

An Assessment of the Life Experiences of Women Who are Survivors of Sexual Abuse in Zengeza Community Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the life experiences of women who are survivors of sexual abuse in Zengeza community of Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. It seeks to explore the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse and how the survivors are coping. A Phenomenological research design was adopted to allow the researchers to know about the subjective, life experiences of the female survivors of sexual abuse without focusing on specific answers. The target population comprised of 20 female survivors of sexual abuse to avoid biased information and participants were recruited using purposive sampling technique, by selecting individuals who are living as survivors of sexual abuse. The findings from this study strongly indicated that survivors of sexual abuse are going through a lot of emotional and psychological distress, with their physical health affected as well. The article extensively explores the intricate and multifaceted challenges faced by the survivors of sexual abuse and the possible coping mechanisms that they may employ. The researchers recommended that it is of paramount importance for the healthcare system to acknowledge what the survivors of sexual abuse are going through and to provide possible ways to curb the challenges that they are facing.

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

This article examines the life experiences of women who are survivors of sexual abuse in Zengeza Community in Chitungwiza. Sexual abuse is widespread globally, eroding progress toward human rights and public health, and is detrimental to the health of survivors of violence as well as the well-being of their families and communities (Abrahams et.al., 2014 Devries, Mak, & Garcia-Moreno, et.al., 2013; Ellsberg et al., 2015). The costs of sexual abuse are substantial which are monetary, physical and psychological. Many other costs to survivors such as stigma and social consequences including social ostracism are further consequences of sexual abuse that are more difficult to fully capture in monetary or research measures (Dratnall & Jewkes, 2013). Our understanding of sexual abuse in the global arena has increased exponentially in the past 10 years. This largely due to a growing body of quality studies that have included rigorous measurement of sexual abuse and to an increase in studies from low and middle income countries including epidemiological studies assessing population based prevalence of sexual abuse and multicountry studies. The most comprehensive and accurate global estimates of sexual abuse prevalence come from 2013 WHO's global systematic review and synthesis report which presents population level estimates of intimate partner and nonpartner sexual abuse against women. A seminal report provided a comprehensive synthesis

of robust global estimates of sexual violence to date from 86 countries. Findings indicated that over one in three women (35.6%) experience intimate partner or nonpartner sexual and/ physical violence in their life time (World Health Organization, 2013).

Regional prevalence of lifetime sexual abuse varies widely. For intimate partner sexual abuse, central sub-Saharan Africa had the highest prevalence at 65.6% and Asia the lowest at 16.3% (Devries, Mak, & Garcia-Moreno, et.al., 2013). For nonpartner sexual abuse central sub-Saharan Africa had the highest rate 21% and Asia the lowest prevalence at 3.3% (Abrahams et.al, 2014). Women and girls who experiences abuse also change over the life time. Intimate partner studies that collected data mainly from individuals aged 15 years or older show important changes in patterns on the prevalence of abuse, abuse rises steadily from early adolescence onwards, peaking I the mid-30s to mid-40s (World Health Organization, 2013). This period of rapidly rising risk of abuse corresponding to the period of the life transition from adolescence to adulthood, is likely linked to the developmental changes occurring in these years, including the formation of initial intimate relationships.

The United Nations, (UN, 2015), discovered that women and girls in Zimbabwe are increasingly vulnerable to sexual abuse because of the social, political and economic instability in the country. It is against such background that the researcher wants to make an indepth research on the life experiences of these women. Sexual abuse tends to affect mostly defenseless girls and women who grieve for protection from those around them, (Kangaude and Skelton, 2018). According to Benoit, (2015) being abused entails secrets and lies whilst being a survivor means silence which silently affect an individual. Previous research by Benoit, (2015) has demonstrated that these women face a lot of challenges from silence, fear to lack of esteem. According Makwara and Kaseke (2015) they sexual abuse survivors have emotional and physical challenges especially those abused by a close relative or a partner as they will have to face the perpetrator daily and also the family members may blame the victim and these women suffer from what is referred to as post traumatic growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual abuse against women has surged in Zimbabwe and globally emerging as a major mental, and physical health issue. Existing research has acknowledged that sexualviolence against women and girls is a dilemma of globalpandemic proportions. The sexual assault that are experienced by women are neither rare nor unique in any particular region of the world (WHO, 2000), for example 23% of women in North London, England reported as having been either been experienced an attempted or complete sexual abuse. The statistics in other states are as follows, Guadalajara, Mexico 23%, Leon Nicaragua 21.7%, Lima Peru 22.5%, Canada 8%, England Wales, and Scotland (combined) 14.2%, Finland 5.9%, Switzerland 11.6% and USA 7.7% (WHO, 2000).

