

Muted but not silent: Factors influencing sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents in Gutu district, Zimbabwe

Mellisa Tafadzwa Gondo ^{a*}, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Jeofrey Mtemeri ^b, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study aimed to establish factors that inhibit sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents: to identify factors that promote sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents and to develop strategies that can promote early sexual abuse disclosure. Adolescents aged between 10 and 17 years ($n = 12$), who experienced sexual abuse and disclosed immediately or after sometime, were purposively selected. A qualitative research approach which made use of the phenomenological research design was used to collect data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The results of the study revealed that the inhibiting factors of sexual abuse disclosure included fear of perpetrator, fear of parent's reaction, non-comprehension of sexual abuse, positive relationship with abuser and uncertainty as to how and to whom to disclose to. Shock and disbelief, beatings and threats and negative effects of sexual abuse also facilitate disclosure of sexual abuse among adolescent survivors of sexual abuse.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, adolescents, sexual abuse disclosure, Gutu;

1. Introduction

Child sexual violence is a human right and a public health worry that is continuously drawing global attention. Sexual abuse is defined as any form of sexual contact or behaviour that takes place in the absence of clear consent of the other person (United States Department of Justice, 2013). It includes unwanted sexual advances such as touching of genitals, oral and anal sex, vaginal penetration or attempted penetration (Adeosun, 2015). Global statistics show that roughly 73 million male children and 150 million female children experience sexual abuse annually (Dahlberg & Mercy, 2002) and the prevalence ranges from 5% to 36% (Barth, Bermetz, Heim, Trelle, & Tonia, 2015; Finkelhor, 1997). These statistics explicitly present devastating evidence that child sexual violence is an extensive problem around the world. The true scale of the problematic issue of child sexual violence, however, remains difficult to determine as statistics also show that a vast number of sexual abuse cases go unreported and in most case disclosure is delayed.

Globally, research explicitly indicates delays in sexual abuse disclosure (Adeosun, 2015; Alaggia, 2010; Kogan, 2004; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005). Other studies report that 80% of sexual assaults go unreported (Barrios, 2018). There is a large body of literature that studies sexual abuse disclosure and findings show that there is secrecy involved as many children often delay the disclosure of their sexual experiences or do not disclose. For example, an Australian study conducted by Hunter (2011) reported that shame, fear and self-blame are the main inhibitors to child sexual violence disclosure. Adeosun (2015) states that studies carried out mainly in Europe and North America found a spectrum of factors that contribute to failure to disclose sexual abuse. These include fear of failure to be believed, peer influences, feelings of shame, negative responses to informal or initial disclosure, fear of perpetrator, ambivalent relationship with perpetrator, self-blame, uncertainty relating to whether their experience falls under the category of abuse, stigma, concerns about criminal justice system, guilt and expectation of negative responses to disclosures. It seems immediate disclosure of sexual abuse is not easy as factors facilitating disclosure are ability to vocalise the abuse, being asked about it, enduring an escalation of abusive acts, failure to cope with consequences, maturity and protecting others from becoming survivors of similar abuse (Allnock & Miller, 2013).

In African studies, for example, a cross-sectional study carried out in Nigeria revealed that among the 93 participants who were survivors of child sexual abuse, only 32 (34.4%) immediately disclosed the abuse. Non-disclosure is attributed to the survivor feeling that reporting the incident will yield a negative publicity. Sexual abuse legislation in Nigeria is not strictly enforced and as a result, parents are also not willing to report due to stigma and discrimination that comes with sexual abuse (David, Wapmuk, Ohihoin, & Odeyemi, 2018). Similarly, Adeosun's (2015) research on adolescents' sexual abuse disclosure in Nigeria highlighted the following as barriers to sexual abuse disclosure: sex discussions are deemed taboo, stigma, fear of sexual violence perpetrators, self-blame, fear of the reaction of authority figures and parents, mistrust of law-enforcing agencies, ignorance of the fact that the incident was actually sexual violence, fear of not being believed and guilt. Similar findings were found in a South African study where barriers such as self-blame, fear of sexual violence by perpetrators and stigma were reported (Artz et al., 2016).

Meinck et al. (2017) note that an investigation carried out by the Nationally Representative Violence Against Children Studies revealed that trends are alike throughout the sub-Saharan area.

Malawi, Tanzania and Kenya statistics show that less than 10% of survivors of child sexual violence willingly accessed formal services and less than 20% revealed their sexual abuse experiences to members of their families and service providers or family members (Meinck et al., 2017). Sumner et al. (2015) purported that the percentage of children who experienced sexual abuse and received appropriate attention varied from a percentage of 2.7 in Zimbabwe to a percentage of 25 in Swaziland.

