

Prevalence of abuse among school going adolescents in eastern Nepal

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Abstract

Introduction: Adolescent years are the formative years of a person's life. Any form of physical or emotional maltreatment may have long term negative impacts on child's life. So, it is crucial to protect them from any form of adversities and promote their socio-emotional learning as well as psychological wellbeing.

Objective: To assess the prevalence of abuse among school going adolescents.

Methodology: An analytical cross-sectional study was conducted among 305 school going adolescents of Dharan Sub-metropolitan city by using purposive sampling technique after taking Ethical approval from Institutional Review committee of Kathmandu Medical College. Data was collected from October to November 2022 using using NORVOID abuse questionnaire through self-administered questionnaire technique. The collected data was analysed by using statistical package for social science version 21.

Results: The prevalence of emotional physical and sexual abuse was 18.7%, 11.8% and 5.2% simultaneously. Being female (OR = 3.8, CI:1.8-8), living outside one's own home (OR = 2.7 95% CI:1.5-6.9), and having a father engaged in business (OR = 2.23, 95% CI:1.05-4.7) were significant risk factors for emotional abuse. Sexual abuse was more likely among females (OR = 12.25, 95% CI: 2.2-68.5) and those whose mothers were involved in business (OR = 10.195% CI: 1.1-92). Physical abuse was associated with living away from one's own home (OR = 3.3, 95% CI:1.3-8.3).

Conclusion: Female gender, parental involvement in business, and residing away from one's own home had significantly influenced the risk of abuse highlighting need for targeted interventions to protect vulnerable groups.

Keywords: Adolescent; Child abuse; School; Students

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical period of growth, but the increasing exposure to various forms of abuse endangers their safety and development. It is estimated that, globally one in two children from the ages of two to 17 years are experiencing some form of violence. Majority of them involve children between the age of 12-17.¹ Child abuse among adolescents occurs in various forms like, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, physical abuse being the most prevalent one as reported by 66.4% of respondents.² Common places where it happens are home, school or online environment. According to World Health Organization (WHO) report, approximately 1 in 4 adolescents experience physical abuse and one in five girls and one in thirteen boys report sexual abuse before the age of 18.³ Similarly, emotional abuse is also widespread. Furthermore, many cases go unreported due to fear, shame and social taboos, only one percent of adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex reached out for professional help. The issue is equally serious in South Asia including, where 26% of

adolescents aged 13–17 have experienced some form of violence.⁴ These are associated with long-term impacts like anxiety, depression, substance abuse, school dropout, and even suicidal behaviour.⁵ % prevalence of some form of abuse or violent discipline in Nepal is 80%.⁶ So, addressing this issue is very crucial and requires robust context specific data.

METHODOLOGY

An analytical cross-sectional study was conducted in the Dharan Sub-Metropolitan city of Sunsari District, Koshi Province, Nepal, from September to November 2022 among school going adolescents. Calculated sample size was 282 with 80% prevalence of some form of abuse or violent discipline in Nepal⁶, at five percent level of significance and five percent margin of error by using the formula Z^2PQ/e^2 with 10% non-response rate.

$$=4*0.8*0.2/0.05*0.05=256$$

$$=256*10\%= 25.6$$

$$=256+25.6=181=282.$$

One government school and one private school were selected purposively and all the students studying in grade 9 and 10 of those two schools were taken as sample. As there were total 305 students in two schools, the final sample size came to be 305. Data were collected by using NORVOID abuse questionnaire (NorAQ)⁷, to measure prevalence of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, which is a validated questionnaire with good reliability. Socio-demographic and other required information were added in the NORAQ to meet the objective of the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional review committee of Kathmandu Medical College (IRC Ref no.07102022/19).

The objectives of the study were clearly stated and explained to each respondent. Data were collected using self-administered technique after taking permission from school administration, informed consent from parents and ascent from children. Then self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents that were collected on the same day by the researchers themselves. The data were systematically coded, entered into Microsoft Excel and analysed using the statistical package for social sciences, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows version 21 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages were calculated to see the prevalence of abuse and Inferential statistics i.e., logistic regression was used to see the associated factors considering 95% confidence interval not crossing one as statistically significant.

