

ZJER

ZIMBABWE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

VOLUME 22

Number 2 July 2010

ISBN: 1013-3445

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INCESTUOUS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SHONA SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS ON THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GIRL CHILD

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Abstract

Every society has rules that endorse and those that prohibit sexual relationships between and among its members. Incestuous sexual relationships are amongst the castigated relationships and taboos were put in place to prohibit such sexual practices. Incest taboos which exist in many societies were meant to concretise the sexual and marriage prohibitions. The Shona of Zimbabwe strongly condemn incestuous relationships which they call 'makunakuna' and attract severe punishment. However, incestuous child sexual abuse has become a prominent issue in modern day Zimbabwe. Its high prevalence is a concern for society especially in this era of HIV and AIDS. In this regard, the intention of this research is to find out the implications of incestuous child sexual abuse on the educational achievements of the girl child in Zimbabwean Shona society. The assumption of this research is that the main victim of incestuous child sexual abuse is the girl child. The inspiration of focusing on the girl child is derived from the gender inequalities that continue to define African societies in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Such inequalities have seen most of the victims of incestuous sexual abuse being girl children. Informed by various theories among them the culture-historical, feminist, sociological and psychological, this research makes a critical analysis of Zimbabwean Shona society's attitudes towards women as a way of explaining the motivational factors which lead to the occurrence of incestuous child sexual abuse. Unstructured interviews, questionnaires, and general observations were used in gathering data relevant for this paper. Due to difficulties encountered in getting data from alleged perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse, researchers had to gather data from eyewitnesses of such abuses.

Background

Cases of incestuous child sexual abuse form newspaper headlines nearly everyday in Zimbabwe and the world over thereby dispelling the myth that children are sexually abused only by strangers. Though an age-old phenomenon, cases of incestuous child sexual abuse are spreading at an alarming rate. In April 2008, the world was shocked by an incest abuse case of Josef Fritzl, an Austrian, who

imprisoned her daughter for 24 years, fathering seven children with her. In May 2008, An Argentinean Court sentenced a man to 16 years imprisonment for an incestuous relationship with his daughter. He abused the daughter since she was 12 years old and impregnated her with the first child in 1992. He forcibly impregnated the child with a second child in 1997 (<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=56810>). On 7 May 2010, at its 22:00 hours bulletin, the Zimbabwe SFM Radio reported a story of an Argentinean father who sired 7 children with his daughter. The matter only came to light when the daughter reported her father to the Police after the father had tried to sexually abuse one of their daughters. Coming back to Zimbabwe, on Sunday the 23rd of August 2009, the Sunday Mail carried a report of a father who had sexually abused his daughter and fathered a child with her. As if that was not enough he went on to abuse the same child he had fathered with his daughter. On the 30th of August 2009, the same paper carried a story of a step-father who had sexually abused his two year old step-daughter; scalded her private parts with hot water in order to conceal the crime. The little girl had to be treated for first degree burns in hospital. These two cases in Zimbabwe's media are just a tip of the iceberg.

In Zimbabwe, incestuous child sexual abuse ought to be understood within a specific historical and cultural context. Therefore, any theoretical perspective for understanding the etiology of incest must be related to the history and culture of the Shona people. Historically and culturally, children in Shona society are highly valued to the extent that without them marriages can collapse, and it is the duty of parents to ensure the protection of these children. In the social set-up of the Shona, children are taught to respect and obey adults and they are never empowered to question what adults do, be it good or bad, a situation which leads them to be easily manipulated, both physically and psychologically and are often easily frightened into sexual compliance.

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However, it is morally unacceptable in Shona society for people to engage in incestuous relationships. The incest taboo that exists in this society is meant to regulate this practice. From pre-colonial Zimbabwe, up to the late 1990s, incest cases were exceedingly rare. Reasons for this rarity could be attributed to the way Shona society was structured especially the fact that the extended family was still to a large extent functional. Moreover, in the traditional set up, the way the huts were built was in such a way that the hut in which girls sleep (*nhanga yevasikana*) was built some distance away from the boys' and the parents' huts. This girls' hut was jealously guarded. It was a no-go area for all males. In return, daughters were prohibited from entering their parents' and brothers bedrooms. Fathers and brothers would address their daughters and sisters as 'mother-in-law' (*ambuya*) clearly defining the distant association that existed between them. Traditionally, if a girl was found not to be virgin at marriage, it was mandatory that she revealed the culprit and virginity tests should be understood in this context.

