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Child sexual abuse reporting attitude among school teachers

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The current study examines teachers' perceptions about reporting child sexual abuse (CSA), a widespread public health concern with immediate and long-term effects on children. While having the world's largest population of adolescents, India also has a high rate of crimes against minors. 47221 total incidents were reported under POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences), n.d.) in all of India, according to figures from the national crime records bureau. These data are all based on cases that have been reported. But there are a lot of incidences of sexual abuse of children that go undetected. This underreporting results from a lack of awareness about the problem, disapproval, and a lack of knowledge of the reporting procedure. Teaching children and their guardians about the sexual abuse of children is the most excellent strategy to address this problem. Teachers are the primary carers for children and significantly impact the children's and concerned persons' lives. Reporting child sex abuse and putting prevention measures in place of child protection measures must involve teachers to shield children from potential harm. The study aims to determine the reporting of child sexual abuse by teachers and their familiarity with the process. Conducted with 50 teachers who are currently teaching students in lower primary and upper primary

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grades using the “Teachers’ Reporting Attitude Scale for Child Sexual Abuse” (TRAS-CSA) developed by Walsh et al. (2010). The study stressed the significance of educational programmes for teachers to prevent child sexual abuse, furthermore, teacher reporting guidelines.

Key Words: *Teachers, Attitude, sexual abuse of children, Malappuram District, reporting child sexual abuse.*

Introduction

Sexual abuse of children (SAC) is a severe human health issue affecting thousands of children worldwide. According to WHO, one in five women and one in thirteen males report having experienced sexual assault as a kid between the ages of 0 and 17, 1.2 crore girls and young women under age 20 have engaged in some sort of forced sexual activity. These data are all based on cases that have been reported. But there are a lot of incidences of sexual abuse of children that go unreported. With the intention to prevent the lasting effects of child sexual abuse and save the victims’ lives, reporting is a crucial first step. Teachers, the primary caregivers, can play a very significant role in reporting child sexual abuse (CSA). Yet, teachers underreport alleged child abuse (*Child Maltreatment Prevention: Past, Present, and Future*, 2011) even though they are frequently the first to spot indicators of probable CSA (*Child Maltreatment Prevention: Past, Present, and Future*, 2011; Bruno, 2008; Kenny, 2004). According to studies by Alvarez et al., 2004; Walsh et al., 2010; Walsh & Farrell, 2008, they frequently lack training and awareness regarding mandated reporting laws and indicators of abuse. Furthermore, given their potential to affect report decision-making and the dependability, trustworthiness, and correctness of notifications provided to child safety authorities, teachers’ views towards reporting Sexual abuse of children or child sexual abuse CSA are worth researching (Walsh et al., 2010). In addition to being required to register cases of child abuse, teachers are essential in all-encompassing preventative efforts (Brassard et al., 2015). Therefore, researching teachers’ reporting attitudes may offer vital information about their function in effective child safety systems (Walsh et al., 2010). The objective of current study is to investigate how teachers feel about disclosing child sexual abuse (CSA) by using the “Teach-

ers' Reporting Attitude Scale for Child Sexual Abuse" (TRAS-CSA), developed by Walsh et al.(2010).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a serious public health issue, which will impact the physio-psychosocial health of a child. WHO has established a definition for child sexual abuse (CSA). as the "involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society" (Health, 2006). Any type of Physical contact, that fall under the following criteria, such as unwanted "caressing, fondling, frottage, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, and oral, vaginal, and anal rape" are examples of the experiences that can be described. Additionally, they can involve non-contact sexual activities, including voyeurism, exposing, making sexual remarks, and showing pornographic material to youngsters (Haugaard, 2006; Putnam, 2003). According to (Baker et al., 2012), a study on CSA based on an evaluation of meta-analysis shows the cumulative prevalence rates of sexual abuse before the age of 18 are 18.0% for girls and 7.6% for males. In childhood, 12–20% of females and 5–10% of men experience child sexual abuse (CSA), It can include penetrative assault and unwanted touching exposure (Dube et al., 2005; Dunne et al., 2003; Finkelhor, 1994; May-Chahal & Cawson, 2005). India also has a high rate of crimes against minors. 47221 total incidents were reported under POCSO in India, according to figures from the (*National Crime Records Bureau*, n.d.). According to Kerala Police, 4586 cases were statistically registered in 2022 under the POCSO Act.

