**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PERPETRATED BY MEMBERS OF THE IMMMEDIATE FAMILY IN MBARE SUBURB**

**BY**

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**R112734W**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES HONOURS DEGREE AT THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY.**

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# Table of Contents

[Table of Contents i](#_Toc402119552)

[RELEASE FORM i](#_Toc402119553)

[APPROVAL FORM ii](#_Toc402119554)

[DECLARATION iii](#_Toc402119555)

[Dedication iv](#_Toc402119556)

[Acknowledgements v](#_Toc402119557)

[Abstract vi](#_Toc402119558)

[List of figures and tables vii](#_Toc402119559)

[List of Acronyms viii](#_Toc402119560)

[INTRODUCTION 1](#_Toc402119561)

[Background of the Study 1](#_Toc402119562)

[Problem Statement 2](#_Toc402119563)

[Research Questions 3](#_Toc402119564)

[Significance of the Study 3](#_Toc402119565)

[Theoretical Framework 4](#_Toc402119566)

[Conceptual Framework 5](#_Toc402119567)

[Methodology 11](#_Toc402119568)

[Research Approach 11](#_Toc402119569)

[Research Design 12](#_Toc402119570)

[Population and Sampling 12](#_Toc402119571)

[Delimitation of study 13](#_Toc402119572)

[Limitations of the Study 13](#_Toc402119573)

[Data Collection 14](#_Toc402119574)

[Data Analysis 15](#_Toc402119575)

[Ethical Considerations 15](#_Toc402119576)

[Chapter 1 17](#_Toc402119577)

[An Overview of Child Sexual Abuse in Zimbabwe with Particular Reference to Mbare Suburb 17](#_Toc402119578)

[1.0 Introduction 17](#_Toc402119579)

[1.1 Effects of child sexual abuse on development 17](#_Toc402119580)

[1.2 Causes of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe 21](#_Toc402119581)

[1.3 Nature of perpetrators 25](#_Toc402119582)

[1.4 Environments of risk 27](#_Toc402119583)

[1.5 Child Sexual Abuse in Mbare 31](#_Toc402119584)

[1.6 Hamilton’s Rule Theory 33](#_Toc402119585)

[Chapter 2 35](#_Toc402119586)

[Unpacking and Explaining Child Sexual Abuse by Immediate Family Members in Mbare 35](#_Toc402119587)

[2.0 Introduction 35](#_Toc402119588)

[2.1 A Description of Child Sexual Abuse perpetrated by members of the Immediate Family in Mbare 35](#_Toc402119589)

[Chapter 3 47](#_Toc402119590)

[Tackling Child Sexual Abuse by Immediate Family Members in Mbare 47](#_Toc402119591)

[3.0 Introduction 47](#_Toc402119592)

[3.2 Conclusions 57](#_Toc402119593)

[REFERENCES 61](#_Toc402119594)

[Appendix 1 66](#_Toc402119595)

[Appendix 2 69](#_Toc402119596)

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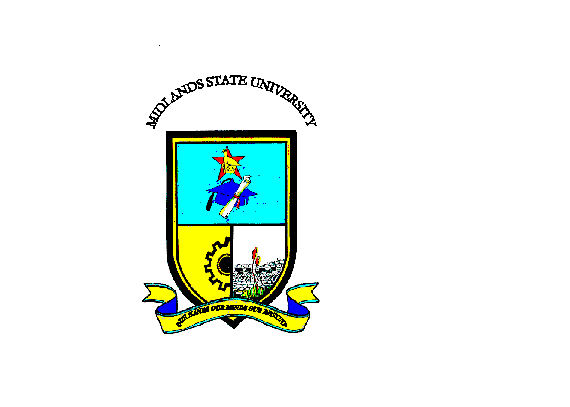
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## 

The undersigned certify that they have supervised the student Munyuki Caroline on the dissertation entitled:

**Child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family in Mbare suburb:** submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies Honours Degree.

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**DECLARATION**

I Caroline Varaidzo Munyuki, hereby declare that this dissertation research for Degree in Development Studies at Midlands State University is my own work and it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any Post Graduate qualification to another university or another qualification

Student Name………………………………………………………

Signature……………………………………………………………

Date…………………………………………………………………

# Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Mary F. Machingaidze, my family and in remembrance of my late father Jonathan Munyuki

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Almighty God for taking me this far in my academics. If it was not for His grace I would not have made it.

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# Abstract

*The focus of this research was on exploring the phenomenon of child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by members of the immediate family. The research was inspired by the increasing incidence of children who are being sexually abused by members of the immediate family in Mbare and therefore sought to get an understanding of the dynamics and trends of the phenomenon. The descriptive research design was used in order to describe the situation of child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by the members of the immediate family within Mbare. An explanatory research design was also applied during the research in order to explain the phenomenon, with regards to the trends and dynamics involved. The study population comprised 15 participants who include social workers, health staff, and child survivors of sexual abuse, representatives from organisations and some members of the families of the children who had been sexually abused. The researcher employed interviews as a data collection instrument. In view of the interview responses, the research ascertained that indeed there are some members of the immediate family who are perpetrating abuse on children, and it is the girl child who is most affected. The study also found that children are mainly vulnerable because they are not very much aware of their rights. In light of this, the researcher outlined views from key respondents which are measures that should be taken to address problems at family level and also to raise the awareness of the general populace concerning child sexual abuse that is being perpetrated by members of the immediate family.*

# List of figures and tables

**Table 1** National statistics for child sexual abuse **24**

**Table 2** Types of sexual abuse (13-17 age group) **25**

**Table 3** Characteristics of perpetrators **26**

**Table 4** Locations of some of the sexual abuse incidences in Zimbabwe **27**

**Table 5** Survivors at the clinic in Mbare **32**

**Figure 1**Perpetrator –child relationship **26**

# List of Acronyms

**NBSLEA** National Baseline Survey on the Life

Experiences of Adolescents

**STI** Sexually Transmitted Infection

**ZRP** Zimbabwe Republic Police

**MSF** Medecins San Frontieres

# INTRODUCTION

## Background of the Study

In Zimbabwe child sexual abuse has become more prevalent than any other crime against humanity. Despite several efforts to try and curb the problem, it does not seem to recede, rather it keeps getting worse. According to Ndlovu (2014), there are 1500 children who were raped in the first five months of 2014 on a national scale. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) reported that they received 3168 cases in 2012 whilst in 2013 a total of 3297 cases were recorded. These statistics are an indication of how rampant child sexual abuse has become in Zimbabwe. Vinga (2014) points out that in the year 2014 Childline Zimbabwe also observed an increase of 14% in cases of the sexual abuse of children. This trend raises questions and curiosity concerning the child protection system in the country. The Girl Child Network also estimates that in Zimbabwe, on average, a maximum of 10 girls report rape cases almost every day and young boys are also sodomised.

In Harare, an article by the Daily News of 08 April 2013 reveals a police report that child rape has risen significantly beyond control as statistics indicated that 900 women and girls were raped in 2012. Sachiti (2010) also highlights that in high density areas such as Epworth, poor living conditions and poverty increase the exposure of children to sexual abuse due to the fact that children walk around in the communities begging for alms and in the process they get abused by people who are supposed to assist them. The suburb of Mbare, being a high residential area and mainly characterised by poor households and deplorable living conditions in most cases has not been spared on crimes of child sexual abuse, thus it is the focus of the study. Chimuka (2012) noted the sexual abuse of a sixteen year old girl by male peers in Mbare which resulted in her getting pregnant. Furthermore, trends and statistics indicate that the perpetrators of child sexual abuse are usually strangers, relatives, teachers, friends or other guardians and not members of the immediate family. This is in line with Mutandwa (2012) who postulates that in a research undertaken by the Family Support Trust as of July 2004 to June 2005, results indicated that an average of 9% of the children mentioned that their perpetrator was a stranger. In addition, the National Baseline Survey on the Life Experiences of Adolescents (NBLSEA) (2011) highlights that of the 13-17 year age group, 60% the females and 12% of the males reported that the offenders were either their boyfriend or girlfriend. Furthermore, according to Plan International (2009) 13% of girls testify that they have been sexually abused by teachers and fellow students at school. The NBLSEA (2011) also goes on to reveal that parents were only more prone to perpetrate physical violence on their children than sexual abuse. However, this has been changing, as there is a new phenomenon whereby members of the immediate family are sexually abusing their children. Statistical evidence shown by Childline (2010) from the year 2009 reveals that 17% of the children who had been sexually abused in Harare urban, including those abused in Mbare, identified the perpetrator as a member of the immediate family and in most cases the father is the major offender. Mbanje (2014) also reports the case of a 15-year-old male minor in the Magaba area of Mbare who was, on many occasions, forced by his mother to become intimate with her. This abuse resulted in the boy contracting a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). As such, the researcher has seen the need to explore the dynamics and trends of this emerging phenomenon which is threatening the protection of children within their families in Mbare.

## Problem Statement

The immediate family has previously been seen as a haven of security and protection for children against child sexual abuse in comparison to actors outside the immediate family who are most likely to be perpetrators of child sexual abuse. However, a new trend whereby children are being sexually abused by immediate family members has been surfacing in Mbare. 2009 statistics by Childline Zimbabwe indicated that of the 61 cases of child sexual abuse that were reported in Mbare, 9% of them were cases that were inflicted by members of the immediate family of the child. There is therefore need to find out the drivers, trends and forms of this unusual perpetration of child sexual abuse.

**Research Objectives**

1. Identify the types and forms of child sexual abuse perpetrated by immediate family members in Mbare.
2. Understand the factors that drive child sexual abuse in families in Mbare.
3. Find out how child sexual abuse cases occurring in the home are handled in Mbare.
4. Recommend effective solutions to curb child sexual abuse perpetrated by family members in Mbare.

## Research Questions

1. What are the types and forms of child sexual abuse perpetrated by immediate family members that are most prominent in Mbare?
2. What are the factors that give rise to child sexual abuse in a family setting Mbare?
3. How are cases of child sexual abuse perpetrated by family members handled by the judicial system, family members and other relevant organisations Mbare?
4. What effective solutions can be recommended to eliminate or reduce child sexual abuse in a family setting in Mbare?

## Significance of the Study

The study is of great significance to a wide range of stakeholders. To the researcher, the study is important as it will develop the researcher’s understanding and give more insight pertaining to the problem under study. It will also endow the researcher with more skills on carrying out a research.

The study is also necessary with regards to the Midlands State University and the Department of Development Studies in particular. The study will significantly contribute to the Development Studies module on Children and Development by providing relevant information on the area of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Upon approval, the study will be used as a reference source for information by both students and lecturers.

Furthermore, non-governmental organisations such as Childline, Justice for Children Trust, Family Support Trust and other civil society organisations such as Child Protection Society of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children will benefit from this study by getting awareness on the prevalence of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. It will help increase awareness on this new phenomenon of child sexual abuse and assist in evidence based programming and policy making to curb this problem. It is also beneficial for dealing with these kinds of crimes more effectively.