This, to a large extent made relatives adhere to the incest taboo because they feared this exposure.

The threat that grave consequences would occur if the prohibition was broken ensured compliance. For example, the fear of angering the spirits compelled the society to observe the incest taboo. It should be noted that traditional Shona society respected the ancestors since they regarded them as their guardians. They placed great importance on having cordial relationships with the 'departed'.

It would, however, be far from the truth if this paper would paint a traditional Shona society that completely adhered to the incest taboo. There were instances where the taboo was violated and the Shona call this *makunakuna*. In such cases, the guilty were ex-communicated from the family or the community in which they lived. Even today, incest is viewed as placing the perpetrator and the victim into a state of pollution, dangerous to themselves and to those with whom they consort. Misfortunes such as intestinal worms, leprosy, albinism, infertility, drought among others are associated with incest. As such, incest is regarded as an ethical misdemeanor, a breach of social rules which are enforced by both the living and the 'departed' ones. If not ostracised, the incestuous couple must be cleansed according to the customs of the community. Traditionally, rituals were performed to purify offenders and among the Shona the '*cheka ukama*' ritual served this purpose. The traditional attitude towards incest has not changed in Shona society despite the high prevalence of incestuous child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe today. Both victims and perpetrators are denigrated, demonised and often regarded as outcasts. Such an attitude traumatises the victim who in this case, is the girl child. This may explain why children's organizations in Zimbabwe today have come up with 'safe' houses for child victims of sexual abuse. This paper therefore, seeks to unravel factors which lead to the breaching of the incest taboo, the various patterns of incestuous relationships and more importantly the impact of incestuous child sexual abuse on the girl child's educational achievements in Zimbabwe. The researchers recognise that in some instances young boys could also be victims of incestuous sexual abuse. However, the rationale of focusing on the girl child rests on the fact that the majority of victims are female and reasons for this scenario are going to be discussed below. It should, however, be noted that the area of study proved to be too sensitive and personal as extracting information from the alleged perpetrators and victims proved difficult. As such much of the information was obtained from witnesses of such abuses and secondary sources.

Defining Incestuous Child Sexual Abuse

Defining incestuous child sexual abuse is difficult because it is conceptualised differently in diverse societies or communities. It may be helpful to define terms

such as incest, incest taboo and child sexual abuse in order to arrive at a working definition of incestuous child sexual abuse. According to the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, incest is sexual intercourse between individuals related in certain prohibited degrees of kinship. Kelly (2004:474) defines incest as "sexual intercourse between close blood relatives." In simple terms, incest implies a sexual relationship between close relatives in violation of the incest taboo. Incest taboo refers to the cultural prohibition of sexual activity or marriage between persons defined as 'close relatives', the degree of which is determined by the society in which the person lives (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/incesttaboo>). Ultimately, attempting to provide a comprehensive definition of incest, in the perspective of Shona society is compounded by the extended nature of its kinship system. On the other hand, Browne (1988:3) defines child sexual abuse as any "physical violence of a sexual nature against a child." The problem with this kind of a definition is that it excludes non-violent actions such as patting the child's body, suggestive looks, gestures and comments that are of a sexual nature. Elliot (1988) concurs with Browne by explaining that child sexual abuse is any sexual exploitation of a child under the age of 16 years for the pleasure, gratification or profit of an adult or significantly older person. Similarly, Sepel in Nyoni (1999) explains child sexual abuse as any sexual activity, whether it be ongoing or a single occurrence, ranging from sexual overtures to sexual intercourse, between a sexually mature or maturing person and an unconsenting or consenting child who is cognitively and developmentally immature. In addition, Kempe and Kempe quoted in Cohen (1992:170) define child sexual abuse as:

.....the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violates the social taboos of family roles."

Inferring from these definitions incestuous child sexual abuse can, therefore, be understood as the sexual exploitation of a child/minor by a close relative in violation of the incest taboo with or without consent.

