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## **A study on awareness level of parents on child sexual abuse with special reference to Thiruvappu Panchayath, Kottayam district**

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### **Abstract**

The study aims to check the awareness level of parents on child sexual abuse (CSA) especially in the areas such as types of CSA, existence of CSA, whether gender and age of child, time and place occurring CSA, socio-economic factors of family, and perpetrator influence the occurrence of CSA, the prevention methods and legal awareness on CSA. The samples were selected from Thiruvappu Panchayath, Kottayam district, Kerala, India and using quota sampling method. The major findings are majority of respondents are not aware on the aspects that child sexual abuse can be happen to any child from any socio-economic background of families, boy children can be sexually abused, and also the legal measures such as POCSO act, minimum age for marriage of men, and even the Child Help Line number in India.

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse (CSA), awareness, parents

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### **Introduction**

India as being one of the most populated country in the world and its multi-dimensional and multi-ethnic culture the increasing Child Sexual Abuse cases becomes a pressing human right issue and public health concern. The issue seems to be serious as the children are very vulnerable to sexual abuse irrespective of their age, gender or the socio-economic factors of the family. In such a scenario, it is important to check the awareness level of parents on Child Sexual Abuse, since parents are the first teacher of every child.

According to WHO, 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 and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to: the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; the exploitative use of child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

As discussed in Parent-Involved Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: A Qualitative Exploration of Parents' Perceptions and Practices in Beijing by Qian Wen Xie, The University of Hong Kong Hong Kong, Hong Kong in 2015 parents perceived that CSA risks differed between all children and their own children, between boys and girls, and between poor and non-poor children. They insisted that perpetrators were more likely to be familiar rather than strangers.

The Kerala Women's Commission is probing the ease of a 12-year-old who underwent an abortion at the age of nine after her stepfather raped her. She was also allegedly molested by the

father's nephew for years. Her mother remained a silent spectator to the assault despite being told by her daughter on several occasions. "When I used to, tell mummy, she would tell, it's okay." the 12-year-old told us. (Kerala's unsafe homes: increasing rapes of minors. NDTV 2013).

If children do not have adequate and authentic information about sexual abuses that can be occurred towards them, it is difficult to remove this crime from the society even it develop. For achieving this parent also should have enough knowledge regarding child sexual abuse, irrespective of their traditional beliefs, so that to save their children from sexual assault. This study reveals the awareness level of parents towards child sexual abuse and also checks their information on child sexual abuse is right or not

### **Objectives**

The major objectives for this study were:

- To check the knowledge level of parents on Child Sexual Abuse

It was checked in terms of types of CSA, existence of CSA, whether gender and age of child, time and place occurring CSA, socio-economic factors of family, and perpetrator influence the occurrence of CSA, the prevention methods and

- To check legal awareness of parents on sexual abuse towards children.

Legal aspects which checked involves the basics regarding Protection of Child from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, the minimum age of marriage for men and women as given in Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 and the Child Help Line number in India

### **Methodology**

The research design was descriptive and the population of the study was Thiruvappu Panchayath, Kottayam District, India.

The sampling method was quota sampling and samples were the male or female biological parent having children in between the age group 3-12. This age group is selected because this is the age in which children start to do things independently and having no much knowledge regarding sex related concepts. They require proper directions and monitoring from the part of parents at this age. The data collected using closed format questionnaire was then analysed and described.

**Results & Discussions**

**Socio-demographic profile of respondents:**

The samples selected were 50% of male and 50% females. 60% of total respondents were in between 30-39 age group, 20% belongs to 40-49, 16.6% belongs to 20-29 years, and remaining 3% were in the age group 50-59 years. The educational qualification of respondents were distributed as 35% got SSLC, 20% had PDC and 31.6% had education up to graduation or above and remaining 13.3% had only primary school education. 80% of them belong to nuclear type family and 73.3% have monthly income below 10,000 INR.

