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Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in South Africa: Assessing the Role of Parents, Community Leaders, Educators, and Social Workers

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse is a global problem and is prevalent in South Africa. Child sexual abuse significantly harms the victims. This study looked at child sexual abuse prevention, focusing on the community, school system, and social workers. A mixed methods research method was used. Data were collected from 115 questionnaire respondents, of which 15 in-depth interview participants were selected. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. Low reporting of incidents is hindering the effective response to child sexual abuse. The study revealed the significant role parents and community members could play in preventing child sexual abuse. The results also show that the school system plays a crucial role in educating children about inappropriate touches, discussing prevention skills with children, and encouraging children to report incidents of child sexual abuse. The study found that limited training for educators was a significant obstacle in the school system. Social workers play their part through advocacy and awareness campaigns and assisting the police during investigations. The study recommends a multi-sectorial approach to encourage reporting of child sexual abuse cases and training educators on responding to child sexual abuse.

Keywords

South Africa, child sexual abuse, prevention, community response, leaders, social workers, educators, Eastern Cape Province, Ntabankulu

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PREVENTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SOUTH AFRICA: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF PARENTS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, EDUCATORS, AND SOCIAL WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a global problem and is prevalent in South Africa. Child sexual abuse significantly harms the victims. This study looked at child sexual abuse prevention, focusing on the community, school system, and social workers. A mixed methods research method was used. Data were collected from 115 questionnaire respondents, of which 15 in-depth interview participants were selected. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. Low reporting of incidents is hindering the effective response to child sexual abuse. The study revealed the significant role parents and community members could play in preventing child sexual abuse. The results also show that the school system plays a crucial role in educating children about inappropriate touches, discussing prevention skills with children, and encouraging children to report incidents of child sexual abuse. The study found that limited training for educators was a significant obstacle in the school system. Social workers play their part through advocacy and awareness campaigns and assisting the police during investigations. The study recommends a multi-sectorial approach to encourage reporting of child sexual abuse cases and training educators on responding to child sexual abuse.

KEYWORDS

South Africa, child sexual abuse, prevention, community response, educators, social workers, Eastern Cape Province, Ntabankulu

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IS A PERENNIAL GLOBAL PROBLEM, with sub-Saharan Africa having a high prevalence of incidents (Selengia, Thuy & Mushi, 2020). Global statistics reveal that one in five women and one in thirteen men report they were sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years (WHO, 2020). Similarly, 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age report having suffered some form of forced sexual contact (WHO, 2020). A review of 217 studies revealed that one in eight of the world's children had been sexually abused before the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2020). UNICEF (2020) also estimates that one in every 20 girls aged 15 to 19 (around 13 million) has

experienced forced sex. A study by Finkelhor (2014) revealed that child sexual abuse and assault currently affect one in four girls and one in 20 boys in the United States (US). Given the high levels of child sexual abuse, international and national communities have acknowledged the urgent need for governments and policymakers to do more to prevent, identify, and respond appropriately to child abuse. The United Nations added two target goals to The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. They are to end the abuse and exploitation of children (Target 16.2); and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (Target 5.2) (Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2016).

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children violate human rights and is a public health problem with significant consequences for global health and development (UNICEF, 2020). Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual satisfaction. Definitions of sexual abuse include asking or forcing a child to engage in sexual activities; offensive exposure (of the genitals, female nipples) to a child with intent to gratify one's own sexual needs or to intimidate or groom the child; physical sexual contact with a child; and using a child to produce child pornography (Prevent Child Abuse America, 2012). Selengia et al. (2020) contend that child sexual abuse may take various forms "from physical contact to non-physical contact sexual abuse including sexual harassment, touching, incest, rape or exploitation in prostitution or pornography, exposure to pornographic materials and exposure to one's private parts" (p. 147). Although the child's own home or the perpetrator's home are the most common locations where abuse takes place, child sexual molestation can occur in all the settings in which children spend their time (UNICEF, 2020). Thus, apart from the home environment, abuse can happen in various settings and locations, including schools, on the road, fields, care and justice institutions and public open spaces (Selengia et al., 2020). Worldwide, children are most likely to be sexually abused by a person known to them, usually a boyfriend, an adult or an older child who is a family member, another relative, a family friend or an adult in a relationship of trust or authority (UNICEF, 2020).

