

Sexual Abuse of School Age Children: Evidence from Kenya

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Abstract

Student unrest that sometimes culminates in violent expressions have had a long history in Kenyan schools. Recent evidence, however, points to new expressions of abuse on children. There is concern that an ethos of gendered violence often expressed by sexual subjugation of girls by boys is getting institutionalised within Kenyan Schools. The rise in incidents of reported crimes of a sexual nature and the periodic mass sexual violence directed at girls within learning institutions attest to threatened sexual safety in Kenyan schools today. This paper examines the extent of sexual abuse against school children in Kenya and reasons attributed to it. It is anchored on a study conducted in 10 districts purposefully selected because they represented populations that are socio-economically more vulnerable and exhibit lower school participation. Data was collected from 70 schools. The paper makes reference to data collected from 1,279 and 1,206 children who responded to items on sexual harassment and unwanted sex respectively. Two thirds of the respondents were girls. According to the findings 58 of every 100 children have been sexually harassed while 29% boys and 24% girls reported to have been forced into unwanted sex. The main perpetrators of the violence were mentioned as peers while the home featured as the most unsafe place. The causal factors posited are analysed along two themes: those that play a contributory function and those rooted in the socio-cultural context. The study recommends for a reinstatement of sexuality education, in a comprehensive manner, as a strategy of providing sexual safety education.

Introduction

In recent years, concern has been expressed about the rising incidence of reported crimes targeting women and girls. Police records in Kenya documented 1,987 cases of rape in 2001 compared with 2,908 reported cases in 2004. This represented a 46.4% increase. The actual figure is thought to be higher considering that not all violations are reported. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 36-62% of all sexual assault victims are aged below 15 years. Complementary data from Nairobi Women's hospital indicate that 55% of those violated are girls aged 0-15 years (Munyui 2004). Boys and men have also been victims.

Learning institutions in Kenya have gradually gained notoriety as venues of sexual assault. Since the infamous St. Kizito incident where 70 girls were raped while 19 others

lost their lives when their male peers descended on them during what was supposed to be a school strike, several other group sexual violations have occurred. The reaction from males in authority, on sexual violence targeting girls and women has sometimes been casual. For example, the St. Kizito Head teacher's explanation of his students behaviour in 1991 that "the boys did not intend to harm the girls, they were just having fun"; the then Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs comment on the freezing of donor aid in 2005 that "it is like raping a woman who is only too willing" and a comment by the legislator of Kasipul-Kabondo when discussing the Sexual Offence Bill in 2006 that "... Mr Speaker sir, African women are very shy and do not make advances and therefore criminalising making advances would be tantamount to outlawing marriage...African women will not say yes to sexual advances. Many a times, their no' might actually mean 'yes'"; suggests both a trivialisation of the severity of this violence and an attempt to legitimise it from an African "tradition" standpoint.

Dunne, Humpreys & Leach (2003) and Kariuki (2004) are among the authors who are concerned that violence is not analysed within its gendered and socio-cultural context. The fact that group sexual abuse only targets girls has not tempted penetrative analysis in Kenya. Kariuki (2004) further observes that the gender of the perpetrators of the crime remains silent. While analysing St. Kizito and others schools, she observes that "the students who committed these acts of violence were described as "other students," "colleagues" and "children," but never as male students". This silence confirms a gap in the analytic framework. To understand school violence, the wider cultural norms that shape attitudes and behavior must be scrutinised.

This paper discusses the magnitude of sexual abuse of school children. Field data depicting the extent to which children are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse is presented. The paper analyses some of the socio-economic and cultural factors, as perceived by the study respondents, that contribute to the sexual violations of children before concluding with general actions that need prioritisation as a way of encouraging the sexual safety of school children.

