

# Perception of the Community towards Child Sexual Abuse: A Case of Chawama Lusaka, Zambia

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## Abstract

A number of scholars have reported high incidence of sexual abuse cases among children in the communities. However, little is known about the perceptions the community people have towards child sexual abuse cases. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the perception of the community towards child sexual abuse which hinders the disclosure and reporting of abuse cases. Data were collected through focused group discussions and indepth interviews, with sixty nine participants from nine (9) focused group discussions and nine (9) indepth interviews. Participants were the general community members and relatives to abused children. The interviews were recorded verbatim and transcribed; analysis of data was done using qualitative thematic analysis. Three themes emerged summarizing the factors associated with non-reporting of child sexual abuse cases which included, fear of family and community breakdown, relationship between the victim and the perpetrator and inadequate service provision by the police which also reflected the community's role in supporting the child. In conclusion the study therefore showed that child sexual abuse is common in Zambia and cases are still on the increase. However, there is great need to enforce laws regarding sexual abuse and in addition great change in attitude is needed to prevent occurrence of cases.

## Keywords

Child, Sexual Abuse, Community, Focused Group Discussion, Indepth Interviews

## 1. Introduction

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is the involvement of any sexual activities with a child

where consent is or is not given by the child [1]. Globally up to 80,000 cases of CSA are reported per year, although the number of unreported cases is far greater. This is because children tend to be afraid to tell anyone what happened and the legal process of reporting may be difficult [2]. A study by [3] compared prevalence rates obtained from 19 countries in addition to the United States and Canada, including 10 national probability samples and concluded that CSA still remained an international problem. The lifetime impact of CSA accounted for approximately 6% of depression cases, 6% of alcohol and drug abuse dependency, 8% of suicidal attempts, 10% of panic disorders and 27% of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [4]. According to [5] in Zambia past sexual abuse is a key factor predicting participation in high risk behaviors associated with HIV infection.

Mostly sexually abused children develop low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness and an abnormal or distorted view of sex. The child may become withdrawn mistrustful of adults, and can become suicidal. Some children who have been sexually abused have difficulty relating to others except on sexual terms. Some sexually abused children become child abusers or prostitutes, or have other serious problems when they reach adulthood [2]. Often there are no obvious external signs of child sexual abuse. Some signs may be detected on physical exam by a physician [2]. Associated sexually transmitted diseases (such as HIV) and suicide attempts can be fatal. Therefore all physicians who treat children should be aware of the manifestations and consequences of child sexual abuse, and should be familiar with normal and abnormal genital and anal anatomy of children [6].

A study done by [7] in New Zealand showed that women with a history of being abused were significantly more likely to have raised scores on the measures of psychopathology and to be identified as having psychiatric disorders, predominantly depressive in type. These findings indicate that the deleterious effects of abuse can continue to contribute to psychiatric morbidity for many years. A systematic review done by [8] on factors which influence English and Welsh perceptions towards victims of CSA concluded that, regarding respondent gender, males perceived CSA victims as more to blame, more culpable, less reliable and less credible. These findings show that perpetrators are protected rather than the victims are protected. This can lead to increase in CSA cases as perpetrators know that no action will be taken against them.

Furthermore, [9] reports that the perception of the community towards CSA was that most cultural and traditional practices especially in Africa render a girl child vulnerable to CSA as it leaves the female child with no option than to submit to men's wishes. This is because most traditional systems follow the patriarchal structure where women and girls are culturally considered to have a subordinate status and minimum influence on decision making even in regards to their own health.

The secrecy around child sexual abuse is a universal problem as stated by [10]. This contributes to child sexual abuse cases being under reported especially in

Zambia. Africa at large has attributes of a collectivist culture which sacrifices the interests of the individual for what is in the best interest of the group because the group (family, tribe or state) is the principal element of reality [11]. This may consequently leads to shielding of the perpetrators as they are not reported to the relevant authorities especially if the perpetrator is the one the child is dependent on and the child will be considered a bad person by the family if they report the abuser to the police so they opt to keep quiet.

Therefore, this study intended to explore the perception of the community towards CSA with the view of highlighting issues of under reporting of CSA cases and community awareness and sensitization on CSA.

### Statement of the Problem

Child sexual abuse cases are widely believed to be underreported by the victims as well as the community and most cases are presented only after a child starts to show symptoms or complications [12]. Statistics from the Victim Support Unit indicate that for the past few years, beginning 2007 to 2014 cases of defilement have been rising. Outlined below are reported cases (Table 1).