The study also has the theoretical significance of addressing or bridging the research gap in studies that pertain to children. Child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family is a very under researched area, hence the study will help to enlighten on trends, dynamics and issues surrounding this phenomenon.

## Theoretical Framework

Hamilton’s rule is a theory that was propounded by William D. Hamilton in 1964. The theory gives a detailed explanation of the innate basis for family connections and self-sacrifice, that is, the mind-set of selflessness and a concern for the welfare of others.

Hamilton’s rule suggests that individuals should demonstrate a lesser amount of aggression and more concern towards people of closer connection, that is, people who have a very close biological descent, other than far or distant relatives. This is in line with West et al. (2001) who highlights that the theory expresses selflessness as an attitude that is reliant upon adequately high relations or closer ties between individuals. This implies that individuals tend to favour or support people whom they have closer ties with. West et al. (2001) also notes that the theory also shows that individuals should prefer to help blood relations to whom they are closely related more than distant relatives. According to the theory a person shares part of their genetic material with their parent or child.

Brembs (2001) also noted that the theory offers a good clarification as to why humans will rather be devoted to people of closer blood relations. Brembs (2001) argues that the theory’s aspect of selecting kin explains the behaviour of individuals towards their close relations rather than towards unrelated persons.

In a family, it is an acceptable norm that members of the immediate family treat each other with more affection and favourable attitudes towards one another. Members of the immediate family would prefer to bond more with each other than with persons who are not related to them or distant relatives. As such, members of the immediate family have the responsibility of protecting children from sexual abuse and not to harm them.

In this study, the theory was used in analysing the phenomenon of child sexual abuse within the immediate family, contrary to the view that children ought to be protected by those members from such inhumane acts.

## Conceptual Framework

A child, according to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, is any person under the age of eighteen. Legally, a child cannot fully consent to any form of sexual activity thus if a child has been found to be involved in one it is believed that the child would have been coerced to do so hence; that individual who coerces the child would have committed a crime.

Child sexual abuse, according to the World Health Organisation (1999), is the participation of a child in sexual activities that he/she does not fully understand and is unable to give knowledgeable consent to, and which the child is not developed enough to do. Munro (2000) also defines child sexual abuse as any sort of sexual acts with a minor by an adult, or even by another minor where consent is not involved, or it is not realistic to give consent. Therefore basing on this definition it is clear that not only adults perpetrate sexual abuse on children but other children can also do the same. In this study, the researcher focused on contact abuse in particular. Contact abuse encompasses physical interaction between the perpetrator and the child, for example virginity testing, female genital mutilation and penetrative abuse/rape among other forms of contact abuse that the researcher will bring out in the study.

The immediate family refers to one’s parents, brothers, sisters, grandfathers, grandmothers and uncles. In other words, these are the people who share the same biological decent. The Ministry of Labour and Social Services (2011) defines the immediate family as that family unit in which a child is born and it can also be referred to as the nuclear or biological family. In this study the concept of immediate family refers to individuals who are related to the child by birth, the concept further upholds that one has particular tasks or acts of responsibility towards a very close family member unlike family members who are quite distant.

Perpetrator refers to the individual whether male or female who sexually abuses a child. The International Rescue Committee (2012) defines a perpetrator as a person who directly inflicts or supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against his or her will.

**Literature Review**

Tuckman(1994) defines literature review as a broad examination or significant study on a particular topic. The review of related literature is a way of gathering information on a certain area of research which may assist in achieving or attaining the objectives of the problem under study. The researcher therefore analysed the works of other scholars on child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family.

Child sexual abuse has become an issue of great concern worldwide and particularly in Africa. This is evidenced by the increasing amount of literature concerning this problem. Stewart (2005) highlights that Sigmund Freud and Sociologist Durkheim contributed to the perceptive that incest, that is, sexual relations between family members, is a taboo. Freud argues that there should not be sexual interaction between a mother and father with their children or between siblings themselves. Stewart (2005) further highlights that sexual abuse is a signal of a family catastrophe and the abuse of the victim will perpetuate unless it is dealt with. Hayes (2000) notes that in some cases when parents inflict sexual abuse on their children it is compensation for the abuse that the parents themselves would have suffered when they were young. In his study of intra-familial sexual abuse, Belsky (1980) noted that unemployment of parents is one of the major risk factors for sexual abuse of children. Belsky(1980) suggests that children who experienced child sexual abuse often grew up with parents who were unemployed, he points out that unemployment increases the possibility of parents abusing their children through strain of material assets, or through augmented contact of parents with children. In the same vein several studies reveal that children living with divorced or single parents are at an even a higher risk of being sexually abused.

Parents who are involved in substance abuse are also considered to be perpetrators of sexual abuse to their children. Horwitz et al. (2003) postulates that children who experience sexual abuse within their families, usually have parents who are alcoholics and who often are drug addicts. Furthermore, Yen et al. (2008) noted that adults who abuse substances at times do not make sensible choices in their lives hence they are bound to inflict crimes such as sexual abuse on their own children. Hence this is also one of the many factors that explain why parents may end up sexually abusing their own children.

However, these studies were done in European and American countries hence it is difficult to universalise the findings considering that family settings differ according to culture, thus the purpose of this study is to explore findings in a study area in Zimbabwe.

Moreover most of the literature does not really explore child sexual abuse perpetrated by the immediate family members, an issue which this research intends to investigate. The literature reviewed reflects that in Africa, the scope and extent of child sexual abuse varies from country to country. According to UNICEF (2010) in Kenya, children are exposed to sex at a tender age particularly those who reside from slum areas where people are overcrowded and there are poor living standards. It is supposed that adults keep children in their houses so that they may sell them or give them for hire as prostitutes; this is assumed to be more prevalent in Nairobi, Mombasa and Malindi in Kenya. Furthermore, some parents give away their children to older men for marriage so that they can acquire money for school fees and other uses, thus it is a clear indication that poverty may drive the sexual abuse of children.

In addition, Opobo and Wandega (2011), in a study undertaken in the Jinja district of Uganda, established that children are mainly exposed to fondling and pornography by older adults as a form of sexual abuse. The study also found out that child sexual abuse occurs mostly in the homes and that on average, in Uganda, at least 10 000 children are abused annually where the total population of children adds up to 57% of the total 30 million citizens. Child sexual abuse is also known to spread sexually transmitted infections, for example, in Nigeria, Kisseka and Otesanya (1988) revealed that Sexually Transmitted Infection was prevalent amongst 961 patients who were children. Of the females who were recognized to have contracted an STI, their research reveals that 16% of them were less than five years old and 6% were less than 15 years in age. It was also noted that the sexual abuse was more common among children of school going age. Thus in this literature, not much is mentioned on sexual abuse inflicted on children by members of the immediate family, a research gap which the researcher attempted to address.

In southern Africa, South Africa has a higher rate of child sexual abuse and there are some children who are also known to be perpetrators. This is in line with Cantwell and Rosenberg (1990) who states that these juveniles of rape in most cases have also experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives so they tend to inflict it upon other children as well. Thus, abused children are also likely to abuse other children. Schacheter (1997) highlights that in Southern Africa, the child sexual abuse phenomenon began during the time of the diamond discovery. It is believed that during the colonial period, young girls were forced to marry, and what's more customary traditions and the collapse of the family institution condensed ethical ideals and increased the sexual abuse of children. Furthermore, Reddy et al (2003) highlights that scores of school children in South Africa undergo sexual abuse, several of the assaults occur in learning institutions. Research reveals that by the time young boys reached 18, a number of them would have reported being coerced to be intimate by female offenders. Richter and Dawes (2008) postulate that in South Africa children are likely to be abused in several locations or areas that include the family setting, on the streets and in schools among several other places of risk. Unemployment is yet another risk factor fuelling child sexual abuse within families, for example, Townsend and Dawes (2004) also observe that extreme levels of joblessness can intensify family strain and tension which can then consequently result in child abuse, for example, in a situation where young children sleep with older children as well as adults in the same room because of accommodation challenges and there is a big family.

In Zambia, child prostitution is observed to be another form of sexual abuse. UNICEF (2009) highlights that cases of child prostitution are rampant in most parts of the country, however the phenomenon is more prevalent in towns such as Lusaka and Livingstone. It has also been observed that children as young as 10 are found in bars and clubs. A major shortcoming of the literature on southern Africa is that most of the wide-ranging literature is confined to South Africa, a weakness which the researcher maximised on by undertaking a study of an area within the borders of Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, very few known studies have examined in detail the problem of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Mutandwa (2012) states that child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe has been very difficult to curtail because children are abused by people whom they know and this perpetuates the custom of silence because the crimes are rarely reported. In some cases children are coerced by other members of the family to withdraw the cases they would have reported to the police in order to protect family members who might have perpetrated the abuse.

Some religious beliefs also perpetuate sexual abuse of children in Zimbabwe. A study by Chitereka (2010) on child sexual abuse points out that, just like in several African countries, customs, superstitions and spiritual beliefs play a considerable part in the exposure of children to sexual abuse particularly in families, for instance, the belief that one can be cured of HIV/AIDS by being intimate with a minor or the tradition of girl child betrothal as a means of avenging angry ancestral spirits. However, the study was carried out in the past four years yet the cases of child sexual abuse are increasing daily with changing trends and dynamics, as such, this study is more relevant because it captured information on very recent cases and current information concerning the problem of child sexual abuse.

A study by Chiroro et al. (2006) reveals that girls who were raised or taken care of by brothers in law stood a great chance of being sexually abused by them. This is for the reason that in Zimbabwe there are certain cultural practices in which a brother in law plays with the young sister to his wife and in some cases the play may lead to sexual conduct like fondling or even rape. However, the limitation of this study is that it only focuses on abuse by persons who have no biological descent with the victims, an area which the researcher placed more emphasis in this study.

Furthermore, Masuka (2012) cited poverty as a major cause for child sexual abuse within a family setting. Guvamombe in Masuka (2012) highlights that in a certain area in Bindura, a family of up to seven people can sleep in a single room and this exposes children and the girl child in particular, to sexual abuse. However, the limitation of the above study is that it mainly used desktop research as a means of data collection, but in this study, the researcher accessed data by going into the field and interviewing child survivors of sexual abuse as well as their parents.

## Methodology

### Research Approach

The research was classified under the qualitative research approach. This is because the researcher intended to get insight about the nature of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse which is perpetrated by immediate family members. As such, the researcher employed the phenomenological research strategy. The aim of the researcher was to identify the real meaning of the child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family; this is according to Creswell (2009) who states that phenomenology is an approach of investigating the experiences of people about a particular phenomenon. The aim was therefore to understand the problem of child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by members of the immediate family from the perspective of the children themselves and their families as well as organisations such as childline.