Methodology

This paper uses data collected in 2006 that sought to document the extent and magnitude of sexual violence meted against children.¹ The study was conducted in 10 districts purposively selected because they (a) represented districts with low enrolment, (b) represented the main regional blocs in the country, namely urban, rural and Arid and Semi Arid (ASAL) districts and (c) had been listed as vulnerable districts due to their low socio-economic indices. A mixed method approach embracing both the quantitative and qualitative research paradigm was utilised in the study. The quantitative aspect

¹ This study was commissioned by Action Aid Kenya. The paper derives the field data from the submitted report by the author entitled "Violence against girls as a structural barrier to her right to and in education"

comprised use of questionnaires and fact sheets. The children were guided in filling the questionnaires which sought data on the type and frequency of abuse while the fact sheets sought school data. The study further leaned towards descriptive instruments for detailed understanding of the causes, manifestation and effects of violence. Focussed group discussions were held with the children. The group composition, in terms of gender grouping, was deliberately varied at different intervals. The discussions allowed group perceptions to emerge. Individual interviews were also held with girls who had been violated. A child-focussed design with specific reference to girls was also utilised. This was reflected in the study by the larger proportion of children, specifically girls who were respondents and the adoption of a “bottom-up” approach in collecting the data starting with children as the primary informants.

The pivot point of the study was the school, with children aged between 10 and 18 being the main respondents. While the sample from the larger study was much larger,² this paper will only make reference to data from 1,279 and 1,206 children (two thirds being girls) who responded to the items on sexual harassment and unwanted sex respectively. Due to cases of non-response, different numbers of total responses have been quoted. The secondary respondents who participated in the study comprised persons within the school, in the community, and managers of the education system who are responsible for the children. Some of their views are highlighted in the paper. Computer based packages for quantitative data (SPSS and excel) and qualitative data (Max qda) was respectively used to analyse the data. Given the disproportionate numbers of the sample size, girls and boys data are analysed separately.

The Findings

The nature and extent of sexual abuse on school children

Conceptualisation about what child sexual abuse constitutes is guided by both international descriptions and local definitions as contained in the laws. The World Health Organisation defines child sexual abuse as

The involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, that activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person (quoted by Plowmann 2004)

² The total number of respondents were as follows: 1749 children (1171 girls and 578 boys) from 70 schools (52 primary and 18 secondary schools) and 1986 adults (1269 females and 717 males)

Kenya's Sexual Offence Act (2006) defines a child as anyone below the age of 18 and spells out the penalties carried out for various sexual offences. Sections 8 to 15 of the ACT are devoted to children and address issues of defilement as evidenced in child trafficking, pornography and child sex tourism. The paper presents field data on (a) two aspects of sexual harassment, namely unwanted touches and proposals of a sexual nature; (b) sexual abuse where physical acts of a sexual nature or defilement had taken place (c) teacher-school girl relationships and (d) the causes of child sexual abuse.

(a) The Extent of Sexual Harassment

The data, analysed from 1,279 responses, revealed that 57.5% had faced sexual harassment. Analysed separately, girls recorded a slightly higher frequency of 60% compared with 55% boys. This finding shows that boys as much as girls are victims of sexual harassment. Where violated via touching, the main part of the body targeted was the breast, genitalia and buttocks for girls and penis, chest and buttocks for boys. Different methods were resorted to in executing the harassment such as boys standing in a strategic place with limited space and blocking entrances. This would force the girls to squeeze in the remaining space and during which time the boys would proceed to touch their body parts. Slightly more girls (47.1%) than boys (40.8 %) thought that the main intent of the touch was sexual, and that the perpetrators wanted to enter into a relation or simply have sex with them.

Follow-up data further sought to establish if the children had received love proposals from adults. Of the 1,230³ children who responded to this item, 575 had indeed been propositioned by adults (50.9% being girls and 38.6% boys). These proposals were first and foremost made verbally (43%), followed by letter writing (37%), in kind through being offered a present (11%), through gesturing (7%) and lastly through a friend. The majority of the children (88%) turned down or simply ignored these love proposals. However 12% of the children accepted majority of who were boys (21% boys; 8.1% girls). The children were particularly vulnerable to falling to the trap of "gifts" especially if they had a needs. One girl explained "*If you want something from your parents they at times decline to give it to you. But out there are boys who lie to girls that they will give them whatever they want*" (Pupil FGD 64).

The main perpetrators of sexual harassment were identified as the children themselves (60%) followed by strangers (16%), neighbours (6%) then teachers (5%) while the most unsafe venue was cited as the home (27%), followed by the school (24%), on the way home from school (15%) and other people's homes (12%). This makes the combined mention of home 39%. The total mention for public places (bush, market, disco, town, ceremonies) was 15%.

³ There was no response from 49 children.

