

Fighting Child Sexual Abuse: Perspectives of Pupils From a Developing Country

SAGE Open
January-March 2013: 1–10
© The Author(s) 2012
DOI: 10.1177/2158244012472687
<http://sgo.sagepub.com>


Pesanayi Gwirayi¹

Abstract

This study investigated secondary school pupils' views on strategies that can be used to prevent child sexual abuse (CSA). A survey design was adopted as the operational framework for data gathering. Data were collected from three secondary schools, all in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. The sample comprised 268 secondary pupils (50% female; M age = 15.42, SD = 1.376). Each participant was asked to write down three main strategies that can be used to fight CSA on a given questionnaire. The responses were then analyzed using the thematic content analysis technique. The study revealed that most pupils believed that CSA can be prevented through teaching them about it and also reporting to the police. Another significant finding was that pupils' responses tended to vary with gender and level of education. Whereas female respondents suggested that CSA can be fought by avoiding strangers, saying no to sexual advances, and having reliable friends, their male counterparts suggested teaching the community about CSA, forming new clubs, and enacting life imprisonment for perpetrators, among other suggestions. In terms of level of education, Form 2 participants suggested avoiding strangers, staying home at night, whereas their Form 4 counterparts suggested lessons for Guidance and Counseling, saying no to sexual advances, and having reliable friends. These findings unequivocally demonstrate the need to vigorously engage secondary school pupils in activities aimed at fighting CSA to safeguard their inalienable human rights.

Keywords

child sexual abuse, secondary school pupils, human rights, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a social and public health concern locally and globally (Gwirayi, 2010; Pinheiro, 2006; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2010; World Health Organization [WHO], 2004; Zink, Klesges, Stevens, & Decker, 2009). Following research evidence regarding the devastating consequences of CSA, different countries have been and continue to grapple with various prevention programs. Regrettably, like other aspects of CSA, research on prevention programs also took center stage in developed countries. The prevention strategies that have been mooted cover both proximal and distal levels in the child's ecology, namely, the individual, family, community, and societal contexts. Extant literature suggests that prevention programs dovetail into three main themes, which are justice system practices, educational programs, and outreach programs. The evaluation evidence relevant to each category of prevention is highlighted in this presentation.

Justice System Strategies

Several prevention programs have been developed under this category. These include the strengthening of existing legislation and policies, offender registration, community notification, sentence lengthening and civil commitment,

and enhanced detection and control. Most of these prevention programs were started in developed countries, especially the United States, while the focus in developing countries, particularly in Africa, has been on harmonizing national laws with international laws on child protection (African Child Policy Forum [ACPF], 2008).

Harmonization of National and International Laws

Laws are the bricks and mortar of all efforts aimed at the realization of child rights (ACPF, 2008). Laws are believed to have "primary prevention" effects, because in theory the fear of swift, certain, and serious punishment by the justice system may deter the abuse before it happens (Finkelhor, 2009). In Zimbabwe, CSA is a criminal offense and is punishable by law. Existing pieces of legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act (2001) and the Domestic Violence Act (2006) have been harmonized with international law in an effort to protect children against sexual abuse. Furthermore, the Southern African region has made significant legal

¹Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

Corresponding Author:

Pesanayi Gwirayi, Midlands State University, Educational Foundations,
Private Bag 9055, Gweru, N/A, Zimbabwe
Email: pgwirayi@gmail.com

achievements as shown by the harmonization of national laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Unity [OAU], 1990) in most countries. With increased realization of the widespread assault on young children, especially girls, governments in the region have made attempts to curb the trend by enacting various sexual offenses acts (Beyond Inequalities, 2008).

Despite the existence of national and international laws, CSA remains a serious problem, not only in Zimbabwe but also in other developing and developed countries. Accordingly, the efficacy of existing laws has been seriously questioned. Shumba (2006) believes that both local and international laws have failed to protect children against sexual abuse. This is buttressed by Briggs (2005) who reports that students have been sexually abused by staff in some of Australia's most expensive and prestigious schools and that those in boarding schools seem to have been particularly vulnerable. Similar reports have been made in different parts of the world. What boggles the mind is why all this is happening when laws against sexual abuse are in place. Several reasons have been proffered to explain the status quo. Referring to the situation in Australia, Briggs says that sex offenders are choosing younger victims because they know that the criminal justice system does not protect them. Regrettably, this characterization seems to be symptomatic of most countries, including Zimbabwe. For instance, Smith (2009) reveals that out of 4,000 known rape cases in the country, only 500 end up in successful prosecutions. Similarly, in Africa, nonexistent and/or weak enforcement mechanisms have been cited (ACPF, 2008; Beyond Inequalities, 2008). As Van Niekerk (1999) argues, the lack of or inadequate service delivery (especially of legal services) from all sectors communicate to sex offenders that they can continue to abuse with impunity, and to families and children that they will not be protected. Although existing laws are meant to safeguard children against sexual violence, literature suggests that they seem to have fallen short in doing so, both in developing and developed countries.