### Research Design

This research used a descriptive research design. The researcher meant to give a thorough description of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family; this is in line with Kumar (2005) who notes that, what a descriptive research aims to do is to explain a trend or the way people react towards a matter. An explanatory research design was also used in order to give explanation and unearth the reasons and causes with regards to why a member of the immediate family inflicts sexual abuse on a child.

## Population and Sampling

The key informants and respondents of the research were based in the Mbare suburb of Harare. The study population consisted of the survivors of child sexual abuse in Mbare, the police, perpetrators of the abuse, social workers from Childline, and representatives from organisations such as Family Support Trust, Justice for children Trust, Medecins San Frontieres as well as other members of the community. The sample size comprised of 15 participants from Mbare and outside Mbare. The snowball sampling method was used so as to facilitate the identification of children who were sexually abused by way of being referred by the children, other participants as well as Childline Zimbabwe and Family Support Trust. Participants were asked to identify or name other participants who might be willing to take part in the study and provide the researcher with information. This method was used because it is difficult to locate the respondents of this rare phenomenon of child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by members of the immediate family; hence the study relied much on referrals from other participants. This sampling was also helpful because it minimises the amount of time that is utilised in locating respondents.

Convenience sampling was also used because of the availability of respondents and also the easiness to access them. It was also used based on the fact that respondents were not forced to participate but it was on a voluntary basis especially for the children who were abused sexually. This method also enabled the quick access of data as it was collected from people who were easy to reach. It was also useful considering that most people are not comfortable in disclosing sensitive issues such as sexual abuse.

## Delimitation of study

The research was conducted in Mbare residential area in Harare, Mbare is a high density area and the phenomenon of immediate family members who sexually abuse children has been on the rise. The target population comprised the sexually abused children, other members of the community in Mbare, organisations that provide services to children who are sexually abused such as Childline, Police Victim Friendly Unit as well as Medicins San Frontiers. The researcher was fully cognisant of other forms of abuse that might be occurring in the study area but the focus of this particular study was on sexual abuse that members of the immediate family perpetrate on children.

## Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was in the discussions that the researcher conducted with the child survivors of child sexual abuse. As an unfamiliar person to the child respondents it was difficult for the children to disclose some of the issues. The researcher noticed hesitation and therefore could not force the children to disclose information they did not feel comfortable talking about. Hence getting sufficient information from some of the respondents was quite an ordeal.

The researcher was limited to accessing a limited number of child survivors for interviews owing to denial of permission by parents and caregivers. This was also compounded by the unwillingness of some of the respondents to participate so the researcher could not compel those individuals to provide the much needed information.

It was difficult to access important respondents from other organisations because of their unavailability at the time of the research. Others were outside of Harare while others had other commitments at the time of the research so the researcher had to consult other members of the particular organisation so as to obtain information.

## Data Collection

The researcher used interviews as a way to solicit information from respondents. Unstructured and open-ended questions were used so that respondents were able to explain their views concerning child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family in their own words. This is in line with Denscombe (2000) who states that interviews have an advantage that they can be used for anyone who can speak and most people cooperate. Another advantage was that the researcher was able to rearticulate questions if there was need for further clarification on what the researcher intended to know.

In the view that the researcher interacted with children on a very sensitive issue, special measures were used in order to get information from children. The researcher made use of art/drawing for the children to express themselves without having to communicate verbally on some very sensitive issues. The researcher also made sure that she was patient with the children in order to get as much information as possible.

A desktop research was carried out in order to get scholarly information on the dynamics and trends of child sexual abuse perpetrated by immediate family members. An analysis of secondary sources such as documents, books, journals, reports and newspaper articles was carried out to facilitate the use of relevant data with regards to the sexual abuse of children by members of the immediate family as well as the interventions by various stakeholders.

## Data Analysis

Data was analysed in a descriptive manner which sought to retrieve information on the nature, extent, prevalence and reasons of child sexual abuse within a family setting, as well as understanding the beliefs of informants and their opinions. The researcher identified the main themes that arose from the responses of different informants. The themes were therefore used to analyse data from unstructured interviews, showing their distribution and popularity among respondents.

Transcription was also used as a means of converting recorded conversations to written words. According to Flick et al. (2004) transcripts are essential in order to make momentary conversational conduct lastingly accessible on paper.

Documents that provide records or pieces of evidence were analysed in order to get significant information about the phenomenon of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. These documents include journals, books, newspaper articles, National Baseline Surveys as well as reports by organisations.

## Ethical Considerations

The researcher assured respondents and children in particular, that participation in the research was voluntary and that privacy would be maintained throughout the research and after. The researcher also informed respondents that the information they disclose will be regarded as confidential and that the researcher will not share the information with any person.

Informants were assured that the information they had provided would be kept anonymous in order to guard the identity of the informant.

# Chapter 1

# An Overview of Child Sexual Abuse in Zimbabwe with Particular Reference to Mbare Suburb

## 1.0 Introduction

Zimbabwe is one of the many countries that ratified several international instruments on the rights of children; these comprise the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). By so doing, the Government of Zimbabwe devoted itself to execute the provisions of both agreements. In addition to these instruments, there are also Zimbabwean laws that assist in protecting children; these are the Children’s Protection and Adoption Act as well as the Children’s Act of 2001. However, notwithstanding the existence of all these laws child sexual abuse remains a crisis in Zimbabwe. The phenomenon does not only affect the victims of this abuse but evidence reveals that child sexual abuse has some ripple effects on wider national development. This chapter will also give a general overview of the child sexual abuse situation in Zimbabwe.

## 1.1 Effects of child sexual abuse on development

Politically, child sexual abuse is considered to be one of the main reasons of the limited or reduced participation of children in the political sphere. Hoffman (1995) argues that sexual abuse of children reduces the possibility of a society that is governed through democratic means, and also if a child’s self-respect is destroyed it will have an effect on the intensity and conduct of the way they participate in politics. If a child is sexually abused it might instil fear and even depression in the child such that they will not feel motivated to contribute to or participate in national development. Abuse creates an attitude of withdrawal in children that stems from the emotional trauma they continue to experience due to the abuse inflicted on them.

Child sexual abuse has the possibility of undermining national unity especially when a society is composed of people who are violent in nature. This is largely because when children are abused they are likely to develop a character of aggressiveness towards other people because of the abuse they would have experienced. If they are not given adequate psychosocial support and counselling they will grow up with the idea that aggression and violence is the normal way of life. Hence this will breed individuals who are abusive and who have a violent nature. This is detrimental to development as a politically unstable environment does not sustain development.

On the social facet of development, child sexual abuse is a driving factor of maternal mortality amongst the girl children. The New Zimbabwe of March 15 2014 reports that most teens lack information about maternal health issues so they are at a higher risk of maternal mortality, furthermore the risk of maternal death is two times higher in girls aged between 15-19 and extremely higher for girls whose age ranges from 10-14. Unwanted pregnancy is a driving factor of maternal mortality in children that get pregnant after they are sexually abused. If a child gets sexually abused and then falls pregnant, it is likely that the child will face complications during the pregnancy because the child might not be physically fit enough to have a child and it can lead to death. Furthermore, unsafe abortions by children can also be another factor of maternal deaths. Moreover, child sexual abuse also causes child mortality as children can sustain physical injuries that also can lead to death. As such it is a great challenge to attain Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 4 which lays down that by 2015 there should be a reduction in child mortality.

Furthermore, children who are sexually abused risk contracting sexually transmitted infections as well as HIV/AIDS. In some cases the perpetrators of the abuse will actually be people who are infected with the HIV virus and they transmit it to children. With the already existing stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS it will be an unbearable burden for children as society might discriminate against them. According to UNAIDS (2009) in 2007 there were 1,3 million people including children living with HIV in Zimbabwe. The Girl Child Network, a girl child-centred non-governmental organisation also pointed out that those victims of sexual assault who died between 1998-2004 totalled 2000 in number and this was as attributed to the transmission of HIV/AIDS by the rapist to the child. Hence, this kind of trend undermines the possibility of the country to attain for the country the Millennium Development Goal number 6 which states the combating of HIV/AIDS by the year 2015.

The attainment of education by children can also decrease owing to the increase in cases of children who are being sexually abused; this is largely because children might drop out of school. According to Dakwa et al. (2014) in some cases girls drop out of school because they will be suffering from illnesses that are HIV/AIDS related or because of the stigma that they may get from peers. The girl child in particular is likely to drop out of school due to the consequence of sexual abuse like pregnancy. What is appalling is that in some cases the child might not be able to go back to school while on the other hand the parents of the child might compel her to get married to the perpetrator. In the long run, gender inequality is likely to have a prolonged existence in society because the male child will end up getting more access to education than the female child. This will increase the subordination of women by men seeing that without equality of education it will be difficult for most women to get hold of employment.

Child sexual abuse can also lead to an increase in crime as other children may resort to substance abuse as well as the abuse of drugs as a means of dealing with the abuse. Individuals who use drugs or other substances do not make cautious decisions in life hence under the influence of drugs they might find themselves committing other crimes such as child sexual abuse particularly if they are left in the custody of children. In addition child sexual abuse may lead to the rise of queer gender occurrences such as homosexuality. This may arise due to the idea that if a child is sexually abused by someone of the same sex they may assume that it is acceptable and they later go on to inflict the abuse on other children as well.

Child sexual abuse also impacts the economy of a country negatively. With the rise of child sexual abuse inevitably comes the possibility that finances will be channelled towards the health sector and the establishment of institutions that cater for the protection and treatment of children who were victims of sexual abuse. These are projects that require a lot of financial resources, thus child sexual abuse strains the economy of a country and is a significant impediment to growth as well as financing of other development projects.

In addition, child sexual abuse causes reduction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. Evidence reveals that when children drop out of school it consequently leads to poor education standards and thus a frail or inadequately capacitated human capital base. Human capital is one of the essential factors of the economic growth and development of a country. Thus, if a large part of the population of a country is poorly educated it means the GDP will decrease as labour is inexperienced and unqualified.

Moreover, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in children owing to the increasing incidences of child sexual abuse has terrible repercussions for the economy. HIV/AIDS has been seen to be a major factor of the lag behind in economic development in many African countries, Zimbabwe, 1993 statistics reveal that HIV caused a decline of the Gross domestic product by 13% being one of them. Also resources will be channelled to one area whilst other development projects are deprived of funding.

## 1.2 Causes of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe

Religious beliefs influence the abuse of children in some cases. The Girl Child Network notes that religious beliefs contribute to the abuse of children particularly the girl child, in some apostolic sects, for instance, after virginity testing, if it is discovered that a girl is no longer a virgin she is said to be impure and this is therefore an allowance for her to be forcibly married to a member of the sect, who most of the times will be older than the girl. Hence some religious practices, to some extent drive the abuse of children.