Despite the rise in interest in the disclosure of sexual violence among children, there is partial data on factors hampering the disclosure of sexual abuse in Africa. In the African setting, circumstances associated with child sexual abuse encompass poverty, unstable home environments, poor education and ignorance, and some of these factors are enhanced by the erosion of cultural values and the extended family safety nets, as a result of rapid urbanisation and westernisation (David et al., 2018). It is surprising that there is no study known to the researchers that has been conducted on the experiences of child survivors of sexual violence in African rural settings where the above-mentioned circumstances are even worse. David et al. (2018) carried out a community-based study in the south-western part of Nigeria on disclosures of child sexual violence where the focus was on the pattern and burden of child sexual violence among adolescents.

Similarly, Adeosun (2015) conducted a study on adolescents' sexual violence disclosure in Nigeria and focused on prevalence, obstacles, health and mental consequences. Although these two studies are similar to the current study in terms of focus (child sexual abuse violence disclosure), population (adolescents) and setting (Africa), the uniqueness of the current study is that it employed a qualitative approach for a great opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding based on distinct personal experiences of disclosure of adolescents' sexual abuse disclosure opposed to a quantitative approach used in the two Nigerian studies which is more structured and numerically based and also broader in scale. In addition, the studies were carried out in an urban setting, Lagos. The current study was designed to obtain data from adolescents who experienced sexual violence with the aim of examining factors influencing sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents in Gutu District, Zimbabwe.

1.1. Objectives

- To establish factors that inhibit sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents.
- To identify factors that promote sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents.
- To develop strategies that can promote early sexual abuse disclosure.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. In undertaking this research, a qualitative approach was much more relevant as it provided the researchers with an opportunity to gain authentic and in-depth information on child sexual abuse based on individual experiences of sexual abuse disclosure (Hancock, 1998). The aim with this approach was to understand the culture of non-disclosure of sexual abuse through exploring the 'why' questions rather than the 'how' questions.

2.2. Research design

For the purpose of this research, a phenomenological research design was used. This design is most often used to describe the lived experiences of a number of individuals who have a similar phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In other words, this phenomenological study sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of adolescent survivors in disclosing their experiences. With this design, the researchers set aside their own personal experiences in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of adolescent survivors of sexual abuse in the study (Creswell, 2009).

2.3. Population

Polit, Beck, and Hungler (2001) refer to the population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population includes all elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a study (Burns & Grove, 2003). In this study, the research population comprised female adolescent survivors of sexual violence in Gutu District. Participants were adolescents, aged 10–17 years, who experienced sexual abuse and disclosed immediately or after sometime.

2.4. Sample and sampling procedure

The study made use of purposive sampling in the selection of adolescent survivors of sexual violence. Neumann (1997) notes that purposive sampling is commonly employed on specific cases, for this study; the specific cases were adolescent sexual abuse cases. The researchers purposively selected 12 participants who were survivors of child sexual abuse. The participants were agreeable on the use of recording gadgets during the interviews.

2.5. Instrumentation

The researchers made use of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted face to face and recorded electronically using a mobile phone. Intensive questions enabled the researchers to gather rich in-depth data on sexual abuse disclosure patterns (Charmaz, 2006).

2.6. Data analysis

Thematic analysis is used for data analysis. It is a method used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data. Furthermore, it interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Data were transcribed, coded, analysed, interpreted and verified. The process of transcribing the interviews helped the researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate and obstruct sexual abuse disclosures among adolescents. Lastly, a detailed analysis of each theme was carried out.

3. Results

3.1. Factors inhibiting sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents

The most frequently mentioned motivational factor impeding sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents was fear of perpetrator. This theme comprised statements which suggested that participants were threatened by the perpetrators right after the incident. A number of participants expressed that offenders instilled fear through threatening to kill them or physically

harming their immediate family members if they disclosed to anybody. As a result, participants conformed to the demands of the perpetrator and refrained from disclosing the abuse.

The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

He sexually violated me twice when my grandmother had gone to the field. I did not tell anyone because he threatened to kill me if I told anyone about the incidents.

My stepfather sexually violated me twice and threatened to send all of us (my mother, my siblings and myself) away if I disclosed to anyone.

My parents had attended a funeral, where they were also selling home-made traditional alcohol. I was home alone for the night, that's when our relative whom we refer to as uncle came to our house and forced himself on me. He threatened to chop my head off if I disclosed to my parents or his wife.

Furthermore, it emerged that participant's disclosure was highly impeded in cases where the abuse was intrafamilial and victims resided with the perpetrator who constantly employed treats to gain compliance of the victims. These threats often created extreme senses of helplessness in survivors of sexual violence as evidenced by the following verbal quotes:

I was confused for a while and it was difficult for me to disclose to other family members as he was constantly present and reminded me of the consequences of disclosing. I endured for a while, even though I was in pain and had developed anger towards him.

