

## **MANAGING SEXUAL ABUSE OF STUDENTS BY TEACHERS. A CASE STUDY OF MASVINGO DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Child sexual abuse is becoming devastatingly prominent in most schools, it is wide spread but largely unrecognized problem in many countries. Schools should be a safe haven for students. Under the hand of a respected teacher students are damaged leading to immense suffering of victims and creation of a bad reputation for the teaching profession. It hinders the development of abused individuals. This paper explores sexual abuse of students by teachers in schools. The study adopted a case study design using questionnaires and semi structured interview schedule to collect data. Generally the teachers and school heads were of the opinion that teachers sexually abuse students in the school contexts. Various reasons were given why teachers commit such a criminal offence. Some of the reasons were said to be reflected in the community and wider society such as unequal power relations, and beliefs in myths such as having sex with a virgin cures HIV and AIDS. The study also found a host of negative repercussions on the victims. The participants established that sexual abuse was detrimental to the physical, social and cognitive development of the child and they suggested ways schools can implement to prevent sexual abuse of students by teachers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Child, Abuse, Abuser, Child Sexual Abuse, Teacher, Victim.

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### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Sexual abuse of children is a human rights violation affecting all age groups within childhood globally (Heiberg, 2005:9). Human rights exist as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the entire body of International Human Rights Law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) legally obliges states to protect children's rights (Kibaru-Mbae 2011). Articles 34 and 35 require states to protect children against all forms of sexual abuse. However, it seems children are not adequately protected. A study in ten countries by Finkelhor (1994) clearly established child sexual abuse to be an international problem (Goldman, 2005:79). The World Health Organization estimates that about 223 million children (150 million girls and 73 million boys) have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence globally (Adusei, 2009: 11). According to a report commissioned by the US Department of Education between 6% and 10% of school children in USA public schools have been sexually abused by school employees and teachers. In Britain hundreds of teachers have been accused of sex with pupils. At least 959 teachers and school staff have been accused of having a relationship with a pupil in the past five years (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/25367715>) In the United Kingdom, Nigel Leat, 51, was jailed indefinitely for abusing children at Hillside First School in Weston-super Mare between September 2006 and December 2010. The charges included one count of rape, 22 of sexually assaulting a child under 13 and 9 of sexual assault by penetration. Police also found more than 30 000 indecent photographs on memory sticks (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset>).

Data from different countries in Africa suggest a high prevalence of all forms of child sexual abuse. In Zambia a 2009/2010 government report showed that at least 1,000 teachers had been dismissed from duty in that period for sexually abusing learners. A separate study conducted between 2003 and 2009 revealed that 12 660 girls were sexually abused by teachers (<http://www.afronline.org>). Mpumalanga's Education Department in South Africa dismissed 60 teachers for sexually abusing pupils in the past five years (<http://mg.co.za/article/2010-10-15-sexual-abuse-rampant-at-rural-schools>). The 1998 Medical Research Council study on rape of girls in South Africa, published in the Lancet Report, claims that teachers commit a shocking 33% of incidents of rape against learners (South African Government of Information, 2002).

This silent plague of child sexual abuse is also striking at the fabric of Zimbabwean schools. Zimbabwean school children under 18 years continue to bear the brunt of sexual abuse from educators in the schools. Nine primary school pupils report rape and indecent assault by a 65-year old teacher at Chiredzi's Tshovani primary school, Godfrey Sithole since January (Masvingo Star, 2012). In a related case, a Chamanhanzva High school headmaster Elijah Chitsika was dismissed from work for impregnating a form four pupil and allegedly sexually abusing others resulting in a number falling pregnant as he reportedly used a stocking as a condom. A deputy headmaster and his subordinate, who is a teacher at Kwalu secondary school in Beitbridge district were arrested on charges of raping and sexually abusing two learners aged 14 and 15 (Chronicle , 2012). The above statistics are just a few examples of sexual misconduct - a widespread problem in schools the world over; by the very teachers who are supposed to be nurturing the children in different countries.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

Literature supports the fact that sexual abuse leads to both negative long and short term consequences (Cathers, Fagin & Mulryan, 2004: 94). As these symptoms have implications for individuals and society at large, this study on management of child sexual abuse on learners is imperative. It is hoped that the schools will create safe and disciplined learning environments that celebrate innocence and value human dignity. Schools and courts should find ways to keep molesting teachers out of classrooms. Hopefully, this study will shed light so that learners better understand the phenomenon, and feel protected in an environment in which they can act against the perpetrators of their abuse. Learners can be provided with information on child sexual abuse. Information is power. Learners need all the information on sexual abuse so that they will be able to protect themselves from this form of abuse.

