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## PARENTS AWARENESS RELATED TO CHILD ABUSE MEASURES: A SAUDI COMMUNITY-BASED STUDY

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**ABSTRACT: Background:** Child abuse is a common episode, but rarely predictable. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the parent's awareness related to child abuse measures. **Methodology:** This was a cross-sectional survey of 400 Saudi parents about child abuse-related factors. All participants were 20 years or older. **Results:** Out of the 400 parents, 96/400(24%) (41/175 (23.4%) were fathers, and 55/225 (24.4%) were mothers), have witnessed child abuse during the past 12 months. The most reported type of child abuse was the physical followed by verbal and psychological, representing 42/96 (43.8%), 28/96 (29.2%), and 21/96 (21.9%), respectively. About 19/41 (46.3%) and 10/41 (24.4%) of the fathers have witnessed physical and psychological abuse correspondingly, whereas, around 23/55 (41.8%), and 20/55 (36.4%) of the mothers have reported physical and verbal abuse in this order. Out of the 41 children reported by fathers, 18/41(44%) were males, and 23/41(56%) were females, hence, out of the 55 children witnessed by mothers, 23/55 (42%) were males, and 32/55 (58%) were females. **Conclusion:** Child abuse is common in Saudi Arabia, with the most frequent being physical, verbal, and emotional. Fathers possessed higher levels of awareness towards child abuse-related factors compared to mothers.

**INTRODUCTION:** Child abuse or neglect is common worldwide, and it seems to be epidemic in several parts of the world, with the most common forms being emotional maltreatment, physical abuse, sexual abuse and physical neglect<sup>1</sup>. Since the beginning of reporting child abuse in the 1960s, the number of victims increasing each year. Among ages 0 to 5 years, child abuse and neglect may represent a prime source of injury and death<sup>2</sup>. One of the most apparent obstacles toward implementing sound health and social welfare policies and intervention strategies is the lack of epidemiological data in this context.

However, in recent years new approaches have been developed to characterize the nature and magnitude of child abuse and neglect<sup>3</sup>. Child abuse and neglect is a multifaceted life practice that happens once a parent or caregiver does intend or possible harm to a child, comprising doings of command and omission. Child abuse is a common episode, but rarely predictable. Thus, it is difficult to find out the exact number of cases due to the large unevenness in reported epidemiological data across diverse studies in this context.

Health care practitioners are the most appropriate to the group to face the tragedy of child abuse, as they have the chance to see most of the child's family members and consequently can explore the child abuse associated factors<sup>4</sup>. Although several studies are assessing the awareness regarding child abuse, there is a lack of data showing the exact figures of child abuse in the country. In a study from Saudi Arabia to find out the family profile of

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child abuse, physical abuse was the most common form of abuse (42%), followed by neglect (39%), sexual abuse (14%), and emotional abuse (4%)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, this study aimed to assess parent’s awareness related to child abuse measures.

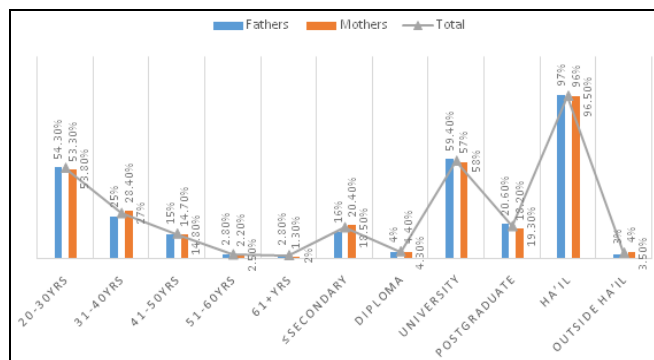
**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** This was a cross-sectional survey of 400 Saudi parents about child abuse-related factors. All participants were 20 years or older. Participants were randomly selected from the general community regardless of social class, economic status, or education level. A purposeful questionnaire was designed, and information was obtained during a personal interview. Besides demographical data such as age, gender, residence, education level, social class, family income, and family type, the questionnaire also included questions.

During the past twelve months, have you witnessed your child or any child be abuse?; Type of child abuse; Gender of abuse child; Source of child abuse; Do you think burning type abuse; Do you think keeping child alone is a type of abuse; Do you think biting of a child is a type of abuse; Do you think harming of a child is a type of abuse; Do you think smoking near kids is a type of abuse.

**Ethical Consent:** Each participant was asked to sign a written ethical consent before the interview. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee at the College of Medicine, University of Ha’il.HREC00136/CM-UOH.04/20.

