

Child Sexual Abuse Khartoum, Sudan: Pattern and Offender Associative Factors

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Abstract

Background: The issue of child sexual abuse in Sudan is becoming an occurrence that is very difficult to ignore.

Purpose: This paper aims to identify the pattern of child sexual abuse in Khartoum, Sudan and to study the offender associative factors.

Methods: 103 offenders were interviewed with the use of semi structured questionnaires and the data collected was analyzed descriptively. The data was collected from Alhuda prison, Omdurman. and from the Family and Child Protection Unit Khartoum. and Omdurman. from March 2015 to January 2016. Parametric and non-parametric studies were done using SPSS 20.

Results: All offenders were male mostly aged 24 - 29 years (30.1%) and single (55.3%). Majority were of low educational status (46.6% Primary-Elementary school and 25.2% illiterate). Only 12.6% had a sexual interest in children of that 30.8% was fixated. They were mostly of average (66%) to strong (23.3%) self-control and interpersonal skills (61.2% average and 33% outgoing). They were from moderate (55.3%) to conservative (42.7%) families. Less than half- (6.8%) had been sexually abused. With regards to the pattern of abuse the victims were mostly pubescent (65%) and female (85.4%), 87.4% of offenders were an extra familial figure, 44.7% of offenders were emotionally involved with their victims. Abuse was mainly through contact (93.2%) and predominantly through vaginal penetration (61.5%). Most abuse occurred in the perpetrators house (49.5%), persuasion means were used to convince the victims in 72.8% and prevention of disclosure was not attempted by offenders in 87.4% of cases.

Conclusion and Recommendations: This study is replicating the international studies findings with some differences in the type of abuse committed (61.5% was vaginal penetration of all contact abuse). Further in-depth studies and theory formulations are recommended.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse; Khartoum; Sudan

Introduction

The issue of child sexual abuse is becoming an occurrence that is very difficult to ignore. The Sudanese public draws much of its knowledge of the issue from extreme cases appearing in the public media but this represents only the tip of the iceberg, while the majority of CSA continues to occur silently.

In Sudanese culture child sexual abuse is a taboo. Conversely, early girls' marriage-below the age of eighteen- is accepted even preferred in many areas of the country. This clearly reflects a misperception of what a child is. In the case of adolescent girls, sexually motivated crimes have often been assimilated with adultery increasing the level of stigma attached to those affected. This has also affected the willingness of families to report such crimes [1].

The child act was passed in 2010 incriminating child sexual abuse. Sudan's first Family and Child Protection Unit became operational in Khartoum in January 2007, operating 24 hours with staff working in three shifts [1].

Methodology

This is a cross sectional retrospective descriptive analytical design. The data for this thesis was collected from Alhuda prison situated in Omdurman as well as from the Family and Child Protection Unit Khartoum and Omdurman. The prison of Al Huda received its first inmates in 2007 it is situated in Omdurman about 13 km north west of Libia's market. It was chosen as a study area because it contained the greatest number of inmates convicted for sexual assaults. The FCPU became operational in Khartoum in January 2007, it has three branches located in Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri. This research took place in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. Situated at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles, the state is composed of three main cities; Omdurman, Khartoum the capitol and Bahri with the majority of its population residing in the city of Omdurman. In the period from March 2015 - January 2016. Target group were adult perpetrators convicted at or above the age of 18, Both genders and from Sudanese Nationality.

Main objective was to study pattern of abuse and characteristics of offenders. And specific objectives were to study; Socio-demographic data (gender, age, marital status, educational level, socioeconomic status, living arrangements, family values). Subjective risk factors (social relationships and interpersonal skills, self-control, substance/alcohol abuse, emotional involvement with victim, sexual interest in children, previous undetected sexual offences, prior convictions, history of physical/emotional abuse or neglect, history of sexual abuse). Victim factors (gender, age, relationship to offender, health). Abuse variables (offender's feeling before the abuse, form of abuse, perception of victims feeling during the abuse, offenders feeling after the abuse, perception of victim feeling after the abuse, location of abuse, method of convincing victim, method of preventing disclosure, frequency of abuse).

A collective of 103 consenting participants fulfilling the inclusion criteria found at the FCPU police unit and Al-Huda prison were interviewed during the study period. The research data was collected through structured interviews with the subjects in the FCPU police unit and in Al-Huda prison. The researcher was assisted by a team of well-trained social workers from the FCPU. The researcher prepared and used a semi-structured questionnaire which was adapted and integrated from theories found in the literature review. The use of a semi-structured questionnaire provides a less intimidating atmosphere for the subjects and increases their willingness to disclose information as well as helps reach participants of all educational levels.