More systematic studies are needed in this area in order to provide a rationale for policy making and education of teachers in training about literature that directly explores issues to do with management of child sexual abuse. This study hopes to contribute in a significant measure to the knowledge base of this area.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Most researchers in the field of child sexual abuse seem to fully appreciate the importance of defining the concept to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon

**Defining child sexual abuse**

To fully understand the meaning of child sexual abuse, the terms child, abuse, will be defined concept and different forms of child sexual abuse will be given.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article I defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger ([http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)). That is to say childhood is defined as ending at 18 years

*Abuse* is a misuse of power which uses the bonds of intimacy, trust and dependency to make the victim vulnerable (<http://www.edmonontonpolice.ca>). Simply put, abuse refers to the violation of an individual's human rights by another person(s). There are many different forms of child abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse. This study focuses on sexual abuse as a form of child abuse.

In numerous attempts to define child sexual abuse, it seems most researchers concentrate on a particular aspect of the phenomenon, for example, age of the victim and perpetrator, contact or noncontact sexual acts, or the type of relationship between abuser and victim. According to Maltz (2002:321) sexual abuse occurs whenever one person dominates and exploits another by means of sexual activity or suggestion. The United Nations Global Study on Violence against Children (UNVAC) defines child sexual abuse as any kind of sexual activity to which children are subjected, especially by someone who is responsible for them, or has power or control over them, and whom they should be able to trust ([http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/Rapport\\_plan\\_LWF\\_web\\_\(3\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/Rapport_plan_LWF_web_(3).pdf)). Child sexual abuse is viewed as a microcosm of a greater and wider domination of the weaker parties. From the above it can be noted that definitions of child sexual abuse generally include the following:

- Sexual exploitation of a child by an adult;
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- Sexual abuse aimed at the sexual gratification of the adult even if it involves attempts to sexually stimulate the child;
- A child as a minor who is unable to give legal consent to the sexual activities that adult involves him/her in. The perpetrator disregards the psychological development level of the child.

The most common dimension used to define child sexual abuse is that it is a form of child abuse. The definitions focus on types of behaviour, the intent involved as well as the age and power discrepancies between offenders and victims. For the purpose of this research, the following definition is used: Child sexual abuse is any physical, visual or verbal behaviour by an adult directed at a child that is intended to sexually arouse or titillate the adult or the child.

**Forms of child sexual abuse**

There are two categories included in the definition of child sexual abuse namely non-contact and contact sexual abuse (Bezuidenhout, 2008(b):198; Heighberg, 2005:462; Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith, 2005:31).

**i) Non-contact sexual abuse**

Bezuidenhout (2008 198); as well as Richter, Dawes and Higson-Smith (2005:3) point out that non-contact sexual abuse occurs without actual sexual contact between the abuser and the child. In schools learners face various forms of non contact sexual abuses from school personnel such as teachers, coaches, and fellow students. This type of sexual abuse

encompasses a range of acts including showing children pornography. Having children watch adults engaging in sexual activity and revealing sex organs to the child are forms of non-contact sexual abuse. Sexting, which involves sending sexually explicit messages and/or photographs electronically via text messages or by internet is non-contact abuse. Non-contact sexual abuse can also include verbal sexual harassment such as sexual innuendos, and derogatory remarks about a child's body, as well as requests for sexual favours (Heighberg, 2005: 462). Non-contact sexual abuse also involves sexual gestures which are a form of non-verbal communication where visible actions communicate sexual messages for example; air kiss. Non-contact forms of sexual abuse are often a prelude to contact sexual abuse.

