

## Preventing Child Sexual Abuse, What Parents Know?

Marwan A Bakarman,<sup>1</sup> Zobeida O Eljaaly<sup>2</sup>**ABSTRACT:**

**Background:** No community is safe from child sexual abuse (CSA) even conservative ones.

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to find outparental knowledge and understanding about preventing child sexual abuse in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional study on parents attending primary health care centers in Jeddah city were selected randomly (n=400). They were requested to fill the questionnaire. The data was entered and analyzed in IBM SPSS ver. 20. P value <0.05 was interpreted as an indication for significance.

**Results:** The response rate was 100%, the overall mean score reflecting knowledge of parents about CSA was 5.0+1.6 out of 10. The mean score of knowledge about CSA was relatively higher among female parents (5.1+1.6) than males (4.9+1.7). Majority of parents (93.8%) knew that CSA is a common problem worldwide. Parents with higher monthly income were less afraid to introduce CSA prevention education to their children and more likely to provide them with audiovisuals materials about CSA prevention; the difference was statistically significant p<0.05.

**Conclusion:** Most of the parents have considerable level of knowledge about child sexual abuse. The majority of participants agreed to protect their children from sexual abuse, mostly showing their willingness to educate their children in schools about prevention of CSA.

**Key words:** *child sexual abuse, prevention programs, behaviors, Saudi Arabia*

**Introduction**

Children can be sexually abused by both grown-ups and other kids who are (by advantage of their age or phase of immaturity) in a place of obligation, trust or control over the sufferer<sup>(1)</sup>. Sexual offense is characterized as "the engagement of a child in sexual action that he or she doesn't completely assimilate, can't give informed consent to, or for which the youngster is not informed , or

else that damages the constitution or social anathemas of society". Studies from around the globe demonstrated roughly 20% of women and 5%–10% of men report having been sexually abused as youngsters<sup>2-6</sup>. There is increasing acknowledgment of child protection campaigns that parents/ guardians and different grown-ups ought to be effectively involved in the prevention of child sexual abuse. High rates of child sexual offense have prompted to more counteractive action programs, especially those meant for guardians and parents of children. Different studies on how guardians can help and decrease the danger of child sexual abuse can potentially guide such programs. So as to create viable developments for parents, it is critical to evaluate how guardians perceive and react to the danger of sexual offense<sup>2</sup>.

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The objective of this study was to find outparents knowledge and understanding about preventing child sexual abuse in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

### Methodology

A cross-sectional analytical study done in Primary Health Care (PHC) centres of the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Jeddah city in 2014, targeting parents for exploring their knowledge about child sexual abuse problem.

As there is no precise figure for the level of the knowledge of parents about sexual abuse prevention, the proportion in the equation was substituted by 50% to get the maximum sample size. Given a confidence level of 95% and power of 80%, the sample size was 384. The calculation was done using Epi info Program version 6.4. This number was rounded to 400, to compensate for possible dropout.

One PHC center was randomly selected from each of the 4 sectors of PHC of MOH. The sample was equally allocated over the 4 PHC centers. Accordingly, 100 respondents were enrolled from each center; making a total of 400 respondents. Participants were selected from each PHC center using systematic random sampling method; by choosing every 3<sup>rd</sup> attendants who was requested to be included in the study. The first participant was chosen by simple random numbers method. Verbal consent was considered as a prerequisite for inclusion; otherwise and in case of disapproval 2<sup>nd</sup> attendant was requested to participate.

Data was collected using Self-administered questionnaire. It was used in several studies since 2005<sup>3</sup>. Permission was taken from the authors to use the questionnaire in this study. Demographic data were structured by the researchers. The questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic by certified translator, and then translated back to English by another translator to ensure lexical equivalence.

### Results

The response rate was 100%; as the questio-

naires were distributed and collected in the same setting. Table 1, describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, it showed that more than two thirds were females (69%), the mean age of fathers (41.8+8.5 years) was higher than mothers (35.5+7.8 years). More than one half of the respondents had university qualifications (54.3%) with a median monthly income of 8500 Saudi Riyals.

