

Perceived Deterrence Among School Teachers Against Child Abuse

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Abstract

Introduction. Child abuse and neglect is one of the most serious social and public health problems. In the most severe cases, child abuse and neglect results in the tragic death of a child. The general objectives are to determine the number of reports of abuse made by teachers, their knowledge of child abuse laws and reporting procedures, and their perceived deterrents in reporting abuse. Also to evaluate teachers' responses to case vignettes.

Materials And Methods: The survey we developed for this study contained 12 questions. Questionnaire was based on teaching experience, teachers knowledge about child abuse and there attitude towards reporting child abuse.

Results: Majority of the teachers have knowledge about child abuse, they are aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse and child neglect but they are not reporting child abuse cases.

Conclusion: Teachers are the next person they are in daily contact with after their guardians. This study clearly outlines the need for enhanced training in child abuse reporting laws and procedures for school teachers. There is a definite need for more thorough training for teachers on child abuse reporting. It can be concluded that teachers should have knowledge about child abuse.

Keywords: perceived deterrence, Child abuse, Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or other caregiver(1). Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organisations, schools or communities the child interacts with(2).

The terms child abuse and child maltreatment are often used interchangeably, although some researchers make a distinction between them, treating child maltreatment as an umbrella term to cover neglect, exploitation, and trafficking(3). Child abuse can also be in the form of emotional abuse involving coercive, constant belittling, shaming, humiliating a child, making negative comparisons to others, frequent yelling, threatening, or bullying of the child, rejecting and ignoring the child as punishment, having limited physical contact with the child(4). Different jurisdictions have developed their own definitions of what constitutes child abuse for the purposes of removing children from their families or prosecuting a criminal charge(5).

Teachers are state-mandated reporters meaning that if they observe signs of suspected child abuse or neglect, they are legally required to take action and report your suspicions to the proper authorities, usually Child Protective Services(6). There were more reportings by school teachers by nearly threefold after the legislative change mandating abuse reports, which made teachers almost one quarter the source of all reports of sexual abuse. Though there was an increase in reporting, the educators are known to be reluctant to report in many instances and situations(7) (KENNY). There was evidence that the gender of the reporter also was seen to be affected when the reporting decisions(8) (Crenshaw et al., 1995). (Finlayson and Koocher (1991))It was found that women were more likely than men to report and suspect cases of sexual abuse and trauma, regardless of the severity of the abuse(9).

Different jurisdictions have developed their own definitions of what constitutes child abuse for the purposes of removing children from their families or prosecuting a criminal charge(10). Aim of this study is to identify the perceived deterrence on

child abuse against children among all school teachers in Indian population.

Materials And Methods

The survey we developed for this study contained 3 sections. The first was about the years of teaching experience and type of school, whether it is government school, private, residential schools, etc. The second section is assessing about the perceived deterrence toward child abuse reporting. The questions were distributed among 100 teachers. The third section is about their reporting experience during the past years.

The questions were as follows:

Years of experience

Type of School curriculum:

Government school

Government aided

Private sector - matriculation

Residential school

Private sector - CBSE

- 1) Child abuse is a serious problem in our society
 - a) Agree
 - b) Strongly Agree
 - c) Disagree
 - d) Strongly disagree

- 2) Have there ever been times when you thought a child was being abused but did not report?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

- 3) Have you ever made a report of abuse to children services
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Maybe

- 4) As an educator, I have an obligation to report child abuse
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Maybe

- 5) At what level do you feel your post service training prepared you to deal with cases of child abuse?
 - a) Adequate
 - b) Inadequate
 - c) Minimal
 - d) I'm not trained