However, these statistics do not reflect the true magnitude of the problem as a number of cases go unreported and experts state that for every reported case there is 10 more unreported cases [13]. None reporting of CSA cases leads to an increase in the cases as the perpetrators go unpunished and are likely to move to the next victim. According to [14] the true extent of CSA in Zambia remains unknown.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

A qualitative method was used because it gave a clear overview of the perceptions and experiences of people on CSA. This lead to comprehensive description of factors contributing to the increase of CSA cases and reasons for reporting of low reporting of cases. This resulted in new perceptions that are health promoting.

### 2.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted in Chawama, Lusaka urban district of Zambia. Chawama community is home to people of diverse cultures, norms, beliefs, tribes, races, religion and nationalists.

**Table 1.** Statistics on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Zambia.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Number of cases reported</b>	852	1224	1676	8467	11908	9612	9775	12,985

### **2.3. Study Population**

The study population was all the men and women aged 18 years and above living in Chawama.

### **2.4. Sample Selection**

Purposive sampling technique was used for both the focused group discussions and the in-depth interviews. The community entry was through sensitization of the study to the faith based organizations, schools, market places, community groups and local authorities. These were engaged to help with community sensitization to would be participants of the study. The participants were mainly found on Shantumbu market day which is a day when the vegetables are cheap and a lot of people go to buy from the market and this day is held on Monday and Friday. Those that were willing to participate were scheduled for consenting. Further, participants who verbalized having a victim who's a relative and consented to participate were later scheduled for an indepth interview which was done one on one with the researcher.

### **2.5. Sample Size**

The sample size was determined by data saturation. This means that data continued to be collected until no new themes were emerging. All consenting participants were included to participate in the focused group discussions, then for the in-depth interview the sample size was dependent on the participants from the focused group discussion who were relatives to the victims and further consented to participate in the study. The final sample size was:

Focused group discussion interview = 60 (9 groups)

Indepth Interviews = 9

Total Sample Size = 69

### **2.6. Data Collection Technique**

#### **2.6.1. Focused Group Discussion Guide**

A focused group discussion guide was used to collect data from the community members. The tool had both closed and open ended questions. The questionnaire had questions exploring the perceptions of the community towards CSA.

#### **2.6.2. Indepth Interview Guide**

Indepth interview guide to collect data from the respondents who were relatives to the CSA victims in order to get their lived experiences. This was easy to use because most major aspects of information needed was already covered in the focused group discussion guide.

### **2.7. Ethical Consideration**

Ethical approval was sought from The University of Zambia Biomedical Re-

search Ethics Committee (UNZABREC). Written consent was also obtained from each respondent and those that would not consent to participate in the study were reassured that they will suffer no consequences as a result of not participating. Those who consented were asked to sign the consent form, which was explained fully to them.

## 2.8. Data Analysis

Analysis of the data from the focus group discussions and indepth interviews took the form of thematic analysis. Data from the tapes were transcribed verbatim then compared with the data contained in the notes. The responses were coded by coloring responses from the various groups of participants differently. The data was repeatedly compared with the codes to prevent a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding. Long table's analysis was used and each question was on a different flip chart followed by responses from the different groups of participants identifiable by the colour code. Long identification was then done by searching across the entire data set and later interpretation was undertaken with an attempt made to theorize the significance of the patterns in relation to the respective research objective.

## 3. Results

After data analysis three (3) themes were identified as key to the study.

- 1) Fear of family and community breakdown
- 2) Relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
- 3) Inadequate service provision by the police

### Key Statement

Fear of losing their marriages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ubuchindami bwa mwanakashi mulume (a woman's respect is determined by having a husband). Mostly women are more respected in society when they are married even if the husband does not provide anything at home</i></li> </ul>
Fear that their daughters would not get married	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It is difficult to report to the police that your child has been sexually abused because everyone in the community will know that she has been exposed to sexual acts and worse off if it's a case of incest. The community members will narrate the abuse story to any suitor who comes to marry the girl in future and after hearing most men are not likely to make them future brides because very few men want to marry someone with a history of sexual abuse. Some community members even tell suitors that can you marry someone who was having intercourse with her father that's a no</i></li> </ul>
Fear of family and community breakdown as a barrier to reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>When a child has been abused, it is very difficult for the mother to disclose such an incident, it is a shame on her part because it's like exposing herself naked in front of society. Sometimes the society expresses views that it was not truly defilement but the result of negligence on the mother's part</i></li> </ul>
Fear of shame to the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I cannot allow my child to play with a sexually abused child because they start teaching bad manners to other kids and some kids start enjoying the abuse so I would rather my kid is at a distance with such a child</i></li> </ul>
Fear of stigma and isolation to the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I cannot allow my child to play with a sexually abused child because they start teaching bad manners to other kids and some kids start enjoying the abuse so I would rather my kid is at a distance with such a child</i></li> </ul>