Table 2, demonstrates the percentages of correct answers to the items and statements reflecting their knowledge about some aspects of child sexual abuse; it was evident that the great majority of the respondents (93.8%) knew that CSA is a common problem worldwide; however, their knowledge about the remaining items varied widely; it was as low as 11.5% of them who knew that familiar people are the one's mostly involved in abusing children; figure (1) illustrates that about one quarter of the respondents (26.1%) indicated that strangers are most involved in abusing children, in addition to one half of the them (49.1%) who pointed to the strangers and acquaintance are being the same. On the same line, as shown in the table 2, only 26.3% of respondents put the accusation of abuse on the molester; for more illustration, figure (2) shows that almost one half of the respondents (45%) put the blame on both the molester and family, and very few (7%) who put the blame on the children. On the same note, only 37.5% who indicated that, in most instances, they should believe children who report that they had been sexually abused. Although almost two thirds of the respondents knew that men abuse children in most of the cases (67.3%), only 37.8% knew that females can sexually abuse children.

The response to the ten items reflecting their knowledge about child sexual abuse was scored; by giving one score for each correct answer. The overall mean score accounted for 5.0±1.6 out of ten; the following section describes the differences in the level of knowledge according to characteristics of participants. Table 3 shows that the mean score for knowledge about child sexual abuse was higher among female respondents (5.1±1.6) than males (4.9±1.7), however, this difference is not statisti-

cally significant. Also, it was observed that the level of the knowledge was growing consistently with increasing age of the respondent. Highest level for fathers or mothers as respondents aged 40+ was found to have Mean ± standard deviation(4.9±1.7) and (5.3±1.5) respectively. The level of knowledge was higher among respondents having university qualifications (5.2±1.5) and those having monthly income more than 10000 SR, however, all of these differences in our result were not statistically significant  $p>0.05$ .

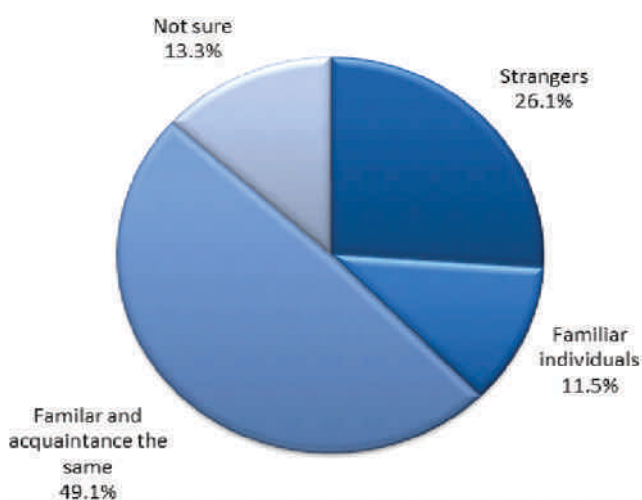
From table 4 it can be seen that the higher the monthly income, the less they are reluctant about introducing CSA prevention education to their children and the more is the likelihood to provide them with audiovisuals materials about CSA prevention; the differences in responses to these items according to monthly income were statistically significant  $p<0.0$

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the study group (n=400).

Characteristics	No.	%
<b>Gender:</b>		
Males	124	31.0
Females	276	69.0
<b>Father age:</b>		
<30 years	11	2.8
30-<40 years	161	40.8
40+ years	223	56.4
Mean ±SD	41.8±8.5	
<b>Mother age:</b>		
<30 years	76	19.0
30-<40 years	216	54.2
40+ years	107	26.8
Mean ±SD	35.5±7.8	
<b>Educational level of the respondent:</b>		
Read and write	6	1.6
Primary	24	6.0
Intermediate	57	14.3
Secondary	95	23.8
University	218	54.3
<b>Monthly income:</b>		
<5000 SR	98	24.7
5000-<10000 SR	120	30.2
>10000 SR	179	45.1
Median	8500 SR	

