

Poster 14

Knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about child abuse among dental students

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Abstract

Background: Dentists are in a privileged position to detect child maltreatment, abuse, and neglect [1,2], and it is important to sensitize and train professionals for this task [3], which is so relevant from a social and public health point of view. Detection, signaling, and reporting are crucial steps for the protection and treatment of these children [1]. **Objective:** Evaluate a population of students of the Integrated Master's Degree in Dental Medicine on knowledge, attitudes and perception about child maltreatment, abuse and neglect. **Methods:** Approved by the Ethics Committee, data collection was carried out through a questionnaire that was applied by email, where each potential participant was invited to participate in the research, informed of its objectives and, if they accepted to participate, giving their informed consent. **Results:** The sample included 342 students from all academic years (77% female, 23% male). Participants most recognized figurative injuries as signs of physical abuse, while traumatic alopecia with skull deformation was least identified. For psychological abuse, aggressive behavior and/or self-mutilation were most recognized, whereas changes in sphincter control were less acknowledged. Regarding sexual abuse, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) - related injuries were more recognized, while regressive behaviors were less identified. For neglect, poor hygiene was widely recognized, while developmental and social delays were less considered. A significant association ($p < 0.05$) was found between the dentist's (MD) role in diagnosing/reporting maltreatment and the student's year of study and gender. More 5th-year students identified the MD as key for diagnosis and knew legal reporting duties. Interestingly, while more female students viewed the MD as a favored professional for diagnosis, more male students claimed to understand legal reporting responsibilities. Overall, 71.1% reported cases to authorities, with the National Commission for Child Protection and Security Forces being the most cited. Fifth-year students showed greater knowledge compared to others. **Conclusions:** We emphasize the importance of establishing future interventions to improve dental students' knowledge and confidence in identifying and reporting these situations promptly, which may help to combat the perpetuation of these situations.

Keywords: dental student; maltreating; child

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