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# **Parent and Teacher Knowledge of Head Injuries**

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## Abstract

This study examined parents and teachers knowledge of aspects of head injury (HI). Part one examined the various sources of information and education parents and teachers have access to that could impact on their knowledge of HI. Part two surveyed 64 parents and 64 teachers of young children (<5 years) from the North Shore, Auckland, to examine the extent of their personal knowledge of HI, and the sources of their knowledge (e.g. media). Participants were asked about the source of their knowledge of HI (i.e. various types of media, personal experiences etc), and the qualifications they hold that could impact on their knowledge (i.e. first aid training, teacher training qualification). Participants were also asked to complete a questionnaire about aspects of head injury - general knowledge, memory, recovery.

Results indicated that there is a wealth of information in the public domain regarding HI. First aid courses provide information that can help a person deal with a HI immediately following the incident, but are not compulsory for teachers to have. Various other sources of information such as doctors, PlunketLine and the internet also provide information and advice for the public to access.

When parents and teachers were surveyed it was found that they have similar levels of knowledge regarding HI, although on average parents had slightly higher scores than teachers. Having a first aid certificate did not mean parents and teachers had higher levels of accuracy - in fact those who did not have a first aid certificate had higher average scores than those who did.

Doctors and PlunketLine were the most likely source of information for parents and teachers. The most popular media-specific sources were daily newspapers and television news.

Further studies could examine the wider public's knowledge of HI. A more complete form of the survey could be used to get a well rounded picture of the current knowledge base of HI.

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## Overview

Head Injury (HI) is a common cause of death and disability worldwide. Children in particular have one of the highest rates of HI, therefore knowledge of the symptoms and long term consequences of this is crucial.

Within the spectrum of HI severity, mild HI accounts for approximately 80% of HI's. Information on the prevalence of mild HI is difficult to determine as some of the symptoms of mild HI (headache, nausea, fatigue etc) can be attributed to other causes, or can be attended to without medical attention. For those who care for young children knowledge of the symptoms of mild HI is particularly important – young children do not have the skills to describe any potential symptoms following a HI and it is up to those who care for them to be able to identify when these symptoms are occurring, to therefore seek and advocate for medical assistance if required.

Therefore a literature review was performed, focussing on the levels of knowledge the parents and teachers of young children have about HI. This search found previous studies which have examined the public knowledge of HI symptoms, in particular a study by Gouvier, Presholdt, and Warner (1988). This survey found there were many misconceptions held by the general public in regards to HI, and has since been repeated with similar results.

From this it was found that there has not yet been a survey of similar sorts in New Zealand. Experiences of the researcher as an early childhood teacher were that many children have accidents, and there was questions regarding how these injuries are dealt with by teachers and parents, and what knowledge parents and teachers have about HI. The researcher also spoke to some parents and teachers throughout the course of researching this topic and found some general confusion about signs and symptoms of mild HI.

Given the above the current study focuses on the knowledge that teachers and parents of young children have about HI. There is a focus on the sources and accuracy of this knowledge, with a comparison to previous studies.

Chapter one begins with an outline of HI, discussing the definitions and different terms used to define HI, and epidemiology of HI. The causes of HI are discussed, and the effect HI has on young children and the general population is also examined. The three ways in which the severities of HI are classified are then outlined.



Following from this Chapter two looks at mild HI, and the definitions and ways in which mild HI is classified. The symptoms of mild HI are divided into three categories – physical, cognitive, and behavioural - and are discussed. The epidemiology and causes of mild HI are outlined, showing how widespread and common mild HI is. The reasons for mild HI being referred to as the ‘silent epidemic’ are discussed, and the risk factors that influence the outcome following a HI are outlined.

Chapter three reviews the factors that influence symptom knowledge, with a focus on the general public and teachers. Misconceptions about HI are discussed, and previous studies analysed. Media and public awareness of HI, and the organisations that help dispense this information are examined. The impact that attitudes can have on knowledge is examined, and the legislation that dictates the training that teachers may get in regards to HI is also discussed.

Chapter four outlines the current study’s aim and hypotheses, further emphasizing the need for the research.

This is followed by chapter five, outlining the method of the current study which is divided into two parts – research into the knowledge available to the public in regards to HI, and a survey of parents and teachers of young children about their knowledge of HI.

Chapter six details the results of the current study.

Chapter seven discusses the results of the current study, followed by an outline of the possible limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and conclusions.