South Africa has a high prevalence of child sexual abuse (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022; Artz & Ward, 2018), and there is documented evidence of high prevalence in the last decade. A 2013 report noted a rise in incidents of sexual abuse in schools, with one in every five sexual abuse cases reportedly happening in schools (Viviers, 2013). Statistics South Africa (2020) report reveals that 59.9% of sexual offences occurred in the home during 2019/20. According to Jewkes, Abrahams and Mathews (2009), a third of girls in South Africa have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. According to Artz et al. (2018), literature and various finalized court cases reveal that children have been and continue to be sexually abused by the very same people who are supposed to provide them with love, care, and protection, such as uncles, biological fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and brothers. Boqwana (2016) emphasizes that:

The act of rape by itself is heinous, but it is more dreadful when a person the child is expected to run to is the one who betrays the trust by breaking her right to dignity in the privacy of their home. (p. 8)

It is despicable that fathers are capable of turning their backs on what is considered their natural duty, that is, to ensure their daughters' safety, and instead pose a danger to their own vulnerable children (Dlodlo, 2016). Boqwana (2016, p. 8) asks, "where should children go if they cannot be safe in their own home?" A study

conducted in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa found that family members did not report child sexual abuse cases within families, especially when the perpetrator was a breadwinner (Zantsi, 2014). Additionally, children refrain from reporting incidents of sexual abuse if they feel they will lose or disrupt the family system (Mathews, 2019).

The continued high prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa points to the limited efficacy of the current measures to deal with child molestation. Thus, this study focused on the intervention approaches to child sexual abuse, focusing on the Ntabankulu area in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The study sought to address three research objectives: To determine the parents' and community leaders' involvement in preventing child sexual abuse, To explore the intervention of the school system in preventing child sexual abuse, and to investigate the intervention of social workers in preventing child sexual abuse.

The study gives context-specific information on a multi-sectorial approach to dealing with a scourge that has negatively impacted child development. The findings will also raise awareness among children and parents on the need to take decisive action whenever there is an occurrence of child sexual abuse case. Findings will also raise community consciousness regarding the perennial problem of child sexual abuse, and community members will know the best way to respond to incidents of child sexual abuse. The study also points out some obstacles that hinder effective responses to child sexual abuse. Information from the findings will assist policymakers when crafting policies and strategies for dealing with child sexual abuse. As part of the conclusion, the study also proffers recommendations for dealing with child sexual abuse. Finally, the study adds to a growing body of knowledge on a serious societal problem.

RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Several risk factors are associated with child sexual abuse. A study by Artz and Ward (2018) established that greater risk of sexual abuse was associated with living in a rural area, school environment, having a flush toilet, being disabled, having parental substance misuse, having poor relationships with parents, and parents who do not monitor their children's activities sufficiently. An earlier study in rural South Africa by Jewkes et al. (2016) shows that childhood trauma exposure due to child sexual abuse will increase the likelihood of the abused child perpetrating child sexual abuse as an adult. The impact of early life adversities and victimization on child sexual abuse is also confirmed by Lussier et al. (2019). A study by Rudolph et al. (2017) also revealed that parenting practices (e.g., low parental warmth, insecure attachment, communication difficulties, harsh parenting practices, and low involvement and supervision) could increase the risk of a child experiencing sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of children in South Africa is also perpetuated within a climate of cultural and religious barriers, poverty, and respect for people in authoritative positions, among other factors (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022). For instance, educators, traditional leaders, and other prominent figures who abuse tend to respond by financially compensating the victim families, who are generally in impoverished socio-economic circumstances. Hence, the matter is not reported to the police (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022). To this end, the rights of the victim child will be superseded by the economic needs of adults. A report by UNICEF (2020) also notes that most forms of child sexual abuse disproportionately affect groups in a community, with the disadvantaged the most affected because of interacting structural inequalities such as poverty, gender inequity, racism and sexual orientation.

