



Effect of Demographic Characteristics on Students' Awareness and perceptions regarding Child Abuse at University Level

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Abstract- Current study aims to explore supportive system, and prevention about child abuse perceived by university students. Undergraduate university students were the participants of the study. Four hundred undergraduate students were selected from six universities as sample. The students belonged to first two years of their degree program and were in the age range 19-22. Students of 19+, 20+, and 20+ age groups were 30.3 %, 35.3, and 34.5 respectively. The instrument comprises 33 statements on 5 point likert type scale regarding awareness, supportive environment and prevention about child abuse and physical, emotional, and sexual abuses. They agree that child abuse prevention education may expose too much information to children ($M = 3.96$) and it is embarrassing to discuss issues related to child abuse ($M = 3.63$) but it is beneficial to discuss publicly about child abuse to prevent child abuse ($M = 4.28$). A connection exists between awareness of child abuse and its prevention which supports the results of prior studies that most of them showed that child abuse and neglect is passed on from one generation to next generation and we can stop this only through education or awareness. It is suggested to prevent child abuse by educating children in school and college and creating parental awareness. For this purpose it must be discussed publicly through seminars, conferences and programs.

Key words: Child abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, supportive environment, prevention for child abuse

I. INTRODUCTION

There are four types of child abuse i.e. physical, emotional, neglect and sexual abuse. Physical abuse may harm the child physically or any injury through kicking, beating, slapping etc. Emotional abuse is also known as psychological abuse which disturbs the emotions of the child through criticizing, not showing concern or blaming, mocking of the appearance. Neglect is failure to provide the basic needs of the child like education, food and care. Sexual abuse is the intentional touching by others or involving and exposing to those activities which are not appropriate for child and inappropriate sexual behavior with child. A good childhood is the corner stone of any good and vibrant community (Ziaei, et al, 2011). Life experiences in childhood are known to have a powerful connection with the well-being of individuals (Cox, et al., 2003). Negative experiences in adolescence generally predict bad psychosocial and physical performance even in adulthood (MacMillan, et al, 2001). In a broader perspective child abuse has a negative impact on individuals and societies (Fang et al., 2015; Tran, Berkel.et al.,2017).

Yekta.et al., (2011) investigated the university student's attitudes and awareness about child abuse. They conducted research on male and female university students. The results revealed that the level of awareness and their perception about child abuse and neglect are good.

Girls are more vulnerable to child abuse and sexual abuse than boys, in nourishing and education, they are being neglected (Runyan et al., 2002). Moreover, women indicated more physical and mental abuse than men (Al- Qaisy,2007).

When Children are subjected to sexual violence, they become the victim to depression, sleeping problems, physical complaints and fear. Children who have had emotional abuse exhibit behaviors like sitting alone, having feelings of worthlessness and show anger (Pavilainen& Tarkka,2003).

Research Objectives

The study aimed to:

1. Explore students' awareness and perceptions regarding child abuse and its prevention at university level.
2. Explore effect of Demographic Characteristics on Students Awareness and perceptions regarding Child Abuse at University Level.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of students' awareness and perceptions regarding child abuse and its prevention at university level?
2. What is the effect of Demographic Characteristics on Students Awareness and perceptions regarding Child Abuse at University Level?

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There is a growing awareness of child abuse and neglect. Doctors and physicians had insufficient understanding towards diagnosing and reporting child physical abuse. A research was conducted with pediatricians in Kuwait, the findings are important to create awareness regarding child abuse (Moosa et al, 2003). In another research, which examined people's attitudes regarding child sexual abuse, it was discovered that females were showing more awareness regarding adult and children sexual contact (Tennfjord, 2006).

Ozbey, et al (2018) conducted research on the students' level of awareness and perceptions related child neglect and abuse. The study was descriptive in nature and the questionnaire was used to collect the information. Majority of the students were female (84.9%) who were living in nuclear family system. 29.4% of the students were informed about child abuse, and 63% of these students received education through school. The knowledge of female students was moderate regarding child abuse but better than male students.

Poreddi, et al, (2016) examined knowledge and attitudes of students about child abuse and neglect and 158 pupils responded to a questionnaire. The results revealed that the student's knowledge regarding child abuse is inadequate but showed positive attitude towards prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The traditional practices of India such as marriage in young age, the caste system, child labor, inequality among females etc leaves negative impact and increase their vulnerability to abuse and neglect. Moreover, in India over a half (53%) of children have been mistreated physically and sexually. Regrettably children in most cases are being maltreated by their parents (Kacker et al, 2007).