**Data Analysis:** Obtained variables were analyzed using SPSS software. Frequencies and percentages were produced.

**RESULTS:** This cross-sectional survey included 400 parents aged 20 years or older, comprising 175/400 (43.7%) fathers and 225/400 (56.3%) mothers. About 215(53.8%), 108(27%), and 59 (14.8%) were at age groups, 20-30, 31-40, and 41-50 years, in this order. Fathers and mothers were similarly distributed concerning fathers or mothers group, as indicated in **Table 1, Fig. 1**.



**FIG. 1: PARENTS BY DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

The majority of parents were with university education level followed by postgraduate and ≤Secondary, representing 232/400 (58%), 77/400 (19.3%), and 74/400 (18.5%), respectively. Most fathers were with university-level 104/175 (59.4%) followed by postgraduate 36/175 (20.6%), whereas most mothers were with university-level 128/225 (57%) followed by ≤Secondary 46/225 (20.4%), as indicated in **Table 1, Fig. 1**. Most of the participants were from Hail city 386/400 (96.5%), and only 14/400 (3.5%) were living outside Hail city, as indicated in **Table 1, Fig. 1**. Out of the 400 participants, 96/400 (24%) (41/175 (23.4%) were fathers, and 55/225 (24.4%) were mothers), have witnessed child abuse during the past 12 months.

**TABLE 1: PARENTS BY DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

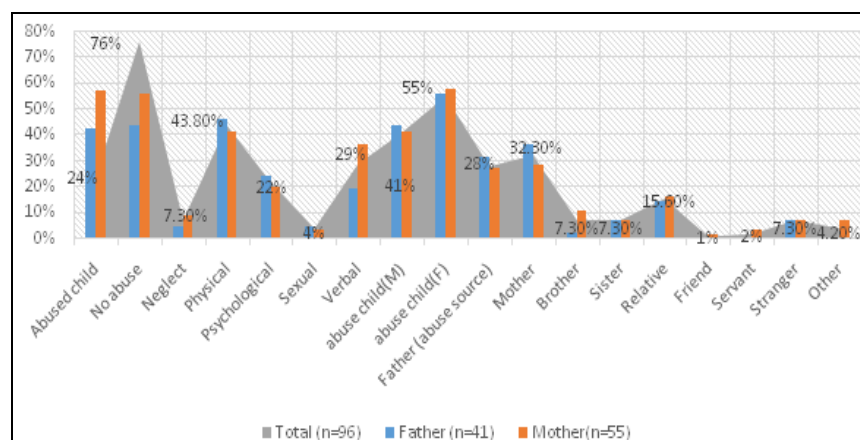
Variables	Fathers (n=175)	Mothers (n=225)	Total (n=400)
<b>Age Groups</b>			
20-30	95	120	215
31-40	44	64	108
41-50	26	33	59
51-60	5	5	10
61+	5	3	8
<b>Education Level</b>			
≤Secondary	28	46	74
Diploma	7	10	17
University	104	128	232
Postgraduate	36	41	77
<b>Resident</b>			
Hail	170	216	386
Outside Hail	5	9	14

The most reported type of child abuse was the physical followed by verbal and psychological, representing 42/96 (43.8%), 28/96 (29.2%), and 21/96 (21.9%), respectively. About 19/41 (46.3%), and 10/41 (24.4%) of the fathers have witnessed physical and psychological abuse correspondingly, whereas, around 23/55(41.8% and 20/55 (36.4%) of the mothers have reported physical and verbal abuse in this order.

Out of the 41 children reported by fathers, 18/41 (44%) were males, and 23/41 (56%) were females, hence, out of the 55 children witnessed by mothers, 23/55 (42%) were males, and 32/55(58%) were females, as indicated in **Table 2, Fig. 2**. The predominant reported source of child abuse was mother followed by father and relative, constituting 31/96 (32.3%), 28/96 (29%), 15/96 (15.6%), respectively, as indicated in **Table 2, Fig. 2**.

**TABLE 2: PARENTS BY CHARACTERISTICS OF WITNESSED CHILD ABUSE**

Category	Variable	Father (n=175)	Mother(n=225)	Total (n=400)
<b>During the Past Twelve Months, Have You Witnessed Your Child or Any Child be Abuse</b>				
	Yes	41	55	96
	No	134	170	304
<b>Type of Child Abuse</b>				
	Neglect	2	5	7
	Physical	19	23	42
	Psychological	10	11	21
	Sexual	2	2	4
	Verbal	8	20	28
	None	134	164	298
<b>Gender of Abuse Child</b>				
	Male	18	23	41
	Female	23	32	55
<b>Source of Child Abuse</b>				
	Father	13	15	28
	Mother	15	16	31
	Brother	1	6	7
	Sister	3	4	7
	Relative	6	9	15
	Friend	0	1	1
	Servant	0	2	2
	Stranger	3	4	7
	Other	0	4	4