In most cases women are sexually abused because of their dependence on men and this is typical of most patriarchal communities (Kirkner 2017). Globally, most sexual abuse cases are committed by males who are well known to the victim, 2.5% are committed by family members whilst 40.8% by acquaintances, (Palinkas 2013). About 56% of Filipians and 64% of Indian and Pakistan women had experienced sexual violence by an intimate partner and this was found out in a study interviewing 143 women (Spohn C, 2020). The United Nations (UN, 2013) reported that out of the 10 000 men interviewed in Asia and the Pacific, half of these males (5 000) reported to have used physical or sexual violence against a female partner.

Sexual abuse has been found to pose long term effects on the survivors. According to Thompson (2020), sexual abuse has been correlated with higher levels of depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problems, and relationship problems.Mental health problems have been predicted to be major effects of sexual abuse on women

(Welch, 2013). This is probably due to the failure by the individual to comprehend the abuse especially in situations where the woman felt vulnerable, or the abuser is a close relative. Maladaptive beliefs are a strong predictor of psychological distress among these women (WHO, 2020).

Depression has been found to be the most common long-term symptom among female survivors of sexual abuse. Survivors may have difficulty in externalizing the abuse, thus thinking negatively about themselves (Makwara, V. & Kaseke 2015). After years of negative self-thoughts, survivors have feelings of worthlessness and avoid others because they believe they have nothing to offer (Mangena & Ndlovu 2014). Stress and anxiety are often long-term effects of sexual abuse common among women survivors. Childhood sexual abuse can be frightening and cause stress long after the experience have ceased. Many times survivors experience chronic anxiety, tension, anxiety attacks, and phobias (Matweta& Bhana 2018).

Body image issues and eating disorders have also been cited as a long-term effect of sexual abuse. Kangaude& Skelton (2018) describes the effects of sexual abuse on survivors' body image problems to be related to feeling dirty or ugly, dissatisfaction with body or appearance, eating disorders, and obesity. One study found that women survivors reported significantly more medical concerns than other women who have not experienced sexual abuse. The most frequent medial complaint was pelvic pain (Makwara, V. & Kaseke, 2015). Somatisation symptoms among survivors are often related to pelvic pain, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and difficulty swallowing.

Survivors of sexual abuse may experience difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships. Common relationship difficulties that survivors may experience are difficulties with trust, fear of intimacy, or weird, difficulty establishing interpersonal boundaries, passive behaviours, and getting involved in abusive relationships. This is supported by Conroy and Cotter,(2017) who examined the relationship between a person's ability to adjust to an intimate relationship, depression, and level of severity of childhood abuse.

Women who have experienced sexual abuse, violence or assault in their childhood or adulthood are more likely to attempt or they commit suicide more than a woman who has not been exposed to that (Benoit C, Shumka L et.al 2015). The urge to commit or attempt suicide is forced on them by shame, blame worthiness by the family and the community that surrounds them.

Sexual harassment can also lead to emotional disturbances and suicidal behaviors in adolescents and adults and a study done in Canada found out that about 15% of these women had some suicidal behaviors (Kirkner et.al, 2017). The extent of the harassment would be so severe and belittling so much that one lacks confidence in self. Abused women also experience post-traumatic stress disorders that can lead to depression and alcohol abuse (Martin and Parcesepe, 2013). Another study that was done in France among sexually abused women found out that survivors of sexual abuse have sleeping difficulties, somatic complaints, drug and alcohol abuse, behave ousal problems such as aggressive behave our, theft and truancy (Pedersen and Stromwall, 2013).

In another study it was established that such women experienced difficulties in reaching orgasm and experience veganism's that is they experience some pains and contractions whenever they have sexual intercourse. Rajasekar, Philominathan, andChinnthambi, (2013) identified that these survivors lack trust on men or they can be overly trusting in their relationship with men.

