

Awareness of the Mother regarding Child Abuse and Neglect

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Child abuse is the physical or psychological maltreatment of a child. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for child's health or welfare, or by a teacher.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 40 million children below the age of 15 suffer from abuse and neglect, and require health and social care. A child is a tender human being which needs support in all forms for its all round development. The parents and the family members are the ones present in the immediate environment of the child to fulfill its need. It is the prime responsibility of the parents especially the mother, to ensure the optimum climate for the child to grow and develop. The mother should have knowledge regarding the child abuse and neglect. It is very pathetic that many parents unknowingly abuse their child sometimes. They do not differentiate between the methods of disciplining the child and the form of abuse and neglect. Since they are unaware of what is abuse and neglect it is very difficult for them to protect their children being abused by others.

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Need for the study: Each year, tens of thousands of children are traumatised by physical, sexual, and emotional abusers or by caregivers who neglect them. Neglect is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, to the extent that the child's physical and/or psychological well-being are damaged or endangered. The scars of child abuse and neglect can be deep and long-lasting, affecting not just abused children but society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Child, 1989 is the most important instrument in the history of child rights at the international level. The Convention has been ratified by most of the developed as well as developing countries, including India, which ratified the Convention in 1992. The four major Articles pertaining to child abuse and neglect in the Conventions are:

Article 3: Protect the best interests of children;

Article 19: Protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, mal-treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parents, legal guardians or any other person in whose care they are;

Article 34: Undertake to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;

Article 35: Take all appropriate national, bilateral and multi-lateral measures to prevent

the abduction of sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

There are four primary types of child abuse: (i) Physical abuse, (ii) Sexual abuse, (iii) Emotional abuse, and (iv) Neglect.

Causes of child abuse: There are many causes of child abuse such as parental stress, lack of nurturing qualities necessary for child care, immaturity - a disproportionate number of parents who abuse their children are teenagers, difficulty in controlling anger, personal history of being abused, physical or mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, alcohol or drug abuse and personal problems such as marital conflict, unemployment, or financial difficulties. In addition, parents also think that children are property of their own and parents (especially fathers) have the right to control their children in any way they wish. Children need to be toughened up to face the hardships of life. The first reason is lack knowledge on child abuse and child neglect.

So this study was undertaken in Perungudi, Chennai, to assess the awareness level of the mothers regarding child abuse and neglect so that actions can be taken to create awareness thereby protecting the rights of the child.

Methodology

Sample : All mothers who have children less than 15 years and

who answered positively to the screening questions were included. From this, 50 mothers were selected by purposive sampling method. It is a mixed category of housewives, working women of various age groups who were residing at Perungudi, Chennai.

Screening questions: (i) Did your parents discipline you by corporal punishment? (ii) Do you use corporal punishment as the method of disciplining your child?

These two questions were asked to the mothers and those who answered yes to these questions were included. The researcher assumed that the disciplining methods, the samples experienced will have impact on disciplining their child.

Setting: The study area (Perungudi) is a new settlement area in the outskirts of Chennai. It has a mixed population of people of its own and people from the other part of Tamil Nadu for various reasons.

Tools: The researcher conducted a structured interview in Tamil to collect information from the subjects. The tool consisted of 3 parts. *Part I* consisted of questions related to demographic variables such as age of the mother, number of children, education of the mother, occupation and income of the mother and religion. *Part II* consisted of questions related to source of information regarding child abuse and whether you were abused by anybody during your childhood? *Part III* also consisted of 15 five-point multiple response questions related to child abuse. *Part IV* consisted of five 5-point multiple response ques-

tions related to child neglect. In each questions of part III and IV there is more than one right answer. All the right options were given score one and wrong options were given zero score. Finally all the scores were counted and percentages were calculated. It was predetermined that mothers who secure less than 50 percent had Inadequate awareness, 51-75 percent had Moderately Adequate awareness and 76 percent and above had Adequate awareness.

