



AWARENESS OF SCHOOL TEACHERS IN IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

ANUJA SINGARAJU BDS, MDS, JUNG-WEI CHEN DDS, MS, MS, PhD
Pediatric Dentistry, Loma Linda University School of Dentistry

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse and neglect (CAN) is a global child-protection and public-health concern that negatively impacts children’s physical, emotional, and psychological development and may result in long-term mental health and behavioral problems.

Teachers are uniquely positioned to detect CAN because they interact with children daily, observe behavioral and physical changes, and may receive direct disclosures. As children spend a large portion of their time in school, educators play a critical role in early identification and reporting. Despite this, many teachers lack sufficient knowledge and confidence to recognize CAN.

OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

Objective: To evaluate school teachers’ knowledge and awareness of possible signs of CAN and to assess the effectiveness of a structured audiovisual educational intervention in improving recognition and knowledge retention over time.

Hypothesis: The AV educational intervention significantly improves teachers’ recognition of possible signs of CAN compared to baseline, with sustained knowledge retention at follow-up.

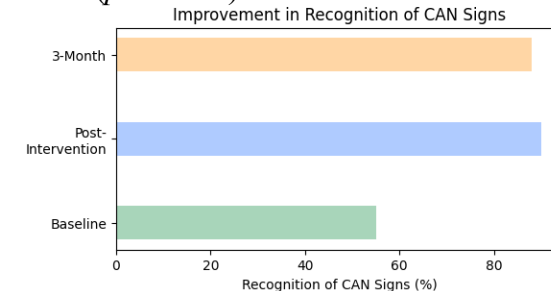
METHODS AND MATERIALS

Recognizing Signs of Abuse & Neglect in Students



RESULTS

Recognition of CAN signs improved significantly after the AV intervention, increasing from ~55% at baseline to ~90% post-training, with high retention at 3 months (~88–90%). Improvements were observed in both male and female teachers, with no major gender-based differences overall. All practice-based indicators showed significant improvement across visits ($p < 0.001$).



CAN Indicator (Agree %)	Baseline	Post	3-Month	p-value
Child's fear of caregivers	54.3	94.7	94.0	<0.001*
Inappropriate dressing for season	49.3	96.3	96.3	<0.001*
Unwillingness to go home	53.3	90.3	92.0	<0.001*
Extreme passiveness/apathy	66.0	88.7	68.3	<0.001*
Burn scars on body	56.3	76.3	76.3	<0.001*
Lack of medical/dental care	53.3	73.7	73.0	<0.001*

DISCUSSION

AV education significantly improved teachers’ recognition of CAN, with good 3-month retention. Our findings agree with previous studies showing that teachers have limited baseline CAN knowledge but improve significantly after structured training. Similar improvements in recognition and reporting readiness have been reported by Kenny¹ and Walsh & Farrell².

Strengths:

- Large sample,
- Standardized AV training,
- Repeated follow-up assessments.

Limitations:

- Self-reported data,
- Single-district sample.

Future directions:

- Larger multi-region studies,
- Evaluation of real-world reporting behavior.

CONCLUSION

Early identification of CAN is essential for both child safety and oral health. When teachers recognize signs early, timely referral can help prevent dental neglect. Incorporating CAN training into teacher training and continuing education programs, along with collaboration with dental and healthcare professionals strengthen child protection.

REFERENCES

1. Kenny MC. Teachers’ attitudes toward and knowledge of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2001.
2. Walsh K, Farrell A. Teachers’ recognition and reporting of child abuse: A review. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2008.