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Research Paper

To assess knowledge of the parents and teachers regarding sexual offences among school children

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ABSTRACT

Background: Parents and teachers play a critical role in preventing and addressing child sexual abuse (CSA), yet gaps in their knowledge of CSA and related legal protections may undermine prevention efforts.
Objective: To assess the knowledge levels of parents and teachers regarding sexual offenses against school children in Sheopur district, India, and identify gaps to inform future educational and training initiatives.
Methods: A cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving 200 participants drawn from various clusters within Sheopur district. A structured questionnaire collected demographic data and assessed knowledge of CSA and related legal protections.
Results: Among teachers, 67% demonstrated poor knowledge of CSA, and none exhibited good knowledge. Among parents, 71% had average knowledge and 11% had good knowledge. Awareness levels varied by age, gender, education, and occupation. Teachers, despite generally higher educational qualifications, showed inadequate CSA awareness.
Conclusion: Significant knowledge gaps exist among both parents and teachers regarding child sexual abuse, with teachers showing particularly limited understanding. Comprehensive, targeted educational and training programs are needed, alongside effective implementation of India's POCSO Act 2012, supported by practical training and ongoing assessment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children are the future of any nation, and their well-being is paramount to societal progress. They go through phases of physical, psychosocial, and emotional maturation, developing behaviours that shape their personalities and future productivity. [1] Adults play a crucial role in guiding and nurturing these behaviours. Children's rights include living in a healthy environment, access to medical facilities, and education without gender discrimination. However, during this vulnerable phase, children often face various risks in their environments, particularly from adults who are supposed to protect them. Despite existing legislation, maltreatment of children remains a significant issue globally, occurring at home, school, and day care centers [2].

Among the various forms of maltreatment, child sexual abuse (CSA) is particularly heinous. CSA includes physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation or neglect. It is not just a problem affecting individuals or families but is a pressing national issue that demands serious attention from health professionals [3]. CSA is a global phenomenon and one of the greatest social problems of the 21st century. It represents a grave violation of children's rights and human well-being. Violence against children, in any context, is indefensible and entirely preventable. Protecting children from violence is a matter of urgent global concern [4].

Child sexual abuse has severe and long-lasting effects on a child's physical and psychological health. Victims often experience a range of emotional and behavioural problems, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The trauma of abuse can disrupt a child's development and hinder their ability to form healthy relationships in the future. Moreover, the stigma and shame associated with CSA often lead to underreporting, making it challenging to gauge the true extent of the problem [5], [6].

Parents and teachers are in a unique position to prevent and address CSA. They are often the first line of defence in recognizing signs of abuse and providing support to affected children. Educating parents and teachers about the risks and indicators of CSA is crucial. Awareness programs can equip them with the knowledge to detect early warning signs, understand the appropriate steps to take if abuse is suspected, and create a safe environment for children to disclose their experiences [7].

Despite the importance of education and awareness, many parents and teachers lack adequate knowledge about CSA. This gap in knowledge can lead to missed opportunities for early intervention and support for victims. Therefore, assessing the knowledge levels of parents and teachers regarding sexual offenses against children is essential. Such assessments can help identify areas where additional training and resources are needed and inform the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies [8].

In India, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012, was enacted to address this pressing issue. The POCSO Act aims to protect children from offenses such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography. It also provides for the establishment of Special Courts for the trial of such offenses and stipulates child-friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation, and speedy trial. However, the effectiveness of this legislation largely depends on the awareness and proactive involvement of parents, teachers, and the broader community [9].

This study aims to assess the knowledge of parents and teachers regarding sexual offenses among school children. By understanding their level of awareness, the study seeks to identify gaps in knowledge and areas where further education and training are needed. The findings of this study can inform the development of targeted educational programs and policies to enhance the protection of children from sexual offenses. Ultimately, the goal is to create a safer environment for children to grow, learn, and thrive, free from the threat of sexual abuse.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Data Collection Tool

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design to assess the knowledge of parents and teachers regarding sexual offenses among school children in the Sheopur district. The research tool was structured into two sections. Section I gathered demographic information, including age, gender, educational qualification, and occupation. Section II consisted of a knowledge questionnaire on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), featuring 20 multiple-choice questions, each with one correct answer and three distractors, designed to assess the knowledge of parents and teachers regarding CSA. The scoring procedure assigned one mark for each correct answer, with incorrect answers receiving zero marks. The total score ranged from 0 to 20, with scores categorized as follows: 0-7 indicated poor knowledge, 8-14 average knowledge, and 15-20 good knowledge.

