

# *Sexual Abuse in School Environment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Case of Uvira Town, South Kivu Province*

## *[Les Abus Sexuels En Milieu Scolaire En République Démocratique du Congo, Cas de la ville d'Uvira en Province du Sud Kivu]*

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**Abstract** - This study aimed to estimate the prevalence of sexual abuse, to determine the teachers' share and give expression opportunity to the victims. The assumption was that young girls are victims of sexual assault in schools. A questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate students of 3 colleges between February and May 2018 to assess the abusive sexual experiences of childhood, the age of the victim, the type of abuse perpetrators and the opinion of the victims. 277 students voluntarily agreed to participate with 263 respondents (94, 9%). 76, 8% reported sexual abuse during their schooling, 30% before the age of 16, the average age was 13. Sexual abuse involved 12% of rape, 15% of attempted rape, 36% of sexual touching and 14% of insistent solicitation. 50, 5% of sexual abusers were teachers, 33,7% of schoolmates, 13,3% of school headmasters and 2,5% of school principals. Among 86, 1 % of extra-curricular abuse, 56% was intra-family mainly perpetrated relatives, and 67, 8% extra-familial in which 57% perpetrated by friends. Among 45, 2% of girls who had given in to the abusers, 39,5% were for gifts and money, and 37,7% for the promise of marks and 26, 8% for fear of sanctions. To end to the phenomenon, 86% of girls had suggested the education of boys to respect women, 81% to promote denunciation, 74% to punish the perpetrators, 47% to end the amicably arrangement and for 32% the castration of rapists. These results confirm the initial hypothesis and call for the introduction of a program to prevent sexual abuse in schools.

**Keywords** - Sexual Abuse, School, Children, Prevention, Congo D.R, Africa.

**Résumé** - Cette étude visait à estimer la prévalence des abus sexuels, à déterminer la part des enseignants et à donner des possibilités d'expression aux victimes. L'hypothèse était que les jeunes filles sont victimes d'agression sexuelle dans les écoles.

Un questionnaire a été distribué aux étudiants de premier cycle de 3 collèges entre février et mai 2018 afin d'évaluer les expériences sexuelles abusives de l'enfance, l'âge de la victime, le type d'abus et l'opinion des victimes. 277 étudiants ont volontairement accepté de participer avec 263 répondants (94,9 %). 76,8 % ont déclaré avoir été victimes d'abus sexuels pendant leur scolarité, 30 % avant l'âge de 16 ans, l'âge moyen était de 13 ans. Les abus sexuels concernaient 12 % des viols, 15 % des tentatives de viol, 36 % des attouchements sexuels et 14 % des sollicitations insistantes. 50,5 % des agresseurs sexuels étaient des enseignants, 33,7 % des camarades de classe, 13,3 % des directeurs d'école et 2,5 % des directeurs d'école. Parmi les 86, 1 % des abus parascolaires, 56 % étaient des parents commis à l'intérieur de la famille principalement, et 67,8 % des membres extrafamiliaux dans lesquels 57 % étaient perpétrés par des amis. Parmi 45,2 % des filles qui avaient cédé aux agresseurs, 39,5 % étaient pour des cadeaux et de l'argent, et 37,7 % pour la promesse de marques et 26,8 % par crainte de sanctions. Pour en finir avec ce phénomène, 86% des filles avaient suggéré l'éducation des garçons au respect des femmes, 81% pour promouvoir la dénonciation, 74% pour punir les auteurs, 47% pour mettre fin à l'arrangement à l'amiable et pour 32% la castration des violeurs. Ces résultats confirment l'hypothèse initiale et appellent à l'introduction d'un programme de prévention des abus sexuels dans les écoles.

**Mots clés** - Abus sexuels, Ecole, enfant, Prévention, R.D. Congo, Afrique.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse of children is an old phenomenon often regarded as a banal. Gender-based violence in schools - sexual, physical and psychological - affects girls in many African schools, as evidenced by numerous reports and testimonies from educational associations and staff and clearly put at stake the dimension of social relations between men and women, but also the inequalities of power between the sexes [1]. In addition to sexual violence, gender-based violence in schools takes many forms: intimidation, harassment, bullying, corporal punishment, compulsory chores, and neglect [2]. However while talking about sexual abuse; common understanding is about sexual intercourse. This serious violation of human rights is widespread and well known. In any case, the prevalence of its incidence is difficult to determine so many cases of educator-learning abuse being never reported [3]. They can affect the victim's mental health and academic performance [4, 5]. In the Democratic Republic of Congo in general and in South Kivu province in particular, cases of rape of minors in schools are regularly reported by local media. We undertook this study to estimate their prevalence in our study environment, to clarify the share of teachers and to encourage victims to express their experiences. The hypothesis is that students are increasingly victims of sexual assaults perpetrated by their teachers and/or schoolmates.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This work was carried out in Uvira, the second large town of South Kivu province during the period from April to June 2018. As the participation of secondary schools was the subject of difficult negotiations, we opted to conduct our survey to girls fresh out of the local high schools.