My stepfather raped me the night my mother went into labour with their child. I found it difficult to disclose to my mother because I respected him and he pretended to be nice in my mother's presence. He was constantly present as we are family and whenever he got a chance he would threaten me and stress that I shouldn't disclose.

I wanted to tell my mother right after the incident occurred but with the way she reacts to other minor issues made me refrain from disclosing due to fear of being physically punished...My mother plays no games when it comes to corporal punishment for minor or serious issues.

My grandmother is always yelling on top of her voice for minor things such as coming home late from school, burning food in the kitchen and hanging around boys. Her nature of yelling has driven me away from her and so we have no bond and our communication is poor. When I experienced sexual abuse, I feared her reaction, especially after her everyday talk about staying away from boys. It was not my fault that I was sexually abused, but I just feared that she would blame me.

The results revealed non-comprehension of sexual abuse as the reason behind non-disclosure of the abuse. Participants were sexually violated by domestic workers working as cattle herders and failed to identify the incidents as sexual abuse. They expressed that at first they were not aware of what had happened; as a result, this continued for a while and they saw nothing wrong with it. The researchers noted from the participants' expressions that

with time, they got used to the sexual abuse; it became very normal for them and they eventually began to enjoy the act and flirted with the perpetrators who pampered them with gifts which include a few coins and jiggies (local crisps, more of potato crisps made from corn) from time to time. This is exemplified by the following statements:

My parents are based in South Africa and so my sibling and I were left in the care of domestic workers that is the maid and the cattle herder at our rural home. My paternal grandparents leave close by in different compound and they visit us on a daily basis just to check on us. One day, as we were watching TV, the cattle herder asked me to follow him to his room and I did not refuse. He asked me to remove my underwear and lie on his bed. He then went on top of me and did what he did. I did not tell anyone as I saw nothing wrong with it. I saw him as a friend and we used to share stories and laugh together. Since this day, he continued calling me to his room and sometimes I would go there on my own until the day the maid caught us in the living room. We were good friends and he bought me jiggies and sometimes gave me coins to spend during break time at school. He also assisted me with some of the household chores that the maid assigned.

We used to go to the garden together with our cattle herder. On two different occasions he sexually violated me and I never disclosed to anyone because I saw nothing wrong with it and I loved the attention he gave me. In addition, it was fun, until my older brother caught us in the act.

Another theme that emerged from the study is that of an ambivalent relationship. Many participants of the research explained that they experienced sexual abuse and failed to disclose due to the ambivalent relationship they had with the perpetrator. It emerged that it is extremely difficult for survivors to disclose sexual abuse in circumstances where the abuser has a close relationship with the survivor. Some of the participants were sexually violated by their boyfriends and they found it extremely difficult to disclose due to their feelings towards the abuser. The researcher observed that where there is love, some survivors of sexual violence actually brush off the abuse fact and resort to eloping.

The following verbal quote reflects the participants' sentiments in relation to their disclosure process:

My husband, who was my boyfriend then, sexually abused me. I did not disclose because I knew that going to the hospital and reporting the matter to the police would result in him being arrested. I love him and I couldn't live knowing that he was arrested due to the fact that I disclosed. I secretly eloped to his family home and we eventually got married.

We were in a relationship whilst I was in Lower Six. One day on our way from school, he waited for me in a secluded area and forced himself on me. I was heartbroken and for some time I couldn't face him and it was difficult for me to report him as we were seeing each other and I loved him. I later realised I was pregnant, as a result, I dropped out of school and eloped.

It emerged from the study that participants failed to disclose their abuse experiences because of lack of knowledge on how and to whom to disclose. Existing child-friendly reporting mechanisms are not common knowledge to every child and contemplating

disclosure becomes difficult where sexual abuse is intrafamilial or is influenced by a close significant family member who is expected to protect the child and provide proper guidance, care and support. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

Growing up we were members of the Marange Church and one day as we prepared for a church conference, my father asked me to pack enough clothes in a big bag. I wasn't aware that after the conference he was going to hand me over for marriage to a man in his 30s. I am 12 years old and I did not know what else to do. The man took me to his homestead where there was my co-wife and his brother wives. I was ill-treated and physically punished by my co-wife and her sister-in-laws in his absence as he worked in Kwekwe and came home towards every month end. I knew this was not right for me and I was missing out in school. My mother died when I was a toddler and I had no one to share with or disclose to as I was new in this village and I was not allowed to leave the homestead. I suffered as I was asked to do all the household chores as they sat and watched. When my husband came home, I would tell him not to have sex with me because of the pain I experienced, but he insisted. I endured for quite some time and one day I gathered up courage and ran away. I went back to my father's house and he was very furious and asked me to go back. I tried to endure again but failed and eventually ran away. I passed by a school and I informed one of the teachers who then called the police and I was taken to Musasa Shelter.