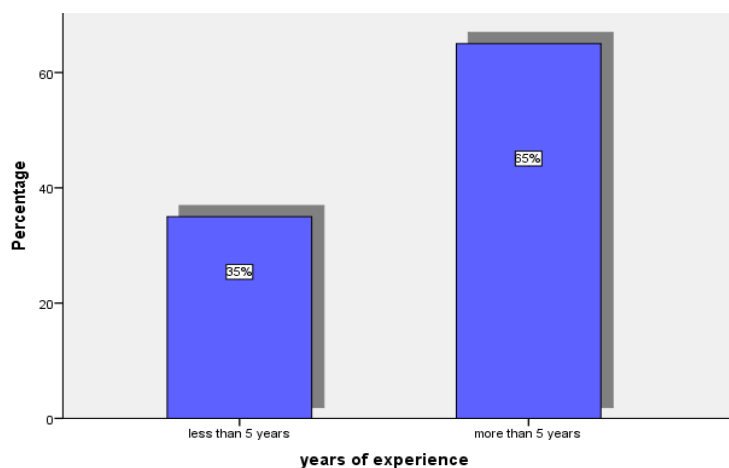
- 6) Have you ever made a report of abuse to children's services?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Maybe

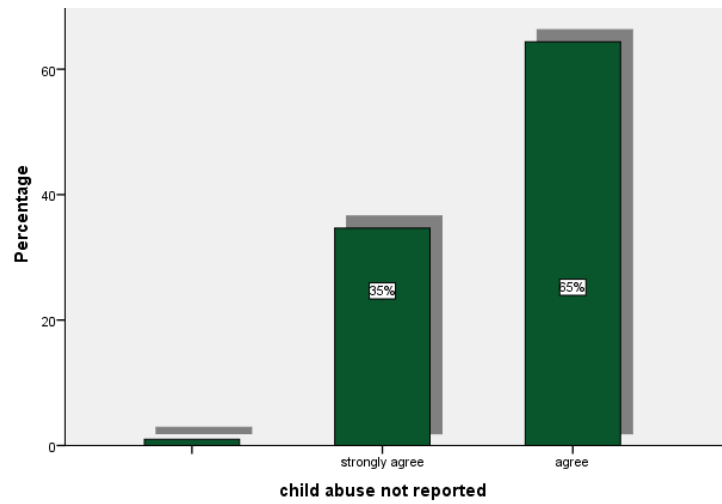
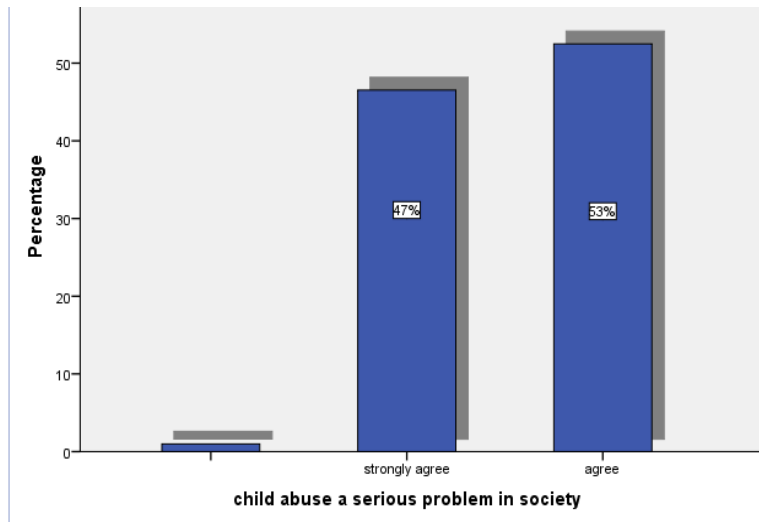
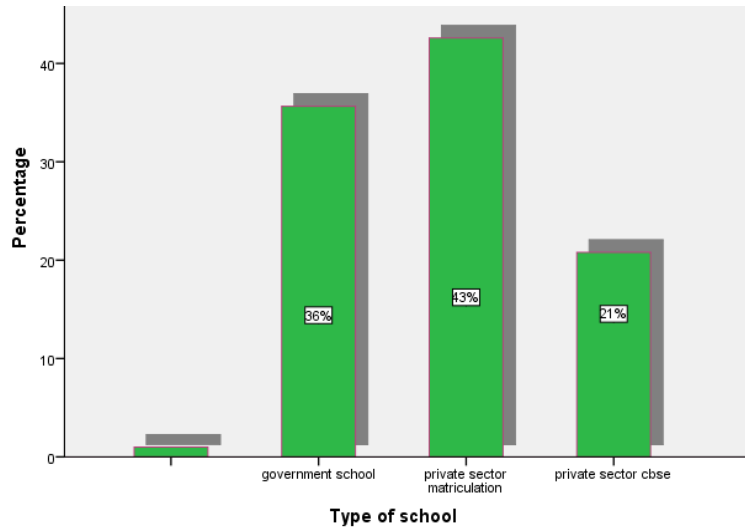
- 7) I'm aware of my schools procedures for child abuse reporting
 - e) Agree
 - f) Strongly Agree
 - g) Disagree