DEALING WITH CHILD MOLESTATION: THE MULTISECTORAL APPROACH

UNICEF (2020) advocates for a multisectoral approach to ending child sexual abuse through strengthening national child protection systems and services and scaling up violence prevention programs such as parenting support, community programs, school prevention programs, and social norms change strategies. In this section, we focus on the multisectoral approach to dealing with child sexual abuse, with a focus on community or parental involvement, the school system, and social workers. Child sexual abuse prevention researchers and advocates have long encouraged an important role parents/caregivers and community leaders can play to keep children harmless from child sexual molestation (Mathews, 2019; Martin & Silverstone, 2016). Communities, especially men, need to become advocates for females and children by making child sexual molestation a subject of conversation (Martin & Silverstone, 2016). Protecting children from sexual abuse is the obligation of everybody in a community, not just women. Other than mothers and grandmothers, child protection and education on child molestation should be the domain of fathers, stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, and community members who have no children or whose children are grown up (Martin & Silverstone, 2016). Community involvement is important, especially given Morris et al. (2017) view that community-level factors such as poverty and neighbourhood social processes are known to be associated with high rates of child sexual abuse. Artz and Ward (2018) suggest preventing substance misuse, especially among parents, and providing interventions that improve parenting skills as measures of dealing with child sexual abuse.

Some recent researchers have measured parents' ability to protect their children from sexual abuse by the extent to which they have discussed child sexual abuse with their children (Walsh, Brandon & Chirio, 2012; Deblinger et al., 2010). Parents should be taught current approaches for protecting children and ensuring that children can disclose specific abusive behaviours, such as inappropriate touching, and identify perpetrators (Walsh et al., 2012; Deblinger et al., 2010). Rudolph et al. (2017) suggest the use of parenting programs that promote positive parenting practices to reduce child sexual abuse risk through the enhancement of parent-child relations that are more positive and warmer, as well as providing parents with the skills to set appropriate limits, monitor effectively, provide a sense of security, and openly communicate with their children. Community involvement in child protection is vital, as adults and children in a community are best placed to identify local protection issues and develop the most appropriate solutions in cooperation with service providers (Save the Children, 2008). If community leaders and parents work together to prevent child sexual abuse, children can identify and avoid abuse and report it after it happens.

In addition to the significant role played by parents and communities, NGOs also play a crucial role in dealing with child sexual abuse. Many developing countries have started enacting laws with nearby and worldwide non-government associations supporting the counteraction of child sexual abuse. Currently, developing countries have extensively embraced approaches and laws that straightforwardly and officially address brutality against children, including child sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2020). This has been accomplished through public strategies on children's safety, the consideration of children's protection from sexual abuse in expansive child security activities, and the improvement of explicit public plans against violence against children (UNICEF, 2020). Save the Children (2008) reiterate the vital role played by families, communities, governments and NGOs in realizing children's rights to protection.

School authorities have primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils. The school is a privileged setting to prevent, recognize and intervene in situations threatening children's welfare and development (Bhana, 2021). Thus, schools must ensure a safe environment for children and be able to track their growth, as well as notify the competent authorities of any identified situation of vulnerability (Kim et al., 2019). For this reason, it is the responsibility of the school to have clear procedures and programmes for child protection in the school, give direction to school management, teachers, and staff regarding the identification and response to child protection concerns and continue support of the child, and designate a person responsible for child protection issues who has the specific skills, motivation, and knowledge required (Rheingold & Patton, 2012). Hence, teachers play a critical role in child sexual abuse prevention and intervention efforts (Kim et al., 2019). Teachers are in daily contact with children in their class, which enables them to detect changes in children's attitudes and behaviours easily and compare children's behaviour with the standards of their peers (Goldman, 2007). Additionally, teachers can be capacitated to identify the signs and symptoms of paedophilia (Rheingold et al., 2012; Goldman, 2007). A systematic review by Lu et al. (2022) revealed that school-based child sexual abuse interventions effectively prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.