My mother died four years ago and my young sister and I stayed with my father for a long time and he never abused me, until one day sometime last year, he came into my room and sexually violated me. I was aware that this was not right, but I didn't have anyone else to disclose to. Our grandmother lives in a village that is very far from our village. My father abused me twice but never abused my young sister who is in Grade 1. My class teacher began to notice changes in my behaviour and she began to ask questions that led to my disclosure. My father was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

4.2. Factors promoting sexual abuse disclosure among adolescents

School programmes were identified as a factor facilitating sexual abuse disclosures among adolescents. It emerged from the study that awareness campaigns and school presentations on child sexual violence prompted survivors of sexual abuse to initiate dialogue in relation to their sexual abuse experiences.

These sentiments are illustrated in the verbal quotes below.

Our neighbour sexually abused me twice in our community garden which is quite far from our homestead. My mother had sent me to go and water the garden. I suppressed this for almost a month. One day our Guidance and Counselling teacher presented on types of sexual abuse and their consequences. The consequences made me freak out and soon after the lesson I followed her to her office and disclosed my experience.

A Form Four student at my school who had been asking me on a date followed me and my twin sister the day we were sent home for school fees arrears. He sexually violated me after one of his friends had walked further with my twin. As soon as I got home, I did not think twice about immediately reporting the incident to my twin sister and my mother. I acquired knowledge in relation to reporting sexual abuse from an awareness campaign that was once

conducted at our school. Besides, there was enough tangible evidence as I was in tears and I had my torn underwear with me.

Another motive that emerged with regard to immediate disclosure of sexual violence is shock and disbelief. Sexual assault is a traumatising experience that comes with a number of negative reactions that occur right after and at later times. Some participants experienced a number of emotions at once due to the sexual violence itself and the way it happened. From the participants' narratives in relation to the day the incident occurred, the researchers noted that they expressed their feelings outwardly by crying and shaking. Participants were also disoriented, confused, shocked and in disbelief. As a result, they arrived home and disclosed immediately as their close family members were very much concerned about their state.

The participants had this to say:

I had gone to search for firewood in the mountain when two men approached me and initiated a conversation that I responded to. They then pinned me down, covered my face and raped me one after the other. As one raped me the other held a knife to my neck. I was afraid that they were going to cut my head off. I was shaking and in shock and I couldn't stop crying on my way home. My mother was outside when I arrived home and she was quick to ask why I was crying and my eyes were swollen too.

My high school mate raped me on our way back home after we had been sent away from school due to school fees arrears. My twin sister had proceeded walking home as I responded to my mate who had stopped me for a conversation. I later proceeded walking and approached my sister in tears and in shock. My sister was quick to ask why I was crying and I explained what had happened.

The other factor that was mentioned as a facilitator of sexual abuse disclosure was beatings and threats. It emerged from the study that sexual abuse disclosure can be elicited through beatings or threats in cases where caregivers became suspicious of the participants behaviour or physical state and development. Some of the participants disclosed after they had received a beating and threats from their caregivers who were very suspicious and demanded for answers so as to map out the way forward.

The following verbal quotes exemplify the above:

Towards dusk, my grandmother sent me to go and bring back cattle that had been released for grazing in the morning. As I got to the field, I met one of the cattle herders from our village who pinned me down and sexually abused me. When I arrived home, my grandmother was furious and asked after the reason why I took so long to come back. She then noticed blood on my skirt and threatened to beat me if I failed to disclose what had happened.

I was sexually abused by a cattle herder in our village who kept telling me that he loved me and wanted to marry me. We were not dating at all as I told him over and over that I did not love him and that he should stay away from me. My school is very far from home and at a certain point my schoolmates take the other route and I am left to proceed home on my own. The day that he sexually abused me, I found him sitting in the bush waiting for me as I walked

back home from school. My sister then noticed changes in my behaviour and physical appearance. I am pregnant and I wasn't aware that time. As an adult, she knew and gave me a beating until I disclosed.

From the responses provided by some of the participants, dire consequences of sexual abuse were found to facilitate sexual abuse disclosure. As discussed earlier, child sexual violence is a chief risk factor for developing a host of negative consequences. It often results in disturbing short and long-lasting outcomes on the mental well-being, development and health of victims of sexual violence. Some participants from the study expressed that they were prompted to reveal their sexual violence experiences by the dire consequences associated with sexual abuse.