Offender Registration

Sex offender registration policies that allowed registries to become public were introduced in the United States in 2006 (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009). It is a prevention strategy that is not yet in place in Zimbabwe and other developing countries. According to Finkelhor (2009), the enforcement of sex offender registration was meant to facilitate the apprehension of recidivistic offenders and also to prevent crime by deterring existing and future offenders. However, critics argue that such kind of registration makes it difficult for offenders to reintegrate into society and thus violates the rights of those who have already paid their debt to society, especially those forced to register retroactively (Finkelhor, 2009).

In the United States, sex offender registration as a strategy seems to be popular with the general public (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Phillips, 1998). For instance, in one study, 95% of the respondents agreed that the name and photograph of registered sex offenders should be available to the public (Levenson et al., 2007). In another study, more than 80% of Washington State residents believed community notification laws were very important (Phillips, 1998). Further evidence for the popularity of sex offender registration comes from a study with a general population sample from Massachusetts which found that on a scale from 1 (*strongly disapprove*) to 10 (*strongly approve*), participants' score averaged more than 8 in support of public sex offender registries (Proctor, Badzinski, & Johnson, 2002).

Community Notification

Although community notification and registration are often implemented and studied together, community notification should be seen as a separate policy (Finkelhor, 2009). Two goals of community notification as a strategy can be discerned. It is meant to help community members take steps to protect themselves against specific offenders in their midst as well as help law enforcement to educate the public about how to protect children in general (Finkelhor, 2009).

Research evidence on the effectiveness of community notification is inconclusive. For instance, a study that was conducted in Washington State reported a drop in reoffending following the implementation of notification but was not able to disentangle the decline from the overall downward trend in crime and other factors (Barnoski, 2005). Evidence for the effectiveness of notification comes from a Minnesota study that reported a significant decline in sex offense recidivism among the highest risk offenders after a community notification law was implemented (Duwe & Donnay, 2008). However, a Wisconsin study found no effect of notification on whether offenders were recommitted to prison (Zevitz, 2000). According to Finkelhor (2009), researchers have shown that notification makes families more likely to take steps to protect themselves. In addition, public opinion surveys have generally found the public to favor notification laws (Klima & Lieb, 2008). Studies have documented the difficulties offenders have in finding jobs and places to live, and in avoiding harassment (Tewksbury, 2005), when their status is made known.

Sentence Lengthening and Civil Commitment

Advocates of this strategy believe that it helps reduce the number of offenders at large in the community capable of committing new offenses. They also believe stiffer punishments have deterrent effects. Similar sentiments were echoed in a South African study in which Bird and Spurr (2004) report that people were not satisfied with sentences

given to rapists as evidenced by their clamoring for stiffer sentences such as the death penalty and life imprisonment. However, in Zimbabwe, the ineffectiveness of this strategy is buttressed by a bill that was recently moved in Parliament, proposing to castrate those accused of raping children. In Zimbabwe, if found guilty of rape, the perpetrator faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison (applies to survivors below 12 years), whereas the maximum sentence for statutory rape is 5 years in prison (survivor 12-16 years; Sexual Offences Act, 2001). These sentences may not be deterrent enough given that the survivor risks contracting HIV and AIDS.

There is no research that can corroborate whether sentencing practices have an effect on sex crime (Finkelhor, 2009). Some studies of crime in general have linked higher incarceration rates with decreasing crime in general (Levitt, 2004). However, the effect is thought to result more from incapacitation than from deterrence (Finkelhor, 2009). It is not clear how much of the improvement is achieved through longer sentences and how much through increased apprehension and incarceration of criminals (Finkelhor, 2009). On the basis of current evidence, the extent to which longer sentences and civil commitment do or can reduce overall risks of child molestation cannot be determined.

Enhanced Detection and Arrest

The most elemental thing the criminal justice system can do about a crime is to increase its detection and disclosure and the likelihood that the offender will be arrested and prosecuted (Finkelhor, 2009). Disclosure can terminate abusive relationships, which are frequently ongoing in CSA, and prevent future ones. The offenders, who are caught, even if they are not incapacitated, are deterred through embarrassment, humiliation, and increased vigilance by members of their social network (Finkelhor, 2009). Other potential offenders may be deterred by the circulation of news that offenders get caught. A case in point is the use of suggestion boxes in Zimbabwe.

There is no research that has been conducted to investigate whether increased law enforcement efforts to disclose, investigate, and arrest have a deterrent effect on sex crime against children (Finkelhor, 2009). For instance, it is difficult to disentangle the role of suggestion boxes in Zimbabwe, in leading to the disclosure of cases of CSA from the efforts of other organizations and strategies.

According to Finkelhor (2009), the potential efficacy of detection and arrest is confirmed by evidence that many child sexual abusers offend repeatedly before getting caught, but thereafter have relatively low recidivism rates compared with other offenders. Getting caught thus plays a crucial role in desistance (Smallbone, Marshall, & Wortley, 2008). General criminology research tends to confirm that offenders are deterred more by an increase in the risk of getting caught than

by an increase in the severity of the likely punishment (Grasmick & Bryjak, 1980).