Childhood sexual abuse survivors will have immediate and delayed consequences due to their exposure to sexual assault. Many mental, physical, and social issues, including persistent Previous research has connected CSA to behavioural problems, drug use, interpersonal sensitivity, sadness, anxiety, and pelvic pain (Chen et al., 2006; Homma et al., 2012; Hornor, 2010; Lin et al., 2011; Tsutsumi et al., 2012)

The situation will get worse if child sexual abuse is not reported in a timely manner and if non-scientific intervention is used. According to studies, many

children who have experienced abuse never come forward, while others take a long time (Smith et al., 2000; Ullman, 2008), which will only worsen the issue. Children may be afraid to speak up for themselves out of concern for the abuser's threats, ignorance that what occurred to them was abuse, or fear that their parents won't believe them and will place the responsibility on them. Hence, the adults who look after the children should be watchful of them, cultivate trust in the kids, and be knowledgeable about the indicators and symptoms of sexual assault. Furthermore, caretakers of children should be vigilant and knowledgeable to provide immediate intervention and promptly report of any abuse. Most of a child's time is spent at school and with teachers. Hence, teachers have a significant impact on the lives of young people. They instruct the child in a variety of subjects. One of the things that a child and a teacher should be aware of is CSA prevention knowledge. The teacher is crucial in teaching kids CSA prevention knowledge and self-defence techniques in school-based programmes (Baker et al., 2012); the teacher can also model protective behaviours for young children, as per (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). In addition, it's critical to promptly report instances of child sexual abuse to carry out prompt interventions and provide the victimised child with emergency care. Teachers should be informed of the reporting processes and the repercussions of not reporting to register on time. Teachers must have favourable knowledge of the social and educational background of sexual abuse to fulfil their reporting obligations successfully; people should have the right attitudes towards the reporting requirement and "legal literacy" (Schimmel et al., 2007) regarding the legal and policy-based reporting requirements. (Walsh et al., 2010)

According to Crenshaw et al. 1995a; Kenny, 2001, 2004; O'Toole, 1999 et al., 1999; Walsh et al., 2008; When identifying and responding to CSA, teachers must interpret the data and take into account a variety of factors.

The reporting of child sexual abuse is affected by a number of circumstances. Circumstances of the kid's case, such as the child's behaviour and the frequency and seriousness of their injuries, can influence a teacher's ability to report child abuse effectively (Walsh et al., 2008). According to (Feng et al.,

2009), teachers were more likely to come forward and report abuse if it was severe and felt it was vital for the child's welfare. Others have to do with institutional considerations, including a positive workplace climate (Abrahams et al., 1992). According to (Kenny, 2001), 40% of teachers who participated in a study of 197 teachers in Florida, USA, stated that their school's administration would not support them if they reported child abuse. Teachers' knowledge of the legal responsibility to report suspected child sexual abuse, their understanding and their perspective on the commitment in light of the nature of that duty (Crenshaw et al., 1995a) also, influence the reporting attitude.

When a teacher has a duty of care to a student, including the obligation to report child sexual abuse that is known or suspected, then failing to do so may constitute a breach of that duty (Butler & Mathews, 2007). Teachers should be aware that it is their professional duty and their responsibility to their students to look into any allegations of sexual abuse of the children. They should be provided with the information and self-assurance they need to identify and report sexual abuse in order to accomplish that.

Methods

The sample consisted of 50 teachers from the lower primary, upper primary, high school, and higher secondary grades in Government, aided, and unaided schools in Malappuram District, Kerala. Purposive sampling was used.

Measures

Teachers' Reporting Attitude Scale for Sexual Abuse (TRAS-CSA), created by Walsh, K., et al. in 2010, was used to gauge teachers' attitudes towards child sexual abuse in the Malappuram region. Permission to use the scale was obtained from the authors. The scale consisted of 21 items which measures the attitude towards reporting CSA. Age, gender, job sector, school type, level taught, family background, housing background, smoking and drinking habits, and CSA training attended were among the sociodemographic factors included in the questionnaire. The survey utilised a 5-point Likert scale with agreement levels ranging from strongly agree to strongly Disagree. Reverse

coding was done on items a, d, e, f, i, l, m, n, q, and s. The reliability was checked. Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.741 for the scale in this study.

