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Knowledge, awareness, and preventive strategies adopted in child sexual abuse by mothers in selected Medical Officer of Health areas, Matara District

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Background: Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a very serious problem in current societies. Consequences of CSA affect the physical, psychological and sociological wellbeing of a child.

Objective: The main objective was to investigate knowledge, awareness and the already followed preventive strategies of CSA of mothers in two Medical Officer of Health (MOH) areas in Matara District.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study was performed in selected two MOH areas in Matara District, Sri Lanka with the participation of 106 mothers who attended child welfare clinics. All the attending mothers were selected according to the numbers given in the registers (systematic random sampling) of the child welfare clinics. Data was collected from the mothers using an interviewer-administer questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested with 20 mothers. The data analysis was carried out using the SPSS version (26.0).

Results: The study revealed that the majority of mothers were knowledgeable about CSA (75.5%). The study revealed that 89.6% of respondents were aware that both sexes could be sexually abused. The majority of mothers (75.5%) were more aware about physical and psychological changes due to CSA. Bleeding from the genital tract (93.4%) and getting pregnant (93.4%) were the commonly known physical changes of CSA. Developing of phobias (95.3%), troubled school performances (92.5%), and poor self-esteem (92.5%) were the commonly known psychological changes of CSA. The majority of mothers believed that a school van (91.4%) was the environment, most vulnerable to CSA. All mothers (100%) had implemented that being alert about their child's odd physical complains, being alert about child's behavior, and frequent observation of wherever the child goes as preventive strategies of CSA.

Conclusion: The knowledge, awareness and practices adopted by mothers to prevent CSA are adequate. One case of child abuse builds up endless problems that affect socially. Therefore, an in depth island wide study is mandatory to address the real world problems.