 20 18

The above table shows that more than half of the respondents were 13years and were Hindus. It was also seen that 54% families contained four members and majority of the respondents (62%) were first borns.

Table No. 1(a) General information of the respondents

Statement	Responses in % (n=50)
Type of family -nuclear -joint	 76 24
Area of living -urban -semi- urban -rural	 66 24 10
Monthly income <10,000 -10,000-30,000 -30,000-50,000 - >50,000	 30 10 50 10
Living with both parents	100

The table above shows that 76% families were nuclear and majority (66%) of them lived in urban areas. The table further explains that half of the family has a family income of rs. 50,000 and all the children were living with both their parents.

B. Awareness on child sexual abuse
The awareness on sexual abuse is illustrated in the table below.

Table No. 2 Awareness on child sexual abuse in children of Ernakulam

Aspect	N	M	S.D	C.R	Level of significance
Awareness on child sexual abuse before the awareness programme	50	5.54	2.18	11.45	0.05 (significant)
Awareness on child sexual abuse after the awareness programme	50	10.12	1.76		

The above table illustrates that there is a significant difference in the awareness of children on child sexual abuse before and after the awareness programme using the information package developed by the investigator. The difference in awareness was found to be large. Majority of the subjects had not even heard of sexual abuse and was not aware that they could also fall victims of abuse. The difference is significant at 0.05%.

C. Awareness on rules of touch
The table below explains the awareness of children on rules of touch.

Table No. 3 Awareness on rules of touch in children of Ernakulam

Aspect	N	M	S.D	C.R	Level of significance
Awareness on rules of touch before the awareness programme	50	5.1	1.23	6	0.05 (significant)
Awareness on rules of touch after the awareness programme	50	6	0		

In connection with rules of touch, there was significant difference the in subject's awareness. There was significant number of children who did not know to differentiate between a good and bad touch before the programme. Many of them also did not know the areas which were safe to touch. This was taken at 0.05% significance.

D. Awareness on personal safety
The following table shows the results on awareness on personal safety before and after the educational programme.

Table No.4 Awareness on personal safety in children of Ernakulam

Aspect	N	M	S.D	C.R	Level of significance
Awareness on personal safety before the awareness programme	50	17.06	1.90	6.4	0.05 (significant)
Awareness on personal safety after the awareness programme	50	18.58	0.83		

From this table it is found that the awareness on personal safety had improved after the awareness programme. This was found at significance of 0.05%. Most of them lacked awareness on areas safety at home, school and while walking on the streets. One main point noted was that no one took a friend or companion while going out without parents.

E. Awareness on stranger safety
The difference in awareness of children on stranger safety is shown in the table below.

Table No. 5 Awareness on stranger safety in children of Ernakulam

Aspect	N	M	S.D	C.R	Level of significance
Awareness on stranger safety before the educational programme	50	2.8	0.69	10	0.05 (significant)
Awareness on stranger safety after the educational programme	50	4	0		

There was a significant difference in awareness of children on stranger safety after conducting the awareness programme. The difference was mainly because many of them said they could differentiate a good and bad stranger from his looks and that they would help a stranger if he/she looked safe. But majority of them said that they would not accept a ride from a stranger.

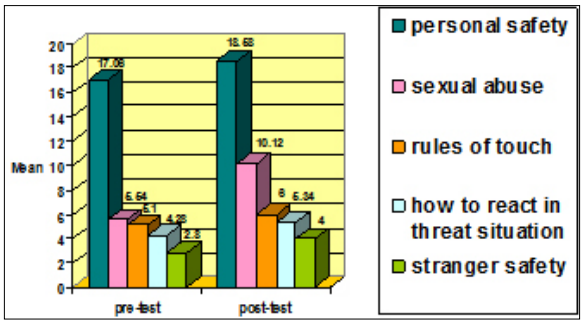
F. Awareness on how to react specific threat situation
The following table shows the awareness of children on how to react in threat situations.

Table No. 6 Awareness on how to react in specific threat situation in children of Ernakulam

Aspect	N	M	S.D	C.R	Level of significance
Awareness on how to react in specific threat situation the educational programme	50	4.28	1.57	3.53	0.05 (significant)
Awareness on how to react in specific threat situation after educational programme	50	5.34	1.41		

The above table also illustrates a significant difference in the awareness on how to react in specific threat situation. Though most of them said they would tell their parents and would report it to police in case of abuse there were a significant number of children who said that they would keep it a secret or would just forget the abuse.

Figure 1
Awareness on child sexual abuse



Conclusion

On the whole it can be inferred that the information package was very helpful in imparting information on various aspects of child sexual abuse such as sexual abuse, rules of touch, personal safety, stranger safety and on how to react in threat situation. There was significant difference in the awareness before and after the awareness programme. Parents should take the initiative to talk to their children and make them more aware of the issue. Teachers should also take the initiative and be involved in conducting more programmes of this sort so that children are more sensitized about sexual abuse.

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