(b) Child Sexual Abuse: Unwanted Sex

A total number of 1,206 children responded to this item. Of these 198 girls (of 802) and 112 boys (of 404) affirmed that they had been forced to have unwanted sex. This translates to 24.6% girls and 29.1% boys when calculated by gender. Table 1 sums up the frequency in which the sex occurs.

Table 1. Frequency of Unwanted Sex

Frequency	Girls	Boys
rarely	17	25
happened only once	68	51
once in a while	3	9
most of the time	3	3
frequently	9	12
Total %	100	100

The evidence shows that while the majority of girls (68%) and half of the boys (51%) were sexually assaulted only once, sexual abuse was still ongoing, with a variation in frequency for 32% and 49% girls and boys respectively.

The circumstances that resulted in the children being forced into unwanted sex were varied. Some would be tricked and blindly accompanied the perpetrators; others yielded to giving sex in exchange for some gain be it food, such as “sex for fish” or better grades “sex for marks.” Others were lured with entirely false promises to them or their families. For example “*there are old men who are tycoons who lure the child for sexual satisfaction actually we may call it a form of compromise rape because ...the tycoon marries this girl for 2-3 days and then divorces her, goes to the other town marries then divorces*” (Male Teacher 23). In such a case a valid institution (of marriage) is used as cover for what can only amount to defilement.

The leading perpetrators were again peers of the children who led with 59% mentions. The fact that the respondents identified them as either girl or boy friend denotes that there is an existing relationship and what transpired may be date rape. The second most cited perpetrators were strangers. In terms of the venue of the sexual violations, while home (own as well as other peoples) leads with a combined statistic of 52% other dangerous places include bush (21%), followed by the school (8%) and the disco (6%).

(c) Teacher-School Girl Relationships

Teachers, who comprise the main adult population in schools, have a mandate to protect children. Yet 16.1% girls affirmed they had been propositioned by teachers. While the majority of these girls (66.7%) indicated they declined the “love proposals” and some 15.9% girls simple ignored, there was a disturbing 17.4% who yielded to the love proposal and entered into a relationship with the teacher. The data further revealed that teenagers on occasion initiated contacts with teachers primarily for the possibility of material

gain in terms of pocket money. However, the possibilities of a relationship starting and progressing lay with the teacher. The following box sums up one of the views.

The Nature of Teacher-Girl Relationship

Q: Who starts these things? Is it the teacher or the student?

F1: They both contribute.

F2: I think that is the teacher because I don't see how a student can approach a teacher.

F1: They are some girls who can approach the teacher.

F3: There is this habit whereby a student keeps following a teacher to ask questions. You know they have feelings but if you are going to the teacher every time even at night you are going to the teacher to ask a question. The teacher will take an advantage.

F1: I have something to say. Let me tell you something, I think that it is the teachers who are mainly contributing. If I approach a certain teacher and he is not interested in me, he will say, "This should not happen; don't follow me again." I wouldn't follow him again and that issue will stop. I will be afraid of any such mistakes but what if the teacher approaches you and says that he loves you. You will also accept him and it is easier. (Girls FGD 55)

The relationships often ended up in sex occurring. Of a total of 1,158 children who responded, 256 or 21% claimed to know of a girl who was engaging in sex with the teacher. Figure 1 provides the children's explanation of when and where the sex occurred.

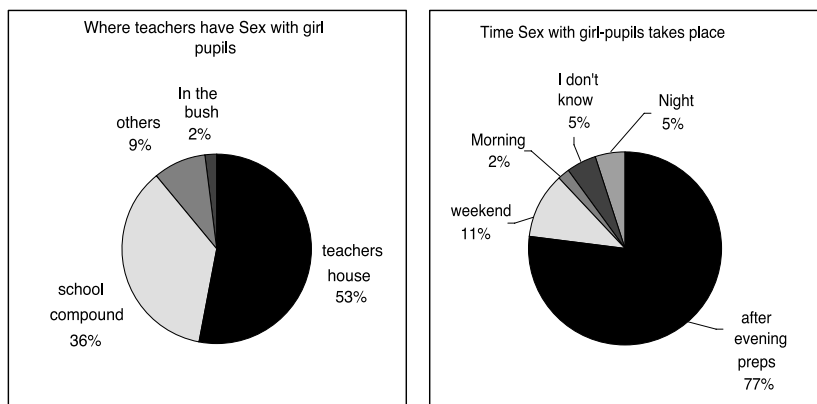


Figure 1. Teacher Schoolgirl Sex by Venue and Time

(d) Impact of Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is detrimental to the child's personal and developmental growth. School participation suffers when knowledge that "you did something with the teacher" spread. If violation results in pregnancy, school attendance is automatically curtailed. Efforts to get statistics on school girl pregnancies were unsuccessful. Poor record keeping