The following sentiments were raised by the participants:

My grandmother suspected that I was pregnant and she peeped through the bathroom opening as I bathed. She then confronted me. I denied as I personally wasn't aware of my condition. She insisted that we go to the nearest clinic for a pregnancy test and the result was positive. I had no choice but to disclose that it was the builder who sexually abused me when she had travelled to Harare.

I contracted an STI as an outcome of sexual violence. I tried to suppress and endure the pain that I felt but it was just difficult and I finally went to the clinic where I disclosed my sexual abuse experience to the nurse.

My class teacher noticed that I began to mess myself with urine in class. She took me to her office, together with the Guidance and Counselling teacher, where they asked me questions that led to my disclosure.

4.3. Strategies that can promote early sexual abuse disclosure

4.3.1. Promote school-based education programmes and awareness campaigns

The findings show that school-based education programmes are effectual in promoting child sexual violence disclosures. These programmes play a significant role of imparting knowledge and skills on the nature of abuses, how to identify dangerous situations, child-friendly reporting mechanisms, how and to whom to disclose to, importance of reporting immediately and the role of the police and other relevant stakeholders, such the health sector and NGO's providing counselling and legal services. During these programmes, children are informed of the tactics employed by perpetrators as a way of instilling fear in them and protect themselves from being caught and facing consequences of sexually violating children. Imparting such knowledge informs children that threats from perpetrators are mere threats and there is no harm that will come their way if they immediately divulge their sexual violence experiences. In this regard, the barrier of fear of perpetrator is eliminated. Equipping children with knowledge and skills will also serve to eliminate the barrier of failure to comprehend sexual abuse among children and adolescents.

It emerged from the study that school-based programmes and awareness campaigns prompt children to disclose their sexual abuse experiences. Child survivors who have never disclosed are prompted to disclose after receiving information, while children who later experience sexual

abuse recall knowledge imparted and know what to do next. In this present study, guidance and counselling (G&C) lessons have been identified as crucial lessons as some participants disclosed as a result of attending these lessons and interacting with G&C teachers who prompt or motivate child survivors of sexual abuse to disclose by asking questions after noticing behavioural changes.

4.3.2. Promote families matter programmes

Based on the findings that children fear their parents' reaction, prevention programmes for adolescents must be developed that focus on parenting skills. The families matter programme is fundamental in strengthening parenting skills so they can help protect their children from health risks they may face in adolescence, such as unwanted pregnancy, HIV or sexual abuse. Parents, through this programme, receive support in gaining knowledge, comfort, skills and confidence to talk with children about sex and sex-related issues. Parents stand to be encouraged to take active roles in educating their children about sex-related issues early since the risks children face begin when they are young and parents need to start talking with them early. This strategy will address the barrier of fear of parents' reaction that emerged in the study. The goal of the programme is to equip parents with positive parenting skills which will improve parent-child communication, thus strengthening their relationship and supervision. A good relationship between parents and children where they talk about sex-related issues and have a bond creates room for children to express themselves openly without fear and this, in turn, facilitates sexual abuse disclosure. Parental supervision allows for quick identification of behaviour change and facilitates questioning that prompts disclosure of sexual abuse. Increased supervision and guidance is most likely to motivate disclosure in the sense that if there is anything troubling the child, through supervision, the parent is quick to notice and engage the child in disclosing. In this regard, it is clear that the relationship among members in the family system is related to the individual's ability to disclose the occurrence of sexual abuse.

4.3.3. Promote community sensitisation programmes

Prevention programmes for adolescents must be developed that advise adolescents and the communities at large to be vigilant when it comes to cattle herders as the perpetrators category showed that cattle herders are the most prevalent perpetrators. In rural communities, young men from villages in other rural settings are employed as cattle herders. It emerged from the study that these young men take advantage of adolescents in their community or at the particular homestead where they will be staying as domestic workers. It is, therefore, crucial for adolescents and the community to be sensitised on the dangers associated with employing cattle herders as it appears that in the long run they have bad intentions. Prophets have also been identified as dangers to the community as they take advantage of adolescent girls all in the name of healing and assisting children/adolescents get through life's difficulties. In this regard, the community and adolescents in particular have to be sensitised so as to be cautious.

