



# International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation

ISSN: 2582-7138

Received: 02-12-2020; Accepted: 04-01-2021

www.allmultidisciplinaryjournal.com

Volume 2; Issue 1; January-February 2021; Page No. 06-09

## The awareness level on POCSO act 2012 among senior secondary students in Kottayam district

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### Abstract

**Background:** Awareness can create protection for mankind, especially for our children who are the future assets of our nation. The aim of the study was to evaluate the awareness level of POCSO Act 2012 among high school students.

**Method:** This study was included 60 respondents from different high schools in Kottayam district. Author applied self made questionnaire to assess the awareness level of students regarding the act and used descriptive statistics to

analyse the data.

**Result:** The study evidences that, majority of the students have awareness on child abuses. But they are lack in knowledge on legal procedures.

**Conclusion:** Study concludes that students and parents must know the legal procedures well. So the awareness is an essential tool for the better life our future assets called children.

**Keywords:** Awareness, POCSO Act, High School Students

### Introduction

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness  
James Thurber

Awareness is knowledge and it empowers people. And today with the help of mass media, we can create awareness. Making of awareness or being aware about a thing or situation is the best way to act in circumstances. Awareness is tied up with the word realization. It is also a way of learning. When we get aware about something in our society then we try to make opinion. A well informed public opinion is essential to the growth of political and social awareness. Awareness is a flowering of relaxation. Environments are continually changing; therefore awareness knowledge must be constantly maintained. Individuals interact with the environment, and maintenance of awareness is accomplished through this interaction. The awareness creation is beginning from childhood itself. "Around school age a child's awareness of personal memory transitions into a sense of one's own self. At this stage, a child begins to develop interests along with likes and dislikes. This transition enables the awareness of an individual's past, present, and future to grow as conscious experiences are remembered more often" (Rochat, 2003) [4].

Children getting aware from the family, school, peer group, and environment etc. and it influences in their behaviour. When they get aware about something will help them to feel relaxed and tension free. Children have only one chance of a childhood. They deserve to be protected from harm, to enjoy good emotional, mental and physical health, and to feel that they belong in their home, at school and in their local community. Child abuse violates the most basic rights of children and adolescents. Child abuse is a massive, daily and underreported problem that affects the population of world wide. It manifests itself in different forms, including physical and psychological aggression, rape and sexual abuse, and takes place in the home, in neighbourhoods, at school, at work and in legal and child protection institutions. Abuse tends to be transmitted from one generation to the next, and the individuals most often responsible are parents or other adult members of the household. All persons under the age of 18 have the right to physical and psychological integrity and to protection from all forms of violence.

Nonetheless, we know that for various social and cultural reasons, children and adolescents suffer violence in the home, at school, in legal and child protection systems, at work and in the community. Thus, children and adolescents are abused precisely in those spaces and places that should offer them protection, affection, developmental stimulation, shelter and promotion for their rights. One of the factors that make them highly vulnerable is their lack of autonomy due to their young age and the consequent high levels of emotional, economic and social dependency on adults or institutions (Ellar, 2006) [2], which make it difficult for them to put a stop to the abuse, request help or report the situation. Violence is understood to be "the intentional use of force or physical power, either by act or threat, against oneself, another person or a group or community, which causes or has substantial likelihood of causing injuries, death, psychological harm, developmental disruptions, disturbances or deprivations" (WHO, 2002) [6].

In the same sense, child abuse is defined as “acts or carried with intent to cause immediate harm to the victim. The manifestations of violence suffered by children are diverse. They range from physical punishment to other forms of cruel and degrading treatment at the hands of their parents or other family members, or by persons responsible for their care in child protection facilities, schools or the workplace. Even at the social level, children identified as “a danger or threat to society” may be abused by the police. Children and adolescents, especially girls, may also be subjected to psychological violence and sexual abuse in the different environments where they grow up (Ellar, 2006) [2]. Evidence suggests that only a small part of the violence perpetrated against children is reported to the legal system and investigated by the authorities, and few offenders are brought to trial.

Furthermore, while in many places in the world there are no reliable systems for filing complaints, there are estimates that every year 275 million children around the world are the victims of violence in their households, and some 40 million persons under 15 suffer violence, abuse and neglect. These incidents are reportedly taking place in different contexts: in families, in schools, in the community, on the street and in work situations (UNICEF, 2007) [5]. Until now, and despite the efforts that have been made, the countries in this region have not developed an effective response to child abuse. One of the main difficulties in developing such a response lies in the lack of information on the true scope and characteristics of abuse, especially when it takes place in the home and in the family context.