A number of studies carried in the Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that in most cases the first sexual experience of girls is often unwanted or it was through forced sex (World Sexual Violence Report, 2011). On the other hand, the Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey (ZDHS), 2010-2011, showed that 42% of women in

Zimbabwe were sexually abused at some point in their lives. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) report

revealed that at least 20 women in Dunga village in Domboshawa are being assaulted daily by their spouses as a way of male dominance and as a way of showing masculinity (Makwara & Kaseke, 2015). Men claim that because they paid the bride's price therefore no one should question them even if they physically man handle their spouses or demand sex without consent.

The Msasa Project (1997), which deals with cases of sexual abuse issues in Zimbabwe, asserts that sexual abuse has a numbers of consequences on survivors and they include miscarriages, gynaecological problems, unwanted pregnancies, mental health problems, depression and anxiety among other psychological problems. Basing from the above evidence it becomes apparent that Zimbabwe is not spared by the menace of sexual violence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The life experiences of women who are survivors of sexual abuse are best explained through the ecological theory, the feminist theory, the frustration theory and the cycle of abuse theory. The ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner's explains the five levels of the environment and how they can affect and influence the human development. According to Roundy (2015), Bronfenbrenner believed that a person's development is affected by everything in their surrounding environment. The five different levels of development are micro- system, meso-system, the exo-system, the macro-system and the chromo-system.

The feminist theory has four main orientations which are the liberal, the Marxist, the radical and the socialist. The liberal feminist was developed during the 1800s and it focused on the women's lack of rights and discrimination in terms race, religion, education (Chinn & Wheeler, 1985). The liberal feminism emphasizes that both men and women are similar that is with regard to their personalities, attitudes and behave ours. Women should have the right to choose whom to have sex with and the right to protected sex. They need to be free from violence because it violates their dignity and reduces her pride and it also takes away her, self-respect (Brison, 2006). The act simply disempowers the self-esteem in a woman.

The Marxist feminist theory focused on the oppression of women through the division among men and women and classification of property sharing (Chinn & Wheeler, 1985). Women were classified as the inferior classes who have no power to initiate anything. In Britain it used to take a few days for a man to divorce a wife and not the same process by a woman.

The socialist feminist claims that patriarchy is the basis of all oppression of women (Chinn & Wheeler, 1985). The society is also to blame because it expects all women to be submissive to men. Women in our societies are expected to wait upon their male partners and not to take any grudges as they are regarded as the supremacy in the family. The society has let down a womn as it let man to abuse her and does not take her plight seriously.

The radical feminist theory challenges the patriarchal systems and blames the cultural systems and says these systems can only be changed by dissolving gender discrimination, gender roles as they construct the wrong impression in man (Chinn & Wheeler, 1985). Patriarchy is defined as social systems that disproportionately take up positions of power and authority over woman (Whisnant, 2007). Men have dominance over women and this entails that they are the custodians of norms, values because of their masculinity. These cultures promote sexual abuse of woman as a way of satisfying the male ego for example in the apostolic sects where young girls are married off to elders in the sect. A woman is deprived of her bodily sovereignty as it is the male who control her sexual desires and the reproductive use of her body.

The frustration aggression theory was propounded by Dollard (1939). Wherever there is aggression it also

means that frustration exists, just as frustration leads to aggression. Frustration aggression is antisocial as it brings suffering to people. A man who is frustrated with his life, work, finances, will always avert his anger at someone, the easiest target is a woman. In life we learn social behavior by observing and imitating the behavior of others.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, enabling the researchers to engage deeply in understanding distinct methodological traditions that explore social issues. A qualitative research brings a wide breath of understanding a phenomenon which allows the research to understand the different perspectives and experiences of the same phenomenon.

Research Design

The researcher adopted the phenomenological research design. This research design allows the researcher to know about the subjective, lived experiences of survivors of sexual abuse women without focusing on specific answers (Wertz, 2005). A phenomenology design is also a descriptive research design which uses the phenomenological reductions to investigate on the intention and relationship between a person and their situation. It also equips the researcher with knowledge of psychological essence (that is the structures immanent in human experience) through imaginative variations (Wertz, 2017).

Data Analysis

The collected data was presented and analyzed through the interpretative phenomenological analysis. This method of analysis is based on the idiographic level that the study is mainly associated with the study of individual's person (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Its other aspect is that of bringing out specific situations or events, experiences in individuals' lives.

RESULTS

In this study 20 individuals participated, of which all were survivors of sexual abuse. Five themes emerged from the study and the themes are:

- Sexual abuse
- Nature of sexual abuse,
- Factors that contributed to sexual abuse
- Effects of sexual abuse
- Strategies for reducing sexual abuse.