2.2 Selection of Participants and Study Setting

The target population includes all parents and teachers of school children within the Sheopur district, with a total sample size of 200 participants. A probability systematic random sampling technique was utilized to select the participants. The Sheopur district was divided into three blocks: Sheopur, Karhaj, and Vijaypur, and each block was further divided into ten clusters, namely Badoda, Makdabada, Pandali, Uttanbad, Datarda, Dhodhar, Sheopur, Manpur, Premsar, and Hajareshwar. Random sampling was conducted within these clusters to ensure a representative sample. Inclusion criteria for this study required that parents and teachers be present in the school at the time of data collection and willing to participate. Conversely, the exclusion criteria eliminated those who were not willing to participate or not present during data collection.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection involved administering a structured questionnaire to the selected participants within the schools in the specified clusters. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and consented before completing the questionnaire. The data collection process was carried out in a manner that ensured participants met the inclusion criteria.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics summarized the demographic characteristics and knowledge scores of the participants. Statistical analysis was executed on IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel-2019.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included obtaining ethical approval from the institutional review board of LNCT University, Bhopal, and securing informed consent from all participants, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Shows the Demographic Variables of the Participants in Frequency and Percentage Distribution

Demographic Variables	Parents		Teacher	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Age				
a. less than 21 years	5	2.5	4	2
b. 22-31 years	114	57	66	33
c. 32-41 years	66	33	114	57
d. more than 42 years	15	7.5	16	8
Gender				

a. Male	62	31	141	70.5
b. Female	138	69	59	29.5
Marital Status				
a. Married	185	92.5	144	72
b. Single / spouse deserted	2	1	55	27.5
c. Widow / widower	13	6.5	1	0.5
d. Divorce	0	0	0	0

Table 1 depicts distribution of parents and teachers as per their demographic data. The research findings revealed that the majority of parents 114 (57%) belongs to age of 22 -31years and majority of teachers 114 (57%) belongs to age of 32 - 41 years. Regarding gender majority of the parents 138 (69%) were female and majority of the teachers 141(70.50%) were male. Majority of parents 185 (92.50%) were married and Majority of teachers 144 (72%) were married.

Table 2. Shows the Demographic Variables of the Participants in Frequency and Percentage Distribution

Demographic Variables	**Parent**		**Teacher**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Type of family				
a. Single	55	27.50	53	26.50
b. Joint	16	8.00	133	66.50
c. Extended	129	64.50	14	7.00
No. of children				
a. No children	00	0.00	36	18.00
b. 1	70	35.00	79	39.50
c. 2	95	47.50	74	37.00
d. More than 2	35	17.50	11	5.50
How did you come to know about CSO (Child sexual offence)				
a. Yes	7	3.50	195	97.50
b. No	193	96.50	5	2.50
Information gained though media				
a. Yes	4	2.00	197	98.50
b. No	196	98.00	3	1.50

Table 2 depicts that Majority of parents 176 (88%) education is higher school and teachers 7 (3.50%) were post graduate. Regarding their occupation the majority of parents 182 (91%) and teachers 113 (56.50%) occupied private jobs. Regarding Income majority of parent 177 (88.50%) income was less than 5000/ month and majority of teacher 182 (91%) income was more than 15000/ month. Majority of parent 106 (53%) and teacher 179 (89.50%) religion was Hindu.

Table 3. Shows the Demographic Variables of the Participants in Frequency and Percentage Distribution

Knowledge Level	**Poor**	**Average**	**Good**	**Total**
Parents	18%	71%	11%	100%
Teacher	67%	33%	00%	100%

Table 3 depicts that majority of parents129 (64.50%) belonged to extended family and majority of teachers 133 (66.50%) belonged to joint family. Regarding number of children Majority of parents 95 (47.50) had 02 child and teacher 79 (39.50%) had 01 child. Majority of parents 193 (96.50%) do not know about child sexual offence and majority of teachers 195 (97.50%) know about child sexual offence. Majority of parents 196

(98%) did not gain knowledge through media and majority of teachers 197 (98.50%) gained knowledge through media.

Table 4. Shows Percentage Distribution of Parents and Teachers as per Knowledge of Parents Regarding Child Sexual Offences

Demographic variables	Parents		Teacher	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Education				
a.Primary school	7	3.50	0	00
b. Higher school	176	88.00	0	00
c. Graduate	10	5.00	25	12.50
d. post graduate	7	3.50	175	87.50
Occupation				
a. Private job	182	91.00	113	56.50
b. Govt job	1	0.50	87	43.50
c. Business	10	5.00	0	0.00
d. Housewife/ househusband	7	3.50	0	0.00
Family income (PM)				
a. less than Rs 5000/-	177	88.50	1	0.50
b. Rs 5001 - 10000/-	6	3.00	7	3.50
c. Rs 10001-Rs 15000/-	10	5.00	10	5.00
d. More than Rs 15000/-	7	3.50	182	91.00
Religion				
a. Hindu	106	53.00	179	89.50
b. Christian	00	0.00	6	3.00
c. Muslim	79	39.50	15	7.50
d. Others	15	7.50	0	0.00

Table 4 shows that the majority of parents 71% reported average knowledge, 18% poor knowledge and 11% good knowledge level. Regarding teacher's knowledge 67% reported for poor and 33% reported for average knowledge.