The content validity was obtained from the experts and the reliability was calculated by the test re-test method and the score $r=0.6$. The standard responses were chosen after a thorough review of literature.

Procedure: The researcher explained the purpose of the study. Then the structured interview schedule was conducted in Tamil to collect information from the mothers. The descriptive and Inferential statistics were used to analyse the results.

Results and Discussion

- 64% mothers were in the age group of 21-30 years and 36% were in the age group of 31-40 years.
- 36% mothers had single child and 56% mothers had two children.
- 96% were educated and 38% mothers completed the UG studies.
- 62% were housewives and the remaining were working women.
- 80% mothers were Hindu, nine (18%) mothers were Christian and only one (2%) Muslim.
- All mothers (100%) reported that they were dis-

ciplined by their parents by beating and other forms of physical punishment and scolding.

- All mothers (100%) reported that they beat their children and scold to discipline them.
- All samples (100%) expressed that corporal punishment used to discipline is not an abuse.
- 32% samples reported that the source of information regarding child abuse was television and 20% reported word of mouth as a source of information and 10% from magazines. The remaining samples quoted all three as their source of information.
- There was an association found between the knowledge level and educational status at 0.5 % level on chi square test.

Table 1 shows the overall score of child abuse and neglect. Only 4 (8%) women had adequate awareness and 34 (68%) had inadequate awareness and the remaining 12 (24%) women had inadequate awareness. Regarding the child neglect, 9 (18%) women had adequate awareness, 12 (24%) had moderately adequate awareness and 29 (58%) women had inadequate awareness. Regarding child abuse, 4 (8%) women had adequate awareness, 13 (26%) women had moderately adequate awareness and 35 (70%) women had inadequate awareness. Table 2 reveals the mean score and standard deviation for various levels of awareness regarding the child abuse and child neglect.

From the above two tables it is clear that the awareness of the mother regarding child

abuse and neglect is very low.

Conclusion

Initially all women reported that the child can be beaten and be given corporal punishment to correct the wrong behaviours of the children. Some women reported that they even physically restrain the children to prevent mischievous behaviour.

At the end of interview, everybody was curious to know whether what they did was right or wrong and how it could be prevented. All samples agreed that the child abuse and neglect should be prevented and there should be some awareness generation programme to create awareness among the public.

Children who were present at the time of data collection opposed the mothers for giving wrong responses such as they never beat and scold their children. These children were more helpful in eliciting the right response from the mothers.

Implications for Nursing

Both in undergraduate and post graduate level, the nursing students should be trained to identify the form of child abuse and neglect in all settings such as Hospital, Community, and School etc. and to take immediate remedial actions. The concepts and theories of child abuse and neglect should be given adequate weightage in the nursing curriculum. Nurses have the opportunity to protect the children from child abuse and neglect by educating mothers, other family members, teachers, and others who are involved in the care and growth of children. She also can join hand and raise her voice against child abuse and neglect with other organisations.

Suggestion and Recommendations

- Parents think that they have the right to punish their children not realising the impact of such abuse done in the name of discipline and punishment.
- The parents especially mothers should be taught about child abuse and ne-

glect and how their children are abused by them without even realising the fact that they themselves abuse their children.

- There should be an awareness generation programme for parents and children regarding child abuse and neglect and methods of discipline.
- Large scale study can be conducted.

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Table 1: Level of Awareness regarding Child Abuse and Child Neglect

Level of Awareness	Child Abuse		Child Neglect		Overall Knowledge	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Inadequate	35	70	29	58	34	68
Moderately Adequate	13	26	12	24	12	24
Adequate	2	4	9	18	4	8

Table 2: Mean and SD score for Various Level of Awareness regarding Child Abuse and Child Neglect

Level of Awareness	Child Abuse		Child Neglect		Overall Knowledge	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Inadequate	29.81	10.21	30.49	12.15	31.38	10.09
Moderately Adequate	60.15	4.87	61.84	7.16	62.64	7.58
Adequate	82.06	3.62	93.56	6.32	81.85	6.37