A survey questionnaire was distributed to girls in the first cycle of higher education in three institutions in the square, namely three institutions the *Institut Supérieur des Techniques Médicales* (medical college), *Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural* (Development college) and the, *Institut supérieur Pédagogique* (Pedagogical), that had 302 girls regularly enrolled. The investigation was carried out by the agreement of the academic authorities on a voluntary and anonymous basis. 263 students or 94.9% of the target returned the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to each one who accepted to respond to it during the course break between 12-13:00 p.m. and then collected by two volunteers from each class.

## III. RESULTS

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents and history of Sexual Abuse

Variable	number	%
<b>Region of origin</b> <i>n=263</i>		
Uvira	194	74
FIZI	54	20,3
Bukavu	8	3
Others	7	2,7
History of sexual abuse <i>n=202</i> 77		
<b>Age when sexual abuse occurred</b>		
5 -9 years	26	13
10-14 years	55	27
15-19 years	113	56
20-and more	8	4
<b>form</b> <i>n=202</i> %		
Nursery school	0	0
Primary school	13	6,5
1 <sup>st</sup> year of secondary school	12	6
2 <sup>nd</sup> year of secondary school	23	11,5
3 <sup>rd</sup> year of secondary school	53	26
4 <sup>th</sup> year secondary of school	55	27
5 <sup>th</sup> year secondary school	40	20
6 <sup>th</sup> year secondary school	6	3

Respondents are mostly from (74%) and Fizi (20, 3%) territories of Uvira. Those out of these places represented only (5, 7%).

Regarding a history of sexual abuse in schools, 202 or 76.8% said that they have experienced sexual abuse during their schooling, of which 174 (86, 1%) claimed to have been sexually abused outside the school environment.

The age at which sexual abuse has been experienced was between 5 and 20 years of age, 56% of whom are between

15 and 19 years of age with lower proportions between 5-9 years (6, 5%) and more than 20 years (3%). Among sexual abusers, teachers were the most cited (50.5% followed by peers (33, 7%). On the other hand, the school authorities represented a total of 15.5%, in particular the schools' head masters (13, 3%). The type of sexual abuse is

much more sexual touching (36%), followed by attempted rape (14%), insistent solicitations (14%) and rape (12%).

Table II. Type of sexual abuse and perpetrator

Quality of sexual abuser	Number, n=202	
	Number	%
Principal	5	2,5
School Head master	27	13,3
Teacher	102	50,5
Schoolmate	68	33,7

Type of assault	Number, n=202	
	Number	%
Insisting solicitation/harassment	29	14
Sexual touching	73	36
Attempted forced sex	30	15
Forced penetration (rape)	24	12

In the event of refusal, the girls reported having received from perpetrators threats or verbal violence, including the risk of exclusion, punishment, that account for 82% by teachers, 77.8% schools 'head masters, 50% by the principals. 32% experienced verbal violence from comrades.

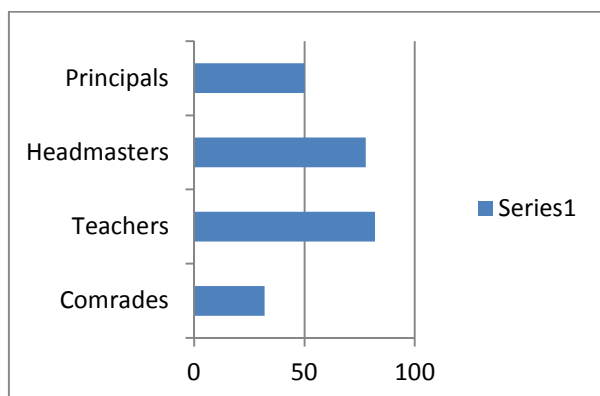


Fig 1. Réaction of school abusers to girl's refusal

For the student reaction, on the other hand, 45, 2% gave in to solicitations, of which 30, 5% to educators and 14, 7% to classmates (p<0.05). The reasons given were the promise of good grades by teachers (37%), the fear of punishment (26, 8%), and having received gifts and money in exchange for acceptance and silence (39, 5%).

The results showed that only 45% did not disclose their sexual abuse experiences and kept quite compared to 6, 4% who had spoken to their friends and 4% who reported the abuser to their parents. Only 2, 5% had initiated legal

proceedings against the perpetrators of rape and who were teachers.