**Continued**

Relationship between perpetrator and victim as barrier to reporting	Stranger as a perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Twenty years is really not realistic sentence behind bars. As you have seen we live in the community. Maybe when you look at the people here you will find that they come from the same family or same tribe. And if they find out that their relative is guilty and will be jailed for 20 years or for life, they cannot accept it, so as a community we are used defending ourselves</i></li> </ul>
	Perpetrator as the main family provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reporting of cases depends on the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. When the perpetrator is a stranger it is a punishable offence and they will be jailed nomater what but when it is a relative it is sorted within the family and the woman parent should keep it as a secret and instruct child never to talk about it</i></li> </ul>
Inadequate service provision by the police	Costly and corrupt police services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The police encourage people to just get money from the perpetrator instead of taking them to the police. Ahhhh ... And these people are clever while they are negotiating with family to accept monetary compensation they are also negotiating for their own amount from the perpetrator. So they make money out of CSA cases.</i></li> </ul>
	Lack of confidentiality by police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The police ask uncomfortable questions in presence of other people such as bana kuchita kangati) how many times were you abused). And honestly no one would want others to know how many times they have been abused and how the abuse was done.</i></li> </ul>

### 3.1. Fear of Family and Community Breakdown as a Barrier to Reporting

“Fear of family and community breakdown as a barrier to reporting” reflected the collectivist culture of people in the community and the influence society has on decision making. Further probing revealed that people care more concerned about what the society will think about them than their own benefits. This theme was constituted by five subtheme; 1) fear of losing their marriage 2) fear that children will not be married in future, 3) fear of shame to the child 4) fear of isolation and stigma to the child.

#### 3.1.1. Fear of Losing Their Marriage

This subtheme: “fear of losing their marriage)” reflected the importance society placed on marriage. Most Participants reported that the community perception is that a woman who was not married was not to be respected. Therefore when a child had been abused by her step father the woman was in a dilemma on whether to report to the police or save her marriage. In most cases women did not report for fear that the community would laugh at her and not respect her as she will end up not having a husband.

*ubuchindami bwa mwanakashi mulume (a woman’s respect is determined by having a husband). Mostly women are more respected in society when they are married even if the husband does not provide anything at home.*

Participants also reported that the traditional teachings that women go through before marriage also requires a married woman to keep home secrets. Therefore, if the abuse case is committed by a step father, brother or uncle or any close relative women will ignore the issue and sort it from home without reporting to the police.

*When woman are getting married they are taught to keep home secrets and not expose whatever is happening home to outsiders. So when child abuse occurs the mother will keep it a secret and instruct the child to do the same.*

Additionally it was reported that people in this community are interrelated and so when an abuse case was committed by a relative women failed to report due to fear of breaking the good relationship both families have had. As such, participant spoke of women protecting their marriages and their families as an aspect that contributed to bad attitudes towards reporting of cases. They reported that their perception was that a woman's ability to report was affected by her marital status and the perpetrator involved.

### **3.1.2. Fear of Not Getting Married in Future**

In relation to fear of losing their marriages, fear of not getting married in the future was also categorized as contributing to non-reporting of cases. This sub-theme: "Fear of not getting married in the future" reflected the worries women have that once community is aware that a child was abused that child is not likely to find a suitor for marriage. Participants reported that in our society a woman is more respected if she is married. For most women, the Mrs Title was an achievement as it came with respect from the community members thus for an abused child she was likely to have challenges finding a suitor. This is how one of them expressed herself:

*It is difficult to report to the police that your child has been sexually abused because everyone in the community will know that she has been exposed to sexual acts and worse off if it's a case of incest. The community members will narrate the abuse story to any suitor who comes to marry the girl in future and after hearing most men are not likely to make them future brides because very few men want to marry someone with a history of sexual abuse. Some community members even tell suitors that can you marry someone who was having intercourse with her father that's a no ...*

