



A Retrospective Survey on Magnitude of Child Abuse Among Health Science Students as Children of an Academy

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Abstract

Introduction: Child maltreatment often goes hand in hand with numerous other adverse life experiences like poverty, desuetude, overcrowding, substance abuse of family members, lack of adequate medical care, parents' unemployment, and parents' psychopathology. The present retrospective survey attempted to find out the magnitude of child abuse among nursing students as children and to find out the incidences of various types of child abuse among them during their childhood. This study was primarily aim to find out the percentage of students who experienced various types of violence and atrocities as children.

Results: A total of 136 students participated in the study. Data on experiences of childhood abuse, 56.68(78) participants expressed that they had childhood abuse.12.3% of the participants were abused by parents, 10.7% were abused by elders at home, 10.7% had abuse from teachers and 8.3% had abuse from relatives. 35.4% of the participants had emotional neglect and abuse, 23.7% had experienced molestation, and 17.6% experienced molestation from parents, relatives, visitors at home and 5% had experience from strangers too. These molestations were real sexual contact and not just exposure.

Discussion: Majority of them found emotional blackmailing is a frequent strategy used by abusers to keep children away from disclosing the event to anyone. Though child abuse shows the staggering financial costs, no price can be kept on the emotional cost of abuse that produce irreversible behaviour that makes the life of the abused and others around miserable.

Conclusion: Child abuse can happen anywhere like inside homes, schools, foster care institutions, at playgrounds, work places and online as well, through social networking sites. Hence it is essential to bring about a holistic approach to the study of Child Abuse, its prevention and its impact on the lives of children.

Introduction

Child abuse has catastrophic lifelong effect on every life that it touches. Several studies have shown that long term impact of child abuse with wide range of negative physical, physiological and psychological outcomes on the child's whole life and it affects the family and society at large. Along with this it affects the whole system of a society in terms of judicial and social services, and law enforcement. Statistics from different countries showed that the immediate as well as the long-term consequences of child abuse cost the nation as much as \$258 million each day in terms of foster care, treatment and legal procedures¹. This is an economic burden for caring abused children. So, it is not only a social menace but an economic drain to a nation.

Child abuse can happen anywhere like inside homes, schools, foster care institutions, at playgrounds, work places and online as well, through social networking sites. Its impact is generally ever-lasting and hampers the child's development which simultaneously nullifies the usefulness of the abused as an asset for the country.

Another terrifying and prominent predicament is that child maltreatment generally occurs through familiar channels including parents, relatives and caretakers. Most accurate scientific studies conducted in India through lengthy interviews depict that 30% of men and 40 % women have been sexually abused during childhood. These molestations were real sexual contact and not just exposure.²

Child abuse can be defined as any act, failure or negligence on the part of any individual; adult or child, that leads to a severe threat to the life and development of a child and results in prolonged physical and psycho-social impacts on his/her health and well-being³.

Two key developmental tasks frequently compromised by exposure to abuse and violence are children's adaptation to school and academic achievement⁴. This study was primarily aim to find out the percentage of students who experienced violence and atrocities as children. As a second step of the study, the investigators would particularly interest to find out the relation between the academic performance of the participants and their exposure to violence.

The present retrospective survey attempted to find out the magnitude of child abuse among health science students as children and to find out the incidences of various types of child abuse among their families.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted among the health sciences students of an Academy affiliated to Kerala University of Health Sciences in Kerala. A survey was conducted among randomly selected students of the institute. A total of 136 samples were selected by random from a total of 540 students. A questionnaire was given to the selected students through google forms and the responses were collected. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics.

Ethical consideration.

Permission for the study was obtained from ethics committee at Aster MIMS Hospital, Kozhikode. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were maintained.

Data collection

The data were collected through a structured questionnaire prepared in the google forms for a period of 3 weeks. There were no mortality and data obtained from 136 students were analyzed.

Results

The findings showed that the majority of the participants were females (98%) and only 2% were males. Among the 136 participants, 3.7% of the students were 18 years old. 34.6% (47) of the participants were at the age of 19 years, 24.3%(33) were 20 years, 22.1%(30) were at the age of 20 years and 14%(19) had 22 years. One of the participants had 19.5 years and another one had 21.5 years. The participants were from all the four years of the B.Sc Nursing and B.Sc MLT Course. 39.7% were first years, 28.7% were second year students, 16.2% were third years and 15.4% were final years. As far as religion of the participants showed that 29.4% of the participants were Hindus, 57.4% were Christians, and 13.2% were Muslims. Majority of the participants 41.17% (56) belong to the Kozhikode district of Kerala, 10.3% belong to Trivandrum, 10.3% belong to Malappuram. 2-3% of students belong to Kottayam, Kasaragod, Pathanamthitta and Idukki making representations of participants from different districts of Kerala. 27.2% of the participants belong to middle class family and 19.9% belong to Above Poverty Line (APL) and 7.4% belong to average income family.