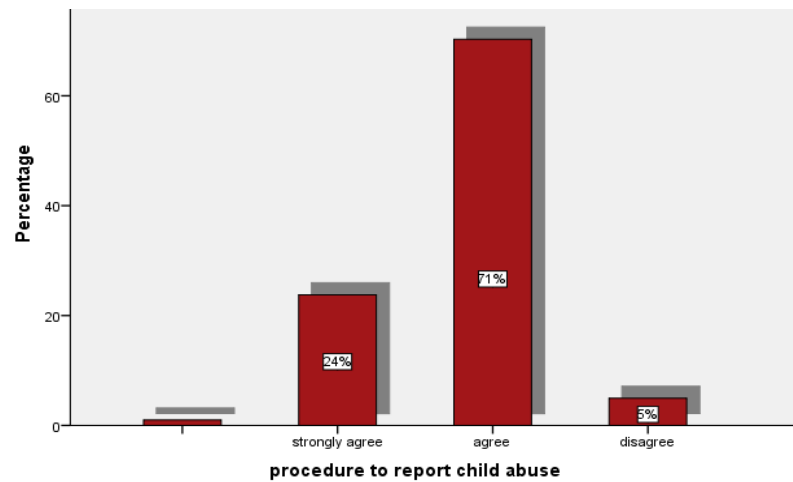
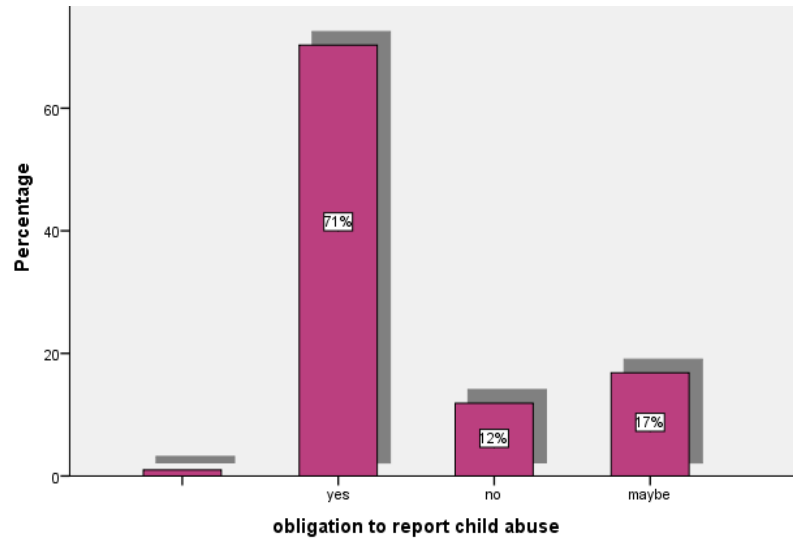
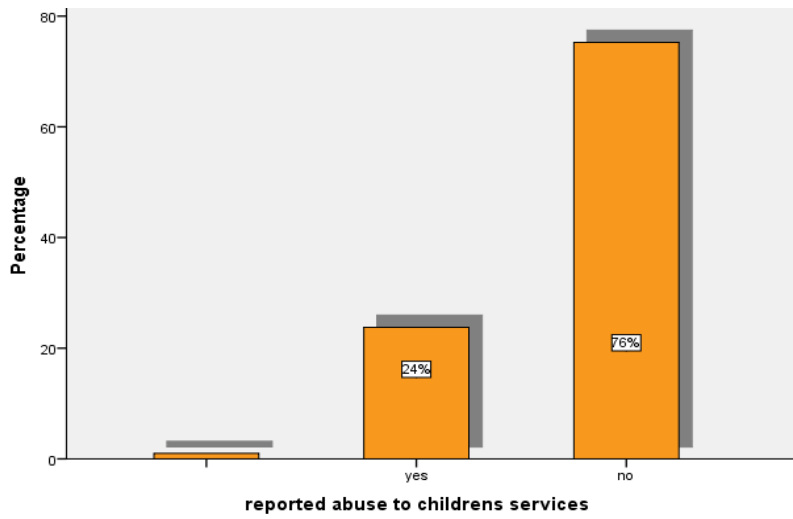
- h) Strongly disagree
- 8) Teachers should not be mandated to report about child abuse?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Disagree
 - d) Strongly disagree
- 9) At what level do you feel your preservice training prepared you to deal with cases of child abuse?
 - a) Adequate
 - b) Inadequate
 - c) Minimal
- 10) Have there ever been times when you thought a child was being abused but did not report?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 11) The procedures for reporting child abuse is familiar to me
 - a) Strongly disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Agree
 - d) Strongly agree
- 12) All parents have the right to discipline their children in whatever manner they see fit
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Disagree
 - d) Strongly disagree