Social workers are essential in preventing and handling child sexual abuse cases. Alongside taking care of the victims in the assurance home, social workers help revamp their lives and make them independent (Grinnell, Gabor, & Unrau, 2016). Social workers point to the significance of educational social group work in preventing child molestation within the family system. According to Grinnell et al. (2016), the social workers focus on providing information to families in different communities about child sexual molestation by parents and other trusted family members. Social workers also need to work together with other stakeholders, such as parents, guardians, school authorities, local administrators and the government (Amadi & Karani, 2021). They are also instrumental in implementing offender management initiatives such as registering sex offenders, appraising society on their presence, monitoring places where offenders live and advocating for lengthy sentences (Amadi & Karani, 2021). In addition to improving knowledge of personal safety skills, child sexual abuse education and prevention programmes by social workers have been found to increase disclosure, decrease self-blame, and reduce rates of future victimization (Morris et al., 2017). In other nations, the role of social workers can be equated to the role of children's advocacy centres. These centres seek to increase multi-disciplinary coordination in sexual abuse investigations, provide an independent, child-friendly environment for forensic interviews, and increase children's access to medical and therapeutic services (Jones et al., 2007).

METHODS

The survey study was conducted in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, specifically in Ntabankulu town. The Ntabankulu Local Municipality is a municipality situated within the Alfred Nzo District in the Eastern Cape Province. It is the smallest of the four local municipalities in the district, accounting for 13% of its geographical area. A total of 115 participants and respondents were invited for data collection through purposive sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. For stratified sampling, the population was divided into three strata: community leadership and parents, educators and social workers. We purposefully identified the three strata since parents and community leadership (N=60), educators (N=25), and social workers (N=30) directly deal with children during various phases of children's

development and when there are incidents of child sexual abuse. Stratified random sampling was combined with snowball sampling, where we identified the first respondents from each stratum, and the respondents rereferred us to other respondents until the required number of respondents was achieved.

Data were gathered through closed-ended questionnaires and structured interview guides. For the questionnaire, respondents indicated their responses on a four-point Likert Scale (The scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). There were three sets of questionnaires, each dealing with its respondents category. Thus, questionnaire A dealt with parents and community leadership; questionnaire B dealt with the school system; and questionnaire C dealt with social workers. Each questionnaire had two sections, with the first section dealing with demographic data, whilst the other section had various opinions from which the respondents were supposed to indicate their responses. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences to reveal descriptive statistics.

After quantitative data gathering, 15 participants were identified for in-depth interviews. All three categories of participants were represented as follows: Community leaders and parents (N=7), educators (N=4), and social workers (N=4). Semi-structured interview questions were used, and each interview session lasted between 25 to 35 minutes. Interview data were analyzed using content analysis to support the quantitative data.

FINDINGS

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS' INVOLVEMENT IN PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Parents and community leadership made various assertions on prevention of child sexual abuse. (See Table 1) The most popular assertion was that parents should know a lot about child sexual abuse; an overwhelming majority, 96.7% (Likert score 3.67), agreed with the assertion. This was followed by the assertion that someone should look after the children when parents are not around, with a mean Likert score of 3.37. In third place was the assertion that perpetrators are always known and trusted by the family and children, with a mean Likert score of 3.35. The assertion that community leaders are always willing to assist the police during the investigation had a mean Likert score of 3.23. In contrast, a related assertion that community leadership plays a role in the prevention of child sexual abuse had a mean Likert score of 3.08. The assertion that parents are supposed always to discuss child sexual abuse with children had a mean Likert score of 3.17.