Educational Programs

Although most of the educational programs are school based, they have also been aimed at families, teachers, youth service workers, and others who may be in a position to intervene (Goldman, 2007; Kenny, 2010; Wurtele, Moreno, & Kenny, 2008). The primary goal of educational programs has been to impart skills to help children identify dangerous situations and prevent unwanted forms of touching and contact, and other ways in which offenders groom survivors, as well as to teach them how to refuse approaches and invitations, how to break off interactions, and how to summon help (Collings, 2007; Finkelhor, 2009). Educational programs also have elaborate secondary goals. For instance, one has been to short-circuit and report ongoing abuse (Finkelhor, 2009). Another, most important from the prevention perspective, has been to mitigate the negative consequences of abuse among children who may have been exposed by helping them not feel guilty or at fault (Finkelhor, 2009; Wurtele, 2009). Different programs have targeted children of different ages, ranging from preschoolers to elementary and middle school children. For instance, in Zimbabwe, educational programs were infused into the school curriculum in the mid-1990s under the subject "Aids Education," which is taught from primary to secondary level. At primary level, child abuse is one of the topics in Aids Education and covers the various aspects of sexual abuse such as forms of touch up to sexual molestation. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs through the Victim Friendly Court launched a massive campaign against CSA involving both primary and secondary school pupils (Manzongo, 2006). In South Africa, Life Orientation subjects also include topics on CSA. In the United States, prevention programs have been bundled into larger safety and health education curricula since the late 1980s (Finkelhor, 2009).

The involvement of parents in CSA prevention programs continues to receive attention due to its perceived advantages. Research shows that when parents are trained in abuse prevention, children receive repeated exposure to prevention information in the natural environment (Burgess & Wurtele, 1998; Wurtele et al., 2008). Furthermore, discussing CSA with a parent might make it easier for a child to disclose to that parent if abuse has occurred or occurs in future. Educated parents would be better able to identify survivors of CSA and how to respond to disclosures of abuse. Even more important is the view that parents who have acquired information about the grooming process of offenders have the potential of limiting the access of potential perpetrators to their children (Wurtele et al., 2008). Regrettably, most of the studies that investigated the involvement of parents in prevention programs were conducted in developed countries, especially the

United States (Kenny, 2010; Kenny & Wurtele, 2008; Wurtele et al., 2008). For instance, a study that was conducted in Colorado in the United States by Wurtele et al. (2008) provides evidence that a relatively brief parent educational program can improve parents' knowledge and ability to talk with their children about personal safety. In another study that was carried out in Florida, Kenny (2010) establishes that at the 3-month follow-up, parents reported maintenance of their child's knowledge and continued satisfaction with the program.

Given some encouraging findings and a prevention model that has proven successful in other youth safety areas, it would seem prudent to continue to pursue educational strategies to prevent sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 2009). Child-focused sexual abuse prevention programs can teach children to distinguish between abusive and nonabusive situations, increase their knowledge, and enhance their personal safety skills (Wurtele, 2009). They can do so without producing negative side effects and actually have positive effects. There is also preliminary evidence that children are able to apply this information in real-life situations and that prevention programs have led to a reduced incidence of CSA cases. Clearly, child-focused personal safety programs play an important part in the effort to keep children safe from sexual abuse, but they cannot single handedly accomplish CSA prevention. Although educational programs are in place in both developing and developed countries, studies that have been conducted to determine their efficacy remain concentrated in developed countries especially the United States, where they seem to have yielded considerable success.

Outreach Programs

In addition to justice system efforts to control known offenders and educational efforts directed at children, a number of other strategies to prevent sexual abuse have been proposed or implemented although on a smaller scale.

Drawing on other community-oriented (as opposed to clinic or school based) primary prevention strategies in public health, one recent concept has proposed trying to target potential abusers (usually through public advertisements) with messages that reinforce the awareness that their behavior is wrong and harmful, and urging them to seek help, often through a confidential telephone hot line (Finkelhor, 2009). This approach appears to be prominent in Zimbabwe where the Department of Public Relations in the Zimbabwe Republic Police, and several nongovernmental organizations such as Child Alert, Child-Line, Girl Child Network, among others, often address public gatherings on the prevention of CSA. For instance, the Child-Line has a hot line that children can use to report incidents of sexual abuse.

Some surveys have shown that overall community knowledge and attitudes about sexual abuse shift in the wake of campaigns (Chasan-Taber & Tabachnick, 1999). Follow-up

studies have also shown that some offenders do contact the hot lines, meaning that some potential offenders at least attend to the publicity (Smallbone et al., 2008). It is not clear, however, whether the hot line calls have prevented any abuse.

