

PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Sexual abuse is hidden social problem. This study was carried to find out the prevalence of sexual abuse among high school children. Data was collected by self-administered questionnaire from students of grades VIII, IX, and X in a selected public high school in Kathmandu valley, Nepal. Total 150 students participated, 76 boys and 74 girls. Of these, 41.3% (n = 62) had experienced some sort of sexual abuse - verbal, exhibitionism, or body contact. The abuse was more prevalent among the boys (44.7%) than girls (37.8%) and between the ages of 13-15 years. The prevalence is significantly high on grade ten students with p value 0.029. Events were mostly occurred on the way followed by abusers home. Majority (42.8%) of verbal abusers were strangers while indecent exposure (38.7%) and contact form (44.8%) of sexual offenders were their friends. The study provides a general picture on the prevalence and type of sexual abuse among adolescents of Kathmandu. Both Male and female students were abused. They were abused not only on the way and by the stranger but also at their own homes and by their own relatives.

Keywords: *Child sexual abuse, prevalence, high school students, Kathmandu*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse is a common and serious public health problem affecting millions of people each year all over the world. It is the least documented form of violence. Only one in 10 incidents is reported.¹

Child Sexual abuse (CSA) is the involvement of a child in sexual activity to which he or she is unable to give informed consent (act may not fully comprehended) or for which the child is not prepared developmentally (physically or mentally) and can not give consent or which violates the laws or social taboos of society. In 2000 the United Nation defined CSA and incest as the imposition of sexually inappropriate acts with sexual overtones by one or more persons who derive authority through ongoing emotional bonding with that child.²

Child sexual abuse (CSA) means any kind of sexual contact with a child under the age of 18.³ The Nepalese law defines rape as any kind of sexual act, which is done with a woman without her consent. In case of children under 16 years of age, it is considered 'rape' even if it happens with consent of the victim. Child sexual abuse is serious type of sexual crime in which children are used in unnatural sexual activities. Nepalese law also considers CSA as rape.⁴

Sexual abuse can be physical or non-physical. Physical or contact form of abuse includes fondling, oral-genital contact, rape or attempted rape, and using a child for pornography. Non-physical or non-contact form of sexual abuse includes

indecent exposure, plain talk about sex designed to shock child or arouse his curiosity, allowing the child to watch or hear sexual acts or materials, and having sex in front of child.

Childhood Sexual abuse has negative psychological impact and persists over time often to adulthood. Female adults with history of childhood sexual abuse are twice likely to attempt suicide than non-abused.⁵ Sexual abuse can cause various physical and emotional problems including lack of self-esteem, self-destructive behavior, anxiety, and depression.⁶ Impact of abuse is more serious among the girls than boys, due to social stigma and risk of adolescent pregnancy and its consequences on health. As a result, unmarried adolescent females are more likely to seek abortion during the second trimester when the consequences may be critical.⁷

METHODS

This descriptive study was conducted in Bhadra, 2062 in a Public High School of Kathmandu. A class section was randomly selected from grades VIII, IX, and X. Self-response questionnaires were administered anonymously to students in class room who agreed to participate in the study. Prior to data collection, written permission was obtained from the school authority. Frequency, percentage and Chi-square test were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Total number of students who responded were 150, out of which 76 were boys and 74 were girls. Sixty two students (41.3%) were sexually abused. Sexual abuse was reported by 44.7% boys and 37.8% girls. Verbal abuse was reported by 79%, indecent exposure by 62.9%, and physical abuse by 46.8% (Table 1).

Tight hugging and unusual kissing were the most common forms of physical contact abuse with both boys and girls, followed by attempted intercourse (Table 2).

Analyzing class-wise prevalence of sexual abuse, higher class students were the majority (Table 3). Regarding respondent's age at time of the first sexual abuse, it was more prevalent between the ages of 13-15 years (Table 4). Most incidents of sexual abuse occurred on the way and at abuser's home (Table 5).

Abusers consisted of peers, non-relative familiar people, relatives, and strangers (Table 6). Verbal form of sexual abuse was perpetrated by strangers mostly while other forms of abuse came from familiar people like peers and relatives. Abuse by family member was not reported.

DISCUSSION

Prevalence rate of sexual abuse among children seems to vary substantially in different population. School-based survey done by Slugget (2005) in Pakistan reported 20% prevalence rate.⁸ The UNICEF has reported 46% abuse rate in Nicaragua and 17% in Canada.⁹ This study found 41.3% prevalence with slightly more prevalence among boys than girls. Nepal and Shrestha (1999) have reported significantly higher prevalence among boys (32%) than girls (13%) in their study in 801 college students.¹⁰

This study has found an increasing rate of sexual abuse in higher grades. The rate increased from 31.2% in grade VIII students to 36% in grade IX and 55.8% in grade X. Possible reasons may be more sensitiveness, awareness, and physical growth of puberty than the younger students. They also presumably are more able to differentiate the usual activity from unusual or abuse activities. Krug et al have suggested that the tendency of rise in sexual abuse in adolescence is due to lack of confidence and decision making skill to refuse with unwanted abuse activities when confronted with such situation.¹¹

In this study, sexual abuse has not been reported by family members, which is contrasting to reports by other studies. Nepal and Shrestha state that the risk of sexual offence from completely unknown person is less than from known person and most of the offences occur from relatives, neighbors, and within family.¹⁰ A Denmark police report on CSA has documented that half of the perpetrators were intra-familial compared to 40% extra-familial.¹²

It is concluded that prevalence of sexual abuse is high in

school children. Thus larger scale study needs to be done to establish the prevalence of sexual abuse in general population and identify the associated factors. Since children can be abused at any time, at any place by anyone and laid long term consequences on their physical, social and mental health, prevention is the priority action of governmental, non-governmental agencies, including children's, parent's and teacher's as well.