in schools and sensitivity of the topic resulted in difficulty in accessing the data. However, the oft observation: “we lose girls year in, year out. When they reach maturity let’s say Std. 5,6,7 to 8, we lose about two to three. Leave out the other drop outs but these ones are getting lost due to these pregnancies” (HT 8)⁴ confirmed school girl pregnancy to be an issue. The study again resorted to pupil’s knowledge as a gauge of the magnitude of the problem. To be as specific as possible, the study sought to establish from the children if they knew of a teacher who had made a school girl pregnant and a total of 418 children or 26.2% (of 1,194) affirmed. By way of elaboration, two further questions were posed: what happened to the teacher in question and what happened to the girl. The details of the pupils’ responses are illustrated in Figure 2.

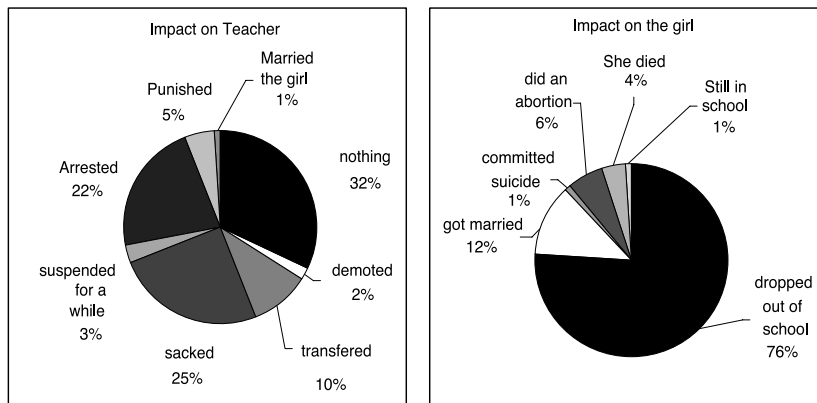


Figure 2. Consequences of Unwanted Pregnancy on the Victim (school girl) and Perpetrator (teacher)

While “nothing” happened to 32% of the teachers, the vast majority of the girls (76%) dropped out of school, followed by 12% who got married. Only 1% was able to rejoin school. These statistics show that the victims fared off worse than the perpetrators. The combined statistic of teachers who got off very lightly, by either only being demoted, or being transferred to another school, or marrying the girl-child stands at 45% compared to 99% of the girls who lost out on schooling or indeed lost their lives because of the unwanted pregnancy.

Teachers are however not the only persons responsible for school girl pregnancies. An analysis of seven interview transcripts of girls who have been pregnant shows that three girls (or 43%) were made pregnant by fellow classmates, three girls by outsiders (in their 20s one of whom was a police officer), and one by a college boy. Adults accounted for 57% of the school girl pregnancy perpetrators as opposed to 43% peers.

For the lucky girls who are able to go back to school, life after pregnancy is made

⁴ National cohort analysis of school enrolment confirms that 40% of those who enrol in class 1 are “lost” from the primary school cycle. While some could have repeated or transferred (drop-in) to other schools, a majority drop out of the school.

difficult by the fact these girls have now experienced “motherhood” and with it comes emotions and responsibilities the girls are too young to comprehend or deal with. These child mothers yearn for their babies. There are those who are aware that their children’s basic needs are not being met and are in a dilemma how they can better their children’s conditions. Then there are those who indeed are fortunate to be in school but suffer from continual taunting from their peers. The school administration is not as supportive as it should be. The girls face frequent absenteeism due to non-payment of school dues. This excerpt, from a girl who cried throughout the interview gives an indication of the emotional and psychological disturbance a child mother trying to get a formal education undergoes.