Theoretical Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse

Various explanations on the causes of child sexual abuse have been put forward. Sociologists and psychologists believe that it is an expression of hostility towards women (Mzarek 1981:97). The hostility emanates from anger at a rejecting, controlling or seductive mother. They also say that abusers are those whose self-control has been weakened by alcohol or drugs. This explanation presents problems in that abusers do not take responsibility (are not accountable) of their actions. Some men will be defending themselves against homosexual wishes or against feelings of sexual inadequacy. As a result, they want repeated acts of

intercourse with willing or unwilling members of society. This theory may be helpful in explaining the high prevalence of incestuous child sexual abuse in Shona society where it remains taboo to speak openly about homosexuality. Culturally, the fact that one fails to perform sexually is a source of shame. Therefore, sexually abusing a child is a way of proving to themselves (the abusers) that though they have homosexual tendencies which are criticised in their society, they are still able to have sexual relations with people of the opposite sex; it is also a way of ascertaining their sexual adequacy by having intercourse with a child who is ignorant of what it means to 'sexually perform'.

Feminists believe that child sexual abuse occurs because there is power differential in relationship being caused by a continuation of male-domination in social structures. The view of women as sexual objects may explain why the bulk of offenders are male and the majority of victims are female. Social construction of gender is crucial to understanding the high prevalence of incestuous child sexual abuse in Zimbabwean Shona society today. This is important in that gender stereotyping is reinforced by the patriarchal nature of Shona society and this exposes female children to sexual abuse, thus, a continued socialization of children along gender lines perpetuates child sexual abuse.

Finkelhor's (1984) Precondition Model of Child Sexual Abuse is one theory that has proved useful in researches on child sexual abuse. The theory's main idea is that there are four preconditions that have to be satisfied in a coherent sequence before one sexually abuses a child. The first condition is that the offender must be motivated to sexually abuse a child. Secondly, the potential abuser must give a free rein to his motivation to offend by overcoming the internal or moral restraints blocking his offending especially by the use of alcohol and drugs. The third condition is that the abuser must prevail over any external restraints that might come in his way as he tries to abuse. In this case, the abuser may isolate his victim from members of her family. Finally, the abuser has to overcome the child's own resistance to the sexual abuse. In this case, most abusers threaten their victims with death if they dare shout for help during and after the abuse.

Marshall and Barbaree cited in Sampson (1994:16) formulated the Integrated theory. The theory merges four experiential factors to explain child sexual abuse. These factors are biological, developmental, socio-cultural and situational. Biological factors have the potential of facilitating sexual aggression in males. However, males are socialised to inhibit this aggression during puberty. This inhibition process is affected by unpleasant childhood experiences such as physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse thereby creating vulnerability and a proclivity to abuse. The affected individuals are lured by negative socio-cultural attitudes. In order to gain a sense of personal power, these individuals may also adopt negative attitudes and beliefs that exist within their respective

societies about girl children and women. Child sexual abuse then occurs if these four factors are combined with other temporary circumstantial factors like drugs. Although the theory is helpful in explaining how developmental experiences contribute to child sexual abuse its major weakness is that it does not account for sexual abusers who never encountered the various abuses mentioned above in their childhood.

Apart from theories that deal with general child sexual abuse, other scholars have come up with theories which try specifically to explain the causal factors of incestuous child sexual abuse. The family systems theory, first propounded by von Bertalanffy and refined by scholars such as Furniss both quoted in Glaser and Frosh (1993:48), posits that incest derives from, or at least is maintained by disturbances in family relationships. According to this theory individuals are subsystems within a family and in this sub-system individual members assume different levels of power. If parents fail to perform their primary functions, that is, nurturing and socialising the children, boundaries in the sub-system are confused and crossed. Consequently, inadequate supervision obtains and the powerful child, usually the elder brother, sexually abuses the defenseless young sister. Mzarek and Bentovim quoted in Mzarek and Kempe (1981:168) have it that

in this dysfunctional family system parents and children are marginalized, parents are also estranged from one another emotionally and sexually. As both parents and children are emotionally needy and impoverished, children often turn to one another to meet their own emotional needs. Parents also turn to their children for emotional support. This often degenerates to become sexual.