Data on experiences of childhood abuse, 56.68(78) participants expressed that they had childhood abuse. 12.3% of the Participants were abused by parents, 10.7% were abused by elders at home, 10.7% had abuse from teachers and 8.3% had abuse from relatives. 35.4% of the participants had emotional neglect and abuse, 23.7% had experienced molestation, and 17.6% experienced molestation from parents, relatives, visitors at home and 5% had experience from strangers too. Responses about their feeling towards molestation showed that 27.2% were sad, 22.8% were depressed, 12.5% were revengeful, 14.7% were frightened, 6.5% felt lonely and 6.5% could not differentiate their feelings. 31.2% of the participants had experience of meeting children suffered from child abuse. Majority of them found emotional blackmailing is a frequent strategy used by abusers to keep children away from disclosing the event to anyone. About 62% participants felt that there must be awareness programme to make children aware of the issue and 78% had the opinion that some sort of teaching programme is essential to school children to learn on child abuse and its prevention strategies. But, 43.32% (58) participants mentioned that they never experience child abuse.

Discussion:

Child abuse and maltreatment is a global issue. A study conducted in Netherlands shows that the overall prevalence of child maltreatment in 2010 was 33.8 per 1,000 children based on the combined sentinel and CPS reports and 99.4 per 1,000 adolescents based on self-report. The present study also shows that 56.68% of the participants experienced abuse as children⁵.

A cross-sectional and retrospective study on the prevalence of child abuse using simple random sampling was conducted using standardized Screening Tools Retrospective version by International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect Child Abuse. Data were collected from 274 students of 4-year BS program in the University of the Punjab, Lahore. According to the findings, physical abuse has the highest rate 57% (46% females and 68% males) of prevalence. Emotional abuse is the second highest form of abuse with 53% prevalence rate (54% females and 53% males). Among the other forms neglect is 40% (40% females and 40% males) and 41% respondents (39% females and 44% males) disclosed being sexually abused. Most frequently reported category of the perpetrator according to the findings of this study are the parents (20%) followed by friends (16%) and teachers (14%). Single year with highest report of all forms of abuse is 12th year, and the age span with maximum occurrence of abuse is from 10 to 15 years for all forms of abuse. Microsoft Excel was used for data processing and interpretation. The findings of the present study showed that 56.68% of the participants were abused as children. Out of these, 12.3% of the Participants were abused by parents 10.7% were abused by elders at home, 10.7% had abuse from teachers and 8.3% had abuse from relatives. 35.4% of the participants had emotional neglect and abuse, 23.7% had experienced molestation, and 17.6% experienced molestation from parents, relatives, visitors at home and 5% had experience from strangers too. The findings are consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Abbass SS and Jabeen.T⁶.

A descriptive, analytic cross-sectional study conducted in Iran in 2013 on 700 Yazd secondary school students using a standardized self-administered questionnaire. The findings showed that Child abuse frequency was 93.5% (92.2% of boys and 94.4% of girls). The most common domains of child abuse among all students were neglect (83.8%), psychological (76.1%), physical (36.1%) and sexual (28.8 %), respectively. The findings of this study also support the findings of the present study⁷.

Another study conducted among first year medical students in a Turkish university between 15th-30th June 2012, using ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool and a questionnaire to collect sociodemographic data. This study was included 192 students, 56.8% female and 43.2% male. Physical, emotional and sexual abuses were found in 14.6%; 32.3%; and 8.9% of participants, respectively. The findings of the present study also support the findings in terms of types of abuse and the participants of the study are from health sciences.

Conclusion

Abusing a child is a crime that is highly belittling and alarming in all forms of social institutions. A child is the most immaculate beings of all and misleading it into the stratagem of abuse is extremely facile. The impact of child abuse is life-long and irreparable. The victims of child abuse, generally have emotional, psychological, physical and mental impact on their lives which harms their past, present as well as future. The impact of child abuse is not only over the abused child; contemporary findings show that soaring levels of child abuse have terrible consequences on the country's economy as well over a stretched period of time. Though our country has stringent laws for prevention of child abuse and maltreatment, still it is not implemented in the right sense and culprits are escaping through the loop holes available. So, the issue requires vigilant and fruitful interventions from all government machineries and proper education to public and children about the harmful effects of child abuse as it affects the equilibrium and harmony of the society at large.

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