Goal of the Study

Extant literature reveals that no strong scientific evidence points as yet in the direction of one strategy or program to prevent sexual abuse. Although educational programs have had a positive impact especially in the United States, research evidence on their efficacy is still equivocal. Other strategies for preventing sexual abuse and its consequences, such as community publicity efforts or outreach to potential offenders, are certainly worth exploring as well. Unfortunately, there is paucity in literature on the perspectives of children, the main beneficiaries of CSA prevention programs. A few Western studies that attempted to close this gap (e.g., Levenson et al., 2007; Phillips, 1998; Proctor et al., 2002) targeted the general population. To a larger extent, the efficacy of CSA prevention programs hinges on how they are viewed by those whom they are intended to help. Against this backdrop, the goal of this study was to increase knowledge and provide evidence on pupils' perspectives regarding CSA prevention strategies. This study thus sought to close a gap in both extant and local literature. To this effect, it was therefore prudent to engage secondary school pupils in Gweru district of Zimbabwe to determine strategies which they think can be effective in protecting them against sexual abuse. Knowledge about pupils' perspectives will help build a robust evidence base that will be used to improve the quality and efficacy of CSA prevention strategies and policies.

Research Design

The centrality of the research design in any research endeavor is highlighted by Hall (1996) who says that "the test question for any academic discussion which is based on research findings is whether the conclusions are justified by the research design" (p. 17). This study adopted the descriptive survey strategy because survey research has the capacity to collect data for describing populations that are too large to observe directly (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Both quantitative and qualitative data were used. Using this design, this study was able to gain a cross section of the views of secondary school pupils in Gweru urban district, regarding strategies that they considered could be used to protect them against sexual abuse.

Participants

The sample comprised 268 pupils attending Gweru district day secondary schools (50% female; M age = 15.42, SD = 1.376). The identification of these participants was based on

three premises. First, local literature shows that secondary school pupils are vulnerable to sexual abuse (Makoni, 2006; Thompson, 2009). Second, as adolescents, secondary school pupils are a high-risk population group as they are more likely to be sexually active. Third, these pupils were preferred because they were believed to be mature enough to have the language to express their perspectives in English.

Sampling Procedure

A two-stage random sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, three day secondary schools were randomly selected from a cluster of seven in Gweru district. In the second stage, stratified random sampling was used to select Forms 2 and 4 pupils at each participating school (Marvasti, 2004).

Research Instruments

In this study, the main data collection instrument was a brief self-administered questionnaire. Babbie and Mouton (2005) cite questionnaires as the most common instruments for data collection in survey research. In view of the sensitivity associated with CSA, a self-reporting questionnaire was used in this study because it provided greater anonymity thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining information in a less threatening way. The questionnaire had two major parts. In the first part, participants were asked to indicate their gender and level of education. The second part was structured as follows: How can secondary school pupils be protected against sexual abuse? List down three ways that you think can be used in the space provided. The questionnaire was pilot tested to 20 Form 2 and 20 Form 4 pupils at a secondary school that did not take part in this study, and was found to be able to produce data that can measure pupils' perspectives on strategies that can protect them against sexual abuse.

Ethical Considerations

Before collecting data, the researcher sought for permission from the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture, which was granted. In addition, the researcher also asked for informed consent from all the participants (Sarantakos, 2005). The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants and allowed them to ask questions about the research before asking them to complete the questionnaire (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). It was also made clear to the participants that taking part in the study was voluntary, and that those who chose to participate were free to withdraw their participation at any stage if they so wished.

Debriefing and counseling are necessary especially in situations where the researcher encounter leaves the participants stressed or with serious questions (Tang, 2002). This had important implications for this study because it dealt

with a very sensitive issue. In this regard, the school counselor was available during the administration of questionnaires to provide counseling and follow-up in the event of any pupil showing emotional distress (Yuen, 2007). In addition, all participants were given information pamphlets on Gweru-based organizations, which provide professional assistance on issues relating to CSA.

Data Collection Procedure

In this study, the self-reporting questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher to ensure a high response rate (Sarantakos, 2005). On the agreed dates with the school heads, and with the cooperation of the class teachers, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the pupils in their classrooms. Data were collected during free periods to minimize interruption of other school activities. Participants were asked to sit separately so that they could feel free to complete the questionnaire without sharing their answers.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the thematic content analysis technique (Marvasti, 2004). This technique allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data that were gathered in this study. In addition, this technique facilitated the process of identifying themes that emerged in this study. Thematic content analysis enabled the researcher to identify the reoccurring suggestions on how secondary school pupils can be protected against sexual abuse. Themes that emerged from this study were presented in tables, with percentages showing their distribution and popularity among the participants.

Results

This section presents the views of the participants regarding strategies that can be used to protect secondary school pupils against sexual abuse. Results are presented under two main subheadings, distinguished by gender and level of education. This study specifically sought to address the following research question:

Research Question 1: How can secondary school pupils be protected against sexual abuse?