There also other cultural practices in Zimbabwe that stimulates the abuse of children to a large extent. Chitereka (2010) argues that traditions such as girl child pledging require parents to give their juvenile daughter for marriage to older men who are rich in that community in exchange for money or other goods. These practices increase the incidence of sexual abuse of young girls. A report by Heiberg (2001), notes that 39% of marriages in Zimbabwe involve girls between 15 and 17, whilst 11% consist of girls who are less than 15 years of age.

Another practice is that of paying an avenging spirit by way of giving an existing member of the spirit’s family a virgin girl. As such, to some extent there are some cultural practises that influence the abuse of children. Furthermore, a practise that is known as *chiramu* in the Shona language, in this practise a man is permitted to tease or touch his wife’s young sister in a sexually suggestive manner. This is done under the pretext of culture but however evidence reveals that in some cases the young girls get sexually abused by their brothers-in-law as some of the acts may involve touching and sexually suggestive language. This is also in line with Barth (1998) who states that some cultural norms augment prevalence of child sexual abuse in an indirect way.

In addition, the political environment of Zimbabwe has contributed to the abuse of children. A society characterised by political instability is a harmful environment to children as they are vulnerable to all kinds of torture. Chitereka (2010) suggests that the unstable political arena in Zimbabwe in the four years prior to 2010 resulted in the sexual abuse of children by adults who had the intention of settling political differences.

Furthermore, children who are mentally disabled as well as those who physically challenged stand at a greater risk of being sexually abused because of their vulnerability. In the same vein, in some cases children who stay with parents who are mentally challenged also face abuse. Mbanje (2014) noted the case of a 15 year old boy who resides in Mbare who was occasionally forced by his mentally challenged mother and HIV positive mother to become intimate with her.

There are also myths and beliefs that fuel the sexual abuse of children, for example, the myth that sleeping with a virgin cures HIV. Scholars such as Plumer and Njuguna (2009) point out that in Kenya, there are trends of abuse whereby some men aim to sleep with minors rather than older women in the idea that they are not likely to get infected with HIV/AIDS. Chitereka (2010) notes that, in Zimbabwe, there are some traditional healers who recommend men to sleep with young girls as cure for HIV/AIDS. As such, children will be more vulnerable to abuse if these beliefs and myths are sustained. There is therefore need to transform the false perceptions of communities if child sexual abuse is to be curbed.

Substance abuse by adults can also lead to the abuse of children. Chitereka (2010) argues that in Zimbabwe there has since been an increase in the abuse of alcohol by adults, particularly during the period of economic and political crisis, aggravation might have provoked adults to sexually abuse children. Some studies also suggest that in several cases child sexual abuse can be linked to the substance abuse of parents or adults. Yen et al. (2008) highlights that an adult who abuses drugs or alcohol usually does not make wise choices in their life; hence children can be very much vulnerable to abuse.

Conflicts that emerge between parents are also another cause of child sexual abuse. Evidence reveals that grown-ups who have unstable relationships or marriages in some cases use children as a way to aid or lessen their intolerable frustrations. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (2011) these conflicts between adults can, in some cases, extend to children such that a man will end up abusing his wife as well as the children.

Another driving factor of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe is the fact that there are quite a number of children who have been neglected by their parents. Chitereka (2010) pointed out that some parents have left for the Diaspora while they live their children without adequate care or in the hands of relatives who might be potential abusers. In the same vein, prevailing economic conditions have compelled parents to leave for other countries so that they can do cross-border trading in order to have a means of survival. However, this has left children vulnerable to dangers of sexual abuse as children are left with inadequate care and there are few people to monitor them.

The dissolution of the family ideals and morals as well as social arrangements has also contributed to the abuse of children by people who should be taking care of them. The police Victim Friendly Unit at Stoddart Mbare police station attribute the increase in child sexual abuse to the decrease in child supervision by family and adults within the community in general. The very fact that there are some family members who abuse children shows that most people no longer have values and children are not being taught about sexual abuse. Socially, people have adopted immoral behaviours and they no longer appreciate moral justice.

Poverty and lack of employment are also factors that can lead to the abuse of children. When an adult is unemployed and is failing to provide for themselves and the rest of the family it can cause him/her to abuse children because of the strain as a result of their unstable socio-economic status. The Ministry of Labour and Social Services (2011) points out that in some instances adults can convey their dissatisfaction with economically related problems such as scarcity or joblessness by way of inflicting abuse on their children.

A general lack of knowledge of the rights that belong to children is also a cause of many cases of child sexual abuse. Most communities are not educated about the rights of children, thus they continue to undertake practices that consequently lead to child sexual abuse or those practices are in themselves a form of child sexual abuse, for example virginity testing and girl child pledging.

**Table 1. National statistics for child sexual abuse**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
| 2013 | 154 | 1404 | **1558** |
| 2014 | 84 | 1011 | **1095** |

**Source: Primary Source**

There are various types and forms of sexual abuse that are perpetrated against children within Zimbabwe. These include fondling, rape, indecent assault and statutory rape.

**Table 2 Types of sexual abuse (13-17 age group)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Females** | **Males** |
| Sexual touching | 5,4% | 1% |
| Attempted rape | 3,3% | 0,7% |
| Physically forced sex | 0,9% | 0,06% |
| Pressured sex | 1,9% | 0,0% |

**Source: National Baseline Survey on the Life Experiences of Adolescents (NBLSEA) (2011)**

A nationwide report by the Family Support Trust (2010) reveals that statutory rape in the 13-16 year age group was 96,3% during the time of the research.

An interview with a social worker from Childline revealed that the 13-17 year age group is the one that constitutes most of the survivors of sexual abuse. National statistics from the years 2008-2010 highlighted that of the 726 reported cases of sexual abuse reported, 316 (43,5%) of those cases were recorded amongst the 13-16 year age group which was the highest among all the other age groups of children. Secondary data also confirmed the same trend, Mashumba et al. (2009) observes that in 2009 the 13-16 year age group exhibited a higher percentage of sexual abuse recording 42,6% whilst the 5-8 and 9-12 age groups had 17,4% and 23,5% respectively. Possible reasons for this trend were cited to be the fact that it is during this phase that children grow into puberty and they might get involved in relationships that might pose a threat to them and they might also be a target for perpetrators especially peers of the opposite sex and neighbours.

## 1.3 Nature of perpetrators

In Zimbabwe the majority of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are largely males. According to UNICEF (1998) in Zimbabwe the majority of child abuse cases are perpetrated by male adults who abuse female children who are left in their care. Vinga (2014) noted that figures from the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development showed that of the 5000 children that are abused annually country wide, fathers come out as the major offenders as they constitute 175 of the perpetrators. A participant from MSF noted that females were more likely to inflict physical violence on children rather than sexual violence.

**Table 3 Characteristics of perpetrators**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Perpetrator** | **Female victim 13-17 years** | **Male victim 13-17 years** |
| Boyfriend/Girlfriend | 60,4% | 12,1% |
| Uncle | 7,1% | 9,0% |
| Neighbour | 14,8% | 12,2% |
| Friend | 8,4% | 13,0% |
| Other relative | 7,4% | 0,00% |

**Source: NBLSEA (2011)**

**Figure 1 Perpetrator-Child relationship**

**Source: Childline Zimbabwe, Harare**

In terms of the victims of child sexual abuse, the researcher recognized that the girl child is more at risk of abuse than the boy child. A respondent from Childline highlighted that this is largely attributed to the subordinate position of the girl child in most societies, whereby the girl child in most cases is helpless and does not have adequate protection. In addition, a study by Mashumba et al. (2009) in Harare, shows that the number of female children who had been sexually abused far exceeded that of male children, that of the females was 92,2% whilst that of males was 7,8%. Thus, the girl child is more vulnerable to sexual violence.

## 1.4 Environments of risk

Children are exposed to sexual abuse in different kinds of surroundings or settings. The environment or setting within the contact of the child is responsible for breeding certain conditions that give rise to the potential of sexual abuse. In this research, it was notable that children are usually sexually abused in places that are normally viewed as safe environments for them. In Zimbabwe, there are a number of cases where children have been sexually abused in the school environment either by teachers or other pupils. According to Nhundu and Shumba (2001) in their study of sexual abuse inflicted on children by teachers in rural Zimbabwean schools, results indicated that the majority of the perpetrators were male teachers and a greater percentage of victims were female pupils. Teachers have the obligation of directing pupils in their education but it seems some of them tend to misuse their authority and power by sexually abusing the children they teach. This abuse is occurring in both primary and secondary schools around the country. Therefore this shows that even learning institutions have become environments of risk for children to sexual abuse.

**Table 4 Locations of some of the sexual abuse incidences in Zimbabwe**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **% of female victims** | **% of male victims** |
| Church | 6.4% | 3.7% |
| Victim’s home | 37.9% | 27.1% |
| School | 6.6% | 2,3% |
| Perpetrator’s Home | 35.6% | 11.8% |

**Source: NBLSEA (2011)**

It is also a notable concern that children are more at risk of sexual abuse depending on their area of residence. According to the report by Mashumba et al. (2009) high density areas in Harare exhibit more instances of child sexual abuse than low density areas. Their 2009 study of child sexual abuse cases in Harare, showed the following results: high density areas 71.3% (82 cases) and low density areas 20.9% (24 cases). One respondent from attributed this trend mainly to the conditions of overcrowding and social turmoil in most high density areas. This crisis, coupled with the number of people living in the household also breeds conditions for child sexual abuse to take place.

In addition another environment of risk is inadequate housing conditions that foster conditions of overcrowding. According to Dawes (2002), overcrowding is a significant structural feature of environments that are shaped by poverty hence this increases the risk of child sexual abuse. He notes that overcrowding reduces the likelihood of the separating of teenagers, children and adults. As such, in a state of affairs like this one it is common to have children and adults of both sexes sleeping in the same room, and this amplifies the likelihood of sexual abuse. In their study, Sigauke and Tekede (2009) note that the sexual abuse of children and women in Mbare has largely been exacerbated by incidences of overcrowding in most of the households. It is also evident that in the Matapi flats of Mbare, up to three families can share a single room. Mutenga (2013) highlighted that the rooms that used to be for bachelors are currently accommodating a maximum of about two to three families. He notes that the rooms are usually separated by ragged cloth or cardboard boxes that divide a part for each family. Thus in such a scenario, the potential for children to be sexually abused is increased.

Communities that are characterised by violence pose another environmental risk factor for the abuse of children. Political and social turmoil greatly limit the protection of children from external threats of sexual abuse. Chitereka (2010) argues that the political turmoil that affected the country in the four years prior to 2010 exposed children to sexual abuse to a great extent as there were adults who wanted to settle political agendas by inflicting abuse on children. Pswarayi and Reeler (2012) noted that there were allegations of some political parties that unleashed violence on some residents of Mbare due to political differences. This exposed children to sexual abuse to a great extent.