Other popular assertions, which had a Likert score means below 3.0 but above 2.5, were: Parents are always ready to support the police in the case of investigation (Likert score 2.77); parents usually support the police as witnesses in court (Likert score 2.75); and cases of child sexual abuse are reported to the police by the community members (Likert score 2.60). The least popular assertions were that; children are always monitored by parents/ guardians (Likert score 1.97); and victims of child sexual abuse are reported to the police by the community members (Likert score 1.67).

Table 1: Parents and Community Leadership's Involvement in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse, N=60

Component	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL	Mean
Parents are supposed to know more about child sexual abuse	0	2 (3.3%)	16 (26.7%)	42 (70.0%)	60 (100%)	3.67
Perpetrators are always known and trusted by the family and children	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.0%)	30 (50.0%)	26 (43.3%)	60 (100%)	3.35
Parents are supposed to always discuss child sexual abuse with children	3 (5.0%)	5 (8.3%)	31 (51.7%)	21 (35.0%)	60 (100%)	3.17
Children are always monitored by parents/guardians	19 (31.7%)	29 (48.3)	7 (11.7%)	5 (8.3%)	60 (100%)	1.97
There should be someone to look after children when parents are not around	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.0%)	29 (48.3%)	27 (45.0%)	60 (100)	3.37
Parents are always ready to support the police in the case of investigation	4 (6.7)	11 (18.3%)	40 (66.7%)	5 (8.3%)	60 (100)	2.77
Parents usually support the police as witnesses in court, where applicable	6 (10.0%)	11 (18.3%)	35 (58.3%)	8 (13.3%)	60 (100%)	2.75
Community leadership plays a role in the prevention of child sexual abuse	3 (5.0%)	8 (13.3%)	29 (48.3%)	20 (33.3%)	60 (100)	3.08
Victims of child sexual abuse are reported to the police by the community members	21 (35.0%)	38 (63.3%)	1 (1.7%)	0	60 (100%)	1.67
Cases of child sexual abuse are reported to the police by the leaders	2 (3.3%)	24 (40.0%)	30 (50.0%)	4 (6.7%)	60 (100%)	2.60
Community leaders are always willing to support the police in the case of investigation		1 (1.7%)	44 (73.3)	15 (25.0%)	60 (100%)	3.23

INTERVENTION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Table 2 presents the responses to assertions on the intervention of the school system in curbing child sexual abuse. The most popular assertions were that learners are taught information about appropriate and inappropriate touches and educators always discuss the importance of supporting affected learners, with a Likert score mean of 3.64 each. This was followed by the assertion that educators are always ready to assist the police in the case of an investigation, with a Likert score mean of 3.60. The assertions that educators always discuss prevention skills with learners, and educators encourage learners to report child sexual abuse incidents had a Likert score mean of 3.48 each. The assertion that educators usually support the police as witnesses in the court had a Likert score mean of 3.16, while the assertion that child sexual abuse cases are reported by the educators to the police had a Likert score mean of 3.0. The least popular assertion was that school educators are trained to deal with child sexual abuse incidents, with a Likert score mean of 1.40.

Table 2: Intervention of Educators in the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, N=25

Component	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean
School educators are trained to deal with child sexual abuse incidents	17 (68.0%)	6 (24.0%)	2 (8.0%)	0	25 (100%)	1.40
Educators are aware of suspected child sexual abuse	2 (8.0%)	18 (72.0%)	4 (16.0%)	1 (4.0%)	25 (100%)	2.16
Child sexual abuse cases are reported by the educators to the police	1 (4.0%)	0	23 (92.0%)	1 (4.0%)	25 (100%)	3.00
Educators always discuss prevention skills with learners	0	0	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)	3.48
Learners are taught information about appropriate and inappropriate touches	0	0	9 (36.0%)	16 (64.0)	25 (100%)	3.64
Educators encourage learners to report child sexual abuse incidents	0	0	13 (52.0%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)	3.48
Educators always discuss the importance of supporting affected learners	0	0	9 (36%)	16 (64%)	25 (100%)	3.64
Educators are always ready to support the police in the case of investigation	0	0	10 (40.0%)	15 (60.0%)	25 (100%)	3.60
Educators usually support the police as witnesses in the court where applicable	0	0	21 (84.0%)	4 (16.0%)	25 (100%)	3.16