It also emerged that adolescent girls are sexually violated when they are sent to water gardens, fetch firewood or herd cattle. As a way of preventing the occurrence of sexual abuse, it is crucial for the community, particularly caregivers, to be sensitised on the dangers associated with sending girl children on such errands without company. To address cultural issues that emerged from the study where adolescent girls stick to the view that one should be married to the man that has deflowered them, adolescents should be well informed on the importance of

reporting sexual abuse and that sexual violence perpetrated by a boyfriend should not go unreported based on the cultural belief associated with virginity preservation and consequences when one is found to be unchaste. Adolescent survivors of sexual abuse perpetrated by their boyfriends often resort to marriage at the expense of their academic. Therefore, these sensitisations should focus more on equipping them with knowledge, empowering them and sharing hopeful messages that life after sexual abuse goes on especially with support from professionals who provide counselling and therapeutic services. It also emerged from the study that caregivers have a habit of allowing male and female children to spend the night in the same room. This has often resulted in male children/adolescents sexually violating female children during the night. Hence, the community has to be sensitised against this practice.

5. Discussion

5.1. Factors inhibiting child sexual abuse disclosure

The results indicate that a few adolescents immediately disclosed the occurrence of sexual abuse. This is in line with findings from previous quantitative research (Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Kogan, 2004) which observed that most survivors of child sexual violence delay disclosure or never disclose at all. This finding explicitly reveals that participants encountered various barriers that impeded disclosure.

A further finding of the study showed that motives for delayed disclosure differ among adolescents and the disclosure process itself is influenced by a myriad of factors either positively or negatively. Many participants delayed disclosure due to fear of experiencing further harm from the perpetrator. It became clear that survivors are often threatened by perpetrators to never disclose the abuse and as a result, survivors comply and delay disclosure or do not divulge at all. This is in tandem with Easton, Saltzman, and Willis (2014), who found out that survivors of sexual violence experience threats from perpetrators if they reported the abuse. Similarly, in a research exploring the effect of threats on sexual abuse disclosure in USA, Lyon (1996) gathered that threats hinder children from disclosing their sexual abuse experiences.

It emerged that participants were distressed and had the desire to open up to their parents, but fear of their reactions impeded disclosure. These findings reinforce the hypothesis by Priebe and Svedin (2008), which states that survivors of sexual violence often expect negative reactions from their parents. These findings are also in tandem with Crisma, Bascelli, Paci, and Romito (2004), who found out that the chief factor hindering adolescents from disclosing their sexual abuse experiences to their parents was dysfunctional family relationships and fear of being accused. Hershkowitz et al. (2007) also found out that many children struggle to disclose to their parents due to fear of their negative or unsupportive reactions. This explicitly reveals that adolescent survivors of sexual abuse were very much concerned about disclosing to their parents. Motives mentioned for contemplating disclosure to parents highlight that adolescents often lack confidence in the nature of their relationships with their parents.

The other motive for non-disclosure that emerged from the study was the survivor's failure to comprehend child sexual abuse the time it occurred. Failure to comprehend what happened to them was also identified as a motive of non-disclosure by Easton et al. (2014) in USA. Similar assertions were also revealed in a Kenyan study (Boudreau et al., 2018), which establish one of

the myriad of reasons behind delayed disclosure of sexual violence among youths is less awareness of sexual abuse and what constitutes sexual violence.

The present study also revealed that uncertainty on how and whom to disclose to plays a role in hampering disclosure of child sexual violence. This agrees with the findings from other studies where it was observed that a number of children who experience sexual violence delay disclosure because of not being sure about how and whom to tell (McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014; Schaeffer Leventhal, & Asnes, 2011).

The positive relationship factor was also identified as a motivator of delayed disclosure of child sexual violence. The positive relationship factor revealed the role played by culture and how it inhibits women's ability to disclose sexual abuse as some participants strongly stressed their belief in preservation of one's virginity and sticking to the man responsible for deflowering them. This also concurs with findings from a literature review on child sexual violence in sub-Saharan Africa by Lalor (2004), which correlates disclosure of sexual violence among youths in Kenya. Boudreau et al. (2018) conducted a study on risk factors linked to sexual violence in Calabar, South Eastern Nigeria (Ekabua, Agan, Iklaki, Ekanem, Itam, & Ogaji, 2006), which revealed that myths, taboos and sociocultural values pertaining to modesty, shame, virginity preservation and filial obligations play a major role in deterring the reporting of sexual violence. In African cultures, as tradition, premarital sex is prohibited and an individual's loss of virginity discredits her and the whole family under whatever circumstance (Okonkwo & Ibeh, 2003). Furthermore, loss of virginity outside marriage ruins an individual's chance of getting married and is more likely to attract social sanctions which may, in turn, lead to an individual's distress and alienation.

