

Sexual Abuse among Female Secondary Students and Social Cultural Issues that Hinder or Enhance Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Africa

Akanle Florence Foluso⁺ and Asebiomo

Institute of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract. This paper discusses sexual abuse among female secondary school students and those social cultural issues, such as social norms, sexual culture, laws and policies issues of power relating, the social environment and other factors which could hinder or enhance responses to child sexual abuse. The paper identified that sexual abuse is a social problem in Africa, even when non discrimination or the ground of sex is a norm of international law, and which is binding to all states. Gender based sexual abuse is still practiced in Nigeria. Finally the paper identified how sexual abuse of female students could be prevented in schools.

Keywords: Sexual Abuse, Female, Secondary Students, Social Cultural, Africa.

1. Introduction

Sexual abuse to some people refers to the activity of having sex with someone against their wishes or without their agreement. Sexual abuse occurs throughout the world. Among secondary school students who are mostly adolescent girls, Jewkews (2001) reported that up to one third of them reported that their first sexual experience as being forced. Coerced sex may result in sexual gratification on the part of the perpetrators, though the underlying purpose is frequently the expression of power and dominance over the assaulted, while sexual violence or abuse can be directed at any one, male or female. Student or non students, the focus of this paper will be on sexual abuse of female secondary school students. Forcing students to have non consensual sexual activity is a behavior found in every country. Usually it is the male teachers who force female students against their will. Owuamanam (1995) reported a high prevalence of sexual abuse in public institutions in Nigeria. According to Owuamanam sexual harassment is a common form of sexual explanation in Nigerian schools. In Nigeria and in most Africa school setting, the most common place where sexual abuse occur or take place is the school.

Cultural as explained by the Cambridge dictionary is an adjective which relates to way of life relating to the habits, traditions and beliefs of a society socio means the society.

Among some of the social factors of sexual harassment are: societal norms that support sexual violence, male superiority and male sexual entitlement. Societal norms that maintain women's inferiority and sexual submissiveness. Weak laws and policies related to gender equality and high tolerance level of crime and other forms of violence in the society. Among some of the community factors of sexual harassments are lack of opportunities for unemployment. Lack of institutional support from police and judiciary system, general tolerance of sexual assault within the community. settings that support sexual violence. Weak community sanctions against sexual violence perpetrators.

As observed above, sexual abuse is a social problems in Africa. Even when non discrimination on the ground of sex is a norm of international law, and the law is binding on all states (even those who have not rectified the relevant convention). Gender based sexual abuse is still practiced in Nigeria and in other African countries. What then are the pertinent issues that hinder or enhance responses to child sexual abuse in Africa?

2. Socio Norms

⁺ Corresponding author. Tel.: +2348066256097.
E-mail address: folusoakanle@yahoo.com.

The socio norms and the type of sexual activities a society regulate play a major role in determining the type of force sex that are allowed or condoned within a particular culture. These norms determine how women are perceived with the context of sexuality and relationship and also the degree to which their perceptions and experience are used in determining what is consensual. Many traditional moves in Africa condoned coercion of the female sexual abuse committed by men is to a large extent rooted in ideology of male sexual entitlement. Those belief systems grant women extremely few legitimate options to refuse sexual advances Wood and Jewkes (2001). Many men thus simply exclude the possibility that their sexual advances towards a woman most especially the unmarried might be rejected or that an adolescent or any other woman has the right to make an autonomous decision about participating in sex. Societal norms around the use of violence as a means to achieve objectives have been strongly associated with the prevalence of rape. In societies where the ideology of male superiority is strong emphasizing dominance, physical strength and male honour-rape is more common. It is also common in countries with a culture of violence, or where violent conflict is taking place.

3. Sexual Culture

Our sexual norms appear natural because we have internalized them since infancy. These norms are part of our culture like the air we breathe. Humans learn their culture so that it has become a natural part of their personality. Among the variety of factors that shape how we feel and behave sexually, culture is possible, the most powerful. A brief explanation of sexual themes across cultures and times could give one a sense of the diverse shapes and meanings, human have given to sexuality. In the 19th century, white middle-class Americans believed that women had little sexual desire, hence they were viewed as asexual, men were believed to have ranging sexual appetites. Men, driven by lust, sought to satisfy their desire by ravaging innocent women. Both men and women believed male sexuality was dangerous, uncontrolled, and animal like. It was part of a woman's duty to tame unruly male sexual impulses. These beliefs provided the rationale for a "war between the sexes". Although, a century has passed since the end of the Victorian era, many Victorian sexual belief and attitudes continue to influence us. They include that men are naturally "sexually aggressive" and women are sexually passive".