### **ii) Contact sexual abuse**

Gandari and Chihambakwe (2010:69) point out that contact sexual abuse involves sexual contact activities such as caressing, fondling, or tickling genitals, breasts, or thighs; oral sexual activities for example, sucking of breasts or tongue kissing; and penetrative sexual activities such as oral, anal and vaginal intercourse. Rape is intentional and an unlawful sexual intercourse when the man's penis penetrates the woman's vagina.

In schools, learners also encounter both contact and non-contact sexual abuse. There are children of all ages whose breasts, buttocks, and genitals are touched, who are kissed and forced to have sexual intercourse, who are shown pornographic photographs, and who are made to listen to sexual slurs and stories. Most of these sexual acts occur at the hands of educators (Shakeshaft, 2002:10).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers despite being role models have penetrated the world of schools and betrayed both parents and students. There is rampant sexual abuse of students by educationists. The rise in incidents of reported crimes of a sexual nature by teachers is a matter of serious concern.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study seeks to explore child sexual abuse by teachers. Reasons why teachers sexually abuse the very children who have been put under their care are sort. The study also aims to establish what the consequences of sexual abuse are on the victims and how schools can fight against sexual abuse by teachers to their students.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why do teachers sexual abuse learners?
2. What are the effects of sexual abuse on learners?
3. How can sexual abuse of students by teachers be minimised?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

An appropriate method for addressing the aim of this study was the qualitative research paradigm. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:30) assert that qualitative research demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. Within the qualitative methodology the study adopted the case study design. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:145) define a case study as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. A case study is an in depth examination of a unit of interest such as an individual, or company (Muranda 2004:54). This study was a case focusing on Masvingo province of Zimbabwe.

### Sampling

The study population consisted of all teachers and headmasters in the district. Purposive sampling was used to select 4 schools within the district. This is in accordance with Maree's (2007) assertion that in purposive sampling you handpick certain groups to include in the sample on the bases of the relevance to the problem under study. From each school, simple random sampling based on randomisation (Tshuma and Mafa in Tichapondwa, 2013:122) in which every element of the population has a known chance of being included in the sample was used to select 14 teachers from each school bringing to a total of 56 teachers. From each of the 4 schools the head was included because they were thought to likely have the information needed on sexual abuse by teachers. The total participants were 60.

### Instruments

Data was mainly collected using two major data collection instruments namely questionnaire and interview guide. Interviews were used to supplement the data collected through the questionnaires. This approach to data collection was based on Yin's (2003) affirmation that with the combination of multiple sources of evidence within a study of the same phenomenon rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretations of research results. Questionnaires with both closed and open ended questions were used to collect data from headmasters and teachers and this instrument with insights from Flick (2009) was considered plausible enough as it enabled participants to respond to the questionnaire freely and in the comfort of their privacy. Interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000:267). The study used face to face interviews which gave room for probing and clarification of issues. Teachers who were interviewed were 8.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study set to investigate sexual abuse of students by teachers. The findings are based on the research questions which are also used as central themes.

### Theme 1: Factors that Cause Teachers to Sexual Abuse Students

The study wanted to establish whether teachers sexually abuse students. The responses are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Teachers Can Sexually Abuse Students  
Number = 60**

Item	Teachers		Heads		Total	%
	M	F	M	F		
SA	9	12	1	2	24	40
A	13	12	1	-	26	43.3
D	5	3	-	-	8	13.3
SD	1	1	-	-	2	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Results reveal that 50 out of 60 participants (83.3%) assert that some teachers sexually abuse students in schools. Only 10 out of 60 (16.7%) do not view teachers as possible abusers. These findings seem to support findings by other researchers. In Niger in interviews conducted with 50 teachers and 174 students, 47.7% of students had observed teachers express feelings of love for a fellow student, while 88% of teachers responded that that there

were sexual incidents, of varying natures between students and teachers at their school (Plan West Africa , 2008). Antonowic (2010:13) asserts that teachers are among child sexual abusers in the school context. Hallian (2009) on the other hand indicates that people do not picture a professional such as a teacher being an offender. They envision teachers as trusted people who cannot sexually abuse learners.