School re-entry after pregnancy: One girl’s experience

I am Form two now but my class mates are in Form three. I was made pregnant by a 25 year old man during holiday. I then reported to Form 1, but in June 2002 I asked for permission to go home from the principal. No one had noticed. The principal was shocked and she gave me a letter to take to my father which I did. My father went to see the parents of the man and the man agreed to marry me but my father refused. Later the parent of the man agreed through the intervention of village elders to pay a fine of 30,000/ and ten goats. My father did the negotiations without involving me. After I gave birth the man refused to take care of the baby the main reason was that he has not married me but my parent stay with my son. I lost my studies for the year 2002. When I came back the principal said nothing to me, only that I will repeat. Imagine being in Form one when my classmates are in Form two. I hate it. It is disturbing me psychologically. I cannot concentrate. Reporting on time was a big problem. I had huge fee balance since the principal said that I should pay fee for year 2002, 2003, and 2004 which my father cannot pay. I hate being in this school because of stigma and discrimination. Most of the teachers and the pupils keep on asking me question concerning my problems. Most people in this school think that I am the only person with a child. The baby issue disturbs me a lot, he has no good food and clothes...Most of the time I cannot talk to other student’s because they abuse me and call me names like “kiji mama, mama ama tuambia nini”. Others call me “parent” but what parent am I when I cannot provide for my child? I fear to announce anything in class even when I lost my things lest the whole class shouts at me calling me names, it is so frustrating. (Girl, 17 years old)

The re-entry to school of this girl has been made possible due to progressive policy making in Kenya. School re-entry is now firmly stated in the Gender and Education Policy (2007) and many head teachers are on record as having used this policy as the base to seek re-admission for girls.⁵ However more support needs to be given to the girls. School have not instituted adequate support mechanisms for these girls. The guidance and counselling

⁵ A Principal in a leading girl’s secondary school in an arid district for example carries out campaigns to reach girls who had to leave school to get married or due to pregnancy. Today, she has managed to re-enrol more than 10 girls and serves as an example of how schools can be proactive in encouraging access to vulnerable girls.

departments are not responsive. The overriding preference is for a girl to resume education in another school where her past will not be public knowledge and where she can start afresh.

Causal factors contributing to threatened sexual safety

The situations that lead to children being sexually abused are multi-factoral and interrelated. Social factors are particularly complex to unravel. For ease of discussion, the explanations are presented in a sequence starting from school related factors, family, community and lastly societal based factors.

(a) The Immediate Causes:

The two aspects in which the school failed to ensure safety of children was with regards to distance to school and school practices. A considerable amount of sexual abuse occurred when learners were in the process of accessing school. In rural areas, spaces, such as the bush were preferred venues of abuse, while in urban areas, road transport, as Chege et al (1994) established presented threats to school children. That children travelled to school early, to be time for morning study time, and left after evening study exacerbated the situation. As a school practice therefore the issue of morning and evening study allocations need re-examination because of the threats to child safety.

Culminating evidence suggests boarding school to be sites for violence. Girls whose basic provisions were unmet were particularly vulnerable. In order to sustain themselves, they accepted “gifts” which potentially lend them to be victims of sexual abuse. One girl who finally dropped out of school due to pregnancy explained; “*Most of the girls are from a rich family. They come with good things and yet some of us do not have. So one is forced to look for a boyfriend to supplement. When I got a boyfriend I never lacked even one thing*”(Girl, 15 years). Lack of basic needs therefore acts as a cause that creates a conducive atmosphere for sexual abuse to occur. It is fuelled by a salient expectation/acceptance that girls can use their sexuality to benefit either themselves or their families. Instances were recorded where parents expect children to bring provisions home and did not interrogate where and how the children got the items:

Some parents take their children as income generating activities. When they are given money to take home to buy sugar the parent sees he has found something. That habit is not stopped. Parents cannot ask,” where did you get this twenty shillings from? If they follow up maybe the girl can stop the habit but when it goes on like that because the mother is poor then the girl might think this one is good. (Head Teacher)

Any acts of “consensual sex” that girls engage in therefore need to be analysed within a broader socio cultural and economic context.