3.1 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical need for improved education and awareness regarding child sexual offenses (CSO) among parents and teachers. The data reveals significant gaps in knowledge, particularly among teachers, which necessitates targeted intervention strategies to better equip these key figures in the lives of children. The results indicate that a substantial proportion of teachers (67%) possess poor knowledge regarding CSO, while only 33% have an average understanding, and none exhibit good knowledge. This is alarming given that teachers are often the first line of defense in recognizing and addressing signs of abuse in children. The lack of adequate knowledge can lead to missed opportunities for early (57%) are within the 22–31-year age group, while most teachers (57%) fall within the 32- 41year age group. This age distribution suggests that teachers, who are generally older, may not have received contemporary training or education on CSO, indicating a potential generational gap in knowledge. Additionally, the gender distribution shows that a higher percentage of parents are female (69%), whereas a majority of teachers are male (70.5%). This gender disparity could influence the differing levels of awareness and perspectives on CSO, warranting gender-sensitive approaches in educational programs. The educational background of participants also plays a crucial role. Most parents (88%) have only completed higher school education, while a significant number of teachers (87.5%) hold postgraduate degrees. Despite their higher educational qualifications, teachers' knowledge about CSO remains inadequate, suggesting that

advanced academic degrees do not necessarily correlate with awareness of specific social issues like CSO. This underscores the need for specialized training and continuing education for teachers.

3.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications for policy and practice. First, there is an urgent need for comprehensive training programs for teachers to enhance their understanding and capacity to address CSO. Such programs should be integrated into teacher education curricula and professional development initiatives.

Second, awareness campaigns targeting parents should be intensified, utilizing various media platforms to ensure broad reach and impact. Community-based workshops and seminars could also be effective in educating parents, particularly in areas with lower socioeconomic status.

Third, the implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012, should be reinforced with practical training for those directly involved in the care and education of children. This includes not only teachers and parents but also other community members and stakeholders [10].

Finally, ongoing research and regular assessments are necessary to monitor the effectiveness of educational interventions and to adapt strategies based on evolving needs and contexts. By closing the knowledge gap among parents and teachers, we can create a safer environment for children, ensuring their right to grow and thrive free from the threat of sexual abuse.

4. CONCLUSION

The study highlights significant gaps in knowledge regarding child sexual offenses (CSO) among parents and teachers in the Sheopur district. The data indicates that while parents generally have a better understanding of CSO compared to teachers, a substantial proportion of both groups lack sufficient awareness. This deficiency poses a serious barrier to the early detection and prevention of CSO, emphasizing the need for enhanced education and training. Teachers, despite their higher educational qualifications, showed notably poor knowledge levels about CSO, which underscores the necessity for specialized training and continuing education focused on child protection. Parents, although more aware, still include a considerable segment with poor knowledge, highlighting the need for broader dissemination of information and resources.

Socioeconomic factors also play a critical role, with disparities in income influencing access to information and awareness levels. The study suggests that targeted, inclusive awareness campaigns and community-based educational initiatives are essential to bridge these knowledge gaps. The implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012, should be bolstered by practical training for parents, teachers, and other community stakeholders to ensure its effectiveness. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of educational interventions are necessary to adapt strategies to the evolving needs of the community.

In conclusion, addressing the knowledge gaps among parents and teachers regarding CSO is crucial for creating a safe environment for children. By enhancing awareness and understanding through targeted educational programs and policy interventions, we can significantly improve the protection of children from sexual abuse, ensuring their right to a safe and healthy upbringing.

4.1 Recommendations

- Increase the sample size in order to increase the generalizability of research.
- Further research studies can be conducted with including more factors.
- Financial Aid- Self financed and no financial aid applied or received.

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Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Mr. Raghuveer Meena	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dr. Sunil Jaiswal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

None to declare by author(s).

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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	**Dr. Sunil Jaiswal,** is a Professor at L.N Nursing College, LNCT University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. He co-authored the 2024 study "To Assess Knowledge of the Parents and Teachers Regarding Sexual Offences among School Children," which came out in the Journal of Nursing Research, Patient Safety and Practice, together with PhD scholar Raghuveer Meena. That study mainly looked at community level awareness about child sexual abuse and also protective laws, so the focus was not just theory. As for any separate, independent publication history, beyond this co-authorship, nothing could be verified.