Child sexual abuse does not just happen. There are contributing factors to the abuse of children. All the participants were asked to provide reasons why teachers sexually abuse their students. Four major causes emerged. Jones, Moore, Villar- Marquez and Broadbent (2008) assertion that power relations between elders and juniors that flourish in the home also exist in the school environment is consistent with the findings of this study. Both school heads and teachers pointed out that teachers exploit their power and sexually abuse students. Children are taught to respect and comply with the orders of adults. In the school situation as revealed by the findings when learners are asked for sexual favours by teachers they feel pressured to comply with teachers` demands for fear of negative repercussion. On the other hand, it was echoed that the issue of being loyal to one`s elders doing as one is told, may make it easier for teachers to attract and then abuse the unsuspecting student.

Findings by Mitchell (2010) and Hobson (2012) have a bearing on this study. Mitchell (2010) found that more than 80% of sexual abuse of children occurs in situations with one child and one adult. In this study, it is also emerged that sexual abuse in schools can take place behind closed doors, in private settings on one- on- one interaction between teacher and pupil. Some of the examples of such situations included

- asking a student to bring books to the teacher`s house
- student having extra lesson with a teacher

In line with this, Shakeshaft (2003: 33) points out that sometimes a teacher takes a learner into a storage room attached to a classroom and engages the learner in sexual intercourse. Shakeshaft gives an example when in one class of boys, the teacher called one boy at a time while discussing homework and would fondle each boy`s penis. The study findings found out that having high sexual appetite leads to sexual abuse if not controlled. Two teachers likened this high sexual arousal to the case of one Zimbabwean RMG End Time Message Pastor, Robert Gumbura with eleven wives who was sentenced to 50 years in prison after being convicted of four counts of rape (<http://www.voazimbabwe.com/content/zimbabwe-rgm-pastor-gumbura/1843622.html>). One of the interviewees had this to say:

*Just like Gumbura who demanded that all girls in his church who were due for marriage first have sex with him so as to get clearance to wed, who also kept pornographic pictures of his wives and was a rapist there are also some teachers who are sex maniacs.*

It was said that naturally there are some teachers whose sexual urges are high and they cannot control the urges. Findings by Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins (2006: 8) on causes of child sexual abuse at individual level, that most abusers who abuse children were themselves victims of child sexual abuse were not confirmed in this study. Jespersen, Lalumiere and Seto (2009:180) also point out that experience of sexual abuse in childhood contributes to later offending that is the victim - offender cycle. This is also in line with the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Erikson which state that early life experiences may shape the later life personalities (Ganga, 2013:37).

Another contributing factor which emerged from the study was that students lead teachers to sexually abuse them. Asked why students sexually seduce teachers. Some of the following reasons were given:

- Children because of modern technologies are now sexually active and are in a position to lure teachers into sexual activity. This is consistent with Freud's seduction theory which points to children as seducers of adults.
- Some children may want to engage teachers in sexual activity because they would like to obtain some benefits like school fees payment, gifts.

One teacher remarked

*Girls especially can seduce teachers. What can a teacher really do when a girl sits purposeful revealing her pant and, making suggestive gestures while you are teaching.*

Another teacher reiterated how some school children post sexual images and messages to teachers on for example Whatsapp.

This is also supported by Antonowic (2010:5) who purports that sex for grades is of the most reported practices of sexual abuse in schools. Students, simply because they want favours such as good grades from teachers can sexually seduce teachers.

## **Theme 2: Effects of Child Sexual Abuse on Victims**

Participants were asked to give their opinions on the impact of sexual abuse on students.

**Table 2: Child Sexual Abuse Has an Effect on Victims**

Number= 60

Item	Teachers		Heads		Total	%
	M	F	M	F		
<b>SA</b>	14	11	1	2	28	46.7
<b>A</b>	12	16	1	-	29	48.3
<b>D</b>	1	1	-	-	2	3.3
<b>SD</b>	1		-		1	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

As evidenced by the above results sexually abusing children have consequences for the victims. Almost all participants 95% agreed that sexual abuse affects the victims while 5% denied the assertion. Hall and Hall (2011: 2) also point out that child sexual abuse infringes on basic rights of human beings. It has serious negative consequences on the physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects of survivors.

The findings of the study revealed that sexually abused children can contract HIV/AIDS and STIs. Some participants cited some cases where some children were infected by teachers with HIV/AIDS. Supportive of this assertion is Kibarue Mbae (2011) who asserts that penetrative sexual abuse can result in direct HIV and AIDS infection. Some heads cited some cases where sexually abused children displayed physical symptoms such as genital warts and swollen private parts.