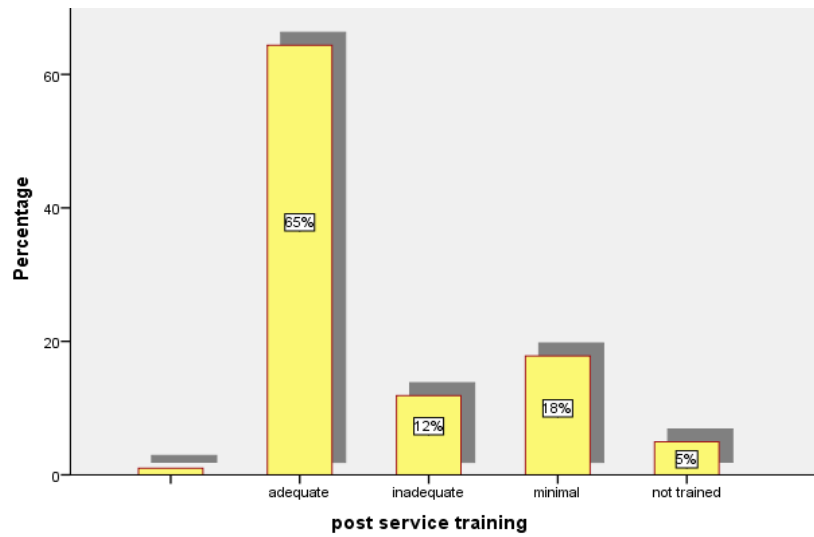
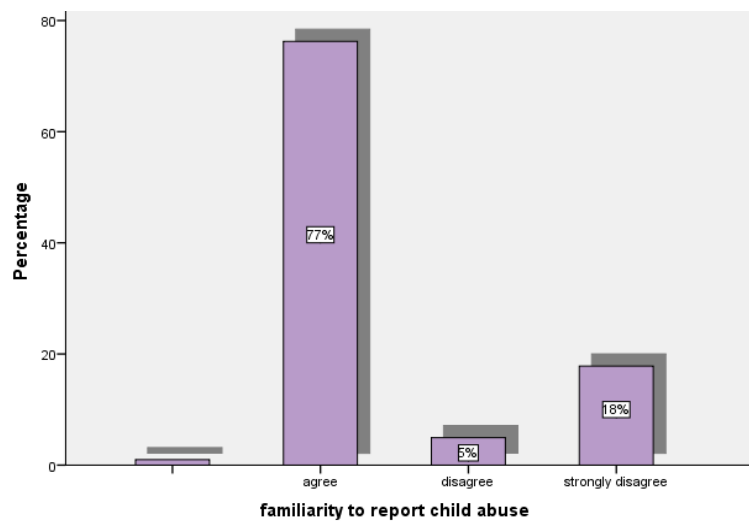
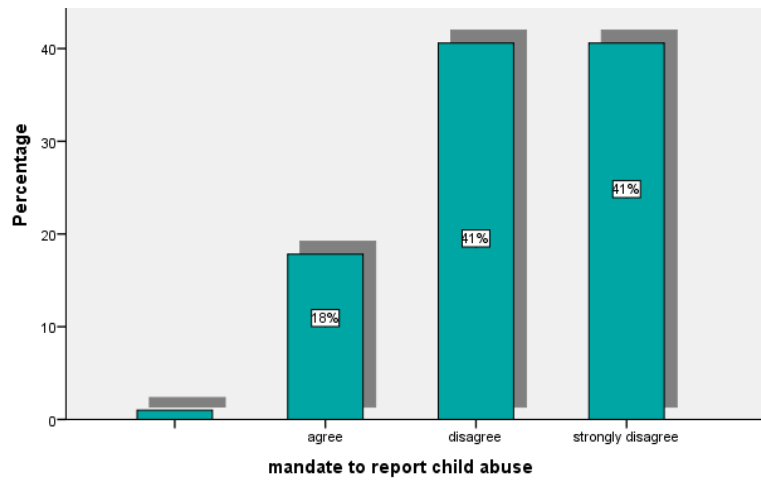
Results