The positive relation factor is also in consonance with findings from an East and Central African study where women disclosed that disclosing sexual violence is more likely to reduce their chances of getting marriage and may result in maltreatment and stigmatisation by their families and community members at large (Byrskog, Olsson, Essen, and Allvin, 2014; Kelly et al., 2012). Survivors of sexual violence are often judged as being promiscuous, wayward or have a certain way of behaving that attracted the perpetrator (Ige & Fawole, 2011; Okonkwo & Ibeh, 2003). These findings reiterate Alaggia's (2010) view that women are affected by a culture of sexist and patriarchal attitudes which hamper their ability to reveal sexual abuse. These cultural and societal attitudes fall under the macro system category factors that impede the disclosure of sexual violence. It is, therefore, clear that negative sociocultural implications discussed above play a role in discouraging sexual abuse disclosure.

5.2. Factors facilitating child sexual abuse disclosure

It emerged from the study that factors such as school-based programmes and awareness campaigns play a fundamental role in prompting disclosure of sexual violence as children are equipped with skills and knowledge pertaining to child sexual violence. Zimbabwe incorporated child sexual abuse into the school curriculum where the topic is covered under guidance and counselling (Gwirayi, 2013; Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2013), and the guidelines have been shared at the national level for effective delivery of age appropriate education on sexuality from early childhood development to secondary level of education. In this present study, guidance and counselling (G&C) lessons have been identified as crucial lessons as a few participants from the study disclosed as a result of attending these lessons and interacting with G&C teachers who

prompt or motivate child survivors of sexual abuse to disclose by asking questions after noticing behavioural changes. This is consistent with Malloy, Brubacher, and Lamb's (2013) findings in UK on disclosures in forensic interviews. They found that opportunities for survivors of child sexual violence to disclose their experience often involves external precipitants, which include, television shows or programmes or presentations at school.

The study also revealed that deleterious effects of sexual abuse later prompt child survivors of sexual abuse to disclose. Participants from this study disclosed because their caregivers realised that they were pregnant and some had contracted STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections). A participant from the study experienced the negative consequence of developing sexualised behaviour and developed an interest in sexual activities as she later dated her classmate and they constantly engaged in sexual activities at the age of 14. This agrees with Rudd and Brakarsh (2002), Zollner, Fuchs, and Fegert (2014) and Adeosun (2015), who argued that numerous psychological, physical and behavioural effects, which also have an impact on health outcomes, have been identified as indicators of child sexual violence among survivors.

It also emerged from the study that threats and beatings play an important role in facilitating child sexual abuse disclosures. This theme is consistent with Mathews, Hendricks, and Abrahams' (2016) findings where they observed that some disclosures of sexual abuse are elicited through beatings or threats where parents or caregivers become suspicious after noticing that there is something wrong with the child.

5.3. Strategies promoting early sexual abuse disclosure

5.3.1. Promoting school-based programmes

Strategies inferred from the study's findings include promotion of school-based programmes and awareness campaigns as they are vital in imparting knowledge and skills about sexual abuse to children. Promoting school-based strategies in facilitating early child sexual abuse disclosure is crucial as this present study found out that some of the participants disclosed after being confronted by guidance and counselling teachers and caregivers after noticing sudden changes in behaviour and physical development. This is consistent with the findings of Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, and Smith (1990), who also considered school-based educational programmes in the UK as vital programmes that impart knowledge and skills for detecting and avoiding abuse to children and also aim to motivate disclosure. Furthermore, this reiterates Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, and Fairholm's (2009) findings in Canada, which determined that there are optimal conditions that facilitate disclosure and this includes being directly asked about experiences of abuse. Recent studies have also highlighted the importance of asking children direct questions to encourage child sexual abuse disclosure [e.g., in UK, Malloy et al. (2013) and in USA, Schaeffer et al. (2011)]. This is also consistent with findings from Kogan's (2004) study where a significant proportion of survivors of sexual abuse disclosed as a result of prompts rather than self-initiation. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, learners have attested to the empowerment received from the education programme implemented in schools known as guidance and counselling, regardless of barriers to its effectual implementation (Zvobgo, 2009). As discussed earlier, it is vital that these programmes should be highly promoted, effectively implemented and augmented by other efforts.

5.4. Promoting families matter programmes

Promoting families matter programmes is also crucial in ensuring parents receive support in gaining knowledge, comfort, skills and confidence to converse with children about sex-related issues as revealed in the current study. Parents are encouraged to take active roles in imparting sex-related knowledge to their children at an early age. These programmes seek to establish a bond between the child and their caregiver, thus ensuring a quality child–parent relationship which in general can prompt a child to disclose sexual violence without delay. This reiterates Alaggia’s (2004) view that the relationship among members in the family system is related to the individual’s ability to reveal the occurrence of sexual violence. The nature of interpersonal relations within the family system both directly and indirectly influences the individual’s willingness to disclose sexual abuse. This is in tandem with Pasli (2017), who notes that harsh parenting attitudes can result in the individual accepting everything without questioning, deters understanding of the abuse one is exposed to and even refrains the individual from telling others, and through these ways, the abuse may remain unrevealed. Increased supervision and guidance is most likely to motivate disclosure in the sense that if there is anything troubling the child, through supervision, the parent is quick to notice and engage the child in disclosing. In this regard, it is clear that the relationship among members in the family system is related to the individual’s ability to reveal the occurrence of sexual violence.