The collected data was analyzed using a statistical package for social sciences. Frequencies were used to describe the offenders and a chi square (p value < 0.05) or a cross tab was used whenever a statistical association was observed.

Permission was obtained from the State Prisons Headquarters in Khartoum and the Police force monitoring the offender detention system. Ethical clearance was received from the University of Medical Sciences and Technology and the Family and Child Protection Unit. Verbal consent was obtained from the offenders before conducting the interviews.

Results

Total Number of respondents were 103. All were males (there is no convicted females of sexual abuse).

Offenders characteristics

- The majority of offenders 30.1% lied in the age group 24 - 29 followed by the 18 - 23 age group accounting for 28.2%, 21.4% were aged 42 and above only 3.9% of offenders were within the 36 - 41 age group.
- Offenders were mostly single 55.3% while 31.1% were married, 11.7% divorced and 1.9% widowers.

- Most offenders- 46.6% made it only to primary-elementary school, 25.2% were illiterate, 23.3% had a high school degree and only 4.9% could make it to university.
- Only 5.8% did not have a job the rest were either employed or working. Of those who were employed/working, 40.2% made less than SDG500 per month, 34% made more than SDG1000 the rest of 25.8% lied in between.
- 35% of offenders admitted to having a substance/alcohol abuse habit.
- 12.6% answered yes to having a sexual interest in children. Of those who answered yes, 30.8% had a fixated interest whilst the rest of 69.2% had a regressed interest.
- 14.6% admitted to performing sexual offences in the past without getting caught.
- None of the subjects were previously convicted for sexual offences.
- 10.7% said they had a history of physical/emotional abuse or neglect as children.
- 7 subjects or 6.8% experienced sexual abuse in the past (4) intrafamilial and all were contact type of abuse (fondling, penetration and oral). (4) of them were victims of repeated abuse.

Victims characteristics

- Survivors were mainly females 85.4%.
- before puberty 65%.
- Majority 87.4% were abused by extrafamilial figure mainly acquaintance 75.5%.
- 10% were abused by complete strangers.
- 13 cases were abused by intrafamilial figure, mainly (8) were third degree relatives.
- 10.7% of victims suffered from a mental/physical disability.
- Offenders claimed that 44.7% were emotionally involved with them.

Characteristics of abuse

- Abuse was mostly contact accounting for 93.2% with vaginal penetration accounting for most of it 61.5%. Non-contact was minimal accounting for 6.8%.
- 49.5% occurred in perpetrator's house, 13.6% occurred in the victim's house, 18.4% occurred in public and 6.8% shared a house with the victim.
- Offenders mainly- 72.8% used persuasion to them convince victims to take part and most did not attempt to prevent disclosure.
- Most offenders 87.4% claimed that they did not attempt to prevent their victims from disclosing the abuse.
- The abuse was mainly a single event accounting for 61.2% of cases.

Section II: Analytical results

There was a significant association between:

1. Age of offender's and the age of victims (young offenders with pubescent girls and old offenders with prepubescent girls.). p value 0.006.
2. Offender's age and being emotionally involved with the victim. (less than 29 years old offenders). P value 0.033.
3. Age of offenders with place and type of abuse. Mainly less than 29 years old offenders commit contact/sexual intercourse abuse and mainly at offender house. P value 0.007.

Discussion

Most of offender's characteristics were replicated by other studies. Like more risk to female gender and offenders as mainly acquaintance [2]. Abuse was mostly contact accounting for 93.2% with vaginal penetration accounting for most of it 61.5%. Non-contact was minimal accounting for 6.8% and this could lead to a conclusion that only cases with the severest damage happen to be the ones reported. These findings were consistent with other researches done in Sudan Alhassan's [3] and Amin's [4]. On the other hand, international studies like that of Madu SN and Peltzer K found 86.7% of the victims were kissed sexually, 60.9% were touched sexually, 28.9% were victims of oral/anal/vaginal intercourse [2]. The same with Aboul-Hagaga and Hamedb where only 1.1% of subjects experienced sexual relations but this difference could be due to different cultural ideas with regards to sexual and intimacy acts [5].

Offender's feelings before the abuse were mostly positive 81.6%. After the abuse offender's feelings were also mainly positive only 18.4% experienced negative emotions. Elliott M., *et al.* also found that nearly half the offenders had no bad feelings about sexually abusing children [6].