Elarousy, Helal, and Villiers (2012) studied o student's knowledge and attitudes about child abuse and neglect in Jeddah. A structured questionnaire was used and filled by 156 female students. Most of the females admitted that they have awareness about child abuse and neglect.

Child maltreatment or abuse is a serious problem. Abusing and neglecting leaves high influence on physical and mental health of the child and on his/her development. The consequences of child abuse have adverse effects and it is not good only for child but also for society. (Butchart, et al, 2006).

Malik, and Kaiser, (2016) stated that children experienced all types of child abuse and neglect in Arab Peninsula. Child abuse may even be accepted as a form of punishment. It is necessary to take a serious step against child abuse and to prevent child abuse and neglect in the Arab. It is reported that 250,000 children experience emotional abuse or neglect, 300,000 to 1.5 million children are wounded annually as consequence of physical abuse. In 2000, 879,000 children experienced violence and neglect in United States. About 2,475 children were abused every day in 2001, and more than 50,000 incidences of child abuse and neglect were reported to child protection services (Dryden, 2009).

Lowenthal (2009) states that both male and female are at the same risk of facing violence and neglect but the only difference is that who abuses them. Non-family members like coaches or educators, trainers are more likely to abuse boys while family members or care givers mostly abuse the girls.

The word "prevention" is described to demonstrate those activities that help to stop a negative action or behavior and can also assist positivity. Effective strategies and interventions in child abuse and neglect must decrease risk factors and ensure supporting environment for the prosperity of both child and family (Tomlinson, 2008)). The problem of child abuse and neglect is not new though the problem has started to be realized. So, the primary goal of child protection policies is to secure children from victimization in order to guarantee their overall growth and development. (Lakhdar, et al., 2019).

Helmy, et al (2017) studied Mother's Awareness about Types of Child Abuse in Saudi Arabia. A descriptive cross-sectional research was carried out. An electronic method was used to collect the data and 400 respondents completed the questionnaire. Most of the mothers said that sexual abuse and neglect are

very serious and significant issues. While the parents of these mothers abused them physically so 40 (12.7%) of mothers physically abuse their children. Almost half of the mothers showed that they often abused their children emotionally but along with this 78% mothers stated that emotional abuse has a very huge impact on children's character and personality. Mothers considered that to reduce or to prevent child abuse and neglect the services of governmental and non-governmental agencies are inadequate.

Parents tend to apply severe form of disciplinary actions without knowing that it is an abuse. Due to the lack of knowledge, parents, especially mothers showed hesitation to report incidents to authorities of health care or legal protection (Helmy, et al, 2004, 2008). If parents have sufficient knowledge or awareness related to child abuse and neglect so they can identify the symptoms and can prevent it by teaching their children (Blumenthal, 2015)).

One's risk for child abuse is considered to be affected by the parent child relationship (Cohen, et al., 2011). The study examined that distance between children and parents enhances the risks of child abuse. An element of the emotional distance between parent and the child relationship may influence the children's future parenting and a chance to abuse their kids. One's relationship with parents is believed to provide the first platform to build their personality traits and skills necessary for healthy relationships and care giving, including emotions and empathy (Kiang, et al. 2004Valiente et al., 2004). Family violence causes negative and adverse consequences regarding well-being of the child but the positive interaction of family with children improves the quality of life of a child (Collishaw, et al 2007)

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in positive paradigm. Quantitative studies can be used to collect data from a larger population. Survey method was used and sample was selected conveniently.

Under graduate university students were the participants of the study. Four hundred undergraduate students were selected from six universities as sample. The students belonged to first two years of their degree program and were in the age range of 19-22. Students of 19+, 20+, and 20+ age groups were 30.3 %, 35.3, and 34.5 respectively. Family type of 75 % students was nuclear family whereas 25 % were living in joint family system.

The instrument comprises 33 statements on 5 point likert scale regarding awareness, supportive environment and prevention about child abuse and physical, emotional, and sexual abuses.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1

Independent sample t test to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of family type regarding sub scales of child abuse

	Type of family				Independent samples t-test		
	Nuclear		Joint		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
1.Awareness	54.26	10.56	51.06	10.50	2.632	398	.009
2.Perception	3.74	0.45	3.80	0.44	-1.109	398	.268
3.Physical abuse	3.94	0.60	3.81	0.65	1.852	398	.065
4.Emotional abuse	3.84	0.67	3.84	0.59	-.033	398	.974
5.Child Neglect	1.84	0.70	1.84	0.60	-.021	398	.983
6.Sexual abuse	3.70	0.78	3.71	0.80	-.165	398	.869
7.Prevention	4.40	0.39	4.38	0.33	.343	398	.732

An independent samples t-test was applied to compare the groups on the bases of family type like nuclear and joint about child abuse. There was a significant difference between groups as the value is smaller than .05 (t (398) =2.632, p=.009).