Two participants reported that when people know your child has been defiled before they will tell any suitor that comes to seek her hand in marriage that she is not pure and carrying bad luck due to the sexual abuse experience. Due to this most suitors would not want to make such a girl their wife as a result most parents opt to hide the abuse incidence so as to allow their daughter get married in future. Parents fear that their child would not be respected in the community if not married so they do anything to hide the case and increase chances of getting married. This is how one expressed herself:

*What you don't know doesn't hurt so if the man does not know that the girl was defiled it will not hurt at all and the two will live in peace. But once he knows she was abused before even the love he had for her will fade away.*

### **3.1.3. Shame to the Child and Family**

This sub-theme: "shame to the child and family" reflected the embarrassment that will befall a family and community once abuse has been reported. Most par-

ticipants reported that CSA brought shame and loss of dignity to the family when the community was aware that their child was sexually abused. This is how one expressed themselves:

*When a child has been abused, it is very difficult for the mother to disclose such an incident, it is a shame on her part because it's like exposing herself naked in front of society. Sometimes the society expresses views that it was not truly defilement but the result of negligence on the mother's part.*

Participants also reported that there is great fear that once abuse is reported the family name would be ridiculed and the mother would become the centre of gossip in the community. Therefore, most families would opt to keep it a secret to maintain the family name and respect than report to the police. This is how one expressed herself:

*It is very shameful and no child or mother can come out in the open to say they were abused. And most women fear that the respected that the family has enjoyed will all be lost in a few minutes.*

Additionally, participants revealed that reporting defilement did more harm than good to the child. Often if the perpetrator is a rich person they would escape prosecution and the survivor is left without justice but shame. Thus the perception is that it is better if cases are not reported as the child will not be put to shame.

*Women are ashamed to speak up in front of everyone about what has happened for fear that if the perpetrator has a lot of money he will pay the police and run away and the child will be left with no justice.*

Further, most women reported that the bible says a woman should be submissive to her husband, so women have to wait for instructions from the husband on whether to report abuse or not since he is the head of the house. Therefore if a woman reported such a case, she was likely to be chased by her husband. So in trying to keep her marriage women kept quiet about abuse cases. This is how one expressed herself:

*A woman is just a helper to a man so she has to wait for instructions from her husband if the husband says go ahead then she can report but minus his consent a woman has no right to report.*

### **3.1.4. Fear of Isolation and Stigma to the Child**

In relation to shame to the child, fear of isolation and stigma to the child was categorized as a reason for non-reporting. Some participants reported that most families do not report abuse cases for fear of stigma and isolation that will befall the child. When the community is aware that a child was defiled other mothers will stop their children from playing with such a child for fear that the abused child might start explaining her experience and consequently start having sexual intercourse at an early stage. This is how one expressed herself.

*I cannot allow my child to play with a sexually abused child because they start teaching bad manners to other kids and some kids start enjoying the abuse so I would rather my kid is at a distance with such a child.*



One participant narrated that isolation of the abused children can make them develop low self-esteem especially if they do not engage in play activities with other children which keeps them away from thinking about the bad experiences. Further, she narrates that isolation of abused kids in communities is real. This is how she expressed herself:

*My elder brother's child was abused and all the neighbours instructed their children not to be friends with her for fear that she may start explaining her experience to the other children. The child become really low and depressed.*

### **3.2. Relationship between Perpetrator and Victim as a Barrier to Reporting**

The second theme: “relationship between perpetrator and victim as a barrier to reporting” reflected how the relationship between victim and perpetrator affects reporting of abuse cases. The theme was informed by two subthemes namely: 1) stranger as a perpetrator 2) Perpetrator as main provider.