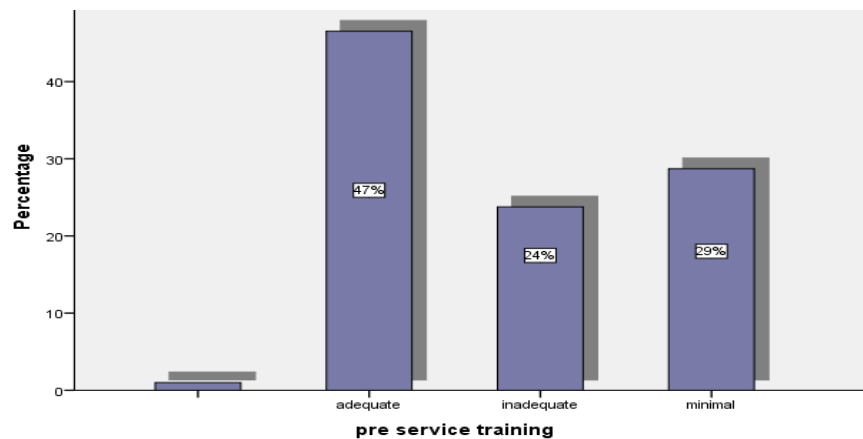
36% of government school teachers, 21% of private sector CBSE and 43% of private matriculation teachers have reported. 47% of teachers strongly agree that child abuse is a serious problem in our society but only 65% of teachers have reported child abuse if seen. 71% of the teachers thought they were obliged as an educator to report child abuse cases. 95% teachers were aware of the schools procedures to report child abuse. 81% teachers disagreed that they should be mandated to report child abuse if seen. Only 24% of teachers have reported cases to children services as they thought it was not their place to take action.