Participants' Suggested Strategies of Fighting Sexual Abuse by Gender

Participants were asked to suggest ways that they think can help protect secondary school pupils against sexual abuse. As shown in Table 1, males' and females' suggestions on strategies that can be used to fight CSA have similarities as well as differences. For instance, both male and female participants acknowledged that CSA can be fought by teaching children about it, introducing Guidance and Counseling in

Table 1. Participants' Suggested CSA Prevention Strategies by Gender

Suggested prevention strategy	Males (%)	Females (%)
Schools should offer lessons on Guidance and Counseling	20.1	17.2
Teaching children about sexual abuse in schools	54.5	70.1
Reporting any form of sexual abuse to the police	38.1	26.1
Girls should wear decent clothes	23.0	9.0
Each school should have a suggestion box	17.2	11.2
Staying home at night	9.0	13.4
Children should always avoid talking to strangers	11.2	24.6
Children should say no to sexual activities	17.9	26.9
Choosing good friends	13.4	21.6
Banning discos in schools	7.5	9.0
Children should avoid people they do not trust	17.2	13.4
Children must be taught not to trust anyone	8.2	10.4
Forming new clubs where children can give each other knowledge about sexual abuse	15.7	11.9
Children must know their rights	10.4	15.7
Avoid walking in the bush	4.5	2.2
Life imprisonment for perpetrators	3.7	0
People who sexually abuse children must be hanged	2.3	6.0
Teaching the community about CSA	5.2	0
Making use of the media to increase awareness about CSA	3.7	7.4
Children must move in groups when going to and coming from school	3.0	9.0
Students should not take alcohol	3.0	8.2
Showing children dangers of sexual activities by using pictures of people with HIV and AIDS	6.7	3.7
School gates must be locked all the time	9.0	11.2
Parents must teach children about sexual abuse at home	4.5	9.7

Note: CSA = child sexual abuse.

schools, as well as reporting any incident of sexual abuse to the police. However, some variations can be discerned, suggesting the interaction of gender. For example, female respondents suggested that CSA can be fought by avoiding strangers, saying no to sexual advances, and having reliable friends, whereas their male counterparts, although in small proportions, suggested teaching the community about CSA, forming new clubs where children can share knowledge about CSA, and enacting a life imprisonment sentence for would-be perpetrators.

Participants' Suggested Strategies of Fighting CSA by Level of Education

Findings on participants' views on ways of fighting CSA were also disaggregated by level of education (Table 2). By and large, both Form 2 and Form 4 participants share the premises that CSA can be fought by teaching children about it, and reporting any incident to the police. However, some variations were noted. For instance, Form 2 participants suggested avoiding strangers, staying home at night, and moving in groups on the way to and from school, whereas those who were in Form 4 suggested the introduction of Guidance and Counseling, saying no to any sexual advances, having reliable friends, teaching children about their rights, and also teaching the community about CSA.

Discussion

In this study, participants were asked to suggest strategies that can be used to protect them against sexual abuse. It emerged that, by and large, the distribution of the suggested strategies was influenced by the gender and level of education of the participants. Consistent with research (Collings, 2007; Finkelhor, 2009; Wurtele, 2009), the present study established that the main strategy that participants unanimously believed can help protect them against sexual abuse is by teaching them about the social vice. Although this view was shared by both Forms 2 and 4 participants, there was a preponderance of females. However, there is paucity of literature both in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, against which to compare the influence of gender in preferring to fight sexual abuse by teaching about it. One may be tempted to believe that more females than males preferred to be taught about sexual abuse perhaps because they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse as suggested by the majority of international literature.

Allied to teaching children about sexual abuse, this study further established variations that differed with both levels of education and gender, but were consistent with literature. For instance, it emerged that Form 4 females suggested teaching children about their rights, choosing reliable friends, and saying no to sexual activities. Consistent with research,

Table 2. Participants' Suggested CSA Prevention Strategies by Level of Education

Suggested prevention strategy	Form 2 (%)	Form 4 (%)
Schools should offer lessons on Guidance and Counseling	9.0	28.4
Teaching children about sexual abuse in schools	60.0	65.7
Reporting any form of sexual abuse to the police	30.6	33.6
Girls should wear decent clothes	9.7	22.4
Each school should have a suggestion box	11.2	17.2
Staying home at night	14.2	8.2
Children should always avoid talking to strangers	22.5	13.4
Children should say no to sexual activities	13.3	31.3
Choosing good friends	12.7	22.4
Banning discos in schools	5.2	11.3
Children avoid people they do not trust	14.3	16.4
Children must be taught not to trust anyone	9.7	16.6
Forming new clubs where children can give each other knowledge about sexual abuse	10.4	17.2
Children must know their rights	8.2	17.9
Avoid walking in the bush	4.5	2.2
Life imprisonment for perpetrators	0.7	3.0
People who sexually abuse children must be hanged	3.0	5.2
Teaching the community about CSA	0	5.4
Making use of the media to increase awareness about CSA	6.7	4.5
Children must move in groups when going to and coming from school	9.7	2.2
Students should not take alcohol	1.5	9.8
Showing children dangers of sexual activities by using pictures of people with HIV and AIDS	3.0	7.5
School gates must be locked all the time	14.2	6.0
Parents must teach children about sexual abuse at home	6.0	8.2