SOCIAL WORKERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD MOLESTATION

The social workers' responses to the assertions on their role in the prevention of child sexual abuse are presented in Table 3. The most popular assertion was that discussion of children's rights information is provided to children in all communities, with a Likert score mean of 3.67. This was followed by the assertions that social workers offer home visits regularly for victims of child sexual abuse and that social workers are always ready to assist the police in the case of an investigation, with a Likert score mean of 3.63 each. The assertion that social workers know how to deal with child sexual abuse cases had a Likert score of 3.57. The least popular assertions, albeit with a significantly high Likert score mean of 3.47 each was that social workers share effective information about child sexual abuse with the communities and that social workers usually assist the police as witnesses in court where applicable.

Table 3: Social Workers' Involvement in Prevention of Child Molestation, N=30

Component	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean
Social workers know how to deal with child sexual abuse cases	0	0	13 (43.3%)	17 (56.7%)	30 (100%)	3.57
Social workers offer home visits regularly for victims of child sexual abuse	0	1 (3.3%)	9 (30.0)	20 (66.7%)	30 (100%)	3.63
Effective information about child sexual abuse prevention is shared by social workers with the communities	0	0	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (100%)	3.47
Discussion of children's rights information is provided to children in all communities by social workers	0	0	10 (33.3%)	20 (66.7%)	30 (100%)	3.67
Social workers are always ready to support the police in the case of investigation	0	0	11 (36.7%)	19 (63.3%)	30 (100%)	3.63
Social workers usually support the police as witnesses in court, where applicable	0	0	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (100%)	3.47

Interview Participants' View on Intervention Strategies for Child Sexual Abuse

There were varying views on mitigation strategies for child molestation from the different stakeholders. Parents highlighted preventive measures such as leaving their children with trusted people when they were away, open discussion with their children on child sexual abuse and close monitoring of children in schools. However, two participants highlighted that it was taboo to talk about child sexual abuse with their children. Of note were extreme views by two participants who indicated that relatives or trusted members of the society could not commit child sexual abuse. The parents made the following remarks:

Child molestation cannot happen within the family, no uncle or even a brother can molest their own blood especially in rural areas like Bhonxa. That is behaviour of strangers.

It is impossible that a trusted person like church mates can rape or even molest my child. I have for several times left my children with my church mates when I am not around. I know that there is nothing wrong or un-holly that they can do to my children, that molestation thing is not real especially with Christians, only animals like pigs can do that.

In support of the above remarks, one of the parents argued that their intervention was to ensure children were left with a trusted individual who was available at that moment. When such a person was not available, they took the child to any church member available. They preferred these individuals based on the assumption that they had similar values, which made it easy for them to trust that individual.

Some respondents indicated that other families just wanted the perpetrator to pay for the damage caused, whilst other victims' families were overpowered by

powerful families of perpetrators, especially if the victim came from a poor family. Sentiments from community leaders showed that community members did not report child sexual abuse cases as they treated them as family matters. Whilst traditional leaders deal with cases reported to them, it was difficult for community leaders to report cases to the police without the consent of the victim's parents. Moreover, some of the social workers revealed that traditional leaders are not supposed to handle cases of child sexual abuse. In some instances, even if parents had reported to the community leaders, that did not mean they also reported to the police. They confined the child sexual abuse cases to traditional leadership mechanisms.

