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Knowledge of Signs Regarding Child Abuse and Neglect in Lithuania

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Objectives The violence experienced by a child can have a range of short- or long-term negative consequences and we must protect the fundamental rights of the child. Dentists are in close contact with patients during clinical practice, therefore they are able to identify child abuse and neglect. The aim of this study was to assess knowledge of dental professionals and dental students in Lithuania, regarding signs of child abuse and neglect.

Methods The data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire based on previous similar studies. The content validity of the questionnaire was tested by conducting a pilot survey. 153 dental students and 414 dental professionals participated in the survey. The anonymous questionnaire consisted of 21 questions and 2 clinical situations. Statistical analysis was performed using the IBM SPSSv.23. Non-parametric Chi-square (χ^2) test ($p < 0.05$) served for statistical analyses.

Results The most commonly mentioned signs of physical violence were fractures/dislocations/avulsions (58% professionals, 22% students), bruises behind the ears (65% professionals, 23% students). Fear of physical contact (67% professionals, 25% students), syphilis signs in the mouth (55% professionals, 23% students) were most mentioned signs of sexual abuse. The most commonly mentioned signs of psychological abuse were pronounced nervousness (63% professionals, 23% students) and when child tries to avoid any contact (63% professionals, 24% students). Untreated rampant caries (67% professionals, 23% students) and untreated pain, infection or trauma of orofacial region (66% professionals, 26% students) were most selected signs related to child neglect. Significantly more students (71.7%) were correct in clinical situation with child neglect than professionals (38.4%) ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions Dental professionals could better describe signs of child abuse and neglect, but dental students were better at identifying clinical situations related to the problem.