Table III. Victims' reaction and motives

Victims 'reaction		n=202	%
Yielded to solicitations		86	43
Disclosure to parents		8	4
Disclosure to friends		13	6,4
Legal prosecution		5	2,5
Nothing(silence)		90	45
<b>total</b>		<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

Reason		n=190	%
Yielded to Educators		58	31
to Schoolmates		28	15

$\chi^2 = 0.0819, p = 0.774714$  NS at  $p < .05$

Reason	Fear of punishment	23	27
Giving in	Promise of good marks	29	38
	Gifts and money	34	40

Reason of non-disclosure		n=	%
Same		29	32
Fear of the environment		17	19
No punishment		19	21
Feeling of guilty		25	28
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

Sexual assaults outside the school were also mentioned by 174 girls, 86, 1% of whom were family-born and 67.8% outside the family.

The perpetrators of the sexual assault in the family are mainly the husband of the older sister (26,8%) so called brother in law, the domestic/waiters (19,6%), the half-brother (16,1%), the husband of the aunt (14,3%) and the mother's husband (12,5%). The father and brother were respectively evoked by 1.8% and 3, 6% of the girls while the family driver and/or house watchman were evoked by 5, 3% of the girls. On the other hand, extra-family abusers are friends/friends (57%), followed by guardians' sons (11%) and cousins (8, 5%), bikers (5%), neighbours and choir leaders each (3.4%). Soldiers, guardians and nurses each

accounted for 2.5%, while doctors and priests/pastors were mentioned by 1, 7% of girls each.

Table IV. Type of sexual abusers out of school

Sexual abuse out of school	Number	%
<b>In family</b>		
Father	1	1,8
Mother's husband	7	13
Waiter	11	20
Half brother	9	16
Brother	2	3,6
Aunt 'husband	8	14
Old sister's husband	15	27
Home's driver/watchman	3	5,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Extra family</b>		
Neighbour	4	3,4
Friend	67	57
Cousin	10	8,5
Motorcycle riders	6	5
Soldier/policeman	3	2,5
Tutor	3	2,5
Tutor's son	13	11
Physician/doctor	2	1,7
Male nurse	3	2,5
Priest/pastor	2	1,7
Choir's leader	4	3,4
Unknown	1	0,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100</b>

To put an end to the phenomenon of sexual abuse, men's education on respect for women was suggested by 86% of girls, 81% suggested promoting denunciation, 74% suggested punishing perpetrators and 47% suggested ending amicable arrangements. 32% of girls suggested castration of rapists.

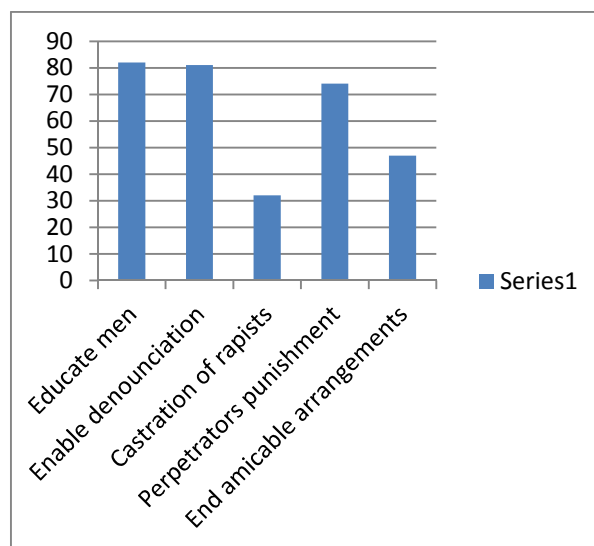


Fig. 2. Suggestion to end sexual abuse

The majority of sexual assaults were more committed in the home of the perpetrator or his friend's home (35%) followed by the office on average of 18, 7%, much more for school-based abuses. Others occurred in a hotel (6, 4%), at the river (9, 7), in the field, in the bush, in the room of in the home kitchen.

Table V. place where sexual abuse took place

Place of occurring	% in school	% extra school	Average
In his office	28,7	8,6	18,7
In the classroom	12	0	6
His home	15,4	21	18,2
Friend/colleague home	21	12,6	16,8
In a hotel	6,4	6,3	6,4
in the car	4	3	3,5
In the field	0	11,5	5,7
In bush	4	5,1	4,5
in my room	0	10	5
in the kitchen	0	8,2	4,1
At telephone	6	4	5
At the river	2,5	9,7	6,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

#### IV. DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional study based on retrospective experiences aimed to highlight scale and the prevention of sexual abuse in schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The initial assumption was that students are often sexually abused in schools. Our results confirmed this hypothesis. In fact, 77% of respondents were sexually abused during their schooling, 40% of them were before the age of 15 (Table I).