The diminishing role of parents in children’s up bringing cushions violence. Parents

have been faulted with abdicating or ignoring their parenting duties. Weakened family fabrics and fluid family situations governed by the “absentee” father are more common today. This situation is exacerbated by non protective social environments that evade the tradition code of conduct that regulated behaviour. In most Kenyan communities, pre-marital sex and pregnancy was discouraged and the punishment was brutal.⁶ Today, girls “*are giving birth to two or three children before marriage*” (Programme Officer). Girls are extremely vulnerable in

- social gatherings that often spill into the night, such as vigils, wedding ceremonies, religious gatherings like “*Keshas*”, where a new norm of behaviour has emerged that subscribes to fewer rules and regulations
- living arrangements common in low economic urban contexts, where adults and children share the same room results in children being exposed to “adult only” activities which they may feel bound to experiment
- legal lapses such as lack of age restrictions to unsuitable environments like bars
- Exposure to explicit sexual content in video halls and through other forms of electronic media.

These social contexts and spaces have considerably lower behaviour prescriptions and can become breeding grounds for sexual violence to occur.

A final immediate cause of sexual violence that was explored was the conspiracy of silence, fear, shifting of blame or distancing oneself from an act of violence. For the majority, a first reaction to child sexual abuse is to hush it. Sexual abuse is particularly afflicted with the syndrome of blaming the victim and absolving the perpetrator. This can be illustrated by the question of dress as summed up in this excerpt: “*Some fathers can rape their children but sometimes it is their children’s fault because some girls wear mini-skirts and they pass in front of their fathers. Some fathers are filled with lust so they can immediately rape their children*” (Pupils FGD 74).

(b) The Underlying Causes

The factors listed above are simply the manifestations of a wider set of beliefs, or structures or conditions that result in violence. An examination of the belief system shows an almost deliberate attempt to suppress women and girls. This is evident in some proverbs. Proverbs are considered to be words of knowledge accumulated over the years. They represent the core of community knowledge; the wisdom that people are socialised into. The fact that there are certain proverbs that demean the person of women shows the deep rooted conceptualisation of the inferior place of women and girls. Three examples shall be used to guide the discussion.

⁶ Amongst the Nandi for example, the social code demanded that such children be “disposed” off. This often meant they were killed or left to die.

Somali Proverb: “A woman is a child with long feet”

Maasai Proverb: “A girl just eats and then goes”

Somali Proverb: “A girl is like a vegetable”

First, there is a deliberate disempowering of women. However old a woman is, she is regarded as a child (Proverb 1). A child has no say. A child cannot be respected to make any decisions. In short, the stance being propagated by this proverb is that women need to be “cared” for. As such their destiny is placed in the control of the men folk such as fathers, brothers, uncles and male cousins. Decision of the timing and the manner in which sex occurs rests with men. Secondly, there is a deliberate objectifying of women and girls, which in turn supports practices like early marriage. Girls are viewed as commodities to serve an end. Because a girl is expected to leave her natal home and get married, it is not justified to invest in her (Proverb 2). Her value comes in the bride wealth she will bring to her father. Marriage has to occur early when the girl is at her “prime.” Using the metaphor of a vegetable in reference to girls is particularly insightful (Proverb 3). Vegetables are perishable. They are at their best and most appealing when ripe. If sold at the right time one gets value. Likewise, a girl ought to be married when she is most appealing to a man and when she can command the most bride wealth. The belief system allows girls to be viewed as commodities to benefit their families. This explains the tacit acceptance that girls can use their bodies for own or family good (e.g. sex for fish and sex for grades). The use of the belief system is a structural way of enforcing actions such as FGM and early marriage, which violate the girls’ person. These rules are made and upheld by men. Patriarchy, being a condition whereby males dominate positions of power, therefore emerges as an underlying cause of sexual violence.

Patriarchy accords men the right to institute practices and codes that as a first priority benefits them. It is vital that analysis be made against the background of the male demand and “rights.” Certain practices reported in the study confirmed that male students, as young men, were getting socialised in masculine roles that assigned them dominance and control with due rights to certain services from girls. Girls on the other hand assumed their role of caregivers and would offer service to fellow boys. These social characteristics were complementary and allowed such incidents to occur:

When I came here two years ago I used to receive reports of boys taking their uniforms on Friday night to the girls so that they can be washed. And I was told that the head teacher before me used to tell the boys...“they are your girls so take care of them” (Head Teacher).