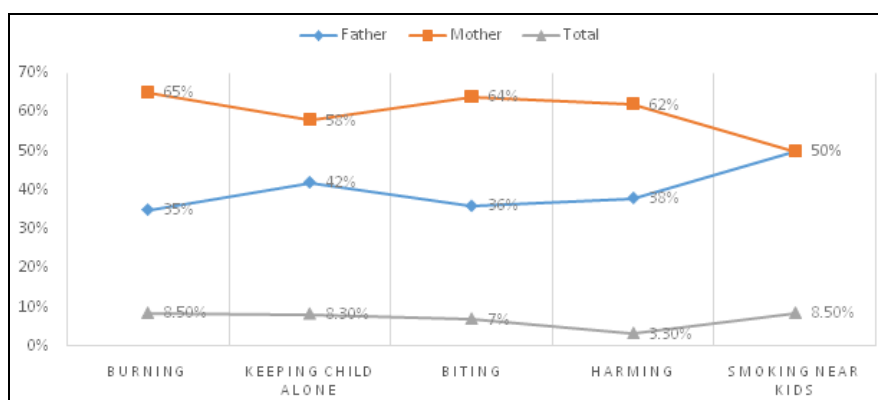
**FIG. 2: PARENTS BY CHARACTERISTICS OF WITNESSED CHILD ABUSE**

Burning, keeping child alone, biting, harming and smoking near kids, were reported as non-abuse by 34/400 (8.5%) (12 (35%) males & 22 (65%) females), 33/400 (8.3%) (14(42%) males & 19 (58%) females), 28/400 (7%) (10 (36%) males & 18

(64%) females), 13/400 (3.3%) (5(38%) males & 8 (62%) females) and 34/400 (8.5%) (17(50%) males & 17 (50%) females), of the parents (males & females), respectively as shown in **Table 3, Fig. 3**.

**TABLE 3: PARENT’S AWARENESS TOWARD SOME CHILD ABUSE-RELATED FACTORS**

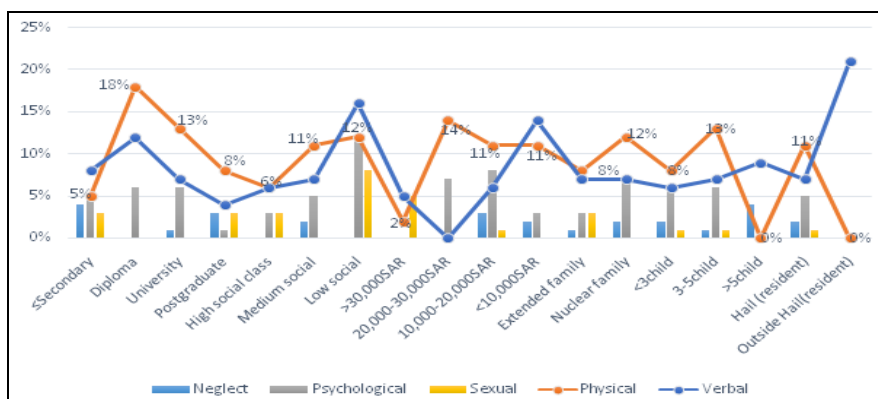
Category	Variable	Father (n=175)	Mother(n=225)	Total (n=400)
<b>Do You Think Burning Type Abuse</b>				
	Yes	163	203	366
	No	12	22	34
<b>Do You Think Keeping a Child Alone is a Type of Abuse</b>				
	Yes	161	206	367
	No	14	19	33
<b>Do You Think Biting of a Child is a Type of Abuse</b>				
	Yes	165	207	372
	No	10	18	28
<b>Do You Think Harming of a Child is a Type of Abuse</b>				
	Yes	170	217	387
	No	5	8	13
<b>Do You Think Smoking Near Kids is a Type of Abuse</b>				
	Yes	158	208	366
	No	17	17	34



**FIG. 3: DESCRIPTION OF PARENTS BY LACKING AWARENESS TOWARDS CHILD ABUSE-RELATED FACTORS**

The distribution of parents employing child abuse and socioeconomic characteristics was summarized in **Table 4, Fig. 4**. Child abuse was witnessed among 19/74 (26%), 6/17 (35%), 63/232 (27%), and 14/77 (18%) of ≤Secondary, diploma, university, and postgraduate, respectively. Child abuse was witnessed among 12/67 (18%), 78/308 (25%), and 12/25 (48%) of high, medium, and low social class, in this order. Child abuse was witnessed among 5/41 (12%), 16/77 (21%), 48/168 (29%) and 33/114 (30%) of the >30,000, 20,000-

30,000, 10,000-20,000 and <10,000 Saudi Riyal (SAR), family monthly income correspondingly. About 62/96 (65%) of child abuse was seen among nuclear families, and the remaining 34/96 (35%) was seen among extended facilities. Child abuse was witnessed among 37/157 (24%), 53/197 (27%), and 6/46 (13%) of the families with <3 children, 3-5 children, and >5 children, respectively. About 93/386 (24%) of child abuse was witnessed in Hail city, and the remaining 3/14 (21%) was outside Hail city.