**Table 2:** Response of the participants to the items reflecting their knowledge about child sexual abuse.

Questions (model answer)	Correct answers	
	No.	%
Child sexual abuse problemsexist around the world	375	93.8
Children are most likely to be sexually abused by their relatives	46	11.5
A person who has sexually abused a child will likely repeat the offense	309	77.3
Whose fault is sexual abuse	105	26.3
Usually there are no obvious physical evidence if a child sexually abused	108	27.0
Females cannot sexually abuse children	151	37.8
Boys cannot be sexually abused	356	89.0
The child who was sexually abused will be held back from disclosing the episode by the abuser	142	35.5
Children who report being sexually abused, can be believed?	150	37.5
Men sexually abuse children in most cases	269	67.3



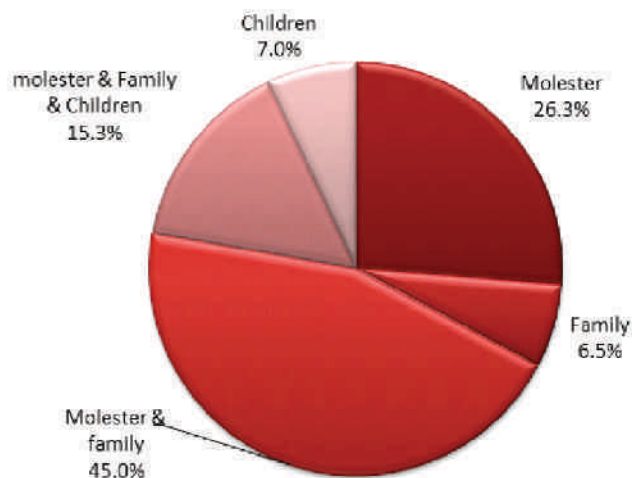
**Figure 1:** Response of the participant to the statement “Children are most likely to be sexually abused by?”

**Table 3:** Knowledge of the respondents about child sexual abuse according to their demographic characteristics.

Characteristics	Correct answers	
	Mean±SD	P
<b>Gender:</b>		
Males	4.9±1.7	0.151
Females	5.1±1.6	
<b>Age of respondent fathers (n=124):</b>		
<30 years	4.3±1.6	0.645
30-<40 years	4.8±2.0	
40+ years	4.9±1.7	
<b>Age of respondent mothers (n=276):</b>		
<30 years	4.7±1.0	0.063
30-<40 years	4.8±1.7	
40+ years	5.3±1.5	
<b>Educational level of the respondent:</b>		
Read and write	4.5±1.0	0.265
Primary	5.0±2.1	
Intermediate	5.1±1.7	
Secondary	4.7±1.7	
University	5.2±1.5	
<b>Monthly income:</b>		
<5000 SR	5.0±1.8	0.770
5000-<10000 SR	5.0±1.7	
>10000 SR	5.1±1.4	

**Table 4:** Differences in agreement and expected behaviors of the respondents about aspects related to education of the children about child sexual abuse according to monthly income.

Queries and statements	Agreement according to monthly income in SR			P
	<5000	5000- < 1000	10000+	
	No. (%)	No. (%)	NO. (%)	
Are you afraid that CSA prevention education may induce your child to know too much about sex?	36(36.7%)	31(25.8%)	41(23.2%)	0.049
Provided books or audiovisual material about CSA prevention for their children.	17(17.3%)	27(22.5%)	54(30.3%)	0.045



**Figure 2:** Response of the participant to the statement “Whose fault is CSA)

**Discussion**

Children should have the privilege to live in a decent well being and free of viciousness. A huge number of children, globally, are experiencing physical, sexual and emotional abuse and brutality. Not only child abuse and neglect poses a great threat to a child's well being and healthy growth, but it also has some dire consequences in later stages of victim's lives. Study reports that adults having a history of child abuse and neglect have significantly lower education, salary, low employment opportunities and reserved assets compared to normal adults. They may also experience serious neurological and psychological disorders as depression, suicidal thoughts and low self esteem.<sup>(4)</sup>