From a feminist perspective, brother-sister incest is jet-propelled by masculine-feminine psychology (Glaser and Frosh, 1993:28). Boys are brought up and socialised to think that they are stronger, superior and independent to girls. Thus, sexual exploitation of girls is viewed as an attempt by the boy child to exert his power and authority on the girl child.

Common Types of Incestuous Sexual Abuse in Shona Society and their Prevalence

Modern Shona society has witnessed an increase in the cases of incestuous child sexual abuse. In most instances, parents and close relatives are perpetrators of this abuse. There are various types of incestuous child sexual abuse but this paper is going to explore only those that involve the girl child for reasons that have already been outlined above. Data collected from forty questionnaires randomly distributed to Bachelor of Education students at Great Zimbabwe University shows that 34 (85%) respondents have knowledge or have witnessed

the occurrence of incestuous child sexual abuse whilst 6 (15%) of the respondents expressed ignorance of its existence. The Table below shows the common types of incestuous child sexual abuse highlighted in the sample.

Table 1

Type of incest	No. of cases	Frequency-%
Brother- sister	16	40
Uncle-niece	13	32,5
Father-daughter	5	12,5
None	6	15
Total	40	100

Information in the Table above demonstrates that incestuous child sexual abuse is prevalent and almost ubiquitous in Shona society. The motives and circumstances that promote each of the above types of incestuous child sexual abuse shall be examined in relation to various theoretical perspectives.

From **Table 1** above, it is noticeable that the most prevalent type of incestuous child sexual abuse is the brother-sister, constituting 40% and this is committed mainly by blood related brothers and sisters. This sibling incest occurs at two levels; that is, peer incest and cross-generational incest. Whilst peer incest involves sexual contact between individuals who are close in age, cross-generational incest exists between participants with a large age difference (www.faqs.org/health/topics/68/incest.html).

Interview and questionnaire responses show that brother-sister incest is largely a product of 'mutual admiration' between the siblings. Russell in Cohen (1992:173) calls this the "myth of mutuality". The sample also revealed motivational factors for brother-sister incest as absentee parentage (physically and emotionally), unsupervised study into the late hours of the night and children watching movies unmonitored. Mzarek in Mzarek and Kempe (1981:168) argues that in a dysfunctional family, particularly where parents are absent, the brother may assume the role of a father in the family and may coerce the young sister into sexual intercourse. de Young (1982:84-85) avers that;

sibling incest is in most cases motivated by play, imitation and exploitation. Simulation of certain plays, drama or games may result in sex. Furthermore, sibling incest may be an imitation of sexual behaviour viewed by the children within the home environment.

More often, this is a result of unhealthy family interactions. For example, increasing poverty and a serious lack of accommodation in Zimbabwe today provide conducive environments for incestuous sexual abuse to occur. Similar sentiments were aired by Bonasso, Forselledo and Knircha of the Inter-American Children's Institute when they said, "along with the marginalization of women and children, poverty also plays a pivotal role in sexual exploitation." In Zimbabwe's urban, farm and mine communities, most people live in one room with siblings and parents, a condition favourable for girl children being abused by either their brothers or fathers. This observation was supported by an interview with the Advocacy and International Lobbying Officer at the Girl Child Network who stressed the relationship between the sky-rocketing cases of sibling incest and overcrowded urban settlements like Mbare, Epworth as well as farm and mine communities.

Another common type of incest which is notable is the uncle-niece, accounting for 32,5%. This is not surprising because of the extended nature of Shona families. This kind of incest is enhanced by the patriarchal ideology (de Young, 1982: 95) and this is common in most if not all types of incestuous abuses. In patriarchal families, the uncle is seen as a father figure with full authority and responsibility over the niece. The authority of the uncle cannot be questioned or challenged. In most situations, the niece solely depends on the uncle socially and economically. This dependence compels the niece to comply with sexual demands made by the uncle. The uncle usually intimidates and threatens to withdraw his support from the child. Currently, Zimbabwe is experiencing high mortality rate due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic which has left a large number of children orphaned thereby increasing the vulnerability to sexual abuse of the girl child by those taking care of them.