**Knowledge on Child Sexual Abuse**

Problem of child sexual abuse is bigger than what was either understood or acknowledged. According to 'Knowledge Regarding Child Abuse among Parents' a study by Akoijam Mamata Devi, Faculty of Nursing, SGT University, Gurgaon, there is no association between knowledge score when compared to age, sex, occupation, religion, socioeconomic status, parental status, previous source of knowledge expect education status. It reveals that maximum demographic variables of the parents do not affected level of knowledge except education status. The data analysed shows that majority (60%) of respondents strongly agreeing that children are subjected to various forms of sexual abuse. When 100% of respondents considers rape, touching private parts of body of child and touching body of child

with sexual intention as types of child sexual abuse, 96.6% considers making of porn videos using child and showing them to child as a type of child sexual abuse and 93.3% of respondents considers talking to children with sexual contents via mobile phone, internet etc as types of child sexual abuse

One of the important finding of the study is that 66.6% of respondents are thinking that boy children are not getting sexually abused. 50% of respondents are disagreeing the statement that children are not being sexually abused at their homes. 40% of them are aware that people within the home will sexually abuse a child.

46.6% of respondents are agreeing that socio-economic factors of family of child are influencing child sexual abuse. They are thinking that CSA will occur only in poor homes. 53.3% are strongly agreeing that CSA can be occurred at any time, irrespective of day or night.

96.6% are agreeing that sex education should be part of school curriculum and 53.3% of parents strongly agreeing that parents should give sex education to children at home itself. 91.6% are in the opinion that school management should ensure the service of school counsellors in the school.

**Legal Awareness on Child Sexual Abuse**

Assuming that the parents might not have in-depth knowledge on the laws, policies etc, the study was focused only on the fundamentals regarding most popular legal measures in India for the prevention of child sexual abuse, i.e. POCSO Act, 2012 and Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 and also the Child Help Line number.

The findings include:

66.6% of respondents have no idea about POCSO Act. Also, 73.3% respondents are not aware about the maximum penalty i.e. death penalty given to child sexual abusers as per the POCSO Act.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents on the basis of knowledge regarding POCSO Act, 2012

	Total responses	Correctly answered		Wrongly answered /Not known	
		Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency
POCSO Act	60	20	33.3%	60	66.6%
According to POCSO Act, maximum punishment for sexually abusing a child	60	16	26.6%	44	73.3%

CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF) is the nodal agency of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development acting as the parent organisation for setting up, managing and monitoring the CHILDLINE 1098 service all over the country. It is the best NGO

in India working for child labour, child trafficking, child abuse, child marriage, homeless child, conflict with laws etc.

From this study, it is observed that majority of respondents (76.6%) are not at all aware about Child Help Line number.

**Table 2:** Distribution of respondents on the basis of knowledge on Child Help Line Number

	Total responses	Correctly answered		Wrongly answered / Not known	
		Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency
Child Help Line Number	60	14	23.3%	46	76.6%

53.3% are disagreeing that child marriage is existing in Kerala, but it is evident According to Dipavali Hazra (2016), in a district-wise breakup, the northern Kerala district of Malappuram, a muslim-dominated area, reports the largest number of child

marriages in the state. Over 45,000 child marriages occurred in Kerala since 2001, in which a majority were from Malappuram district, according to the study.

**Table 3:** Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness on existence of child marriage

	Total responses	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency
Child marriage is still existing in society	60	-	-	24	40%	32	53.3%	4	6.6%

According to Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, the minimum age for marriage of male persons is twenty-one and that of female is eighteen. One of the another important finding of the study is

that majority of respondents (95%) are aware about girl's minimum age of marriage but 33.34% are not so aware about the minimum age of marriage for males.

**Table 4:** Distribution of respondents on the basis of knowledge regarding minimum age for marriage

	Total responses	Correctly answered		Wrongly answered/ Not known	
		Frequency	Percentage of frequency	Frequency	Percentage of frequency
Minimum age of marriage for men	60	40	66.6%	20	33.3%
Minimum age of marriage for women	60	57	95%	3	5%

### Suggestions & Recommendations

The study reveals the need of social work interventions in the field of creating legal awareness among parents on child sexual abuse. It is evident from the study that they have no idea regarding POCSO Act, and Child Help Line number which are widely accepted to be the powerful legal measure for the prevention of CSA.

Also recommend the Government to ensure service of counsellors and social workers in schools which can fasten the identification of occurrence of child sexual abuse.

### Conclusion

The study can be concluded that majority of parents are aware about child sexual abuse, but possess less knowledge regarding sexual abuse of boy children, perpetrators from family itself, legal aspects etc. Interventions must be made in such areas through community, family and school-based programs.

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