The present study’s findings concur with Wurtelle (2008), who contends that parents are of paramount importance as they can be effectual in imparting sexual abuse knowledge to children, for example, recognising abuse, saying no and reporting child sexual abuse. This buttresses findings from other studies which observed that the involvement of parents in strategies designed to prevent child sexual abuse yields positive results [e.g., in Denmark, Zeuthen and Hagelskjær (2013); in USA, Wurtele (2008); in Nigeria, Ige and Fawole (2011); in Zimbabwe, Gwirayi (2013); in Australia, Walsh et al. (2015)]. This explicitly reveals that parents are the most crucial support system for children. However, economic and administrative barriers are a hindrance to the effective implementation of child-focused programmes. In this regard, strengthening child-focused community-based programmes appears to be the most feasible child sexual abuse prevention strategy that will most likely facilitate disclosure and also serves to complement strengthening of legislation and policy. The present study’s findings are also in line with Ige and Fowole’s (2011) findings in a Nigerian study, which show that a number of parents are active in terms of discussing sex-related issues and sexual safety with their children. This will hopefully reduce children’s vulnerability to sexual violence and such discussions are most likely to motivate disclosure in the case that the child is victimised.

5.5. Promoting community sensitisation programmes

In relation to the findings of the study, it is crucial for communities to be sensitised on the consequences of sending girl children to herd cattle, water gardens and fetch firewood in rural communities as these settings are associated with child sexual abuse. Furthermore, communities need to be sensitised on the effects of trusting male cattle herders as this category of perpetrators had the highest number. In addition, it is also crucial for community members to be sensitised on the dangers of allowing male and female children to spend the night in the same room as this provides adult male children with an opportunity to sexually violate female children. Prophets have also been identified as dangers to the community as they take advantage of

adolescent girls all in the name of healing and assisting children/adolescents get through life's difficulties. In this regard, the community and adolescents in particular have to be sensitised so as to be cautious.

Zimbabwe has also incorporated community-based child sexual abuse prevention programmes which are mainly coordinated by child protection committees. To measure the effectiveness of child protection committees in Zimbabwe, a study was conducted and the findings showed that the level of activity and capacity vary depending on the area of operation, support received from no profit organisations and personal motivation (UNICEF, 2012). The findings also revealed that, in most areas, CPCs (Child-Parent Service) do not have impact lack or exist just on paper. The efficacy of CPCs was said to have been hampered by lack of mobilisation at community level, unavailability of resources essential for capacitating committee members through training and the community's lack of knowledge pertaining to the role of CPCs in the prevention of sexual abuse. Overall, there is little or no evidence that shows that CPCs are functional in Zimbabwe. Community and traditional leaders have a significant role to play in preventing and appropriately responding to child sexual abuse in their respective communities through facilitating awareness campaigns at grassroot level (Zimbabwe Judicial Service Commission, 2012). In this regard, it is crucial for CPC to be promoted and revived. It would also make a big difference if child protection sensitisation sessions are prioritised whenever community members gather for various reasons. Trainings for traditional and community leaders on sexual violence against children is also paramount as they are the pulse of communities and will serve to impart knowledge and provide guidance to their communities at large.

6. Conclusion

A myriad of factors contributes to the concealment of sexual abuse experiences and these include fear of perpetrator, fear of parent's reaction, positive relationship with abuser, uncertainty as to how and to whom to disclose to and non-comprehension of sexual abuse.

Motivational factors influencing disclosure of sexual abuse include school-based programmes where children are equipped with knowledge related to prevention of sexual abuse and child friendly reporting mechanisms. Shock and disbelief, beatings and threats, and negative effects of sexual abuse also facilitate disclosure of sexual abuse among adolescent survivors of sexual abuse. Prevention programmes, such as school-based awareness campaigns and G&C lessons, are crucial as they serve to equip children with knowledge of behaviours that constitute sexual abuse and prompt them to disclose past abuse or immediately report in the even that they experience sexual abuse in the future.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the study:

- It is recommended that school-based programmes, awareness campaigns, community sensitisations and positive parenting programmes on sexual violence against children be aggressively implemented, for the sole reason of equipping children with knowledge which will, in turn, facilitate immediate disclosure of child sexual abuse.

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- Sexual violence prevention programmes and messages encouraging disclosure should focus on all adolescent age groups with emphasis on the 10–14 age group.

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