The results are summarized on the table below

Theme#	Theme title	Findings
1	Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative • Male Friend • Ex-boyfriend • Manager • Gardener

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stranger
2	Nature of sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indecent assault • Penetration sex • Other
3	Factors contributing to sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of conjugal rights by partner • Vulnerability • Cultural practices/Patriarchal beliefs
4	Effects of Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of men • Loss of self Esteem • Trauma • Humiliation
5	Strategies for reducing women sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocating for change in cultural practices • Awareness campaigns • Psycho-education • Reporting offences • Imposition of stiffer penalties • Empowering women

Theme 1 Sexual Abuse

This theme has six subthemes. The subthemes include relatives, male friend, ex-boyfriend, manager, gardener and a stranger. All these emerged from the following findings.

Subtheme 1: 1 Relative

7 of the 20 participants reported that they were sexually abused by a relative. The relatives who abused the respondents include spouse, uncle, cousin brother and brotherin law and a father in law. This finding is supported by the following statements by eight respondents:

I was sexually abused by my husband.(Participant 2)

I was sexually abused once by an uncle with whom we lived with at home.(Participant 4)

I was sexually abused by a cousin brother and a brother in law.(Participant 7)

My father in law sexually abused me twice. (Participant 17)

Subtheme 1: 2 Male friend

Participant 1 reported to have been sexually abused by a male friend and this is supported by the following statement.

A male friend sexually abused me when he visited me at home.(Participant 1)

Subtheme 1: 3 Ex-boyfriend

Participant 10 purported to have been sexually abused by an ex-boyfriend. The participant had the following to say.

An ex-boyfriend of mine sexually abused me when we met at function.(Participant 10)

Subtheme 1: 4 Manager

One respondent stated that she was sexually abused by a workplace manager, as evidenced by the following statement.

A manager at a certain company whom I had approached seeking for employment demanded for sex before he offered me a job.(Participant 5)

Subtheme1: 5 Gardener

The participant was sexually abused by their gardener. The participant had this to say.

I was sexually abused by a gardener who was employed by my father. (Participant 11)

Subtheme 1: 6 Stranger

Three participants reported to have been sexually abused by strangers whom they met while travelling alone and this is supported by the following statements.

Some stranger whom I met while walking alone from work at night sexually abused me.(Participant 20)

I was sexually abused by Haulage track driver who offered me a lift from South Africa.(Participant 10)

Theme 2 Nature of Sexual Abuse

This theme has three subthemes which are indecent assault, penetration sex and other. Participants cited that either the perpetrator fondled their breasts, thighs, private parts, or it was complete immersion of the penis through force or they were beaten or abused verbally. The following findings emerged from the study.

Subtheme 2: 1 Indecent Assault

Eight participants were indecently assaulted by the perpetrators fondled their breasts, thighs and private parts. These claims are supported by the following statements.

I was sexually harassed by the perpetrator as he fondled my breasts and he kissed me.(Participant 17)

He fondled my private parts, breasts and thighs.(Participant 3)

He fondled my breasts without my consent.(Participant 10)

Subtheme 2: 2 Penetration Sex

Six participants reported to have been sexually abused through penetration of the vaginal. It is either they were forced to have sex, or they were raped by the perpetrator or fear was induced on them before they were

sexually abused and this is supported by the following statements.

He demanded and forced me to have sex with him in return of getting a job.(Participant 5)

My uncle would periodically force himself on me by having sexual intercourse without my consent. Our gardener would force me to do sexual intercourse with him through the anal organ. Both men would threaten me with death if I told anyone.(Participant 11)

The driver forced me to have sexual intercourse without my consent.(Participant 12)

My husband raped me on five occasions.(Participant 13)

My brother in law overpowered me and forced me to have unprotected sexual intercourse with him.(Participant 14)

My father in law demanded that I have sexual intercourse with him, if I want my marriage to sustain and also that it is part of their tradition that I have sexual intercourse with him.(Participant 15)

Subtheme2: 3 Other

Participants in this category were subjected to physical harassment like beating and insulted by their perpetrators. The findings are supported by the following statements.