Discussion

In the US, Congress recognised the serious nature of childhood abuse and passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Public Law 93–247, in 1974 (11). States followed this action by establishing mandatory reporting laws for some professions. In all 51 US jurisdictions, school teachers and administrators are mandated to report child abuse and neglect to child protective services (12). In 1996, child protective agencies received and investigated over 2 million reports of alleged child abuse and neglect (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

All states have legislation requiring that certain professionals report child abuse. In all states, teachers are included as mandated reporters. Although laws vary from state to state, there are several commonalities including who must report and in what instances (i.e., suspicion of abuse) (13). The Florida reporting guidelines require that teachers report directly to child protective services. In addition to this mandate, some school districts require that teachers also then report to school administrations.

Child sexual abuse laws in India have been enacted as part of the child protection policies of India. The Parliament of India passed the 'Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Bill, 2011' regarding child sexual abuse on 22 May 2012 into an Act. The rules formulated by the government in accordance with the law have also been notified in November 2012 and the law has become ready for implementation. There have been many calls for more stringent laws.

53% of children in India face some form of child sexual abuse. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the cases of rape and murder of children increase every year. The growing complexities of life and the changed social economic conditions have exposed the children to new and different forms of abuse. But the sad state of affairs is that such heinous acts are reported less. It has such a psychological impact on the mind of the child that he seldom gathers the courage to speak about the act being committed against him. Even if he confides the fact with someone, the social factors let the fact be dumped under the fear of family reputation and other related issues. In fact child abuse is a violation of the basic human rights of a child. They have also introduced a child helpline - 1098.

The present findings were consistent with other research that found that school professionals are reluctant to report child abuse violations, especially by members of their staff (i.e., other teachers). The most commonly cited reason for failure to report this abuse was fear of making an inaccurate report, followed by feeling as though child protective services does not offer help to maltreated children(14). It seems that the fear of making a false report outweighs the desire to follow legal standards in protecting children. The responses to these vignettes highlight the need for educating teachers about child abuse reporting. In these instances, both of which were reportable, most teachers failed to respond(15)

Investigating the potential barriers to child abuse reporting, Abrahams, Casey, and Doro(16) concluded that 52% of responding teachers were concerned about potential damage to the parent-teacher and teacher-child relationships, and that a lack of support from the school in making a report was a significant reason for failing to report.

The significant difference found between special education teachers and regular education teachers is worth discussing. Special education teachers made more reports than regular education teachers but did not report having any better pre- or post-service training.(17) Special education teachers may be more apt to report abuse, as they may be more likely to see abused children. Some research examines the higher likelihood a child has for being abused if they have emotional or other difficulties. A child who has a behavior problem at home may be at greater risk for being physically abused by a parent who lacks appropriate parenting skills. Much research demonstrates the connection between children with disabilities and child maltreatment. It is known that children with disabilities constitute a disproportionately high percentage of abused children (18)

Many teachers report not being adequately trained to confront the problem. Several studies report that teachers do not receive adequate training on child abuse during their college education or in-service training programs (19). Abrahams and colleagues found that the majority of teachers receive minimal instruction on identifying, reporting, and intervening in suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. Further, teachers are dissatisfied with the quality and amount of child abuse education which they receive (20) found teachers to be the least knowledgeable about child abuse when compared with mental health professionals and physicians(21,22).

Teachers should be aware of various aspects involved in educating students.(23,Based on the present study one of the main reasons why the reports were not made, were because of their attitude that parents have the right to discipline their child in any form. We all thrive on encouragement. Replacing criticism with encouragement can have a powerful effect on your child.

Conclusion

Teachers are the next person they are in daily contact with after their guardians. This study clearly outlines the need for enhanced training in child abuse reporting laws and procedures for school teachers. There is a definite need for more thorough training for teachers on child abuse reporting. It can be concluded that teachers should have knowledge about child abuse

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