Aim: Elder abuse is an understated issue in our society and dental professionals themselves, who can play a significant role in detecting and reporting abuse, are not sufficiently trained to perform their social responsibilities. The aim of this study was to find out the awareness regarding elder abuse amongst interns of dental college and hospital. Materials and Method: This was a questionnaire study conducted on 62 students at a dental college. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions adapted, modified, and validated from the previous study. The questionnaire was tested and retested on the interns to check for its internal validity. Data was analyzed using SPSS 17 software and the descriptive analysis was performed for all the questions expressed as percentage. Chi Square test was done to find out the effect of gender on the results obtained. Results: The result of the study revealed that the interns were barely aware about the term elder abuse and had no knowledge regarding signs and symptoms of abuse. Statistically significant difference in sensitivity amongst males and females (chi square p.009) was noted. Interns had not undergone any training, though they would like to be trained (85%) in this regard. Dental students suspected (74%) elder abuse cases, but there was no reporting of abuse (94%). Conclusion: The study concludes that there is lack of awareness and no training amongst dental students regarding their socio-legal responsibilities. Training programs should be held in dental institutes and added in the dental curriculum. Clinical significance: In order to train the dental students towards the psychosocial aspects of the elderly population, there is a need to revise the dental curriculum.

Key words: Dental students, dental curriculum, elder abuse

Introduction

It is the responsibility of the doctor to ensure complete rehabilitation of the patient whatever may be the treatment he has been approached for, especially when it comes to the vulnerable section of our society. We as dentists and more so being prosthodontists are approached by the elderly people for their dental needs.

Elderly people are much more experienced in life, but still due to ageing they begin to lose the physical and mental abilities to be able to compete like the younger generation, due to which they become dependent on their children for their basic needs. As a result, they are forbidden their rights and become victims of frustrations of their children and society. Changing lifestyles also have taken a toll upon them as no one has time and patience to look after them. This in turn affects their physical, psychological, and social well-being. This is termed elder abuse. Surveys have shown that one out of six elderly undergo abuse at some point of life.¹ This is one of the major factors of morbidity in elderly.² Fourteen percentage of the victims are unaware of laws against it.

The problem of elder abuse has been recognized worldwide and the government has made several policies to prevent elder abuse and victims of abuse.
Several non-government organizations are working towards the welfare of the elderly and safeguard their life from perpetrators of abuse. But, are these steps sufficient to combat the problem that is happening at grass root level? Instead, when the elderly approach a healthcare professional, a thorough investigation can help to diagnose the issue and take necessary step to help the victim at the time of need. Dentists can play a unique role, as they routinely examine the head and neck regions along with doing the dental examination. There is a need to address the concern of the dental professionals being trained to deal with such issues, and also their interest in being trained for the same.

Several studies have been conducted around the world to know the perspective of healthcare professionals towards intervening into a patient’s personal life and going out of the way to report abuse. Studies conducted in Los Angeles and University of California have revealed that the post-doctoral students feel undertrained to handle sensitive issues as abuse and that once a training program for the same was conducted, their responses significantly differed and improved. Study of this kind in an Indian population is lacking, hence the aim of this study was to develop a knowledge attitude and practice questionnaire and assess the perspective of dental interns regarding elder abuse. The results of this study can give insight into the level of awareness amongst interns to the dental educators.

Materials and Methods
The study was conducted at Dental College and Hospital, Vadodara and 62 dental students doing their compulsory rotatory internship were enrolled for the same. Ethical approval was sought from institutional ethical committee prior to the beginning of the study.

A knowledge, attitude, and practice questionnaire was adapted and given to the subject experts to check the construct of the questions and language. The questionnaire was tested and retested on the interns to check for its internal validity. The internal validity was calculated with Cronbach alpha test, which was found to be 0.76. The participant information sheet along with printed questionnaire and consent form was given in a printed form to the participant.

Participants were explained the purpose of the study and were requested to complete and return the questionnaire immediately. Descriptive analysis and chi square test was applied to the data recorded. Data was analyzed using SPSS 17 software and expressed as percentage.

The questionnaire consists of 14 questions adapted, modified, and validated from a previous study (Annexure I). Each question had two or more options and was scored as mentioned below.

- Questions 1 to 4: Were scored from 1 to 3 (do not know, know a little, and know a lot)
- Question 5: Was scored from 1 to 3 (disagree, not sure, agree)
- Question 6: Was scored from 1 to 5 (Not at all=1 to Entirely=5)
- Question 7: Was scored from 1 to 5 (Difficult=1 to Easy=5)
- Questions 8 to 12: Were scored as 0 or 1 (Yes=1 No=0) and
- Questions 13 and 14 were answered descriptively.

Results
The descriptive analysis results are presented in three sections as knowledge, attitude, and practice (Table 1). There were 12 males and 49 females in the study. According to analysis of knowledge section, the results reveal that 67% of the interns have heard about the term elder abuse. They did not have an idea about the issue, and not much is known regarding the signs and symptoms to detect abuse (70%). It also reflected that they do not know about their role in helping such patients suffering from abuse (55%). Their knowledge regarding the procedure to help such victims is equally inadequate (80%).