He made comments about my dressing using sexually explicit language.(Participant 2)

My husband used to beat me with clenched fists or use a belt.(Participant 6)

My brother in law used to insult me using vulgar language. (Participant 7)

Theme 3 Factors That Contributed to Sexual Abuse

The participants shared various factors that contributed to their abuse which ranged from denial of conjugal rights to partner, aggression of their partners, vulnerability and fear of the perpetrators. Three subthemes emerged from the findings which are fear, vulnerability and cultural values. These findings are supported by the following statements from the participants:

Subtheme 3: 1 Denial of conjugal rights to partners

Three participants in this category claimed that they were abused because either they could have suspected their partners to be having extra marital affairs or they just used their machismo. The following statements show factors that contributed to the abuse.

He did not want to be asked why he was always away most of the time depriving me and the kids of food and other basics so I refused to have sexual intercourse with him.(Participant 2)

I had discovered that he had an extra marital affair with a woman who lived in the same village with us and I denied him his conjugal rights.(Participant 6)

Subtheme 3: 2 Vulnerability

It emerged from the findings made that nine participants were taken advantage of by their perpetrators, it is either they were alone with the perpetrator or they were younger than the perpetrator and therefore had slim

chances of avoiding the advances of the perpetrator. This is supported by the following claims.

I wanted a job, but however the manager took advantage of my desperation and slept with me on condition that he would offer me a job.(Participant 5)

We stayed together with my cousin brother when I was looking for employment since my parents were in the rural areas and I had nowhere to stay. My brotherin law hated me because he once proposed love to me and I turned him down instead I fell in love with his elder brother whom I am now married to.(Participant7)

I would have refused to have sexual intercourse with him as he used to have multiple affairs.(Participant 13)

Subtheme 3: 3 Cultural practices / Patriarchal beliefs

Three participants claimed to have been sexually abused due to cultural values (chiramu in Shona and sibale in isiNdebele), where uncles and in laws take advantage of their nieces and sisters in law to sexually abuse them. Such incidents emerged from the following participants.

I was left home alone with my uncle and he used to say (muzukurumukadziurimukadziwanguiwewe) meaning that a niece is a wife to a maternal uncle. He was also older than me and I could not resist him.(Participant 4)

He would sneak into my room whenever my husband was away and say you are mine and my brother is failing to make you conceive because he is weak, so I want to show you what a real man is like in bed. He always does this without my consent.(Participant 14)

According to my husband's culture a daughter in law should have sexual intercourse with the father in law on the first encounter before the woman sleeps with her husband.(Participant 15)

Theme 4 Effects of Sexual Abuse

The study found out that the participants felt traumatized, humiliated and loss of self-esteem. Four subthemes emerged from these findings and these are fear, trauma, humility and loss of self-esteem.

Subtheme4: 1 Fear of men

Three participants expressed that they fear men and resent because of what they went through. These sentiments are supported by the following statements.

What I went through made me to fear and resent men and I no longer trust any men.(Participant 1)

I do not feel safe in the company of men I do not know although I am in a stable marriage I just fear men and think they are the same.(Participant 7)

I fear men and I am withdrawn toward men and always assume them to be rapists. What I went through is taking long to erase in my memory as I sometimes lose sleep.(Participant 11)

Subtheme 4: 2 Loss of self esteem

Participants from this category expressed that they are now socially withdrawn, their self-esteem has been affected.

I am now socially withdrawn as everyone blamed me for the broken marriage as I am now looking after our

two children. I have lost self-esteem and cannot start a new relationship again.(Participant 2)

It affected me in such a way that I was always shy whenever I met the manager anywhere around town. I lost my confidence and felt used especially that he did not offer me the job.(Participant 5)

It affected my self-esteem because it injured my ego.(Participant 10)

Subtheme 4: 3 Trauma

Six participants reported that they are traumatized, have lost confidence in self, they felt degraded and emotionally injured because of what they experienced and these findings are supported by the following statements.

I lost my confidence and I am physically and emotionally affected by the abuse as I constantly ask myself why did this happen to me as I am ashamed and embarrassed.(Participant 8)

I am physically and emotionally traumatized as I contracted HIV/AIDS after the assault. I am psychologically insecure.(Participant 12)

I am psychologically traumatized and hopeless. I have self-pit, I feel humiliated and healthwise I contracted sexually transmitted infection that they wanted me to manage at home with traditional medicines but I had to sort medical treatment until I was healed.(Participant 15)

Subtheme 4: 4 Humiliation

Three participants reported having felt being humiliated after the sexual abuse. This notion is supported by the following statements from the affected participants.