The beliefs about sexuality have led men to believe they can force a woman to have sex. Many traditional mores condone sexual violence. The society believes that male could force sex on female. Among the pertinent issues which encourages violent sexual culture is the myths about rape; a number of myths, which serve to encourage rather than discourage rape is the issue that women are to blame for their own rapes, as if they somehow "deserve" them or were responsible for them. Belief in rape myths is part of a large belief structure that includes gender role stereotypes, sexual conservatism, acceptance of interpersonal violence, and the belief that men are different from women. (Kaler and Wade 1998).

Sandra Byers and Raymond Ene (1991) found that acceptance of rape supportive myths among college men is associated with the use of physical force, verbal coercion, and belief in "uncontrollable physical arousal".

Another myth is also that "women ask for rape" many people believe that women ask for it" by their behaviour, provocative dresses or some other life styles. A study reported by Haolcomb, Sandage Williams (1991) reported that 25% of male students believed this myth. Another study found that provocative dress on the part of the victim of a date rape resulted in a greater perception that the victim was responsible and that rape was justified (Cassidy & Hornell, 1995). Some of the pertinent issues which hinder responses to sexual abuse include the following:-

3.1. Laws and Policies

There are considerable variations between countries and their approach to sexual violence. In some countries there are weak approaches to issues of correction of an alleged perpetrator on the evidence of the women alone. In some cases, the evidence of a woman is not allowed. In some settings of sexual violence, the definition of sexual abuse or violence are excluded from the legal definition in some cases victims of rape are strongly deterred from bringing the matter to court through the fear of being punished for filing an "unproven" rape suit. In Nigeria for example the proportion of students or female who either report cases of rape or receive medical treatment for immediate problem related to sexual violence is relatively small. Many

people do not report cases of sexual violence because they are ashamed or fear being stigmatized or blamed. This is because issues around sex and sexuality are taboos in many cultures and this can lead to a reluctance to discuss and address sexual health issues. Unmarried adolescents are routinely denied limited access to sexual reproductive health services even though they are vulnerable to sexual abuse or sexual violence. Although rape is criminal in Nigeria some victims of rape do not report cases of rape. This is because of the belief that publicity resulting from prosecution of cases in court may have adverse effect on the female victim perceived stigma and embarrassment can make it difficult for her to find a husband, organization that could provide support for victims are not readily available. Consequently victims of rape and other mild coercive behaviour seem to suffer in silence.

3.2. Issues of Power Relations

“Among the pertinent issues that hinder responses to sexual abuse or might prevent female students from refusing the sexual advances of teachers are: The victim lack choice or faces physical, psychological and social consequences if they refuse sexual advance from their teachers. The relationship between female students and their lecturers involves power and struggle. A person having power over one limits one's ability to refuse, for fear of reprisal for example is a teacher or professor assisting one in a class ask one for a date, one is placed in an awkward position. If one say no, one's grade will suffer, one may be ignored in class and one may fail his examinations. Sexual harassment is a mixture of sex and power, power may often be a dormant element. In school, female students are devalued by calling attention to their sexuality for women especially, sexual harassment may be a way to keep the “in then place” and make them feel vulnerable.

3.3. The Social Environment

The social environment within a community is however important. How deeply entrenched is the community belief in male superiority and male entitlement to sex will greatly affect the likelihood of sexual violence taking place, (general tolerance in the community as well as sexual assault and the strength of sanctions, if any, against perpetrators. Could also affect the likelihood of sexual violence taking place.

In some places, rape can even occur in the public, with passers by refusing to intervene. Complaints of rape may also be treated leniently by the school authority or the police, particularly if the assault is committed during the school period or where police investigations and court cases do proceed, the procedures may well be either corrupt or the legal papers being “Lost” in return for a bribe. The social environment may be responsible for hindering responses to sexual abuse: most culture teach children to respect and obey elders, adults (including teachers) and at the same time female students are often given little direct information about sex, their own organs and has to protect themselves from sexual abuse. Adolescents need sexuality education, in form of skill training, education by the media and group instructions in schools, either as a component at regular class instruction or as an after school program (Dare 1994). These programs teach children that they have rights: to control their own bodies (including their genitals) to feel “safe” and not to be touched in ways that feel confusing or wrong. These programs teach female students.

To say “No”, to get away from the assailant or situation and to tell a trusted adult what happened and keep telling them until they are believed.

Factors operating at the society level that influence sexual violence, include laws and national policies relating to gender equality, as well as norms relating to gender equality, as well as norms relating to the use of violence. While the various factors operating with the school and communities also influence from norms and laws working in the school environment.