There was a significant difference between groups regarding awareness about child abuse for nuclear (M=54.26, SD=10.56) and for joint (M=51.06, SD=10.50); t (398) =2.632, p=.009.

No significant difference was found between groups about perception of child abuse for nuclear and joint families (t (398) = -1.109, p=.268).

There was no significant difference between groups with reference to physical abuse as the value is greater than .05 ($t(398) = 1.852$). There was no significant difference in preventing child abuse for nuclear family ($M=3.84, SD= 0.67$)

Table 2

One Way ANOVA to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases age regarding sub scales of child abuse

Age groups		20-21		21-22		F	p
19-20		M	SD	M	SD		
51.88	9.64	53.78	10.75	54.51	11.20	2.08	.126
3.78	0.44	3.78	0.44	3.70	0.46	1.32	.267
3.92	0.66	3.90	0.61	3.90	0.57	0.03	.967
3.78	0.71	3.93	0.63	3.80	0.61	2.13	.120
1.77	0.59	1.90	0.69	1.84	0.73	1.20	.302
3.69	0.79	3.70	0.76	3.70	0.80	0.01	.989
4.47	0.34	4.36	0.40	4.36	0.36	3.81	.023

* $p>.05, p<.05$

A one-way ANOVA was applied to compare the mean scores on the bases of different age groups about child abuse. There was no significant difference in awareness and perception of child abuse on the bases of age groups was found (19-20yrs, 20-21yrs, 21-22yrs). There was a significant difference between groups (19-20, 20-21, 21-22) to prevent child abuse; as the value is greater than .05 ($F= 3.81, p=.023$).

Table 3

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-Std. Error J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
19-20	20-21	.11252*	.04597	.0044	.2207
19-20	21-22	.11037*	.04620	.0017	.2190
20-21	21-22	-.00216	.04442	-.1066	.1023

Post Hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there is a significant difference between the age 19-20yrs and age 20-21yrs ($p=0.23$) regarding prevent child abuse.

The mean score of prevent child abuse of age 19-20yrs ($M=4.47, SD=0.34$) are higher than the mean score of prevent child abuse of age 20-21yrs ($M=4.36, SD=0.40$).

There was a significantly difference between age 19-20-yrs and age 21-22yrs ($p=0.23$).

The mean score of prevent child abuse of age 19-20yrs ($M=4.47, SD=0.34$) are higher than the mean score of prevent child abuse age 21-22yrs ($M=4.36, SD=0.36$).

Table 4

One Way ANOVA to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of birth order among siblings regarding subscales of child abuse

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	ANOVA	
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	F	p
1.Awareness	53.55(10.39)	54.32(10.56)	53.76(10.56)	52.37(11.39)	52.90(9.77)	.44	.783
2.Perception	3.74(0.50)	3.71(0.42)	3.80(0.42)	3.73(0.46)	3.78(0.51)	.69	.599
3.Physical abuse	3.86(0.59)	3.86(0.58)	3.97(0.62)	3.86(0.66)	3.95(0.59)	.75	.559
4.Emotional abuse	3.85(0.64)	3.77(0.57)	3.87(0.65)	3.79(0.78)	3.99(0.52)	1.14	.337
5.Child Neglect	1.88(0.82)	1.79(0.67)	1.87(0.69)	1.84(0.65)	1.82(0.54)	.20	.941
6.Sexual abuse	3.67(0.80)	3.73(0.75)	3.75(0.81)	3.62(0.81)	3.65(0.71)	.47	.759
7.Prevention	4.43(0.39)	4.42(0.30)	4.37(0.39)	4.37(0.43)	4.40(0.34)	.42	.796

* $p>.05$

One-way ANOVA was applied to compare the difference in mean scores on the bases of student's birth order in siblings about child abuse. There is no impact of birth order on perceptions and awareness regarding child abuse i.e. awareness, perception, physical abuse, emotional abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse and prevention of child abuse because the p value for each score is greater than .05

Table 5

Level of awareness of child abuse among students

Levels	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
	1	83	15

Table 5 shows 83% students are aware about child abuse and 15% are highly aware about child abuse

Table 6

Independent sample t test to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of type of family regarding child abuse on total scale

M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
172.82	11.54	172.15	11.08	.512	398	.609

Table No. 6 shows that independent sample t-test was conducted to see the impact of type of family i.e. (nuclear and joint) on student's awareness regarding child abuse prevention. The result of independent sample t-test shows that no significant difference was found between groups on the bases of family type because the p value is (.609) which is greater than .05.