A cursory analysis of the records of complaints leads to the conclusion that, in most cases, the abusers are known to the victims, and in large proportion are family members; and that physical abuse is inversely proportional to the age of the child, while sexual abuse generally occurs when the victims, mainly girls, are between 7 and 11 years of age. This latter form of child abuse is the one least reported, especially when committed by parents or close family members.

### Significance of the study

With the offences against children growing at an alarming pace, it makes one wonder whether people are getting sensitised or rather desensitised. Well, one aspect stands out pretty clear. The need to run a massive educational drive, involving relevant departments and implementing authorities, to create awareness on Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012. In this contemporary period, the awareness about POCSO Act is necessary to save our children from child sexual abuse. This study signifies the awareness on POCSO Act among high school students. The need for studying this topic is relevant in Kerala, especially in the Kottayam district, because no studies on this topic are yet conducted here. This study is focus on the knowledge on abuse to the students and resources of student getting aware about the POCSO Act. This study lights on the supportive system of students. This indicates the changes in their life by the awareness of POCSO Act and child abuse. There were many cases reported in Kerala related to child sexual abuse. This indicates the poor knowledge regarding the laws for children relevant in our country. Also there is a provision that every school or educational institutions should appoint a counsellor and he/she will be from the social work discipline. So the studies

on this topic can give better understanding about the awareness on POCSO Act among high school students in Kottayam district and finding appropriate solutions.

### Statement of the problem

We all perceive children as the symbol of innocence and care freeness, but what if a child bears an untold pain behind the innocent eyes? What if a child’s innocence taken advantage off? Even before we point out our fingers towards the government, we should ask ourselves if the common people including us know the existence laws for the purpose of protecting children. And also need to understand the knowledge on abuse and act’s among children. Study on Child Abuse India 2007’ which revealed that more than 53% of children in India have probably been sexually abused and many have never shared the fact of this abuse with anyone. The legislature has done its bit of providing a statute which exclusively deals with sexual offences against the innocent mass of the society. But, what makes a statute alive is its awareness and implementation. Today, even most of the judicial officers and Public Prosecutors aren’t aware of the ‘Protection of Child from Sexual Offences, Act 2012’ (POCSO) and it is because of such lack of awareness that they refer to the ‘Indian Penal Code’ for sexual crimes against children which prescribes lesser degree of punishments for such offences. This does not provide complete justice to the child because of many loopholes that were found in the Indian Penal Code with respect to children. In order to understand what rights a child has regarding such heinous offences against them, it’s very important for all of us to understand the ‘POCSO’ Act and then spread awareness all around in the society.

### Base objective

- To study the awareness on POCSO Act 2012 among high school students in Kottayam district

### Specific objectives

- To study the knowledge on abuse to the students
- To study the knowledge on POCSO Act among these students
- To study the resources of students getting aware about POCSO Act
- To study the supportive system of the students to get aware about the act and child abuse
- To understand the influence of knowledge on POCSO Act in their life

### Methodology

This study was conducted among the senior secondary schools in Kottayam district age group between 16 to 18 years. In this research, quantitative approach and explanatory research design were followed. For the study researcher used probability sampling and stratified random sampling method. The self-made questionnaire was used for the collection of data after checking its reliability, validity and normality. This study followed descriptive statistics with the help SPSS and all ethical considerations.

### Discussion based on Analysis

This discussion part is based on analysis which is generated from the base objectives of the study. And it clearly mentioned below.

**Socio-demographic details**

- In this research majority of the children in the age of 14 years (48.33%)
- The composition of male and females are equal in this study (50-50%)
- Most of the students are coming from rural areas (51.7%)

**Knowledge on abuse to the students**

Almost 86.4% children were aware about the term child abuse. And 95% children stated that the complete right over the body is to them only. The Respondents had knowledge on different types of abuse such as physical touch from others without permission, neglect, teasing and blaming a child unnecessarily, lack of consideration from parents, drug abuse among family members, etc.

- Most of the students aware about the news in social Medias (75%).
- Above 95% students thinks that, they are not secure in the current society.
- Majority of the students have conscious on the rights over their body.
- Almost 8.33% students affected physical touch from others without their permission.
- Above 18% of the students get neglect from various places such as house, school etc.
- Majority of them did not have any neglecting and physical touch from others.
- 5% students blaming unnecessarily from others. And 95% could not have any problem in this area.
- 35.5% students were getting unnecessary teasing from others.
- Majority of the students get consideration from the parents on their health issues. But 6.7% did not get the consideration.
- Alcoholism among the family is 39%. And 21.67 % students have psychological or mental disturbance due to the alcoholism.
- 5% students said that, they are the victims of abuse. Because they forced to touch the body parts of others
- 30% students familiar with the term child pornography. But they did not watch it before.
- Researcher fines that, almost 70% students have awareness on the policies and legislative measures in our country to secure the children.
- But, about 60% students do not aware about the programmes undertaken in our Panchayat level.