4. Preventing Sexual Abuse of Female Students in Schools

The idea of working to prevent sexual abuse in schools in relatively new sexual abuse, sexual harassment, aggression and discrimination of female student, represent the darker side of human sexuality. Their common thread is humiliation, subordination, or victimization of others. But we need not be victims. We can educate ourselves and others about these activities: we can work towards changing attitudes and institutions that support these destructive and dehumanizing behaviours.

Most programmes typically address three audiences. The children, their parents and the professionals

4.1. The Children

Most programs include group instructions in schools, either as a component of regular classroom instruction or as an after school program (Daro 1994) CAP programs aimed at children use play, puppet show, films videotapes, books and comic books to teach children that they have right to control their own bodies (including their genitals), to feel “safe” and not to be touched in way that feel confusing or wrong. The CAP programs stress that children are not at fault when such abuse does not occur. These programs generally teach children three strategies.

To say “No”, to get away from the assailant or situation and to tell a trusted adult what happened and keep telling them until they are believed.

4.2. Their Parents

Prevention programmes could also focus on educating parents, who it is hoped will in turn educate their children. These programs seek to help parents discover abuse or abusers by identifying warning signs. However the involvement of parents may be hindered by the concept of appropriate sexual behaviour, adult fear of discussion and controversy over sex education. In some cases parents seem reluctant in general to deal with sexual abuse issues with their children. Such programs with parents therefore has to be cultural sensitive.

4.3. Professionals

Child abuse programs could also educate, teachers, health worker and police officers to educate the children; this is because of the close contact with children and their role in teaching children. Professionals are encouraged to watch for signs of sexual abuse and investigate children’s report of such clause.

5. Preventing Sexual Abuse through Sexuality Education

Adolescents who are between the age of twelve to twenty years suddenly become aware of the tremendous changes that are taking place in their sex organs and hence seek various avenues to get answers to his or her sexual interest. Female student who are adolescents are often given little direct information about how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. Skill training needs to be given to female students to help them to be able to be assertive in saying “No” to sexual abuse, get away from an abusive situation or the assistant and be able to report any form of sexual abuse on her for immediate action in school. Teaching female student to know their right could establish or instill confidence in then to report sexual harassment.

Boys to need sexuality education to help them acquire desirable attitudes to sex and develop wholesome attitude to it. There is need to educate boys to work towards changing the attitudes and institutions that support these destructive. The habits, traditions, belief and myths which encourages sexual violence in our culture has to be deal with through the education of our youth. Education concerned with sexual issues should start from childhood. Parents do not have to wait until adolescence before teaching people how to avoid or prevent sexual violence. Sexuality education can be done through the use of the media, school, home and all agencies of Education.

6. Law Enforcement a Judicial Process

Commitment to preventing or controlling sexual violence should also be reflected in the emphasis on police training and the allocation of police resources to the problem of sexual abuse. Priority should be given to investigation involving case of sexual assault, and in the resource made available to support courteous and the provision of medico-legal service to them.

Complaints of rape should no longer be treated with line by the police when corrupt policemen should be dealt with in case of bribery involving police in cases of papers be “list”.

Legislation and policies which would help to discourage sexual clause should be taken more seriously in Africa. Given the extent of underreporting and the obstacles which might exist in the judicial process, training may be necessary for law-enforcement, custodial officers and the judiciary as priority areas. In particular, negative and unsympathetic attitudes on the part of police officers who deal with cases of sexual violence are considered deferent to reporting and making training for officers essential. Survivors of the sexual violence and all female students may also need to be educated as to their legal rights.

7. Involvement of NGO's

The non-governmental sector has a critical role to play in terms of addressing the issue of sexual violence. For example at the community level, CBOs and NGO's explore and raise the extent of the problem. They can develop and implement specific educational and advocacy activities.

Concerns relating to violence together with its prevention and the mitigation of its consequences can be integrated within ongoing development activities for example those relating to human rights governance, gender sustainable livelihoods, social welfare and health micro financing and credit.

At the national level advocacy activities may be necessary to raise awareness of the problem to highlight the barriers which impede the justice process, including the review of existing legislation and the introduction of new law or prosecution policies.

At both national and international levels NGO's have a critical role to play in terms of monitoring and reporting sexual violence as abuses of human rights, in vigorously promoting the right of victims and prosecution of offenders and in reminding government and international agencies of the responsibilities within the context of UN policies and charters, and the plans of action of the relevant international conferences.

8. Conclusion

The paper has identified some of the social and cultural issues they may hinder or enhance responses to child sexual abuse in Africa. Preventing non consensual sex would therefore need to deal with those factors in the society and culture of sexuality in Africa if sexual abuse would totally be eliminated.

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10. Reference

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