Table 7

One Way ANOVA to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of age groups regarding scale on awareness of child abuse

19-20		20-21		21-22		F	p
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
180.25	11.20	179.18	12.46	178.70	12.06	.563	.570

Table No. 7 shows that one-way ANOVA was conducted to see the impact of age on student's awareness regarding child abuse prevention. Results declared that no statistically significant difference was found between, 19-20 years (M=180.25, SD=11.20), 20-21 years (M=179.18, SD=12.46), 21-22 years (M=178.70, SD=12.06), F=.563, because p=.570 is greater than .05.

Table 8

One Way ANOVA to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of birth order among siblings regarding scale on child abuse

1		2		3		4		5		F	p
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
172.7234	10.80	172.8	10.06	173.03	11.36	171.44	12.87	173.43	12.06	.343	.849

Table 8 shows that one-way ANOVA was conducted to see the impact of student's birth order on awareness regarding child abuse prevention. Results indicated that no statistically significant difference was found in student's awareness regarding child abuse prevention because the p value (.849) is greater than .05.

Table 9

Independent sample t test to find out difference in mean scores between groups on the bases of family type regarding scale on child abuse

Questions	Nuclear		Joint		t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
1 In Pakistan, child abuse is the serious problem.	4.71	0.53	4.57	0.59	2.17	0.03
2 You know one of your friends/siblings is physically abusing.	3.87	1.01	3.64	1.05	1.95	0.05

Table 8 shows that there is a significant difference in perception on the bases of family type i.e. nuclear (M=4.71, SD=0.53), and joint (M=4.57, SD=0.59), $p < 0.05$, regarding the statement "in Pakistan, child abuse is a serious problem."

There is a significant difference between groups on the bases of family type i.e. nuclear (M=3.87, SD=1.01), and joint (M=3.64, SD=1.05), $p < 0.05$, regarding the statement, "you know one of your friends/siblings is physically abusing."

V. DISCUSSION

Recent study shows that we can prevent child abuse through education, and awareness. A relationship exists between awareness of child abuse and its prevention which supports the results of prior studies that most of them showed that child abuse and neglect is passed on from one generation to next generation and we can

stop this only through education or awareness (Dryden, 2009). Pakistan National Education Policy in 2009 states that for the avoidance and prohibition of child abuse, knowledge of child abuse and neglect must be incorporated in the curriculum and awareness programs should be created for students and for educators within context taking into account cultural & moral values and sensitivities (Ministry of Education Pakistan, 2009). Tomback, (2010) said, "Promote and encourage the positive and suitable interactions between children and adults."

Another study supported the current study that prevalence of child abuse can be considerably decreased through the actions of parents, community members and society (Deutsch & Fortin 2015). For instance, it should be ensured that families have an economic strength and approach to a good job, proper education, housing along with healthy care of the child and early education would minimize the rates of child abuse and neglect and will also improve the quality of life for children and families. (Fortson, et al., 2016). Motivate and encourage the adults outside of family who represent themselves as role models to children (Linders, et al.,2014, Wurtele, et al., 2010).

In this study according to demographic information majority of the student's live in nuclear families than joint family. The previous study supports the study that 80% of the students live in nuclear families (Daral.et al, 2016). On the contrary, Deb and Modak (2010) found that children are physically and sexually more victimized in nuclear families than their peers who live in joint families. Other study Reyome, (2010) studied family systems like nuclear and joint system. The results showed that there was no important role of family type in child's abuse. Previous studies support that due to a larger number of children, a child can suffer physical & emotional abuse and neglect because parents has to take care of a larger family(Malik,2010; Yekta.et al., 2011).

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of student's awareness to prevent child abuse. Globally, Child abuse and neglect is a serious problem. Child abuse and neglect have a greater influence not only on individual's life but also on family and society. Child abuse and neglect has long lasting negative effects on growth and development of a child i.e., physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and that may persist in adulthood with some emotional and behavioral problems, in developing inter or intra -personal relations. Due to abuse and neglect, children, adolescence even adults can't perform positively in their lives and have effects on their academic achievements and self esteem. They may display aggressive behavior. The prevalence of physical abuse and emotional abuse is highest respectively. The most common cause of child abuse and neglect is a lack of awareness. Lack of awareness in parents is also a reason of child abuse and neglect because parents are not aware of any negative results of abuse and neglect. The study illustrates that students are not aware of any helpline to ask for help against child abuse and they do not feel supportive environment. It is suggested that awareness should be provided to overcome child abuse by educating children in schools and colleges. Parental awareness is also important and for this purpose it must be discussed publicly through seminars, workshops, conferences and media.

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