Procedures

The data was collected using an online Google Form. In the initial portion of the Google form, all participants were informed of the study's goal, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality and privacy of their responses.

Data Analysis

68% (n=34) of the total participants were female, compared to 32% (n=16) of the males. Of the respondents, 46% (n=23) were government school teachers, followed by 40% (n=20), 14% (n=7) of aided and unaided teachers, respectively. Of this total, 72% (n=36) were permanent teachers and 28% (n=14) were temporary teachers.

Table 1. Background of the respondents

Variable	Groups	Valid percent
Age	Below 30	32%
	30-35	16%
	36-40	18%
	41-45	8%
	46-50	16%
	Above 50	10%
Gender	Female	68%
	Male	32%
Marital status	Married	72%
	Unmarried	28%

Level teaching	Lower Primary	20%
	Upper Primary	36%
	High School	32%
	Higher Secondary	12%
Job sector	Aided	40%
	Unaided	14%
	Government	46%
Job status	Temporary	28%
	Permanent	72%
Family background	Joint Family	26%
	Nuclear family	74%
Residence background	Rural	74%
	Urban	26%
Alcohol consumption	Yes	10%
	No	90%
Smoking habit	Yes	2%
	No	98%
Training attended on CSA prevention	Yes	48%
	No	52%
Duration of training	Nil	48%
	Less than a day	38%
	A day	10%
	2 days to 1 week	4%

The majority of respondents (94%) agreed that they would report suspected child sexual abuse, while only 4% said they would not. Just 48% of those surveyed said they were familiar with the reporting procedures. Just 34% of respondents said they would

not be reluctant to report CSA out of concern for reprisals. 98% of respondents said that teachers must have reporting guidelines.

Table 2 Respondents' attitude towards reporting Child Sexual Abuse (n=50)

Sl No	Statements	Strongly Agree (Valid%)	Agree (valid%)	Neutral (Valid%)	Disagree (Valid%)	Strongly Disagree (Valid%)
A	I plan to report child sexual abuse when I suspect it	72	22	2	4	0
B	I would be apprehensive to report CSA for fear of family/ community retaliation	8	26	8	22	36
C	I would be reluctant to report a case of CSA because of what parents will do to the child if he/she is reported	6	24	6	36	28
D	The procedures for reporting CSA are familiar to me	6	42	28	18	6
E	I would like to fulfil my professional responsibility by reporting suspected cases of child sexual abuse	52	44	2	0	2
F	Reporting CSA is necessary for the safety of children	80	18	0	0	2
G	I feel emotionally overwhelmed by the thought of reporting child sexual abuse.	20	36	20	20	4
H	I would not report CSA if I knew the child would be removed from their home	10	8	16	50	16
I	Reporting CSA abuse can enable services to be made available to children and families	32	32	18	10	8
J	I would consider not reporting CSA because of the possibility of being sued	4	14	20	38	20

K	There is a lot of sensitivity associated with reporting CSA	22	44	26	4	4
L	CSA reporting guidelines are necessary for teachers	64	34	2	0	0
M	It is important for teachers to be involved in reporting CSA to prevent long-term consequences for children	58	32	10	0	0
N	I believe that the current system for reporting child sexual abuse is effective in addressing the problem	8	44	22	24	2
O	Teachers who report child sexual abuse that is unsubstantiated can get into trouble	12	38	24	20	6
P	It is a waste of time to report CSA because no one will follow up on the report	4	10	24	36	26
Q	I would still report CSA even if my school administration disagreed with me	36	44	14	6	0
R	I lack confidence in the authorities to respond effectively to reports of CSA.	12	34	18	24	12
S	I will consult with an administrator before I report CSA	22	48	22	8	0
T	I would find it difficult to report CSA because it is hard to gather enough evidence.	6	32	32	26	4
U	A CSA report can cause a parent to become more abusive toward the child.	8	22	26	32	12

Independent sample t-test for Gender and training received in CSA prevention

Following hypotheses have been evaluated using independent sample t-test

H₀: There is no significant difference between reporting attitude towards CSA with respect to Gender.