Parents, being closest and most responsible for their children should be able to observe changes in

children behavior and health that could be indicative of any child abuse. Active involvement by parents may contribute substantially in preventing child abuse. A Chinese study investigated the level of knowledge, attitude and communication practices of parents with their children with regard to CSA. They found that both groups of parents, those who discussed the topic of CSA with their children and

those who did not, possessed inadequate knowledge and supportive attitude regarding CSA. It was also suggested in this study that community based awareness programs for adults and parents should be adopted to manage the problem of child abuse.<sup>(5)</sup> Effective CSA prevention should be provided in collaborative form from various parties, it includes parents; schools, mass media, religious people and legislative authorities<sup>(6)</sup>. In a study conducted among twins who were sharing the same genetic, familial and environmental aspects, it was found that the one who was humiliated by sexual abuse were significantly more likely to develop sadness and depression, Panic issue, alcohol abuse, drugs and suicide endeavors, this twin study provided strong evidence for the correlation between CSA and these disorders<sup>(8)</sup> which call for the necessity of taking strong actions towards preventing it. Among multiple areas of preventive tasks, child education about prevention of sexual abuse had been recommended<sup>(7)</sup>. Therefore, current study was intended to explore willingness of the parents for preventive measures of CSA either at the school or at home. Although most of the parents agreed about preventive education in schools, yet, a considerable proportion (27.1%) was still afraid as it might induce undesired topics about sex.<sup>(5)</sup> Moreover in our study, on the other side, it was noted that only few thought that there was no need for such education at young age as the child will get it as he/she grows up (9.8%), and 7.3% who belief that there is no need for such education as the problem of CSA is not common.

The roles of the parents include support for their children and teaching them about risks of CSA and how to protect themselves. A study conducted aimed to measure level of learning and aptitudes of child sexual abuse (CSA) among Chinese preschoolers. This study also explored the relationship between kids' scores on the information and abilities and their parents' information and correspondence with kids about CSA avoidance. The questionnaire was based on the virtual "What If Situation Test". Less than one half of the youngsters realized that outsiders were by all account not the only culprits

and just 16% suspected that kids ought to report mystery touching, under 30% of the kids knew about utilizing verbal reaction to decline the unseemly touching and under 20% of the kids knew about unquestionably expelling themselves from the injurious circumstances. Parent-child communication about CSA and parental instructive level were the huge variables for youngsters' self-insurance abilities<sup>(9)</sup>. These findings points to the importance of the role of parents to convey relevant messages to their children; in the current study, it was found that the great majority of the parents were not reluctant to talk to their children about securing their private parts, never to let someone to see it, never to go with others even if familiar person, or accepting gifts from strangers except after parents' permission and not to go with strangers who ask them the nearest way to store; however, only one quarter of the parents agreed that they would provide their children with audiovisual materials about CSA prevention; this low percentage should be viewed on the background of the conservative values modulating our community in contrast to the willingness of the parents in the western countries to broadcast such audiovisuals to their children<sup>(10,11)</sup>.

The close proximity of the mothers with their children during childhood could explain the notion that they were significantly more likely to talk with their children about securing their private parts, refusing to show it to anybody and not to obey anyone who might be asking them to show the way to the nearest store, these findings come in accordance with other studies<sup>(11,12)</sup>. The prevention strategies for avoiding and coping with neglect and management of child abuse should focus on increasing parent's knowledge about CSA and role of parenting in such situations, working on strengthening the communication as well as bond between the patents and their children, enabling parents to deal with stress and other psychological issues associated with possible consequences of CSA, increasing peer support and decreasing family isolation, and ensuring social and health related

## Conclusion

Most of the parents have considerable level of knowledge about child sexual abuse. The majority of participants agreed to protect their children from sexual abuse, mostly showing their willingness to educate their children in schools about prevention of CSA.

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