Furthermore, children are also at a greater risk of sexual abuse within their own homes were they reside, in the home perpetrators can include parents, guardians, relatives or even neighbours. The general belief is that children who have homes ought to be sheltered from external harmful factors such as sexual abuse; however this is changing as evidence reveals that children are being abused in their very homes where they ought to be safe. Children who stay home at night alone or those with less supervision by parents or guardians also tend to be abused. According to a report by Family Support Trust Zimbabwe (2011) in a 2008-2010 study of child sexual abuse cases reported at their clinics around Zimbabwe, it was revealed that 40% of the sexual abuse cases occurred in and around the home of the child. The NBLSEA (2011) also highlights that of the 13-17 years age group there were 38% males and 25% females who encountered their first experience of sexual abuse within their homes.

Evidence has also revealed that some children who live with a parent who has a mental illness are susceptible to sexual Abuse. The World Health Organisation states that when a child stays with a parent who is mentally ill it is likely that the child can be abused. Mbanje (2014) reported the case of a male minor who was sexually abused by his mother who was mentally disturbed in Mbare. This shows the reality that even members of the immediate family can abuse children.

An environment where a child stays with a single parent is also another risk factor for sexual abuse. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (2011) the pressure of parenting exacerbated by economic pressures such as poverty and lack of employment can cause a single parent to abuse their own child.

A family environment characterised by domestic violence also increases the vulnerability of a child to sexual abuse. Conflicts between parents can come down to children as well. In most cases the biological father or step-father of the child might end up sexually assaulting the mother and the children.

Orphan hood is a factor that increases the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse. Children who do not have parents and particularly child headed households, are at a higher risk of being sexually abused because they do not have adequate protection from mature adults. Mutandwa (2012) argues that children are at risk of sexual abuse particularly if they are left in the custody of adults who are not their parents. Children can be manipulated by relatives whom they live with to indulge into sexual activities and in some cases if they do not comply they can be threatened with withdrawal of financial support or other necessities.

Children are also at risk due to the absence of a parent. In Zimbabwe, because of the complicated socioeconomic status of a number of households, some parents have largely become migrant labourers. Parental migration has compelled some parents in Zimbabwe to leave children in the care of relatives or neighbours who in some cases end up abusing the children. Children can be left in the care of members of the extended family who sometimes end up sexually abusing children.

It should also be noted that perpetrators use various methods in which to attain the compliance of their targeted victims. This includes coercion, intimidating them with the possibility of harm, offering them money or gifts as well as inflicting physical violence.

## 1.5 Child Sexual Abuse in Mbare

Mbare is a high density residential area located in Harare, it also one of the oldest suburbs in Zimbabwe. It is notable that some of the causes, trends and dynamics of child sexual abuse that are being manifested in the whole of Zimbabwe are also being experienced within Mbare.

Mbare is one among many of the densely populated residential areas in Harare that have been experiencing increased incidences of the sexual abuse of children. According to Childline Zimbabwe (2009), Mbare recorded a total of 619 cases that were reported at the Childline drop-in-centre. There are quite a number of causes that are perpetuating this trend, and some of them include the prevailing situation of households that are overcrowded, especially in the Matapi flats where the size of one family can strain or exceed the size of the few rooms that are available. In those flats people demarcate the rooms by dividing them with cloth or cardboard material. This increases the risk and vulnerability of children especially the girl child to be sexually abused.

A participant from MSF noted that in Mbare the bulk of child survivors of sexual violence are mainly found in the age group that ranges from 13 to 15 years, which is approximately the same with that of the rest of Zimbabwe as well as Harare as has been highlighted above. This is also followed by the age group of 16 to 18 years which is also equally affected. She also went on to say that at least 54% of the victims of sexual abuse are children who are less than 15 years of age.

The most affected age groups at the Edith Opperman clinic in Mbare from 2012 were as follows:

**Table 5 Survivors at the clinic in Mbare**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Age range of survivors** | **Percentage distribution** |
| 5years | 6,80% |
| 5-12 years | 11,0% |
| 13-15 years | 36,0% |
| 16-18 years | 14,90% |

**Source: Medecins San Frontieres**

The majority of the perpetrators of child sexual abuse are people that the child is familiar with as well. These comprise relatives, partners, Traditional healers, grandfathers and neighbours among others. Uncles were found to be perpetrators in 78 cases, Boyfriends 27 cases, neighbours 102 cases, grandfathers 5 cases, traditional healers 2 cases, cousins 40 cases. Nevertheless there are also cases were a child is abused by strangers and people whom they are not related to and such cases totalled 319 in the year 2012.

Furthermore, in Mbare children are usually abused in places where they ought to be safe and well protected such as in their own homes. However, there are cases of homeless children who live in the streets and are also exposed to abuse. According to MSF 33% of the abuse that is inflicted on children takes place at the child’s residence/home, 30% is perpetrated in the home of the offender whilst 14% occurs in areas that are bushy and isolated such as maize fields.

The girl child has the highest vulnerability to sexual abuse in Mbare. According to Childline girls face a risk that is 2 to 3 times higher than that of boys, it was also pointed out that a girl might be raped by more than one person particularly in cases of gang rape and also if the abuse has been continuous without being reported and when it is being perpetrated by different individuals.

In Mbare, 2013 statistics reveal that the most dominant forms of sexual abuse are rape 40%, statutory rape 1,2%, indecent assault 2%. According to MSF most young girls are raped by a person they know, such as a member of their family or an employer in the case that they are employed as housemaids.

The major causes of this phenomenon in Mbare are partly similar to those found in Zimbabwe. Domestic Violence renders children vulnerable to sexual abuse. Such a family environment causes stress and family disorganisation which leads to adults expressing their anger through inflicting abuse on children. Orphan hood is also a factor that has increased the likelihood of children who are sexually abused in Mbare. Interviews with respondents from Childline and Mbare pointed out that some of the cases they deal with are those of children whose parents have died and those children are either homeless or they live with relatives who neglect them and as such expose them to sexual abuse. In some cases children run away from home and are forced to live in the streets of Mbare or squatter settlements like the Magaba area where they are still not protected from abuse.

Also overcrowding and poor living conditions have exacerbated the problem of child sexual abuse particularly in the Mbare hostels of Matapi. Poverty and lack of employment have aggravated the poor living conditions in most areas of Mbare. Therefore, as a strategy, most people have opted to live in overcrowded houses where the large family sizes also worsen the accommodation problem. Hence, children are very vulnerable to abuse in these areas.

Nevertheless, a new trend in Mbare has emerged whereby children are being abused by some members of the immediate family.

## 1.6 Hamilton’s Rule Theory

The theory suggests that individuals who have a very close biological relationship behave selflessly towards one another. As such in that kind of setting, such people always protect and favour one another unlike relatives who are distant or who are not related by biological descent or by blood. However, in Mbare it is worrying that children are being abused by some members of the immediate family who ought to protect them from such kind of acts. The causes and trends of this phenomenon will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2

# Unpacking and Explaining Child Sexual Abuse by Immediate Family Members in Mbare

## 2.0 Introduction

As we has been noticed in the previous chapter, child sexual abuse in Mbare is not a new phenomenon; children have become very vulnerable to abuse due to a number of contributory factors. There are quite a number of perpetrators from different backgrounds who are inflicting sexual abuse on children. However, the worry is that cases of child sexual abuse being perpetrated by members of the immediate family is on the rise and this goes against Hamilton’s Rule which states that individuals who have a very close biological relationship and are related by blood behave selflessly towards one another. The theory further highlights that people who have a close biological connection usually show concern for each other’s welfare and therefore should not demonstrate aggression to each other. It will be the preserve of this chapter to unpack and explain child sexual abuse by members of the immediate family in Mbare by unearthing the forms of sexual abuse undertaken by members of the immediate family, explaining the causes of the perpetration of sexual abuse by members of the immediate family as well as highlighting the trends and dynamics that surround the phenomenon in Mbare.

## 2.1 A Description of Child Sexual Abuse perpetrated by members of the Immediate Family in Mbare

The study found that in Mbare there are several forms of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family against children. Notable is the issue of rape perpetrated against the girl child. The researcher identified rape as the most prevalent type of abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Statistics obtained from a key informant reveal that in Mbare rape cases currently stand at 33,2%. Rape was described as sexual intercourse that involves penetration. This form of abuse is perpetrated against the girl child. Results from the study also reveal that the main perpetrators are fathers (4 cases) while uncles perpetrated in 2 cases. The reasons behind this trend were attributed to the fact that fathers have more economic power over their families especially their children. Given the levels of poverty in most households in Mbare, it is clear that some fathers take advantage of their economic influence to coerce children into sexual activity, so a child recognises that if she does not comply with the order of an elder she might be deprived of basic needs or given some punishment of some sort for being disobedient. In the Zimbabwean culture, children are nurtured to respect their elders and male elders in particular, as such, young children fall vulnerable to the sexual abuse because they cannot disobey their elders and moreover they are not mature enough to understand what they are being lured into owing to the fact that the majority of them are young and they do not comprehend appropriate and inappropriate sexual conduct. Another factor contributing to the sexual abuse of children mainly by fathers is the issue of domestic violence. Parental conflicts have the possibility of causing family disorganisation and disunity. Parental or marital conflict is often manifested through domestic violence where there is usually the use of physical violence between the individuals who are in conflict with each other and often it is the father who overpowers the mother. Consequently the domestic violence spills over to children and the father in some cases expresses his anger by inflicting physical and/or sexual violence on children and the girl child is at a very high risk of being harmed.

Another cause for this trend is the widely believed myth that having sexual intercourse with a virgin cures HIV and there are also some traditional healers in Mbare who are alleged to be recommending prescriptions that their clients must sleep with a virgin in order to boost their business, so some fathers who seek to get rich easily often resort to taking that prescription and they end up raping their daughters. Hence this has resulted in the increased incidence of child rape by fathers. The researcher also observed another cause for this phenomenon to be the turnaround of the roles between the parent and the child. It was recognized that in some households the girl child ends up executing the roles and tasks of the mother when she is absent, this is usually the case in families where the mother would have separated from the father and the child is left in the care of the male parent. As such, in that kind of a setting there are certain things that are expected with regards to the responsibilities that the child is supposed to execute in that home. Therefore, it is clear that children risk the possibility of being exploited so as to meet the requirements of their parents and this often results in sexual abuse.

The researcher also ascertained that some fathers who rape their daughters are those who usually were not present during the early childhood years of the child. These fathers then come in at a later stage in the child’s life. A key informant highlighted that usually these fathers do not have the necessary parenting skills to be able to take care of the child and so when they encounter disputes in the family; it is probable that psychological pressure can lead them to sexually abuse children. A family characteristic that is also seen to be a factor increasing the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse is the view that there might be the existence of sexual problems within the marriage, so some fathers resort to gratify their sexual cravings by raping innocent children.

