

*Original Study*

# Knowledge and Awareness about Identification of Domestic Violence, Abuse and Neglect of Victim among Dentists

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## Abstract

Domestic violence is an age-old social evil which remains hidden from the eyes of the society for long. The incidence of domestic violence (DV) is at epidemic proportions of violence, abuse and neglect of any individual have a significant impact on the social system. Majority of the studies report violent and abusive injuries involve the head and neck region but many times dentists fail to report abuse. The various reasons could include loss of patients, economic loss and fear of dealing caregivers or of getting involved. Above all these, the majorly lack of sufficient knowledge about identification uncertainty of diagnosis and agencies where to report. The purpose of this paper is to assess the knowledge regarding identification of domestic violence, abuse and neglect and reporting agencies of maltreatment.

**Aim & Objective:** The aim of the present study is to assess knowledge and create awareness regarding identification of domestic violence, abuse and neglect and reporting agencies of maltreatment among dentists of Mysuru city of India.

**Method:** A self-administered, structured questionnaire written in English given to the dentists who give their consent.

**Results:** 91.7% (n=100) of the participants had heard about Domestic Violence, neglect and abuse and 73%(n=67) had come across victims of Domestic violence, neglect and abuse. Among them, 9.2% (n=10) had come across them frequently and 32 (29.8%) occasionally.

51 respondents said that the domestic violence victims are adult females, elderly female patients (16.6%) followed by children between 12 to 15 years of age (13.7%)

**Conclusion:** Many dentists will come across and identify the victims in their practice, but only few dentists will make an attempt to report. The main reason being lack of knowledge and proper training. Thus, there is a need for all of us to get trained in this aspect. Recognizing reporting the violence is everyone's responsibility.

**Key Words:** Domestic Violence, forensic dentist, Dentist, Knowledge & Awareness, Abuse And Neglect.

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## Introduction

Violence, abuse and neglect of any individual has a momentous impact on the social organization. Majority of the studies report violent and abusive injuries occupy both head and neck section, which places dentists at front of abuse discovery.

Domestic violence (DV) is an age-old social evil which remains hidden from the eyes of the society from long time. The incidence of domestic violence is at epidemic proportions.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Abusers establish and maintain power over victims through the use of a variety of coercive tactics, which may include physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse. Domestic violence also otherwise called intimate partner violence is a problem of epidemic proportion. In recent years it has emerged as a significant risk factor for many chronic health problems including obesity, substance abuse, mental disorder and gastro intestinal problems.<sup>3</sup>

With large amount of domestic violence occurring in both region, dentists have the unique opportunity to play a role in conducting routine examination of victims and identify the victims.<sup>2</sup>

The dental experts are the first peoples to watch noticeable injuries on the patient's head and neck together with ligature marks, scratches, abrasions, scrapes, and bruises.<sup>4-7</sup> Dentists have a chance to play a proactive job in helping these casualties. Reporting is the beginning of protection.

In spite of the dental specialist's remarkable opportunity, a national review appeared; just 41% dental specialists conceded that they consistently screened for abusive behavior at home just when they see persistent with injury of head and neck.

Many times, dentists fail to report abuse. The various reasons could include loss of patients, economic loss and fear of dealing caregivers or of getting involved. And majorly lack of sufficient knowledge about identification uncertainty of diagnosis and agencies where to report.<sup>7</sup>

When victims are identified and referred to appropriate resources, they can receive necessary care and counseling therefore affording protection from further violence, disease, and also death and helping to break the cycle of violence from harming future generation.<sup>10</sup>

Most patients have positive views of their dentists and trust them that the dentists also have social responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

A Countrywide survey of dentists discovered that those who had acquired any training about domestic violence were more likely to screen for domestic violence and to intervene than those who had obtained none.<sup>12</sup> it seems that Little has been achieved to discover positive approaches to instructing or education dentists to verify or deal with domestic violence. While a preceding learns confirmed our tutorial to be effective for dental students,<sup>13</sup> domestic violence training for dentists has no longer been addressed in any posted Report.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing reporting the violence is everyone's responsibility. In India, the commonness of abusive behavior at home ranges from 6-60%, with considerable variation across the states<sup>3</sup>

India is a sub continent with a wide variation in its population distribution, socio financial differences and cultural beliefs and taboos, these beliefs have induced social domestic violence is a displayed as social supremacy especially concerning intimate partner violence.

The intention of this paper is to assess the knowledge concerning identification of domestic violence, abuse and neglect and reporting agencies of maltreatment.

## **Aim & Objective**

The aspire of the present study is to evaluate the knowledge and create consciousness regarding identification of domestic violence, abuse plus neglect in addition to reporting agencies of maltreatment among dentists of Mysuru city of India.

## **Methodology**

A self-administered, structured questionnaire written in English was given to dentists who were eager to take an interest in the examination and give their consent. A self-administers, prepared questionnaire written in English will be given to the dentists who give their consent. The investigator visited the dental clinics and hospitals on a scheduled day and issued the questionnaire to the dentist in their respective work places and once the questionnaire was filled collected it personally. Members were approached to react to everything in the poll by picking the most proper choice. Privacy and Secrecy of the respondents was assured.

Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional ethical committee of JSS Dental College and Hospital, affiliated to JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research, Mysuru.

Questionnaire included 15 close ended questions related to domestic violence identification and reporting. the self-administered questionnaire was in english language. The questionnaire be validated by few experts in the field of dentistry in Mysore and those experts were not considered for the main study. The data thus collected will be retrieved and will be amiable to statistical analysis using SPSS software version 22. Descriptive statistics such as Mean, Standard Deviation, percentages, in addition to frequencies was applied for data analysis.