**FIG. 4: MEANS OF CHILD ABUSE AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS EMPLOYING CHILD ABUSE AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Variable	None N=298	Neglect N=7	Physical N=42	Psychological N=21	Sexual N=4	Verbal N=28	Total N=400
<b>Education Level</b>							
≤Secondary	55	3	4	4	2	6	74
Diploma	11	0	3	1	0	2	17
University	169	2	29	15	0	17	232
Postgraduate	63	2	6	1	2	3	77
<b>Social Class</b>							
High	55	0	4	2	2	4	67
Medium	230	7	35	16	0	20	308
Low	13	0	3	3	2	4	25
<b>Family Income/Month</b>							
>30,000 SAR	36	0	1	0	2	2	41
20,000-30,000	61	0	11	5	0	0	77
10,000-20,000	120	5	18	13	2	10	168
<10,000	81	2	12	3	0	16	114
<b>Type of Family</b>							
Extended	119	2	13	4	4	11	153
Nuclear	179	5	29	17	0	17	247
<b>Children/Family</b>							
<3 children	116	3	12	10	2	10	157
3-5	142	2	25	11	2	13	197
>5	40	2	0	0	0	4	46
<b>Resident</b>							
Hail	287	7	42	21	4	25	386
Outside Hail	11	0	0	0	0	3	14

**DISCUSSION:** Although child abuse and child neglect are prevalent worldwide, it is infrequently reported in many countries, mostly in regions where it muddled with some social customs. In Saudi Arabia, like most other countries, there is a lack of data regarding child abuse and exact neglect investigations. Available literature pertains to the assessment of awareness in different Saudi regions, which greatly vary. As a result, this study aimed to assess the parent's awareness related to child abuse measures.

In the current study, about 24% (23.4% were fathers, and 24.4% were mothers), have witnessed child abuse during the past 12 months. The most frequently observed child abuse in this study was physically followed by verbal then psychological. According to our literature search, the frequently reported form of child abuse reported from Saudi Arabia was sexual abuse, which constituted only 7.3% of the witnessed child abuse measures in this study. A previous study from Saudi Arabia has reported physical abuse (42%) as the most common type of child abuse followed by psychological (14%) and sexual (4%). Moreover, neglect was reported by 39% in the same study<sup>5</sup>. In a study to inspect the prevalence of sexual child abuse in

Saudi Arabia, 16% of the children reported their exposure to one or more types of sexual abuse, particularly boys who lived with step-parent<sup>6,7</sup>. In the present study, girls (57%) were more frequently exposed to child abuse than boys (43%). However, these percentages may vary according to the type of child abuse. When psychological abuse was more frequent among girls, sexual abuse was reported to be more common among boys<sup>6</sup>.

In the present study, the parent represents the most common source of child abuse. In a study to assess Saudi opinions regarding child abuse, as well as the influence of child abuse on emotional health, 34% of the parents claimed a childhood history of child abuse. About 18% of the parents employed physical punishment. The most common forcefully child abuse accelerators are a history of childhood abuse, young parent, poor self-control, and witness of domestic violence<sup>8</sup>. Concerning parents' awareness of some child abuse-related factors, such as think burning, think keeping a child alone, think to bite a child, and think to harm a child. Parents in this study showed high levels of awareness. However, fathers have shown significantly better awareness than mothers. However, for smoking near the kids, both mothers and fathers have shown



relatively lower levels of awareness. In the current study, child abuse was witnessed reversely with the increase in education level. There is a sparse of literature correlating child abuse with parent's level of education. However, designed educational programs targeting the attitude of the parent were effectively improved parent attitude and many safe children compared to programs delivered by conventional childcare programs in health centers<sup>9</sup>.

Child abuse was more frequently witnessed among parents with lower monthly income. Economic status is a factor that determines some degree of child abuse, particularly when the neighborhood is rich<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, more child abuse was observed among nuclear families compared to extended families. Such indications were previously reported<sup>11</sup>. Though the current study makes available large information for health policymakers for implementing better strategies to prevent child abuse, it has some limitations, including its cross-sectional setting and qualitative measures.

**CONCLUSION:** Child abuse is common in Saudi Arabia, with the most frequent being physical, verbal, and emotional. Fathers possessed higher levels of awareness towards child abuse-related factors compared to mothers. Educational programs are deemed important to improve the parents' attitude toward child abuse measures.

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