Furthermore, 12,5% of the questionnaire responses, indicated that father-daughter incestuous child sexual abuse is also common. Like other forms of incestuous abuse, it is also attributed to the patriarchal ideology which makes the father the head of the family. As such, the father is the sole decision maker whose decisions are not always questioned. Paternal incest is prevalent where authority is centralized hence the father is often autocratic, rigid and controlling whilst the mother is submissive and dependent. Weinberg in Glaser and Frosh (1993:28) echoes similar sentiments by asserting that incestuous fathers can be:

- ❖ endogamic abusers who are oriented inwards, towards their families over whom they keep a tightly possessive hold;
- ❖ psychopathic abusers who treat all people within their power as sexual possessions;

- ❖ paedophilic abusers whose psychological immaturity makes them fixate upon children as their sexual objects.

Such fathers are common in dysfunctional and patriarchal homes where the father-mother and father-children relationship is always vertical with limited dialogue. Fathers have so much power vested in them such that even if they abuse the power no one dares challenge them.

Marital conflict and estrangement also catapults father-daughter incestuous abuse as the father seeks out a non-conflictual partner in his daughter(s). In this case, the child provides a loving and accepting partner. Emotional deficiency in the family makes the daughter confuse the sexual attention and favours she receives from the father as these satisfy her need for affection and nurturing. In her endeavour to avoid and regulate conflict, the daughter "takes over the wife's sexual role thereby removing the major source of stress and effectively binding the family together in the firm web of incestuous secrecy" (Glaser and Frosh, 1990:47). Role reversal characterises this relationship. Thus, Maddock and Larson cited in Kelly (2004:474) say "families in which there is a great deal of chaos; role confusion and the blurring of boundaries between generations" are also frequently involved in incestuous relationships."

Societal belief systems also contribute to the occurrence of incestuous child sexual abuse. Aschwanden (1989:79) and Bourdillon (1990:189) concur that in Shona society incest is inextricably bound to the immoral practices such as fertility rituals and witchcraft. The Shona people firmly believe that witches and sorcerers possess strong magical powers through which they can mysteriously exploit their daughters sexually even in broad daylight. Such magical possessions are referred to as '*mubobobo*'. Children who are often tired, dizzy and doze during school activities are thought to be victims of this sexual manipulation. Relatedly, fertility rituals (*divisi*) are thought to be incestuous. These rituals are believed to be associated with communal farmers and small retailers particularly rural shop owners. For farmers, the rituals derive from the fact that traditionally, the communal economy is agro-based yet the climate does not always guarantee adequate rains for a bumper harvest. Thus, to minimise crop and animal failure, the farmers perform incestuous rituals. The rituals attribute effectiveness to sexual contact with one's own blood and girl children are the usual victims because of societal perception on female reproduction. Usually, both parents are involved and instrumental in persuading, bribing or forcing the daughter to consent. The sexual acts which may occur at the onset of the farming season are a strictly guarded family secret. Most successful communal farmers as well as retailers are thought to have performed incestuous related rituals in order to have bumper harvests and attract customers. Out of the 34 respondents who acknowledged having knowledge of the prevalence of incestuous child sexual abuse among the Shona, 4 (11.8%) of them ascribed father-daughter incestuous abuse to the father's desire to prosper in business.

The outbreak of HIV and AIDS has added its fair share of victims of incestuous child sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers. Bogus traditional healers (*n'angas*) are on record for prescribing sex with a virgin daughter as a curative measure for HIV and AIDS patients. Thus, the exponential increase in HIV and AIDS cases has also witnessed the proliferation of incestuous rape of minors.

The extent to which incestuous child sexual abuse is influenced by the factors discussed above is summarised below using data collected from questionnaires:

Table 2

Factor	No. Cases	Frequency-%
Unsupervised interaction	14	41,2
Dependency	10	29,4
Religion (myth and beliefs)	6	17,6
Mutual admiration or lust	4	11,8
Total	34	100

Implications of Incestuous child sexual abuse on the Educational Achievements of the girl child

Incestuous child sexual abuse has far reaching short and long term effects to the psycho-social and physical development of the girl child which in turn also influences her educational progress and achievements. **Table 3** below summarises some of the effects.