The majority of the educators noted their important role in dealing with child sexual abuse cases. They highlighted that they are in daily contact with children at school, allowing them to detect changes in children's attitudes and behaviours easily. The majority of educators in this study indicated that they reported child sexual abuse cases to the police and were always ready to support in the case of an investigation and as witnesses in the court, where applicable. Other educators indicated that educators' involvement in reporting child abuse and neglect is authorized or supported by regulations, state law, and local policies and procedures. Each of these levels, they noted, provides authority, and encourages or enforces educators' participation in the reporting process by showing what educators need and how to fulfil this obligation.

Social workers indicated that they worked with different departments to prevent child sexual abuse. Some of the social workers revealed that a number of the perpetrators had been removed successfully from the communities as they threatened the safety of children and the community at large. The following were some of the sentiments from the social workers:

Yes, we do assist with the investigations. Firstly, South African Police Services (SAPS) will send a request to social workers to conduct investigation regarding the sexual abuse then we are requested to provide the report to South African Police Services (SAPS) within a period of 90 days. We do the investigations through home visit where we provide psychosocial services to the family. We do counselling, gathering information and we use standardized form report of section 155, where it includes child's information, family history, health issues, source of income, school information, investigation factors, intervention, evaluation and recommendations of the case.

The social workers always conduct awareness and community dialogues on children abuse to alert community and their leaders of what they faced with.

As a Worker I prevent that abuse through awareness campaigns in community, parenting skills that are rendered to parents, children's talks and awareness on children abuse in schools.

DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that most parents and community leaders believed they should know more about child sexual abuse. This is because parents and other community members are the closest people to the children, and they can identify signs of sexual abuse from their children. Findings also revealed that the majority support leaving children with trusted persons when parents are away. The trust influenced this belief that a family member or close relative would never harm their children but protect

them. This finding is, however, worrisome, especially given the long-standing position that close relatives perpetrate most child sexual abuse cases or someone known to the victim's family (Selengia et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Artz & Ward, 2018). Moreover, despite parents' trust for close family members and relatives, a significant majority confirmed that perpetrators are always known and trusted by the family.

The finding that most child sexual abuse cases are not reported to the police is also a cause of concern. While traditional leaders sometimes receive reports of child sexual abuse, they do not always refer the cases to the police for investigations, especially when the victims' parents do not consent to such action. There could be various reasons for this scenario. For instance, child molesters can manipulate victims to prevent them from telling anyone. This can be as obvious as a direct threat like, "I will hurt your family if you say so," or subtler, like bribing or isolating a child. Another reason family members neither believe nor report cases of child molestation when they occur within families is when the perpetrator is a breadwinner, as confirmed by the resonance with Artz & Ward (2018) and Naidoo & Van Hout (2022). Consequently, this behaviour encourages the perpetrators to victimize children, and such cases are not reported for fear of losing breadwinners and disrupting the family system. In support of this, Boqwana (2016) states that child sexual abuse is heinous, but it is more dreadful when a person who is supposed to protect a child is the one victimizing him/her.

The findings point out the central role of the family environment in the fight against child sexual abuse. If parents are open to the idea that trusted people can abuse their children, then parents can be key to preventing child sexual abuse through dynamic and involved parenting.

Most of the parents in this study believed that it was very important to discuss child sexual abuse with their children, and few believed that it was taboo to talk about child molestation with children. According to Martin & Silverstone (2016), parents, especially male parents, need to become advocates for females and children by opening child molestation subjects for conversation in families and communities. Open discussion about molestation with children is also supported by Walsh et al. (2012) and Deblinger et al. (2010). However, as noted by two participants, some parents do not openly discuss child sexual abuse with their children, which was also observed by Walsh et al., 2012. Some cultural and social norms discourage an open discussion about feelings and sexual experiences between a child and a parent/elder and promote masculinity over femininity. Men commit most child sexual abuse cases in South Africa. This alludes to the male norms that are permitted to flourish inside families, communities, and the country's broader social and cultural background. Men may be the source of the problem, but they are also a part of the solution. For example, the traditional concept that men have the right to exercise physical control or discipline over women and children makes women and children vulnerable to intimate partner violence and puts young girls at risk of sexual abuse. As Naidoo & Van Hout (2022) noted, such cultural beliefs hinder the effective response to child sexual abuse.