He humiliated me as he beat me up in front of our children and I incurred a fractured hand. I now constantly have severe headaches that occurred after the assault as he hit my head on the wall.(Participant 6)

I feel humiliated and filth and I have lost self-confidence.(Participant 13)

He psychologically humiliated me, reduced my pride and worthiness. (Participant 14)

Theme 5 Strategies for Reducing Women Sexual Abuse

Six subthemes emerged from this study and they include eradication of some cultural practices that infringe the rights of women, provide awareness campaigns, educate men on issues of sexual abuse, women should report all abuse cases, court should impose stiffer penalties to perpetrators. The courts, community and civil society should realize that women are physically and emotionally weak and therefore they need to be protected aggressive men. Women need emotional and psychological support as an intervention strategy to their problems. These findings emerged from the following study.

Subtheme 5: 1 Advocating for change of cultural practices

Some cultural practices are an infringement to the rights of women and they deprive them of their rights to be heard and to voice their concerns. Such reports are supported by the following statements from affected participants.

Generally African males believe that a strong marriage is sustained through beating the wife regularly. Men need to be educated that beating your wife does not solve problems instead it brings misery and broken

marriages. Such cultures that allow uncles to sexually abuse their nieces and the (chiramu) issue must be addressed in our different religious sects that sexual abuse to women is a punishable offence.(Participant 4)

All issues that have to do with cultural practices should be addressed by the elders in a community and communities need to be informed to respect each other. There is need to abolish all cultural practices that allows young women to be intimate with their in-laws. I therefore call upon the Chiefs in these respective provinces to address this issue with the elders and members of the community.(Participant 14)

Subtheme 5: 2 Awareness campaigns

Six participants in this category called on for awareness campaigns that warn men against abusing women and also empower women to report all perpetrators to the police. The following statements support the findings.

Raise awareness through churches, social clubs on the effects of sexual abuse and conscientise women to avoid being in areas that are risk alone or in the company of males.(Participant 7)

There is need to raise awareness campaigns that promote the rights of women.(Participant 8)

By raising awareness campaigns through workplaces and social gatherings, that are aimed at behave our change and change of attitude among men in order to curb further sexual abuse among women. (Participant 9)

Subtheme 5: 3 Psycho-education

Some participants felt that men need to be provided with psycho-education on the importance of respecting women and upholding their dignity. Such statements are supported by the following findings.

Psycho-education provides men with a clear background of maintaining peace and building better homes and this education should be done in churches, workplaces and social networks about how to overcome their problems that they face in their homes.(Participant 2)

Educate perpetrators on the risks involved in sexually abusing women as people end up contracting STIs and unwanted pregnancies. Also train women in martial art skills such as karate in order to be able to defend themselves however when the sexual abuse being done by a partner we fear to report the men as he is the soul breadwinner.(Participant 12)

Educate the society on the effects or advantage and disadvantage of the committing crimes of sexual abuse and harassment as a way of correcting behave ours.(Participant 14)

Subtheme 5: 4 Reporting of offences

Two participants reported that sexually abused women need to report to the police all forms of abuse perpetrated on them. These sentiments are supported by the following statements.

Women should report any sexual abuse to the police regardless of the relationship and they should be punished severely.(Participant 3)

Every woman must report any sexual abuse she encounter to the police or any organization which protects the rights of women than to protect the men and continue to be sexually abused.(Participant 5)

Subtheme 5: 5 Imposition of stiffer penalties

Some participants suggested that perpetrators should receive stiffer sentences as a way of distracting other would be perpetrators from abusing women. These findings are supported by five participants who had this to say.

Stiffer penalties should be imposed to deter other men from sexually abusing women for in the case of husband, he was sentenced to 200 hours community service which was lighter and did not change his attitude.(Participant 6)

Stiffer penalties on perpetrators of sexual abuse are necessary and there is need for speedy prosecution.(Participant 8)

All abusers must be jailed for a very long period probably this will send a message back home that it is wrong to sexually abuse women.(Participant 11)

Subtheme 5: 6 Empowering on women

Two participants suggested that women should be empowered to fend for themselves without depending upon men for financial assistance and support. The finding is supported by the following statements.