Note: CSA = child sexual abuse.

some earlier studies have also pointed out that choosing reliable friends (Newcomb, Munoz, & Carmona, 2009) and saying no to sexual activities (Collings, 2007; Wurtele, 2009) can help in protecting children against sexual abuse. Similarly, a recent study that was conducted in Zimbabwe by Gwirayi and Shumba (2011) report that secondary school pupils were not aware of their rights except for education. In this regard, the suggestion coming from participants in this study has far reaching implications given that CSA in its various forms is a violation of their rights as enshrined by the CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (OAU, 1990). Sexual abuse is a form of violence that undermines the realization of children's rights. Arguably, it is through education that these adolescents can be equipped with skills to safeguard their rights. As Gwirayi and Shumba opine, children's awareness of their rights denotes some form of empowerment, which has a positive effect on the other domains of their lives. However, what remains difficult to interpret in this study is why Form 4 females were particularly apt to raise the issue concerning children's rights.

Consistent with literature, participants suggested the formation of new clubs in schools as a way of fighting CSA. Regrettably, this idea was suggested by a small proportion of males. The role of peers in sharing vital information has been reported in earlier studies (Chaffin, Kelleher, & Hollenberg,

1996). Consistent with the idea that adolescents need to separate from their families and develop into autonomous individuals, adolescents are more likely to accept feedback from peers than they are from adults (Chaffin et al., 1996).

Furthermore, the study noted other variations in suggestions that were associated with Form 4 males but generally consistent with research. For instance, Form 4 males were more likely to suggest having a suggestion box at each school, showing children dangers of sexual activities by using pictures of people with HIV and AIDS, and that girls should wear decent clothes. The use of pictures with people suffering from HIV and AIDS is important given that research has reported an association between the perpetration of CSA and HIV and AIDS and contracting sexually transmitted infections (Lalor, 2008; Pinheiro, 2006; WHO, 2004). This suggestion further illustrates respondents' awareness of the various implications of CSA for their health. However, male concern with girls wearing indecent and revealing clothes is characteristic of the Zimbabwean patriarchal society (Nhundu & Shumba, 2001). In the same vein, a study that investigated pupils' perceptions of sexual abuse by teachers in Zimbabwean schools reported that one of the reasons cited by male respondents was that girls wear clothes that reveal their bodies (Shumba et al., 2008). This mentality by male adolescents, which was also confirmed in this study, further buttresses the need for more education on issues to do with CSA.

The need to teach children about sexual abuse was further buttressed by responses that mainly came from Form 2 females. They suggested that secondary school pupils can be protected against sexual abuse by staying home at night, avoiding talking to strangers, moving in groups when going to and coming from school, and keeping school gates locked all the time. Form 2 males suggested avoiding walking in the bush. Although by and large, participants of both genders and forms suggested that children must avoid people they do not trust, most of the suggestions implying the need for more education and lack of knowledge about CSA came from Form 2 participants. Perhaps this could have been a function of their cognitive development relative to their Form 4 counterparts. The above suggestions clearly show pupils' lack of understanding about the dynamics of CSA such as its location and type of perpetrators. In this regard, participants did not consider family members, relatives, teenagers, or even trusted acquaintances such as schoolteachers, as potential perpetrators of sexual abuse. Research is unequivocal that perpetrators first gain the child's trust before abusing him or her (Spies, 2006; Wurtele, 2009), hence CSA is a betrayal of trust. Thus, participants' suggestion of avoiding people they do not trust further supports the need for more education on CSA given that the majority of perpetrators are people known very well by the survivors.

Research suggests that while child-focused sexual abuse prevention programs play an important part in the effort to keep children safe from sexual abuse, they cannot single handedly accomplish CSA prevention. In fact, literature shows that CSA prevention programs cannot be effective without parents (Wurtele et al., 2008). When parents are trained as prevention educators, their children receive repeated exposure to prevention information in the natural environment, thus providing a series of booster sessions to supplement other prevention efforts (Wurtele et al., 2008). Consistent with research, this study established the involvement of parents in the fight against CSA albeit this finding was reported by a small proportion of Form 4 females. In this regard, adolescents presumed that their parents were informed enough to teach them about sexual abuse, something that should not be taken for granted.

Furthermore, research suggests that one way of preventing the occurrence of sexual abuse is by educating the community at large about CSA (Petersen, Bhana, & McKay, 2005). Unfortunately, few prevention interventions have been aimed at the general public (Wurtele et al., 2008). This finding was confirmed in this study in that only a small proportion of Form 4 males suggested involving the community in the fight against CSA. This is a serious omission given that most cases of CSA are committed at home and in the perpetrator's home. CSA is a social problem that affects the various levels of society, including the community. The failure to link the fight against CSA with the community further buttresses the need for more education on prevention efforts. Given that communities have been involved in

fighting various forms of crime, they can also be reined in the fight against this social vice, which is a crime by both national and international laws.