Field data also proves that some fathers sexually abuse their children because they have increased contact with those children. There are situations whereby a child is left to stay with her father who can force the child to have sexual relations with him or even rape the child. With regards to strategies used by perpetrators, the study found out that to gain the compliance of children, fathers usually use their fatherhood practices such as care and trust so as to easily form a bond that would lead them to eventually rape the child. Additionally, information obtained from the field showed that child rape has awful health consequences for the child. One respondent from the Mbare polyclinic highlighted that child rape has terrible health consequences for the girl child, most child survivors of rape experience pain in the genital area, some contract Sexually Transmitted Infections and pain in the abdomen.

Key informants also pointed out that fondling is also another form of abuse that members of the immediate family perpetrate against children. This form of abuse was found to be more common in girls but it constituted 22,2% for both boys and girls. Fondling involves sexual touching of breasts, buttocks for the female child as well as genital parts for both females and males. It was found that the perpetrators of this type of abuse are largely uncles and grandfathers. According to data collected from the field research, the trend is that in some cases fondling is described to the child as mere play between the child and the adult and so young children normally do not disclose it to their parents because they see it as a form of play and not abuse. Notably, uncles and grandfathers usually bought the children some gifts such as clothes or other treats as a way of establishing a bond with the children. In such a case children would find it difficult to resist the sexual advances of the perpetrators when such a gesture would have been made.

It was seen that uncles and grandfathers are the most common perpetrators of the act of fondling children because they manipulate the trust that the children have for them. As such they know that children will not disclose that they are being abused because the abuse is being perpetrated by a close member of the family whom is trusted and respected; hence these perpetrators get away with this crime because it goes unreported in several cases. A factor that is maintaining the fondling of children is the condition of overcrowded households. The researcher observed that in flats such as Matapi, Mbare hostels and Shawasha there is clear evidence of overcrowding characterised by instances where many families can share a room with limited space and this implies that arrangements of sleeping can be compromised and children will end up sharing a room with adults hence in such a case children do not have the privacy they need , the situation is also compounded when other close relatives comprising those uncles and grandfathers have come to visit or when they are actually living permanently with that family. Child survivors pointed out that it was difficult for them to report the perpetrators because they were worried about what would happen to that member of the family. Instead sometimes the abuse is identified when the child goes to public spaces, for example, at school where teachers often notice poor academic performance and decreased presence at school. In most cases that is when the child may disclose what is happening to her at home.

Under reporting in this category was attributed to the way children are socialised in most of those families. A social worker pointed out that in some cases; children grow up in families that have extreme control by male family members. At times this control is exercised through sexual forms and violent behaviour; children then perceive that maybe the behaviour is acceptable and that it is a means of preserving family order and emphasizing the authority that male elders have. Another respondent noted that another contributory factor to under reporting of this sexual abuse is the fact that adults have the right and authority to reprimand children who fail to comply with orders given by adults, it is therefore not easy for children to turn down and resist sexual abuse because they fear the consequences of doing so, most children are generally powerless and frail so sexual abuse becomes inevitable because they are viewed by perpetrators as easy targets.

Findings from the research revealed that indecent assault is another form of sexual abuse that is perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Indecent assault in Mbare usually involves kissing and touching children in a sexual manner. The prevalence of indecent assault by age group was 2% for the under 5 age group, 1% for the 5 to 12 age group and 2% as well, for the 13 to 17 age group. A key informant also noted that this form of abuse was mainly perpetrated by brothers (1%), fathers (3,0%) and also uncles (3.2%). The cause of this trend was attributed to the fact that sometimes children are left at home in the care of individuals who are potential abusers and already targeting these children and without adequate supervision their vulnerability to sexual abuse is therefore increased. Siblings such as brothers also emerge as perpetrators because of bad peer influence, delinquent behaviour and a social environment where sexual violence is not condoned, this leads them into indulging in sexual activities and then they end up practising it on their young brothers or young sisters. In the same vein, another cause for this trend was seen to be the unusual condition of paedophiles whereby there are some adults who have an abnormal sexual attraction to children and prefer sexual relations with children than with adults as such this compels such individuals to perform such acts on children. It was also highlighted that of the children who reported sexual abuse in this category, at least 1in 5 of them were orphans living in the homes of their uncles or grandfathers and even child headed households, as such orphan hood was a risk factor for the incidence of sexual abuse in children. It was also noticed that these perpetrators usually trick children to participate in the sexual activity by portraying the sexual activities as being harmless as well as an expression of care and love. Others also reportedly used physical force or threats of physically harming the victim; this was done in order to obtain cooperation from the child.

Results from the field revealed that such individuals usually have the expertise of planning and practising tactics to engage themselves with children and they usually do this through grooming. Grooming involves the practices that adults undertake so as to establish emotional bond with a child and to lure the child into sexual activity. Children are usually groomed over a long period of time so that they become familiar with the practise and the perpetrators do this through constantly touching the child during play such that the child does not recognise the actions are inappropriate and also threatening the child not to disclose what is happening and this is mainly done through coercion.

Sodomy also emerged as another common form of sexual abuse against children by members of the immediate family. Statistics obtained from key informants show that it is mainly brothers who perpetrate this type of abuse (11,1%). This form of sexual abuse was observed to be prevalent in the male children who are aged between 6 and 12 years. It was also clearly laid out that the age of the perpetrators where mainly adolescents with age ranging between 16 and 19 years. Explaining the cause of this form abuse, a respondent who was interviewed, stated that older male siblings have an increased degree of contact with the younger male children because they live in the same house and the older brother has more control over the young one so it becomes easier to manipulate the child. What is even worse is that sometimes the abuse has even occurred when the children are left at home in the care of their brothers such that the abuse happens while the parents/parent is not present at the time.

A close assessment of the dynamics and trends of children who are sodomised revealed that abuse of alcohol is a driving factor of siblings who sexually abused young children. One respondent noted that some male child survivors of sexual abuse who experienced sexual abuse from their siblings pointed out that the brothers have occasions where they get extremely intoxicated by alcohol, so it is probable that they may have sodomised children whilst under the influence of alcohol. The compliance mechanisms used by brothers to gain the cooperation of their young brothers was by way of using force and threats aimed at demoralising them from resisting the act. However, this form of abuse was not classified under those that are repeatedly perpetrated against children. The prevailing trend is that this form of abuse usually occurs once and is normally discovered a long period after it has been perpetrated.

Field data revealed that these perpetrators sometimes create an environment where children are exposed to incidences of sexual activities. A particular case in point showed that in some instances, older brothers watched pornographic material such as movies with young children with the aim of grooming them into improper sexual conduct. Very young children will therefore find it difficult to resist the sexual behaviour because they cannot, as yet, comprehend whether it is appropriate conduct or not. A factor that was highlighted as the grounds for this sexual abuse was the protracted absence of parents especially with parents who are employed as migrant labourers or who do cross border trading causing them to be away for weeks or even a month. Information attained from one respondent confirmed that a family system that is not operating well is a good breeding ground of committing sexual crimes because of poor communication and widened tensions that would be in existence.

The study also found out that some perpetrators within the immediate family sexually abuse children through the insertion of objects into the child’s genitals. A key informant identified it as digital penetration. However, this type of abuse was not as common as other types of abuse as the statistics highlighted that it happened in 1 case and the perpetrator was the father of the child. Results from the study reveal that this was common for female children in the 0-5 age group and the father undertook the abuse by inserting his finger into the child’s vagina when he was left to nurse the child whilst the mother was performing other household chores. In that particular case it was the mother who identified the abuse after noticing some abnormalities on the child and constant crying. It was then identified at a hospital that the child had been abused. The cause of this was said to be poor supervision of children by their parents particularly mothers and it was also attributed to poor parenting skills. Child neglect has also given rise to the prevalence of this trend in Mbare, there is no adequate supervision of children. Children do not disclose the abuse because they now view it as normal especially when it has been going on for a long period of time. They also fear the risk that no one will believe them if they report that a family member has abused them. Another cause is that there is no healthy parent and child communications about sexual development.

Attempted rape was also noted in 17% of the reported cases of sexual abuse. The study found that the major perpetrators in this category were uncles. It was also highlighted that uncles usually attempted to rape children in the absence of their parents usually when a child is left to stay at the home of the uncle. This trend was common in the female child who is in the 13 to 17 age range which is also the pubertal stage. A common strategy that was used by uncles to gain compliance of children was convincing the children that the act was an expression of their love and care and they also develop an abnormally close relationship with the child. It was observed that this form of abuse traumatises children to the extent that they become depressed and they would often lose concentration during lessons in class. Children will therefore tend to live in constant fear of the perpetrator because of the likelihood that the same thing can reoccur. An interesting trend is that offenders of child sexual abuse do not like facing the outcome of the offences that they carry out and so, not only do they manipulate the children that they sexually abuse but they go further to manipulate the setting or atmosphere in which they abuse that is why they make sure that during the time they contemplate attempt the abuse, they will be alone with the child.

The research found that in this type of sexual abuse, physical violence is not normally used. As an alternative to using force or coercion, these perpetrators make use of threats, bribing the children or promising gifts for children so as to manipulate the trust that the child has for the offender and the consequent helplessness of the child.

Furthermore pressured sex was also noted as another form of sexual abuse undertaken by the immediate family against children. Prevalence rate of this type was said to be at 6% for the female and the male children. This form of abuse is usually characterised by the coercion of children by perpetrators to get involved in sexual intercourse, perpetrators usually demand that children perform sexual acts with adults. A particular case in point is of a 17 year old boy from Matapi whose mother forced him to be intimate with her for several months. What led to this unfortunate occurrence was the fact that the mother is mentally ill and so the child was in a very compromising environment. A participant who was interviewed mentioned that the mother even physically assaulted the boy at times so this child could not do anything about it because he was constantly exposed to all sorts of abuse. Another reason that explains the occurrence of pressured sex is that children lack awareness of their sexual rights and therefore become vulnerable to all forms of sexual exploitation.

A worrying trend in this phenomenon is that sometimes the mothers of children who are being abused do no report the sexual abuse to the police. Information from one interview revealed that there is a trend of secrecy in a number of these child sexual abuse cases perpetrated by members of the immediate family whereby mothers and other siblings resort to keep silent about the abuse and resolve the issue privately. This trend was attributed to the subordinate position of the mother in the family as well as the other children in the family. This is happening because they know that if they report the matter, it is apparent that the perpetrator will be found guilty and sent to jail and they will be left with limited or no survival strategies since the offender will be the breadwinner. Most mothers decide to settle the issues within the setting of their families because they do not want to face societal embarrassment but they do not realise that they are putting the child to a great disadvantage and only encouraging the maintenance of sexual abuse in that family. Thus it is quite clear that some mothers facilitate the sexual abuse of children.

Another key participant who was interviewed noted that at least 2% of the sexual abuse cases that are reported are withdrawn because the child survivor usually alters the testimonials in court or is persuaded by other members of the family to withdraw the case with the aim of wanting to protect the perpetrator.

