

Preventive Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse in School Settings: A Meta - Analysis

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2023-10035295

Volume: 10

Issue: 3

Month: January

Year: 2023

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 15.10.2022

Accepted: 05.12.2022

Published: 01.01.2023

Citation:

Arulselvi, V., and N. Geetha. "Preventive Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse in School Settings: A Meta - Analysis." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2023, pp. 6–11.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v10i3.5295>




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Abstract

Most likely, child sexual abuse is a health issue that affects children and has the wide-ranging negative effects. The prevention of child sexual abuse in school settings is examined in this paper, along with a number of other factors that may affect the lives of victims. An electronic database search has been conducted to identify literature related to (child sexual) abuse preventive strategies given at schools in English. Investigators reviewed 62 studies out of which 13 studies illustrated the outcomes of the child sexual abuse preventive strategies followed in schools were successful. It was found that very few research had been conducted to prevent child sexual abuse in school settings, and additional intervention techniques were required globally.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse, Preventive Strategies, School-Settings, Consequences, Meta-Analysis.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a worldwide problem which adversely affects physical, cognitive, emotional, social, behavioral, and neurobiological aspects throughout life time. Meta-analysis of Paolucci, Genuis, and Violato (2001) confirmed the link between child sexual abuse and its subsequent negative short and long-term effects on children's development. Child sexual abuse includes all types of sexual victimisation of children-penetrative or non-penetrative sexual intercourse, pornography, sexual harassment, commercial sexual exploitation, sex tourism, and online exploitation. Andrews, Corry, Slade, Issakidis, and Swanston (2004) analysed various anecdotal and experimental evidences and suggested that child sexual abuse causes negative psychological outcomes such as poor self-esteem, lack of a sense of control, difficulties with intimacy and continuing sexual difficulties in the victim's life. The meta-analysis of 55 studies from 24 countries showed that the prevalence of CSA (non-contact abuse, contact abuse, and mixed sexual abuse) ranged from 31% for girls and 7% for boys (Barth, Bermetz, Heim, Trelle, & Tonia, 2013). Child Sexual Abuse is very difficult to notice unless the victim discloses it. Due to rigid cultural beliefs, negative stigma, and threats from the offender, children do not report and disclose the abuse (UP Manila, UoE, CPNF, & UNICEF, 2016). As National Crime Records Bureau (2020) indicated that rape cases of children increasing ever year, preventive strategies must be developed to protect children.

Child sexual abuse among school children is linked with high levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Yancey, Hansen, & Naufel, 2011). Since the child sexual abuse phenomenon has been reported in higher rates nowadays in several countries, it is imperative to highlight the social importance of apprehending the nature and scope of this problem. Because child victims manifest many social and academic problems (Blanchard Dallaire & Hebert, 2014; Daignault & Hebert, 2009) which, in turn, represent a substantial economic burden for society (Letourneau, Brown, Fang, Hassan, & Mercy, 2018). Children's rights must be at the vanguard of government laws and priorities.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is to critically review the available studies on the effectiveness of child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention programs.

Need for the Study

Many aspects of the CSA make it difficult to identify the true magnitude of the problem. To estimate the scope of the problem, one method is to count the instances of sexual assault that are reported to professionals. Epidemiological studies have had a major role in identifying the consequences of sexual abuse of children which shows that children who experienced sexual abuse may have several mental health outcomes such as depression, suicide, multiple personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, and substance abuse, sexual problems of promiscuity, prostitution, teenage pregnancy, and criminality. With the response of the growing knowledge of consequences of child sexual abuse, researchers will be able to evolve preventive strategies that stop the phenomena from increasing globally.

Methodology

Researchers reviewed totally 62 studies from various databases from 2000 to 2022 out of which 13 studies highlighted about prevention of child sexual abuse in schools and its outcomes. Electronic database searches were carried out to find out literature related to child sexual abuse prevention education given at schools in English language. The

databases searched were; ERIC, JSTOR; Research Gate, ProQuest; PubMed, Zlibrary, PsychInfo and Science Direct. The search word child sexual abuse in combination preventive strategies, school settings, impact, causes and victims, school-based prevention program, sexual abuse prevention education and role of school were given. The number of papers identified in the searches was 62, and they were screened by the title and skim-reading abstracts. Abstracts deemed relevant in this process were read more thoroughly. Studies were considered eligible for inclusion criteria in the review if they were: i) published in a peer-reviewed journal, ii) reporting on causes and impact of child sexual abuse on children aged between 0–17 years and iii) school-based child sexual abuse prevention program. The results of the meta-analyses were also examined.

Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

Several studies show that child sexual abuse covers the entire spectrum of sexual offenses committed against children up to the age of seventeen. A child sexual abuse offense includes a wide variety of non-contact offenses such as exhibitionism and the use of children to create pornography, sexual fondling, and penetrating acts committed by a child sexual offender who may be an adult as well as a child or youth themselves.

Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse

Sexually abused children suffer more psychological consequences than children affected by other forms of abuse. Langev in, Cossette, and Hebert (2016) found that sexually abused pre-school children displayed greater emotion regulation difficulties than non-abused children. Daignault and Hebert(2009) showed in his study that girl victims aged between 7 to 12 years displayed withdrawal symptoms and social problems. Early abuse may lead to developmental issues for children. As Finkelhor (2009) indicated in his research that Parents, teacher, and educator concerns about the safety of their children should extend to society as a whole in order to prevent spectacles of child sexual abuse. A stranger, a member of the school staff, a neighbour, a friend, or a neighbour may sexually abuse a victim. (Butler 2013; Snyder, 2000). Arulselvi and Geetha

(2022) revealed from their survey that 58% (N-66) of the girl children believed that children are never sexually abused by their family members which exposed the fact that children especially girls are not aware of the perpetrators. Amedee, Perreault, Hebert, and Cyr (2019) reported that 72.8% of the children experienced sexual abuse by their family members. It is the well-known fact that when children abused by trusted person or a family member, it will cause serious behavioural outcomes such as withdrawal, isolation, and difficulties in social relationships. As such, it seems relevant to investigate consequences of child sexual abuse and its preventives strategies in school settings.

A child may experience a variety of emotions, such as dread, unloved, unsafety, or embarrassment, depending on whether the abuse occurs at home, school, or in the community (Putnam, F. W. 2003). In a study conducted by Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates (2010) whose participants demonstrated substance use to deal with their early trauma of child sexual abuse. Since elementary school children spend their most time, it is vital to talk about child sexual abuse and its prevention in educational systems (Wurtele, Moreno, & Kenny, 2008). School based programs may serve as prevention which help children to identify dangerous situations. According to Wurtele, Moreno, and Kenny (2008) the main objective of the school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs includes teach children how to say “No,” teach children to report dangerous situations (feeling hurt or unsafe) and recognize unsafe situations (Wurtele, Moreno, & Kenny, 2008). Preventive measures seem to be the most effective way to diminish harmful effects of child sexual abuse (Guterman, 2001; Renk, Liljequist, Steinberg, Bosco, & Phares, 2002). A central objective has been to teach children how to recognize dangerous situations and avoid abuse by identifying boundary violations, unwanted forms of contact, and other ways in which offenders groom or desensitize victims. Moreover, it is important to teach them how to refuse approaches and invitations, how to end interactions, and how to seek help.

Prevention Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse

Teaching and non-teaching staff are in an ideal position to identify, prevent, and support victims

of child abuse because of their regular contact with students. The majority of research on the primary prevention of child sexual abuse examined child-targeted personal safety education programmes which these programmes teach of child sexual abuse awareness and personal safety strategies to potential victims using the specified curriculum followed in schools (Finkelhor, 2009). For children to be protected from sexual abuse, protective behaviors must be taught. As Zwi, Woolfenden, Wheeler, O’Brien, Tait, and Williams (2007) mentioned in his meta-analysis, children of all ages who have participated in an education program are six to seven times more likely to demonstrate protective behaviour in simulated situations. David and Gidyez (2000) and Topping and Barron (2009) found from their meta-analysis of child sexual abuse prevention programs indicated that effective prevention programs such as active participation and behaviour skills training, such as modelling, rehearsal and reinforcement resulted in higher knowledge and skill outcome measurements. Guterman (2001) indicated that adopting particular best practise standards can help child abuse prevention programmes increase the success of their efforts.