Table 3

Educational Achievement	Reason	No. of Victims	Frequency-%
Dropped out of School	Pregnancy	16	47,1
Dropped out of School	Ill-healthly	8	23,5
Dropped out of School	Stigma/other	6	17,6
Poor performance	Stigma/other	4	11,8
Total		34	100

Table 3 above shows what the respondents said were the effects of incestuous child sexual abuse on the educational achievements of the girl child. Of the 34 respondents, 4, which is 11, 8 % mentioned poor performance as one of the effects of this kind of abuse attributing it to stigma and other causes. This,

therefore, indicates that though the abused children continued with their education, they could not perform to their full potential after the abuse was discovered or exposed. The rest of the respondents, 30 (88,2 %) said the majority of incestuous abused victims dropped out of school due to ill-health, pregnancy and stigma. Since incestuous child sexual abuse is almost always exploitative, no contraceptives are used, hence the high pregnancy rate which 47, 1 % of the respondents pointed out. Once the girl becomes pregnant, she automatically drops out of school. The major reason for this high dropout may be that though the education policy in Zimbabwe does allow schools to keep pregnant girls, the girls themselves feel to opt out of school due to stress, depression, embarrassment and stigma.

23,5% of the questionnaire responses revealed that incestuous child sexual abuse victims suffer ill-health. In an interview, the Advocacy and International Lobbying Officer for Girl Child Network confirmed that most victims of incestuous child sexual abuse drop out of school due to sexually transmitted infections as well as HIV infections. This is due to the fact that some HIV and AIDS patients force or solicit for sex with a virgin relative due to the mythical belief that such an act cures them of the virus. Those who continue with their education do so erratically and their performance is generally dismal.

As alluded to earlier, the occurrence of incestuous child sexual abuse is a breach of the incest taboo among the Shona people. Thus, its occurrence is normally a guarded secret especially by the perpetrator of the abuse. Victims of such abuses are threatened with death if they dare report the perpetrator. Since most of these victims are immature and vulnerable, they usually take these threats seriously and they condemn themselves to silence. Silence means the abuse remains unshared hence unresolved and recurrent. Feelings of guilt as noted by Glaser and Frosh (1993:20), lead to depression, lowered self-esteem, phobias and suicide attempts. All these negatively impact on the academic performance of the girl child.

Meggitt and Sunderland (2000:131-134) also identify some psychological effects of incest as attention deficiency disorder meaning a behavioural disorder characterised by inability to concentrate on tasks; autism or autistic spectrum disorder, that is, a disorder which impairs a child's understanding of his/her ability to relate to the environment; dyslexia which is a specific reading disability characterised by difficulties in coping with written symbols; dyspraxia meaning a brain damage that hampers the transmission of messages to the body; and labile meaning having rapidly fluctuating moods such as being cheerful at one moment and angry the next moment. The effects are detrimental to the performance of the girl child in class. This study has established that most victims

of incestuous sexual abuse lose concentration during classes as revealed by one teacher who said: "sexually abused children exhibit symptoms of psychological disturbances and have difficulties relating with people outside of the poisoned environment." This leaves the sexually abused child withdrawn and isolated from the rest of the class yet effective learning takes place where there is pupil interaction.

In addition, de Young (1982: 49) posits that "incest victims wield an unusual amount of power in the family and that power can largely be attributed to the role reversal she is likely to have experienced with her mother." At school, such children are likely to be very authoritative in their interaction with peers. They hardly entertain any criticism and are likely to respond to the authority of the teacher with resentment and confusion. In such a scenario, the child fails to perform to her full potential because of sour relations between her and the teacher as well as other learners. The abused child is, in most cases, hostile and violent towards others.