The research ascertained that most perpetrators place the blame on the child survivors and other factors while diverting the responsibility for the offence from their own selves. Respondents pointed out that most perpetrators give excuses as to why they sexually abused the child and the common responses are that the child enticed them to do that, others say they did it out of love, others insist that they failed to manage the urge to abuse the child while others blame their actions on drunkenness.

The response of various organisations in and outside Mbare has been significant in the handling of child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Medecins San Frontieres offers medical and counselling services to the survivors. Medical attention is necessary in order to prevent contracting HIV, STIs and pregnancy. Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is medication that is given to these child survivors for at least a month so that they do not get HIV. Emergency contraception is also offered to female child survivors in order to prevent pregnancy.

During the provision of psychosocial support to the survivors, the counsellors seek an understanding of the psychological consequences of the sexual abuse and in doing so; they also try to dig deep into the dynamics of the survivor’s family that might have led to the abuse. The social worker then takes over the cases that would have been referred to them from nurses in order to offer assistance in legal guidance and protection from the perpetrators who might possibly victimise the child for reporting.

In Mbare there is a Victim Friendly Unit stationed at each police station around the community. After the child has received medical attention, they are taken to the Victim Friendly Unit; the officers that are stationed there then collect evidence and compile a medical affidavit which is a report that can be used for evidence in courts. The affidavit is therefore important in convincing the court that indeed the sexual abuse occurred because of evidence found on the child’s body after medical examination.

At the Department of Social Services child survivors are referred there for support with shelter. These temporary shelters are important in providing safety for the child in the case that he/she fears to go back home where they have been sexually abused, children also fear victimisation so they will be safe at those shelters whilst investigations are being carried out and the perpetrator is removed from that home.

Childline also assists with reporting of those cases through their drop-in-centre at the Mbare Netball Complex. After they receive those cases, they offer counselling services and also refer to other relevant service providers who handle cases of child sexual abuse. At Justice for Children Trust children are provided with legal assistance with regards to legal representation and all costs involved in the hearing of the case in courts. All these efforts by these service providers have made it easier for children, especially those from households that have low economic status, to get access to justice.

# Chapter 3

# Tackling Child Sexual Abuse by Immediate Family Members in Mbare

## 3.0 Introduction

From what has been discussed in chapter 2, it is quite clear that child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family is a problematic phenomenon in Mbare. It is worrying that children have become vulnerable to sexual abuse even in their own families where it is expected that they ought to be safe and protected. As such, there is need for implementation of lasting solutions and strategies aimed at tackling this problem. This chapter will therefore present and discuss suggestions to address this problem.

The study revealed that children are usually vulnerable to sexual abuse because they lack awareness about their sexual and reproductive health rights. There is therefore a need to boost sex education in both primary and secondary schools. Age-appropriate sex education should be introduced in Zimbabwean schools so that children are aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights from a young age. Some parents and children generally do not have insight into what child sexual abuse really is thus other forms of sexual abuse are overlooked or they are not identified at all. Thus, it is necessary for sex education to be conducted in schools by skilled professionals or to even train teachers in order to equip them with the skills as well as to help them identify if a child is being abused at home.

Moreover, the government must introduce laws that make it mandatory for child sexual abuse to be reported. The researcher established that the phenomenon is the most underreported and perpetrators are getting away with the crime without facing the wrath of the law. Given that child sexual abuse is a criminal offence, and an unacceptable act, most families refute and contain it within the family by acting as if it never happened and by shunning involvement of outsiders. However, this only increases the incidence of the crime because perpetrators are not reported. Thus, if there are laws on mandatory reporting, child sexual abuse will be reduced because a person who identifies a child who is being sexually abused will report because the law obliges them to do so.

Members of the community currently do not have the motivation to report crimes of child sexual abuse. Because family life is regarded as confidential, community members do not seek to pursue reporting these crimes even if they recognise that a child is being sexually abused. This is because they fear victimisation in the event that a member of that family finds out that the abuse was reported. Communities must be mobilised so that they assist child protection agencies in identifying children that are being abused by members of the immediate family since they stay in close proximity to these children. Communities must be empowered to conduct surveillance and also be educated on the reporting procedures of sexual abuse.

Since child sexual abuse has become so prevalent and problematic, it means that it requires a great response from the society as well. Community leaders such as Councillors can assist in identifying the offenders of child sexual abuse. They can help in facilitation of the arrest of these culprits as well as investigating the offences within their communities. This is essential owing to the fact that community leaders are capable of closely interacting with offenders as well as survivors/victims of sexual abuse in comparison to the police. Their role would therefore be central with regards to accumulating as much evidence as possible for use by the police and courts.

Furthermore, it is evident from the findings from the research that dysfunctional family systems create environments for the perpetration of child sexual abuse. It is also critical to establish strategies for family intervention where it has been observed that child sexual abuse is occurring. Members from the child protection agencies must fortify marriages so that domestic violence is minimised and marital problems are resolved amicably so that is does not affect children. These agencies must help delineate wrong sexual conduct as well so as to describe the roles and duties of family members so that they remain within limits that are tolerable.

There is need for increased research with regards to familial risk factors that can contribute to the sexual abuse of children. In Zimbabwe, many studies overlook child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by members of the immediate family thus the phenomenon is not being adequately addressed. Researchers therefore need to adequately document this type of phenomenon in order for effective measures to be implemented to curb the phenomenon. This phenomenon must be well documented and data must be collected so as to facilitate the provision of information concerning the extent of the problem so that informed decisions and policies are made.

Factors within the family structure that cause the family not to sufficiently protect their children. These factors include alcohol abuse, general parental neglect and unemployment. Mechanisms should be put in place in order to address these problems so that they do not culminate in the sexual abuse of children.

The Zimbabwean legal system must guard children from further abuse that occurs within the context of the family. The legal system must act in the best interests of the child and this also implies that they must ensure that children are not coerced or persuaded to withdraw the cases that have been reported in order to protect the family member who has committed the crime. The case must be pursued until just is done.

It is also important for agencies that protect children to be decentralised in residential areas especially high density areas such as Mbare. Children must be sensitised on the services that these agencies provide as well as where they are located so that they know where to report when they are abused.

The government must ensure that children who are being exposed to sexual abuse within their families are removed from those families if possible especially if it is likely that the abuse may not be stopped. Such children must be placed in institutions such as children’s homes where they are safe from the abuse. This will go a long way in providing momentary support for the child whilst the responsible authorities seek for other lasting resolutions.

Poverty in households should also be dealt with because the study identified that poverty is a factor that is leading to members of the immediate family sexually abusing children. The government can identify those families that are in need and offer them help comprising of finances, food and accommodation among other necessities that might help to trim down the poverty. Arrangements can be made to enable those households to start income generating projects in their neighbourhood so that they can have disposable income.

The government should also institute programs that help to sustain families that are vulnerable so as to minimise the likelihood of abuse within the family. These programmes can be in the form of poultry projects, trainings on livelihood diversification such as carpentry, sewing, crafts among others, food and clothing donations, fundraising through Corporate Social Responsibility by firms, and the government can also remove the imposition of tax for low income earning households as well as supporting the education of children from those poor households.

In addition, organisations such as Childline can carry out recreational activities such as sports, fun days and other activities that attract a lot of children in those communities that are affected by the phenomenon of child sexual abuse. This will enable the social workers to interact with children so that they attend to the grievances of children including those that are being abused by members of the immediate family. Practitioners should be geared up to visit children in their different communities, if possible, so that they assemble with children in an atmosphere where they are comfortable. This is fundamental since most children do not have access to a telephone that enables them to contact the Child Help Line.

There is also need for rejuvenation of urban areas particularly in old residential areas such as Mbare where infrastructure and housing facilities have deteriorated significantly. The responsible Local Authorities must make efforts to repair amenities that have depreciated in those areas. Accommodation must be renovated so as to make room for large family sizes. In Mbare, the housing situation is deplorable, with instances were up to three families can share a room which is divided by cloth. This results in cases where children sleep in the same room with adults or their parents and in some cases making those children vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Furthermore, service providers should promote sex education in homes. This can be done by doing door-to-door visits with the intent to disseminate information about sexual abuse so that families are aware of the forms and factors that lead to the sexual abuse of children. This will help children to make use of all manner of socialisation so that they are nurtured to be assertive at all times. This is essential as some children are currently not aware that they are being sexually abused since they are taught to obey their parents.

The government and the family must be continually reminded that the responsibility of averting child sexual abuse lies in their hands. Civil society organisations can do this by launching advocacy campaigns that compel the government to formulate policies and programs that provide suitable environment that preserves the future of children. The government and civil society can also ensure the development of proper advocacy and communication apparatus that will help in preventing the continuation of the phenomenon at family level.

Laws should also be made to be deterrent enough. The law must not sympathize with members of the immediate family who sexually abuse their children. Instead it must be ensured that the penalties of individuals who commit such crimes are corresponding with the degree of the offence that has been done.

Rehabilitation for child survivors as well as perpetrators of the abuse should be made a priority. This will help in building positive lifestyles so that the child will move forward with life; as such there is need for constant therapeutic services to be offered to the child. The perpetrator must not be left out of the rehabilitation process since counselling helps to address those familial or interpersonal factors that might have driven the abuse. It will also help in the successful reintegration of the offender after serving the prison term so that they will not commit the same crime.

Local service provision is important in tackling child sexual abuse. The presence of these service providers needs to be increases within the vicinity of children in the communities so that access to services is not wearisome for them. The service providers include the police, Victim Friendly Unit in particular, social worker, medical health practitioners, and lawyers. This will ease the progress of reporting, psychotherapy and guarantee confidentiality in issues such as these. This is of great importance since children would not need to be accompanied there by an adult if they fear to report the abuse in the presence of an adult especially a family member.

Addressing patriarchy is also key in tackling this phenomenon of child sexual abuse. The study found out that there are some families in which patriarchy is still in control and influences the relations and behaviour that take place within the family environment. In such families, the father is considered to have the duty and the prerogative or power to exercise control over the family, however there are some men who overemphasize this obligation and they end up doing practices that are offensive even to their children. In most African cultures, including in Zimbabwe, there is the notion that children ought to respect their elders and older males in particular; this possibly will persuade children to comply with the abusers instead of turning down the sexual desires of these older male adults who can be their fathers. This is especially true for children of a younger age who might not really comprehend what is happening and they do not have much physical strength to resist coercion into sexual activities hence they inevitably become victims of the abuse. Therefore, to curb the sexual abuse of children by male family members it is important for service providers to publicize cases of male offenders of child sexual abuse who were successfully convicted of those crimes. This will ensure that potential male perpetrators are deterred from inflicting abuse on children.