Other incidents reported in the study, like boys grabbing girls’ breasts may reflect the same spirit of boys assuming their “rights.” The contrary identity was common with girls. They appeared easy victims, who often covered up the identity of the persons who abused them. The abused girls’ portrayed an internalisation of their subservient role. The

socialisation processes therefore need scrutiny.

Discussion

(a) Data on Child Sexual Abuse in Kenya

Violence is an infringement of the individual rights of the child as enshrined in Kenya Children's Act Cap 586 of the laws of Kenya (2001) and the Sexual Offence Act (2006). Despite this, evidence points to its widespread occurrence. The study by Johnson (2004) which was based on a sample of 1,100 children in Nairobi documented that 50% children had been sexually harassed while 10% had been forced into sex. Ogweno (2005) study of 228 children (112 girls) aged 14-18 documented that 20% had been sexually violated. Kenyan based statistics of rape/defilement of children ranges from 10% to 27%. The rather large discrepancy can be attributed to sampling issues, the phrasing of the specific questions in the data collection instrument and the data collection processes. This implies that research methods and processes need re-examination in order to allow better collection of statistics.

A worrying expression of sexual violence often meted against girls happens in the collective form. The group rape attacks of girls have occurred periodically. First noted in the 1990s, groups of school boys, and sometimes men, raid schools and sexually violate the girls as noted in the following examples: January 1993, 13 girls at Hawinga Girls were attacked and raped by armed men as they slept in their dormitories; July 1996, a number of girls were attacked and raped at Mareira Mixed Secondary School, a catholic school in Muranga; 2006, 15 girls in Nyeri were raped as they staged a mid night protest against their school administration; 2007, boys in Kilgoris, demonstrating against internal school problems ended up raiding a sister school and sexually assaulting the girls. (Ruto & Chege 2006; Kangara undated). In all these incidents an orgy of sexual assaults are targeted against the girls and suggest that a culture of mass sexual violence is evolving.

(b) Impact of Sexual Abuse

The consequences of violence are far reaching and have direct and indirect consequences on the life of the child in general and school participation in particular. Sexual, physical and psychological abuse frequently occurs together. As such it has adverse impact on the victims. According to Briere & Elliott (1994) psychological disturbances include stress, disruption of normal development and painful emotions. Children exhibit fear, anxiety, concentration problems more than non-abused peers. Others have cognitive disorders such as chronic self-perception of helplessness, hopelessness, impaired trust and self blame. There is also emotional distress of depression, anxiety, anger. These authors explain that "in abused children, anger is frequently expressed in behavioural problems, with abused children and adolescents displaying significantly more difficulties" (Briere & Elliott 1994, p 58).

Accommodation of ongoing abuse has been noted as a worrying effect of sexual abuse. Often, it is copying behaviour intended to increase safety and/or decrease pain during victimisation. There are long term consequences on personality formation. For example adolescents/adults molested as children are more prone to episodes of short term sexual activity. It has been reported that one of the consequences for early childhood abuse for adult sexuality includes indiscriminate sexuality including multiple sexual partners, unsafe sex practices, substance related sexual behaviour. All these put at risk a person's health and safety (Meston et al. 1999).

(c) Contextual Analysis for promoting Sexual Safety

Literature confirms that most of the school based sexual abuse is perpetrated by boys on girls, and sometimes on fellow boys (Ogweno 2005; Johnson 2004; Dunne et al. 2003). This fact is replayed in the wider society where males lead in sexual related violations. That males take the lead in sexuality could be explained by the fact that it is men (and other elders) who, as the dominant custodians of culture, regulate sexual norms. Kambarami (2006), Tamale (2005) and Rogow & Haberland (2005) are among the authors who discuss the non egalitarian nature of traditional customs and norms which are cushioned within patriarchy. Patriarchy seeks to appropriate social roles and manipulate them for the benefit of males. Women's sexuality is often a key site where power and manipulation is played. Often, though not exclusively, women emerge in a subordinate function. Traditional attitudes about gender roles, inequitable power relations and overall unequal gender relations continue to tilt the balance of heterosexual relations. The typical socialisation for girls impels them towards submissiveness, dependability, and passiveness as opposed to boys where aggression and initiative is upheld (Chege & Sifuna 2006). The accruing gender norms and power disparities that girls and boys are socialised into negatively affects their sexual attitudes and practices.