83.5% perceived their victim's feelings to be positive during the abuse and 77.7% perceived them to be positive after the abuse. At first cognitive defects were suspected however the possibility of the victims actually experiencing positive emotions cannot be completely ruled out especially since many offenders- 44.7% said they were emotionally involved with their victims and persuasion means- 72.8% were used to convince them. These findings were also similar to the findings of Madu SN and Peltzer K; many victims (86.7%) perceived themselves as not sexually abused as a child, and many (50.2%) rated their childhood as "very happy" [2].

49.5% of abuses occurred in perpetrator's house, 13.6% occurred in the victim's house, 18.4% occurred in public and 6.8% shared a house with the victim. Another significant association had been established between age of perpetrators and the location at which the abuse took place. Younger age groups abused in their own houses while older groups seemed to be living with their victim's in the same house. This and other previously mentioned associations could mean that older offenders took an opportunistic approach to abuse; they targeted the more vulnerable prepubescent victims they had easy access to. Younger age groups however seemed to put more effort into grooming their victims; persuading them into engaging in sexual activities with them in their houses.

Offenders mainly- 72.8% used persuasion to convince their victims to take part and most- 87.4% did not attempt to prevent disclosure. This could be because offenders trusted their grooming techniques or they presumed the stigma of being labeled promiscuous in a patriarchal society would shame the victims and their families from disclosing the abuse.

Abuse was mainly a single event accounting for 61.2% of cases and this was again consistent with Al Hassan's study [3].

With regards to the FCPU cases no female offenders were encountered throughout the course of the study in other words, offenders are overwhelmingly male and this was consistent with many studies including Aboul-Hagaga and Hamedb's [5].

The majority of offenders- 30.1% lied in the age group 24 - 29, 55.3% were single- 46.6% made it only to primary-elementary school and 25.2% were illiterate. Only 4.9% could make it to university. This was consistent with Stephen W Smallbone and Richard K Wortley [7].

Most offenders- 61.4% had average interpersonal skills, 33% were outgoing and only 5.8% asocial with regards to self-control, average self-control was the most prevalent 66% followed by strong degree of self-control 23.3%. Weak self-control was the least 10.7%. The average to strong self-control and interpersonal skills exhibited by most perpetrators rules out Freud's psychodynamic theory [8] and the intimacy/attachment theories [9] respectively.

With regards to other risk factors, 35% of offenders admitted to having a substance/alcohol abuse habit. 12.6% answered yes to having a sexual interest in children. Of those who answered yes, 30.8% had a fixated interest whilst the rest of 69.2% had a regressed interest. 14.6% admitted to performing sexual offences in the past without getting caught. 10.7% said they had a history of physical/emotional abuse or neglect as children. 7 subjects or 6.8% were sexually abused as children. 10.7% of the victims in this study had a In this study, 10.7% of victims had a physical/mental disability. Balasundaram., *et al*, Lee JK., *et al*. and Putnam FW included these as risk factors for offending [10-22].

Theories of sexual abuse

If one might attempt to propose a theory that best fits the offenders described in this study, one has to take into account the social and cultural norms of Sudan before labeling anything as deviant or abnormal.

Very early in this thesis it has been mentioned that early girls' marriage-below the age of eighteen- is accepted even preferred in many areas of the country and in the case of adolescent girls, sexually motivated crimes have often been assimilated with adultery.

Most offenders denied having a sexual interest in children yet when asked about the ages of their victims, most readily gave ages of pubescent females below the age of eighteen, a considerable number of them- 45.1% claimed to be in love with their victims.

It appeared that most offenders did not perceive their victims as children but desirable young pubescent girls and this has more to do with their cultural background and upbringing than a cognitive defect or a paraphilia thus supporting the socio-cultural theory [23] where men are taught to be more dominant and aggressive and females to be passive and submissive, seeking younger females accentuated their male dominance [24,25].

Conclusion and Recommendations

After discussion of the results and comparison with those of the cited literature, it seemed that many factors both internal and external as described in Finkelhor's integrated theory played a role in turning the participants into offenders. Nevertheless, with regards to Sudan, an important external facilitator of abuse was the presence of outdated cultural trends and societal roles which were further enhanced by a low educational status.

However, there is a silver lining to that; if these cultural trends could be abolished by mass campaigns and education was made more accessible, a promising reduction in the number of offenders may be seen allowing the scope of future research to be focused on offenders of more complicated motives and histories but more importantly minimizing the incidents of CSA.

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