It is concluded that sexual abuse in students of the select high school in Kathmandu has a high prevalence. As the abuse can occur in different forms and at any place, by any one, multiple factors are likely to be responsible. Larger scale studies need to be carried out to establish the prevalence in general population and to identify associated factors. Sexual abuse in adolescents has long-term consequences in physical, mental, and social aspects of the victim. Therefore, adequate measures should be designed and implemented in select populations to minimize the adverse consequences

Table 1 Prevalence of sexual abuse among male and female respondents

| Gender | Exposure to sexual abuse | | | | Total Number |
|--------|--------------------------|------|--------|------|-----------------|
| | Yes | | No | | |
| | Number | % | Number | % | |
| Boys | 34 | 44.7 | 42 | 55.3 | 76 |
| Girls | 28 | 37.8 | 46 | 62.2 | 74 |
| Total | 62 | 41.3 | 88 | 58.7 | 150 |

Chi-Square Value = 0.74, p value= 0.39 at 1 df

Table 2 Types of physical contact sexual abuse among male and female respondents

| Types of contact form of sexual abuse | Male (n=18) | | Female(n=11) | | Total (n=29) | |
|--|-------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Touching / fondling of victim's genital | 4 | 22.2 | 4 | 36.3 | 08 | 26.6 |
| Asking victim to fondle abuser's genital | 4 | 22.2 | 1 | 9.0 | 05 | 16.6 |
| Attempted intercourse | 9 | 50.0 | 4 | 36.3 | 13 | 43.3 |
| Did intercourse | 4 | 22.2 | 1 | 9.0 | 05 | 16.6 |
| Unusual kissing | 13 | 72.2 | 5 | 45.4 | 18 | 60.0 |
| Tight hugging | 14 | 77.7 | 8 | 72.7 | 22 | 46.6 |

Table 3 Class-wise variation in prevalence of sexual abuse

| Class | Abused | | Not abused | | Total | |
|-------|--------|------|------------|------|--------|-----|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| 8 | 15 | 31.2 | 33 | 68.8 | 48 | 100 |
| 9 | 18 | 36.0 | 32 | 64.0 | 50 | 100 |
| 10 | 29 | 55.8 | 23 | 44.2 | 52 | 100 |
| Total | 62 | 41.3 | 88 | 58.7 | 150 | 100 |

Chi-square value =7.07, p value= 0.029 at 2 df

Table 4 Respondent's Age at First Sexual Abuse

| Age | Verbal Abuse (n=49) | | Indecent Exposure (n=36) | | Contact Form (n=29) | |
|------------|---------------------|------|--------------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| < 10 year | 1 | 2.0 | 1 | 2.8 | 0 | 0 |
| 10-12 year | 8 | 16.3 | 7 | 19.4 | 5 | 17.3 |
| 13-15 year | 38 | 77.6 | 26 | 72.2 | 21 | 72.4 |
| ≥ 16 year | 2 | 4.1 | 2 | 5.6 | 3 | 10.3 |
| Total | 49 | 100 | 36 | 100 | 29 | 100 |

Table 5 Places of Sexual Abuse

| Places of Abuse | Verbal Abuse (n=49) | | Indecent Exposure (n=36) | | Contact Form of sexual abuse (n=29) | |
|-----------------|---------------------|------|--------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| On the Way | 23 | 46.9 | 12 | 33.3 | 7 | 24.1 |
| Abuser's Home | 16 | 32.7 | 7 | 19.7 | 10 | 34.5 |
| Victim's Home | 1 | 2.0 | 5 | 13.9 | 0 | 0 |
| School | 3 | 6.1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.5 |
| Work Place | 1 | 2.0 | 2 | 5.6 | 0 | 0 |
| Others Place | 6 | 12.2 | 12 | 33.3 | 12 | 41.4 |

Table 6 Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse

| Perpetrators | Verbal Abuse (n=49) | | Indecent Exposure (n=36) | | Contact Form of sexual abuse (n=29) | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Peer/ friend | 12 | 24.5 | 12 | 38.9 | 13 | 44.8 |
| Known person but not relative | 19 | 38.7 | 7 | 38.9 | 9 | 31.0 |
| Stranger | 21 | 42.0 | 5 | 19.4 | 4 | 13.8 |
| Relatives | 2 | 4.1 | 0 | 5.6 | 3 | 10.3 |

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