The results of this study reveal that the school system plays a significant role in the fight against child sexual abuse. Educators play their part by educating children about inappropriate touches, discussing prevention skills with children and encouraging children to report incidents of child sexual abuse. This finding is in line with Bhana's (2021) finding that the school is a privileged setting to prevent, recognize and intervene in situations threatening children's welfare and development. As previously argued by other researchers (Lu et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Rheingold et al., 2012; and Goldman, 2007), teachers are in daily contact with children in their class, which

enables them to detect changes in children's attitudes and behaviours easily, and compare children's behaviour with the standards of their peers. Whilst some parents are reluctant to report child sexual abuse cases to the police, educators are obligated to report to the police and are willing to assist the police during investigations. However, the finding that majority of the educators were not trained to deal with child sexual abuse is worrisome, especially given their important role in the prevention and response to cases of child sexual abuse. As recommended by Walsh et al. (2012) and Deblinger et al. (2012), educators ought to be taught about approaches for protecting children if they happen to disclose specific abusive behaviours and if they can identify the perpetrators.

Social workers believed that the best way to deal with child sexual abuse was through children's rights education in communities. This had the highest mean, followed by home visits and police investigations. Thus, social workers play a vital role by implementing programs such as community outreach campaigns to educate and empower people with knowledge on what is child sexual abuse and how to prevent it, as well as responding to cases of child sexual abuse. This is in line with the writings of Grinnell et al. (2016), who state that the social workers focus on providing information to families and communities about child sexual abuse by parents and other trusted family members. These are strategies that help create awareness by the Department of Social Development. Importantly, social workers are better placed to assist the police during investigations of child sexual abuse cases, as they are adequately trained for this crucial role. The social workers also support the police as witnesses in court where applicable. They also receive referrals from schools, communities, and other relevant departments that work hand-in-hand on sensitive cases of child sexual abuse. In essence, the law empowers social workers to work with the police during investigations. Overall, findings reveal that social workers are instrumental in both the prevention and reaction to incidents of child sexual abuse.

LIMITATIONS

While the study explores the multi-sectorial approach to dealing with child sexual abuse in South Africa, the major limitation lies in the small sample of educators and social workers. Notwithstanding this small sample, the study highlights the challenges that impede the effective response to child sexual abuse.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study reveal the important role that parents and community members should play in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse.

Notwithstanding their crucial role, the study also reveals some of the obstacles to preventing child sexual abuse by parents and community leaders, chief among the obstacles being the tendency to entrust their children to close relatives.

Failure to report child sexual abuse to the police by parents and community leaders and the need to protect family relationships also mitigates against effective response to child sexual abuse.

The school system also plays an instrumental role in dealing with child molestation, as educators play their part through educating children about inappropriate touches, discussing prevention skills with children and encouraging children to report incidents of child sexual abuse. The school system also has laid down procedures for

handling child sexual abuse cases, increasing the chances of reportage of cases by educators. The absence of training to deal with child sexual abuse among educators militates against educators' effectiveness in dealing with child sexual abuse.

Social workers play their part through advocacy, awareness campaigns, and assisting the police during investigations.

Given the identified obstacles in dealing with child sexual abuse, this study recommends a multisectoral approach to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. There is a need for the government, NGOs, and social workers to engage parents and community leaders to encourage reporting of child sexual abuse cases.

There is also a need to intensify awareness campaigns in communities, focusing on good parenting skills and response to child sexual abuse cases.

Training educators on response to child sexual abuse should also form part of the curriculum for teacher training so that educators will be well-equipped with the necessary skills to respond to child sexual abuse cases.

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