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Flavia Ary Sahwa, N. K. Tharshini

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Exploring Rural Community's Knowledge on Child Maltreatment

Flavia Ary Sahwa, N.K. Tharshini

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota

Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

Email: stharshini@unimas.my

Abstract

Child maltreatment is an epidemic affecting children of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic status, influencing both physical and mental health. In general, the attitude of the rural population towards child maltreatment plays a key role in determining their willingness to report such incidents. Therefore, this study was conducted among community members residing in Kampung Skim Sekuau in Sibu, Sarawak to explore their knowledge on child maltreatment. The researcher used an in-depth interview approach to collect data on the rural community's understanding and knowledge of risk factors that contribute to child maltreatment. The results of the study show that the majority of the respondents are female, aged between 30 and 52 years old, belong to the Iban ethnic group, and work in the government and private sectors. Nevertheless, the findings reveal the risk factors that contribute to child maltreatment, including conflict between spouses, financial hardship, stress, and parental substance abuse. By understanding the rural community's perception of child maltreatment, the trauma associated with such heinous acts can be more effectively addressed through the existing intact support systems for coping resources and prevention measures against child maltreatment.

Keywords: Child Maltreatment, Parents, Perception, Risk Factors

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) defines child maltreatment as any act or omission by a parent or caregiver that has the potential to result in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation. Child maltreatment is also associated with a range of negative outcomes, including higher rates of depression, substance use, and risky sexual behaviour (Maguire-Jack, et al., 2020). Previous studies have found that rates of investigation and substantiation vary across countries, states, and even neighbourhoods (Bullinger et al., 2023; Maguire-Jack, et al., 2020). According to the National Children's Alliance (2020), 90% of alleged abusers in the US were related to the children, with 51% being relatives of the children' and another 39% being the children's parents. National data from the Administration for Children and Families (2021) shows that the highest rate of maltreatment victims at the state level is in Kentucky, at 22.2 per day per 1,000 children.