Hall and Hall (2011) posit that victims of sexual abuse find it difficult to establish interpersonal relationships. In line with this finding, from both questionnaire and interviews it was also established that children who will have been sexually abused are social withdrawn. During for instance free hours they do not engage in play.

The study also revealed that sexual abuse has an impact on the educational attainment of learners. Global research also indicates that poor academic performance is common amongst children who are sexually abused (Bromberg and Johnson, 2001: 346). Participants revealed that sexually abused children lack concentration and hence their academic progress deteriorates. This study did not establish that not every child who is sexually abused will experience academic problems at school as the study by Ah Hing (2010:283) revealed. Some sexually abused learners become high academic achievers, because they channel all their energies into focussing on their schoolwork as a coping and compensating mechanism.

The study also revealed that sexual abuse does impact emotionally on victims. The emotional impact noted included depression, stress, and feelings of betrayal. One participant pointed out that learners are betrayed by the very people who care for them and as a result trust is destroyed. Another female teacher commented

*‘For the child to be used as an object to satisfy the abuser’s need is a great violation of the self. The child may store the experience as a secret and becomes withdrawn and depressed both at home and school.’*

### **Theme 3: How Schools Can Minimise Sexual Abuse of Students by Teachers**

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem for students worldwide. Having noted the consequences of child sexual abuse on victims all participants 100% agreed that schools are capable of stopping sexual abuse of learners by teachers. This study established that one way to prevent child sexual abuse was for teachers to maintain a professional relationship with learners. Teachers should not be with one learner in a private setting for this is conducive to sexual abuse of the student. This is in agreement with a study carried by Mitchel (2010) which established that more than 80% of child sexual abuse cases occur in one adult one child situations. Research findings asserted that schools should ensure that all one on one teacher interaction be banned sending a child alone to teachers `office or house. However this study unlike study by Mitchell (2010) did not establish that a safe environment like for instance instituting an open door policy, and having classroom doors with windows where other people can easily observe what will be taking place inside as some ways of increasing visibility in trying to create a safe environment free from sexual abuse.

It is also emerged from the study findings that teachers need to have training in sexual abuse issues such as knowing effects on survivors, consequences for abusing learners, and how to report cases of sexual abuse. These findings concur with study by Matthews (2011) who found low level of pre-service teacher training with 76.6% of tertiary teacher education programs not addressing child protection.

It was also established that all teachers should be aware of policies that guide them on their responsibility on students. They should as remarked by one participant be told in no uncertain terms that child sexual abuse is a criminal offence and when committed this will call for immediate dismissal of the teacher from the job.

Mitchell (2010) is of the view that recruitment and selection of child sexual abuse is another way of preventing sexual abuse in schools by teachers. This method seems very effective however from this study this was not confirmed. The screening according to Mitchell includes personal interviews, professional recommendations and criminal backgrounds checks.



The study findings also revealed that in order to reduce sexual abuse by teachers the students themselves need to be empowered on sexual abuse prevention. Gwirai (2010) asserts that the classes on life skills sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS education be included for students in most schools. Thus, child participation was seen as one effective way of reducing sexual abuse by students since they will be empowered.

## CONCLUSION

Child sexual abuse by teachers is rampant in schools. Schools are places where parents send their children to learn. They expect those places to be safe and nurturing. While some teachers do not sexually abuse, many do. Children are vulnerable to sexual abuse. School authorities should be mindful of students' well being and academic success by not sexually abusing them. Many factors such as unquestioning obedience to authority figures in the school discourage learners from escaping the teacher abusers. The belief that having sex with children provides a cure for HIV/AIDS makes teachers also sexually abuse learners. The ill effects of child sexual abuse are wide ranging with the survivors suffering a range of behavioural and psychological problems from mild to severe. Child sexual abuse has been described as a preventable health problem (Shakeshaft, 2004). It is possible to stop teachers from sexually abusing students through for example having annual workshops to remind teachers of their responsibilities, creating safe environments in the school (e.g. having glass classroom doors), and having policies that clearly show repercussions of a teacher for sexually abusing learners.

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