Finally, in this study, participants scarcely referred to justice system strategies in their responses. Only a small proportion of males suggested an increase in jail sentences and capital punishment. Two interpretations can be gleaned in this regard. First, this finding could be a reflection of participants' lack of trust in the justice system strategies, which is supported by literature suggesting that laws have failed to protect children against sexual abuse (Briggs, 2005; Shumba, 2006). Second, this finding may suggest that participants were not aware of justice system strategies that are there to safeguard them against sexual abuse. Accordingly, this finding may further support the need for more education on CSA prevention programs and policies.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating pupils' perspectives on strategies that can be used to protect them against CSA. It established that most of the CSA prevention strategies which participants suggested are consistent with international literature. These include teaching children about sexual abuse, introducing Guidance and Counseling in schools, and reporting any incident of abuse to the police. However, the need for more education on CSA prevention programs and policies is predicated on the premise that little reference was made to parental and community involvement as well as the role of justice system strategies in the fight against sexual abuse. Contrary to extant literature, pupils' responses were mediated by gender and level of education, a noteworthy caveat in the area under investigation.

Recommendations

Based on the above research findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

- There is need to increase support toward school-based programs that focus on prevention of CSA because they are an important strategy that can increase the skills and confidence necessary to avoid sexual abuse. However, such programs should be differentiated according to the level of education of the students to cater for differences in cognitive development.
- This study strongly recommends active parent involvement in CSA prevention programs, utilizing a concurrent parent and child format, rather than targeting either parents or children alone. Simultaneous education of both parents and children allows for increased communication about personal safety, and the joint participation of parent and child may positively affect the parent-child relationship and

the ease with which families communicate about this sensitive issue. Educating parents about CSA can help dispel the myth they commonly hold about CSA and encourage them to provide a safer home environment for their children, thereby reducing the likelihood of victimization.

- More resources should be channeled toward the establishment of child protection committees in the various communities where children reside. Although these committees are believed to be in place, no mention was made about them in this study suggesting their lack of publicity, perhaps obscurity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- African Child Policy Forum. (2008). *The African report on child wellbeing: How child-friendly are African governments?* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Author.
- Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2005). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Barnoski, R. (2005). *Sex offender sentencing in Washington State: Has community notification reduced recidivism rates?* Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Beyond Inequalities. (2008). *The girl child*. Available from <http://www.sardc.net>
- Bird, W., & Spurr, N. (2004). Media representations of baby rape: The case of "BabyTshepang." In L. M. Richter, A. Dawes, & C. Higson-Smith (Eds.), *Sexual abuse of young children in Southern Africa* (pp. 36-52). Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Briggs, F. (2005, March 9). *Every school's worst nightmare: Child sexual Abuse*. AW Jones Oration, The University of Adelaide, the Elders Hall, Adelaide.
- Burgess, E., & Wurtele, S. (1998). Enhancing parent-child communication about sexual abuse: A pilot study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22, 1167-1175.
- Chaffin, M., Kelleher, K., & Hollenberg, J. (1996). Onset of physical abuse and neglect: Psychiatric, substance abuse, and social risk factors from prospective community data. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 20, 191-203.
- Chasan-Taber, L., & Tabachnick, J. (1999). Evaluation of a child sexual abuse prevention program. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 11, 279-292.
- Collings, S. J. (2007). Emerging issues in research on school-based sexual abuse prevention programmes. *Child Abuse Research in South Africa*, 8, 60-68.
- Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5: 16] Act 14/2006*. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.
- Duwe, G., & Donnay, W. (2008). The impact of Megan's law on sex offender recidivism: The Minnesota experience. *Criminology*, 46, 411-446.
- Finkelhor, D. (2009). The prevention of childhood sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 169-194.
- Goldman, J. D. (2007). Primary school student-teachers' knowledge and understandings of child sexual abuse and its mandatory reporting. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46, 368-381.
- Grasmick, H. G., & Bryjak, G. J. (1980). The deterrent effect of perceived severity of punishment. *Social Forces*, 59, 471-491.
- Gwirayi, P. (2010). The role of macro-systemic contexts in understanding the aetiology and epidemiology of child sexual abuse in Southern Africa. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12(2), 253-268.
- Gwirayi, P., & Shumba, A. (2011). Children's rights: How much do Zimbabwe urban secondary school pupils? *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 19, 195-204.
- Hall, V. (1996). *Dancing on the ceiling: A study of women managers in education*. London, England: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Kenny, M. C. (2010). Child sexual abuse education with ethnically diverse families: A preliminary analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 981-989.
- Kenny, M. C., & Wurtele, S. K. (2008). Preschoolers' knowledge of genital terminology: A comparison of English and Spanish speakers. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 3, 345-354.
- Kernsmith, P. D., Craun, S. W., & Foster, J. (2009). Public attitudes toward sexual offenders and sex offender registration. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 18, 290-301.
- Klima, T., & Lieb, R. (2008). *Risk assessments instruments to predict recidivism of sex Offenders: Practices in Washington State*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Lalor, K. (2008). Child sexual abuse and HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse Review*, 17, 94-107.
- Levenson, J. S., Brannon, Y. N., Fortney, T., & Baker, J. (2007). Public perceptions about sex offenders and community protection policies. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 7(1), 1-25.
- Levitt, S. D. (2004). Understanding why crime fell in the 1990s: Four factors that explain the decline and six that do not. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18, 163-190.
- Makoni, B. (2006). *Beauty pageants expose underage girls to sexual abuse*. Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe: Girl Child Network.
- Manzongo, J. (2006, September 19). State launches campaign against child sexual abuse. *The Herald*. Retrieved from allafrica.com/stories/200609190245.html
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology*. London, England: SAGE.
- Newcomb, M. D., Munoz, D. T., & Carmona, J. V. (2009). Child sexual abuse consequences in community samples of Latino and European American adolescents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33, 533-544.