#### **3.2.1. Stranger as a Perpetrator**

This subtheme: “stranger as a perpetrator” reflected the family’s ability to report abuse cases basing on the relationship with perpetrator. Most participants reported that they have a collectivist culture. Thus, when a child has been abused they look at everyone involved in the matter such as perpetrator and victims’ family. They reported that when the abuse act was performed by a relative they would look at the best interest of the family and not concentrate on the child meaning the case is going to be resolved from home and the decision made will be in the best interest of everyone in order to maintain the good family relationship that has been there. This is how one expressed himself:

*Reporting of cases depends on the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. When the perpetrator is a stranger it is a punishable offence and they will be jailed nomater what but when it is a relative it is sorted within the family and the woman parent should keep it as a secret and instruct child never to talk about it.*

She further reports that it is very easy to report the case to the police when the perpetrator involved is a stranger because you are very sure you have no family ties with such a person. But on the other hand, it is not easy to report if abuse is done by a close relative because will lead to family break up when perpetrator is jailed for many years. This is how one expressed herself:

*It is easier to send a stranger to jail because you have no family ties with them.*

Participants further reported that it would be unfair for the other children from the perpetrators family to grow up without a father and not be able to have sound education and a good life all because of a onetime mistake that the man had committed. This is how one expressed himself:

*We all make mistakes in life but that does not mean someone should be sent to jail over issues that can be easily resolved at home. When you look at it a lot of people suffer. It is better if it is a stranger and not someone close to the family.*

### 3.2.2. Perpetrator as a Main Family Provider

In relation to stranger as a perpetrator, perpetrator as a main provider emerged as another sub theme. This subtheme: reflected the response on reporting when perpetrator is the main provider of the family. Most participants reported that the number of years spent in jail for the perpetrators was unimaginable and this made it difficult for the women to report abuse cases for fear the provider will be jailed. This is how one expressed herself:

*Twenty years is really not realistic sentence behind bars. As you have seen we live in the community. Maybe when you look at the people here you will find that they come from the same family or same tribe. And if they find out that their relative is guilty and will be jailed for 20 years or for life, they cannot accept it, so as a community we are used defending ourselves.*

Participants further reported that it is difficult to report abuse cases when the perpetrator is the one taking care of the child and paying their schools fees and the parents are unable to. Most women fear to report because they know when the perpetrator is sent to jail no one would educate them and that will mean the end of their bright future. This is how one expressed herself:

*I would rather deal with the issue from home than have my other children live in abject poverty and the entire family suffering once my husband is sent to jail for abuse. I wouldn't want to see the abused child lose two things their purity and education so it is better resolved at home.*

Participants also reported that most of the women are not financially empowered which leads to them failing to report abuse cases if committed by their spouse for fear that they will be no one to provide for the family if he his sent to jail.

*Hmmmmmm honestly one cannot report when they know they are not in any form of employment and the abuser is the bread winner at home that cannot happen.*

In addition, participants reported that the sentence for the offence is unimaginable and if the case were to be reported the perpetrators family can really suffer if that person is a bread winner. This is how one expressed herself:

*Unreasonable sentence makes people not to report because they sympathise with the offender elo Nikufunta chabe ungakale 20 years osa gona namwamuna uyembekeza chabe) that is madness can u stay for 20 years without sex just waiting for him to come back) all because he made a mistake. Even the bible says forgive and forget hahahahaha.*

### 3.3. Inadequate Service Provision by Police

The third theme: “inadequate service provision by police” was conceptualized by two sub-themes: “Costly police services and “Lack of privacy by the police”. The theme defined community interpretation of the service delivery in the context of provision of privacy to victims and care and attention given to victims after abuse by the police. Experiencing bad care made women and men have uncertainties with the way police handled CSA cases.

*We are provided with inadequate services ... That is why most of the times we do not even bother reporting abuse cases.*

### **3.3.1. Corrupt and Costly Police Services**

The sub theme: “costly and corrupt police services” elucidated the failure by the police to offer adequate care to victims who had no money and pay more attention to rich perpetrators. Most Participants perceived cost and corruption at police stations as barriers to help seeking behavior and reporting of sexual violence by survivors. Participants reported that the financial status of the perpetrator also had an influence on the actions the police took. They reported that if the perpetrator was rich, the police would advise the family to discuss the matter at home and the family compensated.

*The police encourage people to just get money from the perpetrator instead of taking them to the police. Ahhhh ... And these people are clever while they are negotiating with family to accept monetary compensation they are also negotiating for their own amount from the perpetrator. So they make money out of CSA cases.*

One participant who appeared really touched by the CSA stories reported that the police are a bunch of corrupt people who will only give your case attention if you have money, if you are poor and your child is defiled nothing will happen but if you have money you can push the police to any level until justice is sought.