## Results

The total no of participants were 109 practicing dentists of the city. Though there are about 216 no of dentists only those who consented to participate were given the questionnaire. The results of the study with the response from participants is depicted as follows. 91.7% (n=100) of the participants had heard about Domestic Violence, neglect and abuse and 73%(n=67) had come across victims of Domestic violence, neglect and abuse. Among them, 9.2% (n=10) had come across them frequently and 32 (29.8%) occasionally.

51 respondents said that the domestic violence victims are adult females, elderly female patients (16.6%) followed by children between 12 to 15 years of age (13.7%). Of the 87 respondents for finding difficulty in recognizing the victims, 42 said they had found some difficulty and 46 of them did not have any difficulty.

Among 86, 47(43%) elicited reason for violence and 38(34%) of them could not elicit the reason from the victims. The major reason quoted by the dentists for not eliciting the reason for domestic violence in because of lack of proper training in how to elicit the reasons and other reason being most commonly the victim is accompanied by the abuses themselves. Few others were worried of offending the victims by asking about the violence and loosing practice time and also loosing patients because of being inquisitive, thus the patients may not follow up the appointments.

Not many (74%) dentists knew that 50% of domestic violence injuries are mainly in head and neck region. Only 19 participants attempted to report the victims to the concerned authorities. Others did not know which are the agencies to report the victims (n=79). though 86 of the respondents felt that the dentists be able to definitely play a part in reporting domestic violence but they required adequate training to do so(n=97) among them, 75% preferred to attend a workshop to enhance their knowledge regarding ways to identify the domestic violence victims and how to elicit reasons and where to report them.

## Discussion

Abuse is any act which endangers physical or emotional health of the individual. The abusers are generally victims own family members, their spouses, adult children or caretakers. Victimizors originate from varying backgrounds, paying little heed to financial status and instructive, family, strict or social foundation.

The various types of abuse could be Physical abuse, Psychological, abandon, financial exploitation and Social mistreatment.

Violence, abuse and neglect of any individual have a major collision on the social system. Majority of the studies<sup>15-20</sup> report violent and abusive injuries involve the head and neck region, as these areas are exposed and accessible and because the head often is considered representative of the whole being, The dental experts are among the primary people to watch obvious wounds and checks on the patient's head and neck, which places dental specialists at the front line of misuse discovery.

In the article, Domestic Violence and its relation to Dentistry: A Call for Change in Canadian Dental Practice,<sup>15</sup> The authors discuss about highest victims of domestic violence and abuse are women as is found similar in our study also, worldwide women are considered as the weaker section of the society thus victimized in domestic violence. Violence against women is measured to be an significant public health problem for women and their children.

The next most affected by domestic violence are children, similar to our study few other studies which claim that the abused children have shown lowered

intellectual abilities (difficulty in reading, writing, scoring) when compared with the non abused children, these children have displayed overall deterioration in their psychological development. Very often these children also are witnesses of other forms of domestic violence in their families like their mother or grandparents being the victims of domestic violence making even more impact on their psycho social behavioral changes.<sup>21-25</sup>

Apart from women and children the other population most abused is the elders as is found even in our study. A study done by Raju and Prakash, in 2010 found that the elder individuals distress from depression, sickness or physical impairments were more at risk of being abused than those of similar age and normal health status. This implies that an elderly with physical or mental impairments may be perceived as a burden by the caregivers. Such stressful and bitterness spills out in form of abuse and neglect of elderly people.<sup>21</sup>

The authors in an article titled “Changing Dentists’ facts, attitude, and behaviors regarding Domestic Violence through an Interactive Multimedia Tutorial” mentioned regarding a tool called “AVDR,” an acronym for “asking, validating, documenting, and referring.” AVDR means: 1) asking the patient about the injury; 2) providing validating messages that battering is wrong and it is not the victim’s fault in any circumstance; 3) documenting signs, symptoms, or any verbal disclosures that the patient has shown or given in the patient’s records in writing and with any pictures; and 4) referring victims to a DV specialist, which may include counselors, authorities, or shelters<sup>3,26</sup>. This was developed to explain and simplify the dentist’s role in addressing DV. This intervention can be used when abuse is suspected but not disclosed, and it allows dentists to help their patients. Hence, AVDR tutorial is a quick & simple way to educate oral health professionals about the importance of recognizing DV among their patients and learning how to help them by providing strategies for assessment and intervention.<sup>26,27</sup>

Few studies<sup>28-33</sup> have shown brief domestic violence intervention training can be effective in improving knowledge and attitudes among dentists, but could lead to false confidence in staff and should be followed by in-depth practical training and the advancement of proper procedures for managing misuse casualties.

Because dentists routinely assess a patient’s head, neck and mouth, they have a unique and excellent opportunity to recognize whether or not a patient is being abused.<sup>31,33</sup>

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Though many dentists in the study did come across and identify the victims, very few made an attempt to report. The main reason being lack of knowledge and proper training. Thus, there is a need for all of us to get trained in this aspect. Recognizing reporting the violence is everyone’s responsibility.

Dental specialists like forensic dentists have a chance to play a proactive job in helping these casualties. Owing to the fact victims are mostly adult females, extra caution to screen for maltreatment should be an integral part to be taken to while examining the patients of this age group.

Since most of them were not aware of the reporting agencies, Dental offices can aid community awareness of abuse in different ways. Pamphlets on abuse, resource materials from agencies that help the victims can be displayed.

This study was a sincere effort put forward to understand the awareness of dentists regarding domestic violence which is a social crime. In this attempt we found out the dentists are interested to learn and know more about the domestic violence identification, counseling and reporting agencies by forensic dentists. These are the areas which are not thought explicitly in the course curriculum of dentistry in India. In this juncture, Workshops and inclusion of topics in curriculum may be planned and arranged.

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