- Nhundu, T., & Shumba, A. (2001). The nature and frequency of reported cases of teacher perpetrated child sexual abuse in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25, 1517-1534.
- Organization of African Unity. (1990). *African charter on the rights and welfare of the child* (Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49). Retrieved from <http://www.umn.edu/humanrts/africa/afchild.htm>
- Petersen, L., Bhana, A., & McKay, M. (2005). Sexual violence and youth in South Africa: The need for community-based prevention Interventions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29, 1233-1248.
- Phillips, D. M. (1998). *Community notification as viewed by Washington's citizens* [Electronic version]. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Pinheiro, P. S. (2006). *The UN Secretary General's report on violence against children: The way forward*. New York, NY: United Nations.
- Proctor, J. L., Badzinski, D. M., & Johnson, M. (2002). The impact of media on knowledge and perceptions of Megan's law. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 13, 356-379.
- Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social research* (3rd ed.). London, England: Macmillan.
- Sexual Offences Act [Chapter 9:21]. Act 8/2001*. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.
- Shumba, A. (2006). Child abuse in schools and the law in Zimbabwe: Current issues and challenges in the new millennium. *Child Abuse Research in South Africa*, 7(2), 48-60.
- Shumba, A., Gwirayi, P., Shumba, J., Maphosa, C., Chireshe, R., Gudyanga, E., & Makura, A. H. (2008). Pupils' perceptions of sexual abuse by teachers in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 18(2), 279-282.
- Smallbone, S., Marshall, W. L., & Wortley, R. (2008). *Preventing child sexual abuse: Evidence, policy and practice* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Willan Publishing.
- Smith, D. (2009). *Child rape epidemic in Zimbabwe*. Available from <http://Johannesburg.guardian.co.uk>
- Spies, G. M. (2006). The effect of sexual abuse on a child. In G. M. Spies (Ed.), *Sexual abuse: Dynamics, assessment and healing* (pp. 44-58). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Tang, C. S. (2002). Childhood experience of sexual abuse among Hong Kong Chinese college students. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26, 23-37.
- Tewksbury, R. (2005). Collateral consequences of sex offender registration. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 21, 67-81.
- Thompson, M. (2009). *Zimbabwe girls trade sex for food*. Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1989). *Adoption of a Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN Doc. A/Res/44/25). New York, NY: United Nations.
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2010). *Inequities in the fulfillment of children's rights in South Africa: A statistical review*. Pretoria, South Africa: Author.
- Van Niekerk, J. (1999, March 16-18). *Children and survival sex in KwaZulu-Natal*. Paper presented at the National Consultative Conference Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children, University of the Western Cape, South Africa.
- World Health Organization. (2004, August 30-September 3). *Child sexual abuse: A Salient health emergency*. In Fifty-fourth Session, Regional Committee for Africa, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.
- Wurtele, S. K. (2009). Preventing sexual abuse of children in the twenty-first century: Preparing for the challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 18, 1-18.
- Wurtele, S. K., Moreno, T., & Kenny, M. (2008). Evaluation of a sexual abuse prevention workshop for parents of young children. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 1, 331-340.
- Yuen, C. W. (2007). *Child maltreatment in Malaysia: Prevalence, correlates, and probable health and behavioural consequences* (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.
- Zevitz, R. G. (2000). *Sex offender notification: Assessing the impact in Wisconsin (US)*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Zink, T., Klesges, L., Stevens, S., & Decker, P. (2009). The development of a sexual abuse severity score: Characteristics of childhood sexual abuse associated with trauma symptomatology, somatization, and alcohol abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24, 537-546.

Bio

Pesanayi Gwirayi is an associate professor in sociology of education at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. His research interests include child maltreatment, child rights, equality of educational opportunity, and gender issues in education.