*We hear of cases where children are abused and cases not taken anywhere by the police because perpetrators are very rich. Even if the family refuse the bribe the police get bribes and case keeps on being postponed until the family gives up.*

Another one also reported that the law enforcement officers (police) are a problem as they would ask for money from the survivor’s guardians or parents. This is what she said:

*One can really wonder what goes on in the minds of police officers. They ask for money to get on a cab to go and get the perpetrator or air time to call and find out where the perpetrator is?*

Additionally, participants narrated that it becomes costly for the victim’s family to always spend money giving it to the police and in a case where the family decides not to give money to the police their case would not be given much attention and most times pushed to a later date for hearing until they give up.

Participants reported that the process of reporting abuse cases was very tedious and long which made victims give up on the way. This is how one expressed herself:

*When one goes to the police they will be interviewed and then sent to the hospital to be seen by the doctors and nurse and if they are not their you need to wait. Ahhh this process is tiring ...*

Participants further reported that seeking care was also seen as an additional financial burden as the guardians would be forced to find money to be moving in different places to seek help and for transportation from their homes to the

police or hospital to access the services.

*I feels reporting cases also puts a financial strain on the families as they now have to use the little they have on accessing services of which that money would have been used to feed the family*

The participants further reported that the reporting process is too tedious and long as the victim's family is expected to give statements and courts and if days keep being pushed it becomes expensive and disturbs their program. Thus in the end they give up on justice.

*It is very tiring to be moving from court to home especially if you are not even seeing an improvement. You know the little money we have will be wasted on the transport and food as you go to court so in the end people give up.*

Showed concern that the police are the custodian of people's rights but in most cases they are only interested in extracting money from the poor victims' family, as a result most families do not report to the police because they do not want to end up spending more money in the quest to seek justice.

### **3.3.2. Lack of Privacy from the Police**

The sub-theme: "lack of privacy from the police" reflected the inability of the police to conduct interviews in quiet and private rooms. While confidentiality is a fundamental part of ethical principles, Participants expressed concern on the lack of confidentiality from the police. They reported that police officers ask victims uncomfortable questions in presence of other people. They reported that most police officers interview victims just on the reception instead of providing a private room where such matters can be discussed as this case requires maximum privacy in order for a child to open up. This is how one said it:

*The police ask uncomfortable questions in presence of other people such as bana kuchita kangati) how many times were you sexually abused). And honestly no one would want others to know how many times they have been abused and how the abuse was done.*

One participant also narrates that the lack of confidentiality on the part of the police is even worse because police officers also engage in drinking alcohol with the local people and thus as they are drinking if a child or parent to abused child passes the police would start narrating her abuse story.

*Most of the police men are drunkards and like drinking even when they cannot afford to buy alcohol so for them to entertain the people buying when an abused child or her parents pass the police start explaining what they were told in confidence.*

## **4. Discussion of Findings**

The study results showed that child sexual abuse continues to be a major concern in Zambia. The findings showed that reporting of the abuse cases was delayed by fear of the community and family breakdown, relationship between child and perpetrator and the inadequate service provision by the police. While some research has highlighted how cultural factors can serve as both risk and

protective factor for victims of Child sexual abuse. Few studies have explored the basic belief systems and factors contributing to under reporting.

#### **4.1. Fear of Family and Community Breakdown as a Barrier to Reporting**

Fear of marriage breakdown emerged as a serious concern for most of the women and this contributed to poor reporting. Women were afraid that once abuse was reported husbands would send their wives back to their parents and husbands were to be sent to jail for many years which consequently meant becoming single. Similar findings have been reported by [9]. This fear has the consequence of making affected person fear being rejected or avoided by others in the community. Additionally, the belief that a women was more respected when married made women fail to report for fear of loss of respect in the community. The above findings are similar to research results by [15] who stated what women fail to report abuse cases for fear of marriage breakdown. Reporting of abuse was more of a problem for the married than the single and this may be related to the fact that fear of rejection is more intensely felt by the married people as they have a great need for respect from the society.

Additionally, women failed to report abuse when the perpetrator was a close relation such as parent, guardian or relative due to the fear of the shame the abuse would bring to the child, family and community and losing their marriages in the process. The thought that the experience would be known to the whole community was very unpleasant and was linked to avoiding their own internal shame. Similar findings were demonstrated in previous studies which showed that it was difficult for survivors to report or disclose abuse cases due to fear loss of their marriage as well as community and family reactions [9] [16] [17].