The attitude of the interns reflects that they do feel that victims of elder abuse should seek help (95%). They also feel that they as dentists can intrude and question regarding personal life, when they come across an elderly patient. Differences in opinions
regarding the same was noted between males and females (Table 2), however they in general felt that helping a patient suffering from abuse is difficult (81%).

There is a difference in sensitivity amongst males and females. Though total number of students sensitized is 67%, females are more sensitized than males, which may be due to more number of female interns participating in the study. Interns had not undergone any training though they would like to be trained for detecting and reporting abuse (85%). Though they had suspected (74%), there was no reporting of abuse (94%) and neither did they attempt to detect nor did they know to whom and where to report regarding the same.

Discussion

The study was conducted on students doing their compulsory rotatory internship in the institute. They were selected for the study as they have finished their training and can be enquired regarding their awareness about elder abuse. The results of the study revealed the lack of awareness amongst interns regarding the social and psychological factors affecting elderly. This is in accordance with the several studies conducted on dental health professionals outside and within India. There are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sr. No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q.3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.4.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2: Chi square for comparison between male and female for question 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>P value</td>
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<tr>
<th>Q.5.</th>
<th>I believe victims of elder abuse should seek help.</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q.6.</td>
<td>How much do you feel it is within dentists’ role to ask patients about their personal lives and relationships involving abuse?</td>
<td>Entirely</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.7.</td>
<td>What do you think how difficult it is to help victims of elder abuse?</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.8.</td>
<td>Have you ever been sensitized towards elder abuse?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.9.</td>
<td>Have you ever been trained towards elder abuse?</td>
<td>If no, do you prefer to be trained towards identifying elder abuse?</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>53 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.10.</td>
<td>Have you ever suspected a case of elder abuse?</td>
<td>46 (75%)</td>
<td>15 (24%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q.11.</td>
<td>Have you ever identified a case of elder abuse?</td>
<td>48 (78%)</td>
<td>13 (21%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.12.</td>
<td>Have you ever reported a case of elder abuse?</td>
<td>56 (91%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.13.</td>
<td>If you had to report a case of elder abuse, whom did you report to?</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.14.</td>
<td>Was the action taken for the same? If yes, then what action was taken?</td>
<td>58 (95%)</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
several studies on dental students, regarding their role in detecting as well as reporting domestic violence, and also on training students for the same.\textsuperscript{8,9}

The attitude of the interns reflects that they do feel that victims of elder abuse should seek help. They also feel that they as dentists can intrude and query about their personal lives, if they come across an elderly patient, which is in accordance with previous studies. Though there is a difference in opinion among male and females, they also find that helping a patient suffering from abuse is difficult.

There is a difference in sensitivity amongst males and females. Females are more sensitized than males, which may be due to more number of female interns participating in the study. Interns had not undergone any training, though they would like to be trained for detecting and reporting abuse.

There are umpteen number of similar studies conducted outside India, but there is no such study conducted on the Indian dental students. Also, there are studies on the knowledge attitude and practice of dental students regarding elderly and age related issues, but not any regarding elder abuse.\textsuperscript{10} Time and again, it is proved that there is insufficient training of the students to enable them to detect and report cases of abuse.\textsuperscript{11} Hatami et al. in a study showed that lack of adequate knowledge, poor communication skill, and lack of self-confidence are barriers to good care of elderly.\textsuperscript{12} Fabiano conducted a study, which has proved that if the dental students are trained through a curriculum focussing on geriatric care, changes in the attitude, and awareness amongst the dental students improves significantly.\textsuperscript{13} Several tools have been used on the dental students like Palmore, Facts of ageing, and AVDR technique.\textsuperscript{14} However, the scenario in India is poor as the awareness itself is insufficient, so reacting appropriately and managing such cases is difficult compared to the dentists, who are mandated reporters in Canada.

With the changing demography, there is a need to bring change in the dental education system. Nationwide surveys reveal that elder abuse is highly prevalent in our country, but health care professionals are not even aware about this term because this is not a part of their curriculum. Good communication with the patient is of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore adequate training programs, sensitizing the students, and equipping them with usable instruments to ensure care for every approaching elderly is the need of the hour. In turn, adequate confidentiality and safety of the dentist should be ensured by the law makers, so that the health professionals do not hesitate in becoming a legal part of such cases.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Awareness needs to be brought amongst dental professionals regarding elder abuse not only by adding such social topics in the dental curriculum, but also training them to deal with cases requiring help and support. The government should make policies to make sure that the health care professionals help the victims of elder abuse and at the same time maintain their confidentiality.

\textbf{Clinical significance}

In order to help the elderly psycho-socially, a training program is a must for the dentist at undergraduate level. The study reveals the need for a revision in dental curriculum, where a scope is created for the dentist to learn to tackle cases of elder abuse.

\textbf{References}

6. Gironda M, Lefever K. Dental students’ knowledge about elder abuse and neglect and