RESULTS

Mean age of the adolescents was (15±1.1). More than half of them 161 (52.8%) were females and majority of them 231(75.7%) followed Hindu religion. More than half 156 (51.1%) of the adolescents were from joint family and majority 248 (81.3%) were residing in their home (Table 1). Prevalence of emotional abuse was 57(18.7%) followed by physical abuse 36 (11.8%) and sexual abuse 16(5.2%) (Table 2). Being female (OR= 3.8, 95%CI :1.8-8) residing in places other than own home (OR=2.7, 95% CI: 1.5-6.9) and having business as father's occupation (OR= 2.23, 95% CI:1.05-4.7) were the risk factors for emotional abuse. Being female (OR= 12.25 95% CI: 2.2-68.5) and mother's occupation as business (OR=10.1, 95% CI: 1.1-92) were the risk factors for sexual abuse. Residing in places other than own home was also the risk factor for physical abuse (OR=3.3, 95% CI:1.3-8.3) (Table 3).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of adolescents.

Variable	n (%)
Age	
>15	273 (89.5)
>15	32 (10.5)
Mean± S.D=15 ±1.11	
Sex	
Male	144 (47.2)
Female	161 (52.8)
Religion	
Hindu	231 (75.7)
Non-hindu	74 (24.3)
Place of residence	
Home	248 (81.3)
Other than home	57 (18.7)
Family type	
Nuclear family	149 (48.9)
Joint family	156 (51.1)
Father's education	
Basic level	113 (37.0)
Secondary level	137 (44.9)
Higher secondary level	55 (18.0)
Mother's Educational	
Basic level	119 (39.0)
Secondary level	122 (40.0)
Higher secondary level	64 (21.0)
Occupation of father	
Service	114 (37.4)
Business	134 (43.9)
Others	57 (18.7)

Occupation of mother

Service	58 (19.0)
Small scale business	120 (39.3)
Home makers	127 (41.6)

Table 2: Prevalence of abuse among adolescents

Abuse	Frequency
Emotional abuse	57 (18.7)
Physical abuse	36 (11.8)
Sexual abuse	16 (5.2)
No abuse	196 (64.3)

Table 3: Factors associated with child abuse.

Variable	Emotional abuse		Sexual abuse		Physical abuse	
	Percentage	OR (95% CI)	Percentage	OR (95% CI)	Percentage	OR (95% CI)
Age						
13-16	20.5%	1 (reference)	7.5%	1 (reference)	12.5%	1 (reference)
16-19	15%	0.75 (0.4-1.5)	1%	0.12 (0.02-1.02)	10.5%	0.7 (0.3-1.7)
Sex						
Male	11.1%	1 (reference)	1.4%	1 (reference)	14.6%	1 (reference)
Female	25.5%	3.8(1.8-8)	8.7%	12.25 (2.2-68.5)	9.3%	0.6(0.3-1.3)
Residence						
Home	18%	1 (reference)	4.8%	1 (reference)	10.1%	1 (reference)
Other than home	21%	2.7 (1.5-6.9)	7%	2.6 (0.6-10.8)	19.3%	3.3 (1.3-8.3)
Family type						
Nuclear	20.1%	1 (reference)	6.7%	1 (reference)	12.8%	1 (reference)
Joint	17.3%	0.75 (0.39-1.45)	3.8%	0.6 (0.2-1.8)	10.9%	0.7(0.4-1.5)
Fathers' education						
Basic	15.8%	1 (reference)	3.5%	1 (reference)	10.7%	1 (reference)
Secondary	16.4%	0.75 (0.37-1.54)	6.6%	1.1 (0.3-4.3)	11.7%	1.01(0.4-2.3)
Higher Education	28.6%	0.59 (0.23-1.54)	5.5%	0.6 (0.1-3.5)	14.5%	1.74(0.5-5)
Mother's education						
Basic	33%	1 (reference)	3.3%	1 (reference)	10%	1 (reference)
Secondary	35%	0.28 (0.1-0.7)	5.7%	2.8 (0.6-12)	10.7%	1.05 (0.4-2.5)
Higher education	31%	0.4 (0.17-0.9)	7.9%	3.6 (0.7-18.4)	17.5%	1.8 (0.7-4.7)
Father's occupation						
Service	13.2%	1 (reference)	7.9%	1 (reference)	13.2%	1 (reference)
Business	28.4%	2.23 (1.05-4.7)	4.5%	0.27 (0.07-0.98)	12.7%	0.7 (0.34-1.7)
Others	7%	0.29 (0.08-1.07)	1.8%	0.09 (0.01-0.9)	7%	0.3 (.07-0.98)
Mother's occupation						
Service	13.8%	1 (reference)	1.7%	1 (reference)	6.9%	1 (reference)
Business	23.3%	1.7 (0.6-4.7)	7.5%	10.1 (1.1-92)	13.3%	2.5 (0.7-8.5)
Others	16.5%	0.7 (0.3-1.4)	4.1%	4.9 (0.5-46)	12.6%	3 (0.9-10.6)