The study has also revealed that alcoholism/abuse of alcohol is another factor that influences the sexual abuse of children by some members of the immediate family, particularly brothers and fathers. As such there is need for strategies that promote reduction in the intake of alcohol. These can be awareness campaigns that target men and women whilst explaining the connection between child sexual abuse and the abuse of alcohol. There should be the introduction of programs that assist children who have parents that drink alcohol so that they understand how the intake of too much alcohol can have negative impacts on the child. The government can also facilitate control on the sale and provision of alcohol in public spaces through the use of legislation. There also has to be strategies that promote the timely intervention and complete treatment of such individuals so that they can conquer their dependency on alcohol.

It also necessary to have the provision of safe shelters/safe homes in locations where child sexual abuse is rife. These safe shelters are temporary safe havens for victims of sexual and gender based violence. It is very important to have these institutions in place so that when a child is abused at home, and reports the abuse, he/she does not have to go back home to face their abuser where they can be victimised for reporting or where they can live in constant fear and trauma. These shelters will help children to feel safe, thus the shelters must be staffed by professionals who can assist in providing the child survivors psychosocial support as well as the relevant medical attention. In those shelters, there should also be provision of basic necessities such as food, clothing, beds and other things during the temporary stay of those survivors so as to cater for their needs.

Government must also take the lead on providing improved and reliable support for the child survivors of sexual abuse. This support must be offered right from disclosure of the abuse, up to all the court proceedings and go further to counselling services for those survivors who require it. This strategy is essential as it will help in the reduction of cases that are withdrawn before they are completed. Cases are withdrawn because of several reasons, including the fact that the adults who want justice for the child might not afford the expensive legal procedures of acquiring a lawyer or transport costs of travelling. Thus, if the government provides these services it will be easier for justice to be done.

Considering that most of the cases of child sexual abuse are happening to children who are of school going age, it is crucial that teachers be trained on the management of sexual abuse. This will help them identify behavioural, physical and emotional characteristics of a child who is being abused at home. This strategy is particularly important as some children can not disclose the abuse to a member of their family for several reasons; as such a child might feel comfortable to disclose the abuse to someone who is not connected to the family.

Monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects meant to abate child sexual abuse by members of the immediate family is crucial if this goal is to be achieved. Practitioners and all the service providers must not just implement strategies and interventions without forgetting to assess the effectiveness of these measures. There is need to go back to those families and communities where they implement those interventions so that they get response from their target population to see whether those strategies are still appropriate or whether they need to be adjusted.

Moreover, there has to be a multisectoral approach aimed at programming referrals to the relevant counselling services for individuals and family services. The Family Support Trust can extend its operations to residential areas where child sexual abuse is prevalent so that they assist these families on how to cope and recover from the abuse as well as to address other familial factors that may drive the abuse of children.

Practitioners and social workers should also be responsible for addressing dysfunctional familial issues such as cases where a child, especially the oldest girl child, takes up the role of a mother in the family. These cases are particularly evident in families where the mother is sick, has a physical handicap and is not able to carry out the responsibility of a mother, or instances where the mother would have absent for a long time. In most cases these settings can be a driving factor to child sexual abuse because the child will be undertaking all the parental roles of the mother.

Intervention efforts for handling child sexual abuse must not only focus on the immediate family but the extended family must also be involved. This is very important in the case that other relatives may observe or suspect that a child is being abused within the immediate family. It will also help to get rid of the culture of silence that is prevalent in most societies especially if the abuse is occurring within the family setting. There is therefore need for the extended family and family friends to be educated and informed about how to handle sexual abuse.

In addition, the supervision of children has got to be scaled up considering that the rates of child sexual abuse are increasing rapidly. Quite a significant number of children are left without supervision for a long time and this augments their vulnerability to several harmful factors including sexual abuse. As such, there should be an upgrading in terms of ensuring that a responsible adult is left supervising the child. Further enhancements should be made in terms of instituting community help lines to enable children to contact the service providers when they need assistance.

Given the rampant increase of cases of child sexual abuse, it is therefore important for government social workers to conduct home visits periodically as a way of assessing the welfare of children in their families. Findings from these home visits will help practitioners to be aware of the level of safety that children have. It will also give professionals the opportunity to address familial issues such as good parenting, strengthening the relationship of parents with their children, as well as socio-economic crises that families will be dealing with. It will also motivate families to seek professional help services when problems arise.

In order to raise awareness on the child sexual abuse there is need to expand information dissemination mechanisms. This can be done by setting up focal persons in the community so that they are responsible for enlightening people on child sexual abuse within that community. The information has to be sensitive of the age and gender of its recipients so that it infiltrates directly to the parents and children and they become aware that it is the obligation of parents to ensure that children grow up in safety and to also ensure that the family environment is not harmful to the children. The government can also have programs that work with the various families in a bid to ensure the creation of safe family environments for children.

To help families deal with the sexual abuse of a child, it is necessary for stakeholders to develop a procedure or set of rules with guidelines that focus on children so that parents know how to react. This instrument should place more importance on issues that help to strengthen the family system in preventing the abuse as well as after the abuse has occurred; this is because child sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of the immediate family can break family ties and relationships.

It was found that some cases do not progress well at the police level and they are later ignored or neglected because a child will not be receiving the necessary support for evidence gathering in order for the perpetrator to be brought before the law. It is therefore important for the police Victim Friendly Unit to expand follow up programs on the issues. The victim friendly system also has to ensure that the family and the child are given psycho-social support before, during and after court proceedings so that children do not change testimonials in court owing to intimidation from the perpetrator or in a bid of wanting to protect the perpetrator.

## 3.2 Conclusions

Child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family is therefore an antithesis of Hamilton’s rule. Children are being are abused at an alarming rate by people who are supposed to protect them from such atrocities. Most cases of child sexual abuse are known to be perpetrated by people who are outside the immediate family but a new phenomenon has surfaced in Mbare whereby some members of the immediate family are abusing children. The immediate family is a unit in which a child is supposed to find protection and safety but this phenomenon has significantly compromised the protection of children as was highlighted by the findings.

Notable, is the fact that the girl child is more vulnerable to sexual abuse than the boy child. The findings showed that the girl child was the main target of perpetrators and this is exacerbated by their subordinate status in society. Children have become very vulnerable to sexual abuse by members of the immediate family because they are defenceless and they are also taught to respect older people in their families so they become very vulnerable to sexual abuse. Most parents have neglected their children, thus their supervision of children has been minimal over the years. The socio-economic situation in the country has caused some mothers to live their children behind while they search for a means of living by working as cross border traders. Thus, in such scenarios children are left in the care of people who are potential perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Moreover, males dominate a large number of child sexual abuse offenders. The main perpetrators in this phenomenon are fathers, uncles, brothers and grandfathers in particular. Male family members have authority and power over children and women, as such; it becomes an ordeal for children to escape the abuse. Fathers especially, have economic power over their children and that is why it is easy for them to end up inflicting sexual abuse on them. Mothers to a lesser extent perpetrate the sexual abuse and in most cases they facilitate the abuse by creating conditions that increase the vulnerability of the child.

The research found that this phenomenon is under reported especially because it happens in the family. In most households, family life is considered to be private and confidential therefore any interference from external individuals is shunned or avoided. The cases are usually disclosed as a result of illness by the child or it is disclosed accidentally, and in some cases, if the child is of school going age, it is the teacher who notices the problem. Children hesitate reporting these members of the immediate family because of fear that the individual might be sent to jail. Some mothers also, because of a low socio-economic status and few livelihood alternatives, do not report husbands who sexually abuse children because he will be the breadwinner. Instead they decide to solve the issues privately without reporting.

It was also noted that dysfunctional families facilitate an environment where children are sexually abused by the immediate family. These are usually families characterised by domestic violence, divorce or separation of parents, abuse of alcohol and male dominated homes where patriarchy is mostly at play. Children are also at risk when they live in households characterised by overcrowding where accommodation is not sufficient for the whole family. Other risk factors include poverty exacerbated by unemployment of the parents.

The research found that perpetrators use different kinds of strategies in order to gain and maintain the compliance of the children they abuse. Children are usually given gifts or bribes so that they are easily lured. In some instances physical force is used and it was also established that perpetrators groom children through play that involves sexually motivated touching at times. It was also highlighted that child sexual occurs over a long period of time before it is reported. This is compounded by the culture of silence and secrecy surrounding the phenomenon. Children fear victimisation by their perpetrators if they report and some children are sexually abused at a young age such that they think that the abuse is very normal, as such they do not bother reporting.

Organisations such as Childline and Medecins San Frontieres (MSF) facilitate the treatment of child survivors of sexual abuse. These children are given medical care and psychosocial support so that they recover from the trauma and are able to move on with their lives. These organisations also refer survivors to other organisations such as Justice for Children Trust in order to assist them with legal representation and other costs that might be involved. The police Victim Friendly Unit also play a part in ensuring the investigation of these cases however the major challenge is that some of these cases are withdrawn before investigation is complete. This was attributed to pressure from other members of the family so as to protect the perpetrator.

In view of that, it was realised that there is need for the government and other stakeholders to scale up their efforts in tackling the phenomenon. Among other measures that can be used to tackle this problem, the respondents noted that it is necessary for practitioners to address family problems that stimulate environments for the sexual abuse of children. Moreover, children must be sensitised about their sexual rights and be given knowledge concerning child sexual abuse. Hence, teachers must be trained on the management of sexual abuse of children so that they inform children about it. There should also be the provision of safe shelters so that a child who has reported a case of being sexually abused by a member of the immediate family does not go back to that same environment, but is given a temporary shelter to avoid victimisation by the perpetrator and also to protect the child from further abuse.

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# Appendix 1

**Interview Guide**

1. Please describe the current situation of child sexual abuse in Mbare.

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1. In your view what are the causes of this phenomenon and who are the main perpetrators?

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1. Recently Mbare has experienced an increase in the sexual abuse of children that is being perpetrated by members of the immediate family. Can you explain the trends and dynamics of this phenomenon? In your view what are the causes and factors that give rise to the perpetration of abuse by members of the immediate family?

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1. Your organisation has been making significant strides in an effort to curtail this problem. Please give me a general view of the interventions that you and fellow organisations have made in trying to address this phenomenon.

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1. What other interventions and strategies would you recommend as a way of preventing and responding to child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family?

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# Appendix 2

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**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**12 September 2014**

**Dear Sir/Madam**

**Subject:** **UNDERGRADUTE DISSERTATION RESEARCH FOR**

**CAROLINE VARAIDZO MUNYUKI**

This letter serves to inform you that the above named student is carrying out research as part of her fulfillment for undergraduate studies. The research topic reads, “Investigating child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the immediate family: The case of Mbare suburb, Harare, Zimbabwe.”

For more information feel free to contact the Department of Development Studies.

Yours sincerely

Dr. J Matunhu

Department of Development Studies

**(Chairperson)**

**0778723952 or 0733809555**