**Knowledge on POCSO Act among the students**

- Almost 48% students have the knowledge on what is POCSO Act.
- Almost 43.33% students agrees that, any act that is insulting a child is considered as child abuse and it will comes under POCSO Act 2012.
- 81.67% students' opinions that, taking unwanted pictures of a child and publishing it is a serious crime under POCSO Act.
- Almost 63.33% students agree that, bail is not granted for an offender under POCSO Act.

**Resources of students getting aware about POCSO Act and child abuse**

- Respondents getting awareness mostly from social Medias (45%). And 15% awareness they are getting from the family or from the parents

- 75% students interested to watch news on issues related with children
- Majority of the children need sex education and child rights as a part of their school curriculum

**Supportive system of the students to get aware about the act and child**

- 63.3% students keeping good touch with their teachers. They can share everything with those teachers
- About 39% children have the counselling facility in the Schools. But 20% did not have the facility
- Researcher fined about 40% students share their problems first with parents. 30% are have the most reachable person is their best friend. 10% are sharing with parents and friends. 3.3% students share with their teachers. And 6.7% students share with their siblings. About 3.3% share with best friends, parents and teachers. 3.3% share with both parents and teachers. 1.7 % share with best friend, parents and teachers

**Influence of the knowledge on POCSO Act in their life**

- 55% students have a trust in our current legislative system. But 45% did not have a trust in this system
- 56.7% students increased the level of responding attitude. They responded in such situations
- Majority of the students have an influence to change the level of self-confidence and willpower
- Almost 86.7 % students have realization of Good touch and Bad touch
- Most of the students have influence in changing attitude towards the police department. Now they easily approach the police for their needs

According the research lights on the awareness of child abuse and POCSO Act among students in the Kottayam district and most of the schools are providing counselling facility to the children. Both the rural and urban students included in the study. Research shows that, respondents are both boys and girls between the ages of 13-15. They are equal in number. The study is evidence that, majority of the students have awareness on child abuses. But they lack knowledge on legal procedures. Children not have knowledge in policies and programmes for them. In Panchayat level they have many programmes based in ICDS centres. The study evidence almost 48% students have the knowledge on what is POCSO Act. Almost 43.33% students agrees that, any act that is insulting a child is considered as child abuse and it will comes under POCSO Act 2012. And 81.67% students' opinions that, taking unwanted pictures of a child and publishing it are a serious crime under POCSO Act. Almost 63.33% students agree that, bail is not granted for an offender under POCSO Act. And this clearly shows the awareness of POCSO Act among the students.

The research fined, the knowledge on POCSO Act influenced the life of children in many ways. Such as, 55% students have a trust in our current legislative system. But 45% did not have a trust in this system. And 56.7% students increased the level of responding attitude. They responded in such situations. Majority of the students have an influence to change the level of self confidence and willpower. Almost 86.7% students have realization of Good touch and Bad touch. Most of the students have influence in changing attitude towards the police department. Now they easily approach the police for their needs.

**Suggestions**

- Need to provide awareness classes on different types of abuses to the children
- Counselling facility is compulsory in every School
- Children wanted to read news on current issues
- Parents should give consideration in their children and parents need to avoid alcohol abuse
- Sex education and child rights should include in the school syllabus and teach the child to react and respond when they get abused from other
- Legal authorities need to promote child friendly programmes for avoiding stigma among the children

**Conclusion**

Awareness is the ability to directly know and perceive, to feel or to be cognizant of event. It is the state of being conscious of something. A child's right to survival begins before a child is born. According to Government of India, a child life begins after twenty weeks of conception. Hence the right to survival is inclusive of the child rights to be born, right to minimum standards of food, shelter and clothing, and the right to live with dignity. A child has the right to be protected from neglect, exploitation and abuse at home, and elsewhere. Child protection is about ensuring that children have a security net to depend on, and if they happen to fall through the holes in the system, the system has the responsibility to provide the child with the necessary care and rehabilitation to bring them back into the safety net. Now a day's children are facing lot of exploitation from family, school and relatives. So the need of protection on the child rights is necessary. POCSO Act 2012 is very essential for the protection of children from sexual abuse. And the awareness will help the victims to react or respond to the problem in such a good manner. Awareness is knowledge and it helps to the development of self.

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