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the prevalence of child abuse among school-going adolescents and identified socio-demographic and familial factors associated with the abuse. More than half, 52.8% of the respondents were female and 47.2 % were male with the mean age of

15±1.1. Study findings revealed that more than one third i.e., 35.7% of children have experienced at least one form of abuse which is a little more than the findings of South Asia which is where 26% among adolescents aged 13–17.⁴ Prevalence of emotional abuse was 18.7% followed by physical abuse 11.8% and sexual abuse

5.2% indicating child abuse as a significant public health issue. These findings align with the findings of previous national and international studies which showed one in every four children suffer from physical abuse and one in every five girl faces sexual abuse in their life time.^{8,9} This suggests that this is a widespread issue crossing geographic and cultural boundaries. A study conducted in India, revealed that 21.9% of children had experienced physical violence, 20.9% had experienced psychological violence, and 18.1% had experienced sexual violence.¹⁰ Another study from Nigeria comprising 372 participants with 51.2 % male and 48.8% female and median age 15years showed that 48.8 % males had been physically abused, 10.2 % have been forced or persuaded to have sexual experience against their wish as teenagers and 16.8% have been abused emotionally in one way or the other.¹¹ Another study from Sierra Leone found that 85.7% of respondents were exposed to psychological abuse, 66.1% to moderate physical abuse and 54.4% to the severe physical abuse¹², which is quite high in comparison to our study findings.

Study findings also revealed various significant risk factors associated with physical, emotional and sexual abuse among school going adolescents. Gender, residing in places other than own home, and parental occupation were the key risk factors to make children more vulnerable to abuse. Being female was strong predictor of both emotional (OR = 3.8) and sexual abuse (OR=12.25), which suggests that girls are markedly exposed to different form of abuse. Other studies have also consistently reported higher rates of abuse among girl adolescents in comparison to their boy counterparts.^{3-5,8,11} Potential reason behind this might be prevailing gender norms, vulnerable and submissive nature of girls, making them easier target for perpetrators.¹³ Adolescents residing in places other than their own home was another significant factor associated with emotional abuse (OR=2.7) and physical abuse (OR=3.3). This suggests that these children might lack adequate supervision, support system and protection in comparison to children who are staying with their primary caregivers. A study from India reported that children separated from their primary caregivers were more likely to experience maltreatment,

which is similar to our finding.¹⁰ Parental occupation was another significant influencer of child abuse in this study. Having a father engaged in business was significantly associated with higher chance of emotional abuse in child (OR 2.23) over fathers engaged in service. Long working hours, irregular schedule and stress may explain the situation. Likewise, children from self-employed mothers with cottage and small industries like small restaurants, shops etc. were more likely to experience sexual abuse in comparison with mothers engaged in service (OR=10.1, 95% CI, 1.1-92). Despite the wide confidence interval, warning cautious interpretation, it is supported by different studies that mothers working in informal sectors have irregular working hours and unstructured workplace safety leading to reduced supervision of children. Moreover self-employment, especially in small businesses, brings mothers in public or semi-public settings for longer duration and children usually accompany them in potentially unsafe environment or at times left alone. Additionally financial constraints further limit their security and protection and increase the vulnerability giving perpetrators opportunities to exploit such children as described in ecological model of child abuse.^{9,14} Studies from South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa also reported that maternal employment in the formal sector has protective influence on child abuse.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

More than one-third of the school going adolescents had experienced abuse, which is quite alarming. Different factors have influenced the abuse, specially being female gender, staying away from one's own home, engagement of parents in small scale business were the significant risk factors. These findings necessitate targeted interventions towards the protection of vulnerable groups.

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