Another common belief that women were only respected when married led to women resolving issues from home most of the times so as to maintain the respect from the community. Another issue was fear of future marriage prospects for the girls. When the abuse act was made public most people in the community would ensure their children do not marry such a child and further discourage most suitors as she was not regarded pure. These findings are in line with the research findings by [5] [9] with the later revealing that women fear to report abuse cases for fear that their girls will not be taken as brides in future. Changing the mindset of whole families and communities can help forget such perceptions and building their trust takes time and requires specialist skills to bring out and also most Zambians tend to be less individualistic than western people in culture. The behaviours are probably more influenced by other people's values and points of views instead of their own.

Further, women failed to report cases due to their submissive nature to men, hence they had to wait for instructions regarding reporting of abuse cases. Therefore, if a woman disobeyed her husband and reported without consent, husbands would divorce her and she would be regarded as having brought shame to the family. Therefore, most women were afraid of losing their mar-

riages and never reported eventually. On the other hand [18] showed that a woman who reported to the police was often sent back to settle the matter with her family and similar gendered expectations are described in Namibia and South Africa [19]. Such social norms affect women and make them feel inferior and have less desire to go and report the abuse cases.

#### 4.2. Relationship between Victim and Perpetrator

Participants ascribed to the view that child sexual abuse when done by a relative or close family member was not regarded as much of a serious offense. Most participants believed in the saying that *adya kake alibe mulandu* translated as he who eats from his own has no problem. However, as opposed to the *adya kake alibe mulandu* belief a study by [20] showed that defilement by a parent was regarded as more severe and traumatic to the child and the relationship between perpetrator and victim did not affect the perception of CSA. The difference in opinion of the men to women shows how people perceive issues basing on their gender and that there is divergent views in respect to relationship between gender and experience of abuse.

Protection of the perpetrators especially if he/she was a close relative was also cited as another barrier to help seeking. This was because defilement by a relative was regarded as bringing shame to the family and community and the families name would be put to disrepute. The thought of taking the perpetrator to jail for many years was very unpleasant and was linked to avoidance of shame to the individual, family and community. In trying to prevent the parents or guardians from shame most of these cases were not reported because they consider the interest of the greater majority of the people who are going to suffer and not the child defiled. The findings are similar with previous research which showed that protection of the abuser by the victim's family is another reason that prevented effective reporting of defilement cases and most parents turned a blind eye to sexual abuse of their children, sometimes for mere economic gain. Perhaps the social impact of the CSA may exert more negative effects on women because of their lower social status, skills and levels of education and also not having adequate skills for employment or independent.

#### 4.3. Inadequate Service Provision by the Police

It was reported that the process of reporting cases was tedious, expensive and disturbed their programs. The law enforcement officers also kept on asking for money to contact the perpetrator or transport to go and get the perpetrator. Most of the people affected are financially challenged as a result this discouraged people from reporting the CSA cases because they had no money to give the police. Similarly, [17] also reports that the ability of the police to solicit money from victims' family prevented the children from seeking help as most parents and guardians would give up in the process.

On the other hand the financial status of the perpetrator also played a role in the reporting process and help seeking by the families and law enforcement of-

ficers. The police would try by all means to defend the perpetrator if he had money to pay them and will keep on postponing the court sessions until the victim's parents or guardians give up and sometimes the police would even encourage the parents or guardians to receive the money which would help in running of the home. If the police managed to convince the family on receiving the money, the perpetrator would pay both the police and victims parents and guardians. The representation of financial status of the perpetrator as a barrier to help seeking is also reported by [21] with the later revealing that court cases took long in the courts of laws as a result they lost interest in the cases.

## 5. Conclusion

The implication for this is that efforts needs to be made to improve the community's understanding about child sexual abuse among the general public in order to improve the quality of life of the sufferers and their social acceptance. These study findings also provide a substantive base for understanding the phenomenon and add to the scientific body of knowledge, attitude and intentions regarding reporting of child abuse. However, further research is needed on the subject on a larger sample size and different provinces in Zambia in comparison with the urban and rural experience.

## 6. Strengths and Limitation of the Study

Participants were grouped according to their age ranges in the focused group discussions and this promoted freedom of expression.

Sensitive nature of the topic made it difficult to find participants especially relatives to the victims as they felt it was not something they cannot freely discuss in a focus group discussions. Resources could not allow the study to be conducted on a large scale because the project was not adequately funded and therefore, the site was conveniently selected.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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