Children can be protected from sexual abuse by creating awareness about child sexual abuse among teachers, doctors, social workers, policymakers, communities, and families of those who have the greatest responsibility for them. The eight-week Psycho-educational School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Program implemented by Eroguland Hasirci (2013) on Turkish Elementary Students which includes personal rights, my body belongs to me, good touch-bad touch discrimination, breaking promise, body safety rules, say “No”, and bad secrets, talking with a grown-up who believes the child, sexual abuse is never a child’s fault, etc. has been successful. Leclerc, Wortley, & Smallbone (2011) showed that self-protective measures that were taught in child abuse prevention programs (telling offenders NO for touch) was at 89% effective in real life situation. It has been shown that age-appropriate curricular inputs such as body appreciation, boundary setting, appropriate and inappropriate touching, appropriate care taking roles, gender roles, and body anatomy are effective

in preventing child sexual abuse in elementary schools (Gibson & Leitenberg, 2000). Based on their observations, Macintyre and Carr (2000) concluded that nine different concepts in school-based programs, such as (1) Body ownership (2) touch (3) say no (4) escape strategy (5) secrecy; 6) intuition (7) support system (8) blame 9) bullying, were taught through a broad structured curriculum that increased participants' safety skills and knowledge.

Tobin and Kessner (2002) developed 'The Keeping Kids Safe: Child Protection Curriculum' mandated in all public schools and pre-schools in Australia, taught four main areas such as relationships, recognizing and reporting abuse, protective strategies and the right to be safe to keep young children safe and well-informed. Children who have experienced sexual abuse are at risk for a variety of physical, mental, behavioural, and social issues that can lead to academic failure, drug and alcohol abuse, and legal issues (Fry, McCoy, Swales, 2012; Fry, & Blight, 2016). The Safe Schools for Teens intervention raise awareness of child sexual abuse and encourages reporting of it. The intervention also lessens dating violence, demonstrating the value of a systems-strengthening and mindfulness-focused strategy in reducing adolescent violence. Child Sexual Abuse education in schools has shown that children gain knowledge and may be able to better identify inappropriate touch scenarios after such a program (Walsh, Zwi, Woolfenden, & Shlonsky, 2018).

Bernadette, Madrid, Gilda, Lopez, Leonila, Dans, Deborah, Fry, Francis, Pante, Alberto (2020) proclaimed in his study that The Safe Schools for Teens intervention significantly enhanced self-reported knowledge of children on abuse, dating violence and adolescent's impulse control and emotional clarity. The mindfulness focused approach followed in Safe Schools for Teens intervention also resulted in reducing dating violence. The findings of research performed by Chen and Chen (2005) in China demonstrate that parents should be aware of in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills in order to educate and protect their children. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, parental and educational collaboration is necessary in order to develop a Child Sexual Abuse prevention programme that meets the

needs of the children. We reviewed the literature on school-based child sexual abuse prevention. Based on findings in these studies, all of the concepts and skills addressed in a school-based child sexual abuse prevention program can be applied toward Child Sexual Abuse prevention. All these prevention interventions provide a comprehensive understanding about how to convey a message to students, which is key for enduring change. The outcome studies are promising, highlighting the potential of therapeutic intervention with adolescents as a means of preventing sexual abuse (O'Reilly, Carr, Marshall, & Beckett, 2004).

Conclusion

More study is obviously required to discover and create such preventative techniques in India. Because, as of yet, there is no one prevention strategy identified in India that support success in outcomes of child sexual abuse prevention. This paper concludes that preventive interventions in schools are beneficial in boosting children's learning, according to the literature on school-based sexual abuse prevention. Research on the evidence of enhanced protective behaviours in children exposed to school-based programmes to stop sexual abuse is necessary. According to the reviewed researches, victims of child sex abuse are particularly susceptible to becoming sexually victimised again in the future. hence, there is an urgent need for research into school-based preventative strategies and therapies for child sexual abuse.

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