The total number of educators represents 66, 5% of the perpetrators, 50, 5% of whom were teachers compared to 33% of schoolmates. Touching was the most common form of sexual abuse (36%), followed by attempted rape (15%), insistent solicitation (14%) and forced sex or rape (12%). (Table II). Our prevalence is close to that found in Uganda (77%) by a ministry of education survey in 2015 [6] and in Zambia in 2001 and 2012 (72%, 54%) by children in Need and UNICEF [7, 8]. The study of Diraditsile K (2017) in Botswana showed that 83% of students had sexually abused by teachers [9]. However, in similar studies in Tanzanian academia by Denis MacCrann et al. (2019), 27, 7% of female students had been sexually abused as children [10], that is close to the results of Khaled El-Sayed et al. (2012) among Egyptian students (29.8%) [11].

These results show a large proportion of educators in child abuse. D.Mbassa Menick's study in Cameroon (2002) showed the low share of teachers (8%) compared to the classmates (29, 4%) [12]. Contrary to our results where teachers were more concerned, other studies including those of Fiona Leach et al (2003) South Africa, Sara Sara Jerop Ruto (2009) in Kenya and Mamadou Lamine Coulibaly (2013) in Senegal have shown that in 35% of cases, the perpetrators of "sexual pressure" on girls were other peers. [13], [14], [15]. This study has shown 12% of students who experienced being raped at school, results similar to those of Aleme Mekuria et al., who found 11% of the history of rape among Ethiopian female students [16].

According to Sara Turner et al. (2017), studying the long-term effect of child sexual abuse (CSA) among males stated that « sexual abuse was associated with mental disorder among males who experienced CSA with or without maltreatment compared to those who did not experience child sexual abuse. » [17]. Barbara G. Amado et al. (2015) in Spain have found that abuse involving penetration was linked to severe injury, while abuse with no contact was associated with less serious injury [18]. Our study did not assess the long-term effect and was limited to female students only. The report on sexual violence against minors in Cote d'Ivoire by UNCI and UNCHR shows that 60% were committed by the forces of defence and security and that teachers accounted for 77, 5% of rapes committed by state officials [19].

Victims' reactions were more characterized by silence (37%), a low rate of reporting to parents (4%) and legal proceedings (2, 5%), Table III. This situation would partly explain the fact that 42.5% say they ended up giving in to the abusers. There was no significant difference between girls who had given in to teachers and those who had given in to the comrades ( $p>0.05$ ), and reasons for giving in were gifts and money (39, 5%), the promise of good grades (37, 7%) and fear of sanctions (23, 8%).

The need of money have been found in Tanzanian, Rwandan and Zambian schools due to poverty that feeds the «*sugar daddy/mammy* » phenomenon and combined with a certain form of superstition [8, 10, 20]. According to Debra Allnock and Ruth Atkinson, peer groups set powerful rules that Influence the ability and willingness of young people to report sexual harm. A significant proportion of sexual harm is so widespread that it is "normalized and therefore under-reported" [21].

The fact that 47% of girls have suggested ending out-of-court settlements in cases of sexual abuse explains the proposal to castrate rapists and reflects their sense of helplessness in a society where shame and stigmatization and rejection of rape victims may lead to silence, as mentioned by Albutt K. et al. [22] and M. Murray et al. [23]. Such a situation was described among Asian immigrants by Philip Shamir [24]. In the Central African Republic (2013), H. Mimché showed that no victims (woman or man) had made a complaint or sought a medical certificate as a result of culturally accepted social mediation and impunity due to corruption in judicial institutions [25].

These kinds of barriers to disclosure of child sexual abuse are found in many parts of the world [26], [27], [28] and are a barrier to the protection and the psychosocial assistance to victims. The low rate of legal redress and medical consultations are also linked to the parents' concern not to cast anathema on the victim at the risk of depriving her of marriage. Indeed, in our environment, where the majority of raped women are abandoned by their husbands, a raped girl is indexed and has very little chance of finding a husband. This explains the persistence of out-of-court arrangements in which the perpetrator is often forced to marry his victim if the sexual abuse has resulted in a pregnancy.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the main conclusions were drawn. First, the study indicated that there is a high prevalence of sexual abuse among children and adolescents

in Congolese schools. Second, it is clear that teachers and their classmates play a large part in the abuse of young girls. Third, it is emphasized that fear, shame due to stigma and cultural considerations are the obstacle to the disclosure of sexual abuse and thus reduce the possibility of child protection and prosecution of perpetrators. To put an end to this phenomenon, it is imperative that the government put in place comprehensive strategies to effectively address the problem of child sexual abuse in Congolese schools. This includes properly obtaining testimony from the child, as he is the only eyewitness to the violence, especially when no medical evidence is found and corruption still rampant in the judicial system; focus on the gender equality program in schools, popularize and strictly enforce the law against sexual violence and forced marriage.

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