H_0 : There is no significant between those who participated in CSA prevention training and those who didn't in terms of their attitude towards CSA.

The results of the comparison of means between gender and the training received in the prevention of child sexual abuse are shown in Table 3, and they indicate that there is no significant relationship between gender and the reporting attitude of CSA ($p > 0.05$). Hence null hypothesis accepted. Although there is a significant difference between those who received training in the prevention of CSA and those who did not in terms of reporting attitude ($p < 0.05$). Hence null hypothesis rejected.

Table 3. Difference of means according to gender and training attended

	Mean	t value	Sig.
Gender			
Female (34)	3.6275	1.207	.417
Male (16)	3.4762		
Training attended			
Yes (26)	3.6538	-1.178	0.028
No (24)	3.5159		

Independent sample t-test for alcohol consumption and family background

Following hypotheses have been evaluated using independent sample t-test

H_0 : There is no significant difference between reporting attitude towards CSA with respect to alcohol consumption.

H_0 : There is no significant difference between reporting attitude towards CSA with respect to family background.

Table 4. Difference of means according to alcohol consumption and family background

	Mean	T value	Sig.
Alcohol consumption			
Yes (5)	3.5429	-.252	.654
No (45)	3.5926		
Family Background			
Joint Family	3.5201	-.677	.664
Nuclear Family	3.6113		

The results of the comparison of means between alcohol consumption and the family background are shown in Table 4, and they indicate that there is no significant relationship between alcohol consumption and the reporting attitude of CSA ($p>0.05$). Hence null hypothesis accepted. As well as there is no significant relationship between the family background and the reporting attitude of CSA ($p>0.05$). Hence null hypothesis accepted.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the reporting attitude of child sexual abuse (CSA) among teachers and to examine the factors influence the CSA reporting attitude. The results showed that there was no significant relationship between gender and reporting attitude towards CSA, indicating that both male and female teachers hold similar attitudes towards reporting CSA. 52% of the respondents responded that they have not received any kind of training regarding CSA prevention. However, teachers who attended training on CSA prevention showed a better attitude towards reporting CSA. This result suggests that training can positively influence teachers' attitudes towards reporting CSA, which is consistent with previous research that Has shown that teachers with recent training were better able to identify signs of abuse, were more aware of their reporting obligations, and were more prepared to follow reporting protocols which shows the importance of developing training programmes for teachers (Hawkins & McCallum, 2001). In addition to this there are studies which has shown that teachers' reporting practises are influenced by their confidence in their capacity to see abuse (Crenshaw et al., 1995b;

Goebbels et al., 2008) as well as the breadth and quality of their training in abuse recognition (Hawkins & McCallum, 2001). Result of the current study indicated the need of creating teacher training programmes to help them comprehend prevention information. Those who responded that they participated in training programme showed a better familiarity with the reporting process. However, the finding that some teachers are apprehensive or reluctant to report CSA due to fear of family/community retaliation or what parents may do to the child if reported is concerning. This highlights the need for schools and authorities to provide support and protection to teachers who report CSA, as well as to address the root causes of this fear through awareness-raising and community education programs.

The study only included a small sample size. A bigger sample size study is required to fully comprehend instructors' attitudes on reporting CSAs. A qualitative study using focused group discussions and individual interviews can be conducted to gain in-depth understanding on this. It is also possible to conduct experimental research to determine whether a training programme is beneficial.

Conclusion

The current study offers insightful information about teachers' attitudes towards reporting CSA and emphasises the value of support and training in fostering such attitudes. Additionally, it underlines the need for ongoing efforts to allay teachers' concerns about retaliation, improve the effectiveness of the present CSA reporting system, and educate them about the reporting process. In order to provide teachers the confidence to report instances of sexual abuse, suitable scientific training programmes should be developed. Only then will they be informed of the reporting procedures, rules, and regulations pertaining to minors and child sexual abuse.

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