Schools are a basic unit where socialisation takes place. While several authors acknowledge that the school is "gendered" space (Dunne et al. 2003; Kariuki 2004), they are also wary that this important aspect is oft ignored in school analysis. Schools, as various sociologists continually state, are a mirror of society. The school often reiterates the gendered politics evident in society. As a social institution, the school has a particular code that shapes/influences the attitudes and behaviour of girls and boys/men and women within that social space. The school replays what Dunne et al. (2003) term as "gender boundaries" which construct and police the identities boys and girls are supposed to subscribe to. Dunne (2007) study observes that duty allocation in schools does not deviate much from the traditional script. However those who perform roles not associated with their gender, like boys sweeping are ridiculed therefore enforcing a particular code.

Combating sexual violence requires a comprehensive and analytic approach that takes cognisance of the contextual situation that causes child sexual abuse. Any plans, strategies or interventions divorced from the socio-cultural milieu will not have sustained impact. The comprehensive approach would be multi-focussed reaching victims; the

perpetrators as well as interrogating specific practices evident in many institutions that are not protective of children. These actions must be supported by specific laws and policies. In this regard, the Sexual Offence Act (2006) is lauded as a positive step forward. The existence of organisations, such as CRADLE,⁷ which have a specific mandate to offer legal services for children, is commendable. However, the adherence to customary law to govern marriage is dangerous for young girls who fail to get protection from the law.

Safety from child abuse must also benefit from preventive effort. According to Daro (1994) there are three levels of prevention; primary prevention (curriculum based education, support groups, crisis hotlines); secondary prevention (education and support offered to parents) and tertiary prevention (services to known perpetrators that often take the form of therapeutic intervention). Unlike other forms of abuse (such as domestic abuse) that often embrace the three approaches; prevention against child sexual abuse has been positioned on the potential victim. In Kenya one reaction of protecting children has been to rescue them from abuse, or offer possibilities for them to report the abuse. In this regard, a number of homes and schools in selected districts have been established to protect children. In 2008, a crisis hotline (Call 116) managed by Childline Kenya, in collaboration with the Department of Children's Services in the Ministry of Gender, Children's Affairs and Social Development was instituted (Childline Kenya 2008). The more structured method of empowering the potential victim to be able to resist abuse has rested on school based curriculum effort and it is currently evident within the HIV/AIDS education rubric and life skills education. These are not stand alone subjects; rather topics are integrated in a variety of subjects such as religious studies and science. While some sexual safety education is offered, the curriculum approach has been faulted as being overly concentrated on facts and figures without cohesion to the socio-cultural contexts that shape sexual behaviour. It is such limitations that are prompting the call for the introduction of a more comprehensive sexuality education; one that draws more connection to the social contexts in which sexual attitudes and values are created (Rogow & Haberland 2005).

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper confirms that sexual abuse meted against school children exists. The study results were gathered from selected districts that have been ranked low on the socio-economic indices and exhibit lower school participation rates. Though the study did not set out to draw any direct correlations, the fact that the sexual safety of both boys and girls is not guaranteed, can be a contributory factor for poor school participation. The effect of sexual abuse on the personal development of the victims is adverse. For girls who may get pregnant, it almost spells an end to their formal education acquisition. However, the perpetrators seem to get off very lightly. The analysis

⁷ CRADLE stands for Child Rights Advisory, Documentation and Legal Centre

of the causal factors shows that it is rooted in the economic and socio-cultural contexts. The paper advocates for scrutiny of the causal factors in order to unearth the real problem. For example, while girls can be accused of consenting to sex, it is argued that “consensual” sex needs to be examined against demand from, for example parents who encourage their girls to trade their bodies in exchange of commodities for family gain. Efforts to address threatened sexual safety of school children must therefore take cognisance of the contextual situations. In this regard prevention efforts against child sexual abuse still need enhancement given that strategies favour primary preventive methods in the form of curriculum based education. While such curriculum is necessary and present a good channel of reaching children in their formative years, the content and method of teaching in Kenya has been faulted. School based curriculum approaches therefore need a re-evaluation if they are to offer sexual safety education to school age children.

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