Incest victims are also vulnerable to compensatory behaviour, that is, acting out. Feelings of worthlessness, guilty, and stigma push the victim into acts such as running away from home to live in the streets, drug abuse and promiscuity (de Young :1982:51). Interviews with the Advocacy and International Lobbying Officer for the Girl Child Network confirmed that a good number of girls in the streets in Zimbabwean towns and cities are victims of incestuous sexual abuse. This 'escape behaviour' should be understood as a coping mechanism directly related to self, family, or community banishment. The most common temptation after the disclosure of incestuous sexual abuse is to accuse the girl child of being the temptress instead of being the victim. In most cases, children do not disclose the abuse because they fear that they will not be believed or protected. Sampson (1994:28) realised that "children are much more traumatised by the uproar and questioning which follow discovery than by the sexual encounter itself." Mehr (1995:103) echoes similar sentiments by asserting that most teenage runaways are not "boldly seeking adventure and challenge but are members of dysfunctional families and are fleeing from stressful environments" and, these runaway children are school dropouts.

The effects of incestuous child sexual abuse can be physical. Slager-Jorne quoted in de Young (1982:57) lists the following as some of the physical effects: "eating problems, altered sleeping patterns, vomiting, bed-wetting, restlessness, genital rapture, genital irritation, painful discharge of urine, physical handicap" among others. All these effects hinder the girl child from performing academically to her full potential. The victims are almost always in pain hence they have serious difficulties in educational settings. In this regard, incestuous abuse should be considered a monster which is not only detrimental to the educational progress

and achievement of the girl child, but also denigrates and reduces the victims to untouchables in the society.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that incestuous child sexual abuse is indeed a real social problem in the world and Zimbabwe in particular and it manifests itself in different forms. Factors and theories for the occurrence of various types of incest are not type-specific, rather they are inter-related and cut across all the types. Incestuous child sexual abuse has far reaching effects on the victim who in this case is the girl child. Male guardians in Shona society have always been regarded as protectors of their own children, more so of their daughters who culturally are seen to be defenceless. Sexually abusing the daughters is betrayal of trust. Once abused by those closest to them, it has been shown that the world around the girl children collapses around them. Life loses meaning and a lot of them feel they do not have anything to live for. This attitude is worsened if after the abuse the victim is found to be HIV positive. They give up on life. As a result, this research has revealed that in the educational field, they do not fare well. This explains why a lot of them drop out of school either due to illness or failure to come to terms with the abuse.

Recommendations

- Cultural and religious beliefs which lead to the sexual manipulation of the girl child need serious interrogation. This interrogation needs to happen at national, community and family levels. Such an endeavour brings awareness to individuals at all these levels that girl children should no longer be viewed as the possessions of their parents, clans or tribes; that they have rights to decide the course which their lives should take.
- Parents should always be alert and supervise the interaction of their children. They need to emphasise the maintenance of 'critical distances' between girl children and their male relatives. This research has shown that gone are the days when even the father could be regarded as a trusted protector of his own children. It therefore, becomes imperative that mothers monitor ways in which their girl children relate to their fathers as well as other male relatives.
- Communities need to be encouraged to establish support systems for the rehabilitation and counseling of the abused children. Information dissemination about incestuous child sexual abuse should be increased in communities. There is need to encourage girls to act as a group to discuss problems they encounter in life, support each other and learn about their rights.

- Tougher sentences must be given to parents, siblings and male relatives who sexually abuse girl children. The Law should actually act as a panacea for social problems like incestuous child sexual abuse.
- Children should be educated about sexual abuse and be encouraged to open up and report any form of sexual abuse they encounter. Sex education must be included in the school curricula in order to inform children about their sexuality. Such education should empower girl children to be assertive, thus enabling them to squash sexual advances from their male relatives. It should equip them with the necessary skills to create their own 'safe spaces' within the threatening environments they find themselves. It should also empower them to make informed and sound moral decisions now and later in their adult life.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture needs to seriously consider coming up with ways of encouraging impregnated girls to stay in school. For example, it can devise ways of empowering school systems to provide the necessary psycho-social support to these children. In this regard, teachers involved in Guidance and Counselling at schools should be well-trained to counsel abused children and inform the unabused. While resource persons from the Police, Ministry of Education, Childline, The Family Support Clinic and other stakeholders have been holding awareness campaigns in schools and urban communities the researchers recommend that such campaigns be intensified in the rural areas.

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Interviews

Interview with the Advocacy and International Lobbying Officer of Girl Child Network, 22 June 2009

Interview with a teacher at Mabvuku Primary School, 23 July 2009



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