Women should be empowered so that they do not get too desperate financially. When a woman is not financially stable, she is prone to be sexually abused as men view her as vulnerable and available.(Participant 10)

For those women who do cross boarder trading, they need to travel with enough money and food and not to seek for assistance from strangers as a measure of reducing further sexual abuses.(Participant 12)

DISCUSSION

The research established that quite a number of the perpetrators were related to the women. The relationships range from brother in law, father in law, husband, cousin, uncle and guardian. Some of the perpetrators were not related to the victim these were a male friend, an ex-boyfriend, manager, gardener and a stranger. The current research found that 100% of the perpetrators of sexual abuse against women were males.

The nature of sexual abuse perpetrated against women was discovered to vary ranging from indecent assault to penetration sex. About 40% of the interviewed women were indecently assaulted by the perpetrator. They claimed that the perpetrator fondled their private parts, thighs, and breasts and even kissed them without their consent. The women suffered different forms of sexual assault which range from rape, fondling of breast and genitals, forced kissing, having sex without their consent, attempted and complete rape, all these were done only to degrade the women of their rights. It further went on to elaborate that the violence against women fits into several categories which include domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, as well as harmful customary or traditional practices among others.

The research discovered that vulnerability was the major factor that contributed to women being sexually abused. A group of the participants cited vulnerability as the cause of their being sexually abused. Another factor is that of economic factor where the woman depended on the perpetrator for support and some favors which the perpetrator can only provide. Another group attributed the sexual abuse to cultural practices such as (kutambachiramu in Shona), that is seductive plays done by brothers in law towards their sister in laws, uncles and nieces also play the same foul play that is seductively dangerously done. The tradition that

allows fathers in law to have sexual intercourse with their daughters in law is another factor that was cited by the women as to have contributed to their abuse. Patriarchy reined high as a social norm that guided the cultures within the society and the male dominance by men deprives women of their freedom and rights and instead being suffering, ill health, infringed right to religion.

A number of the victims reported that the sexual abuse has caused them humiliation as the victim was sometimes subjected to sexual abuse in front of other people and relatives blamed the woman for the abuse and this made the woman to lose her pride and self-confidence. Some participants reported that sexual abuse has caused trauma on their life as they were left physically and emotionally injured and distressed as some of them contracted HIV/AIDS and sexual transmittal infections. Some of the victims experience some nightmares and are now socially withdrawn. Sexually abused women are traumatized and develop fear in their life time. Survivors of sexual abuse are said to face the most severe of all traumas which causes multiple long term negatives impacts.

The participants proffered some possible strategies for reducing sexual abuse. A number of women advocated for the introduction of awareness campaigns as a measure to curb further sexual abuses of women. Stiffer penalties such as 20 years and above are assumed to be a deterrent to further sexual abuses. These sentiments are supported by United Nations resolution 1325 which calls for greater protection of women from gender based violence which include among other stiffer penalties for sexual offenders. While some of the participants felt that psycho-education can be used as an intervention strategy to women survivors of sexual abuse and also to focus on men as psycho-education is an inclusive subject that should be addressed to all individuals so that they know the importance and dangers associated with women sexual abuse.

In the same vein part of the participants advocated for a change of cultural practices that infringe the rights of women. Women are affected by culture of sexist and patriarchal attitudes that inhibit their ability to disclose as they fear to be blamed and labeled. There was a proposal from the participants of that empowering women would help to reduce cases of sexual abuse. As they advocated for training women in martial arts skills in order to be able to defend themselves or that the women be economically stable so as to be able to fend for themselves and not to depend upon men. Economic empowerment, added with a good higher education and modified cultural norms against sexual abuse would provide better protection.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article extensively explores the intricate and multifaceted challenges faced by the survivors and victims of sexual abuse. It underscores a crucial but often overlooked phenomenon, sexual abuse. Recognizing and intervening in this abuse is of great importance, not only within Zimbabwe but on a global scale. Interventions at a global level are being requested by the survivors of sexual abuse and most feminists.

The majority of women survivors of sexual abuse were abused by people who are known to them such as relatives and friends. Also in most cases the forms of sexual abuse that were incited against these survivors was indecent assault and penetration which considered serious ways or forms of abuse. The study also explored that socio-economic vulnerability is a major factor to women sexual abuse as women are perceived to be weaker than their counterparts.

The research pointed out that women survivors of sexual abuse suffer long term effects of psychological trauma, loss of esteem, rejection, judgment, labeled and all sorts of emotional and mental harm. Combating women sexual abuse is not a oneman effort but it needs our action as individuals, community and nation at large in order to bring out interventions that solidify better strategies that prevent women sexual abuse.

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