

Cultural Factors Associated with Sexual Abuse Among the Young People in Kibera Slums, Nairobi City County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Sexual abuse is a crime that is of concern to society. It is particularly more serious when committed against children, many of whom suffer in silence. Sexual abuse among young people has long history in Kenyan. The Sexually abused children often suffer from suicide tendencies, negative self-esteem, low self-efficacy, stigma and discrimination. Reports indicate that most children are sexually abused by people known to them.

Objective: The aim of this study was to identify the determinants of sexual abuse among young people in Kibera slums, Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Methodology: The study adopted an analytical cross-sectional approach to research; using primary data for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data was collected by use of questionnaires, FGD and KII interviews guide. Study adopted stratified random sampling technique and systematic sampling was used to identify the villages to select with the help of the administrative officers and saturation method was used to select key informants. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square and Fischer's Exact Test were used to measure association between independent and dependent variables.

Results: At least 102(38.5%) of young people who participated had experienced sexual abuse such as rape/attempted rape (48.8%), forced kisses (41.6%) and forced hugs (41.5%) among girls and sexual violence reported (66.7%) forceful touching of private parts (15.6%) among boys. Divorce ($\chi^2=5.732$; df 1; $p=0.031$), weak laws ($p=0.001$), and alcohol consumption ($p < 0.001$) were significantly associated with sexual abuse.

Conclusion: The study reveals high rates of sexual violence among young people in Kibera slums, with females being more affected. The perpetrators are often known to survivors. Cultural factors like denial of legal rights, weak laws, and alcohol consumption contribute to the issue.

Keywords: Sexual Abuse, Youths, Alcoholism, Sexual Violence, Slums

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse is a global issue affecting millions of people annually, with 7% to 48% of girls and young women aged 10-24 reporting their first sexual encounter as coerced. Perpetrators include friends, partners, family members, or strangers (1). The American Medical Association reports that one in every five women is a survivor

of sexual violence before age 21 (2). In developed countries, sexual abuse among young girls ranges from 1-3% to 1-3% (3). In Eastern and Southern African countries, a high percentage of women report having experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives (4,5). Coerced sex is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, with cross-generational sexual relationships in

exchange for money. In South Africa and Tanzania, 28% and 40% of those aged 10-24 years experienced coerced first sexual encounters, respectively (6,7).

The social environment within a community significantly influences the likelihood of sexual violence and child marriage. Community beliefs in male superiority and entitlement to sex contribute to the likelihood of such violence (8). Physically violent childhood environments are linked to sexually aggressive behavior in young men, and men raised in patriarchal families are more likely to become violent, rapist, and use sexual coercion against women(9). Factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and social conditions that provide opportunities for abuse also increase the risk of a man committing rape. Alcoholism, substance abuse, polygamy, and early marriages contribute to child abuse, while weak laws and norms at national and international levels contribute to the repetition of sexual violence(10). The Kenyan government has cited sexual violence as an issue of concern in various policy and strategic documents. The true extent of sexual violence in the world is unknown due to under reporting, but statistics indicate that one in five women and one in 10 men report experiencing sexual abuse as children (11).

MATERIALS & METHODS

An analytical cross-sectional design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods conducted between April to August 2022 at Kibera slum, Kibera subcounty of Nairobi County. The study population constituted of 265 young people between 10-24 years residing in Kibera slum. The study population was selected through snowballing methods as guided by community health volunteers (CHVs). In addition, data was collected from local administration, Community Health Workers and social workers from Kibera slum whom were key informants. The study received approvals from GLUK Graduate School, KNH-UoN-ERC, and the National Committee of Science, Technology and

Innovation. Informed consent was obtained from eligible and consenting caregivers for respondents below 18 years from selected households. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and identifying data was used only for research purposes. No invasive procedures were performed, and participants were informed about their rights. Data was collected from. A structured questionnaire was administered, and participants were provided with information and a code for coding. The principal investigator conducted key informant interviews, obtaining informed consent and permission to record the interviews.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The questionnaires were checked daily for accuracy and numbered and coded. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical software package IBM SPSS version 27. Univariate and bivariate analyses were performed to obtain descriptive statistics and examine associations between variables, measures of association were considered statistically significant when p value was less than 0.05. Thematic analysis for qualitative data was used to identify patterns in the data set, and the results were presented through narration.

RESULT

Socio-Demographic Characteristics.

The respondents age ranged from 10 years to 24 years, the mode was 17 years, median 19.0 years and the mean age was 17.8 ± 1.1 . The findings showed that 34.3% and 28.3% of the respondents were aged between 10-14 years and 20-24 years respectively, most of respondents were between 15-19 years at 37.4%. With regard to gender, 61.5% were females and 38.5% were males. On marital status 76.2% of the respondents were single, 18.5% were married and 5.3% divorced or separated. Majority (63%) of the respondents had primary education, followed by those with secondary education 29.8% and the least were those with post-secondary education at 7.2%. The results

also revealed that 72.8% of the respondents employed (Table 1) were unemployed while only 27.2% were

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

| Characteristics | Frequency (n = 265) | Percent (%) |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Age | | |
| 10 – 14 years | 91 | 34.3% |
| 15 – 19 years | 99 | 37.4% |
| 20 – 24 years | 75 | 28.3% |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 163 | 61.5% |
| Male | 102 | 38.5% |
| Marital status | | |
| Single | 202 | 76.2% |
| Married | 49 | 18.5% |
| Divorced/Separated | 14 | 5.3% |
| Level of Education | | |
| Primary | 167 | 63.0% |
| Secondary | 79 | 29.8% |
| Tertiary | 19 | 7.2% |
| Work status | | |
| Employed | 72 | 27.2% |
| Unemployed | 193 | 72.8% |

Prevalence of Sexual Abuse among Young People

According to results, 102(38.5%) of young people who participated had experienced sexual abuse with the prevalence standing at 28.4% for males and 44.8% for females (Figure 1).

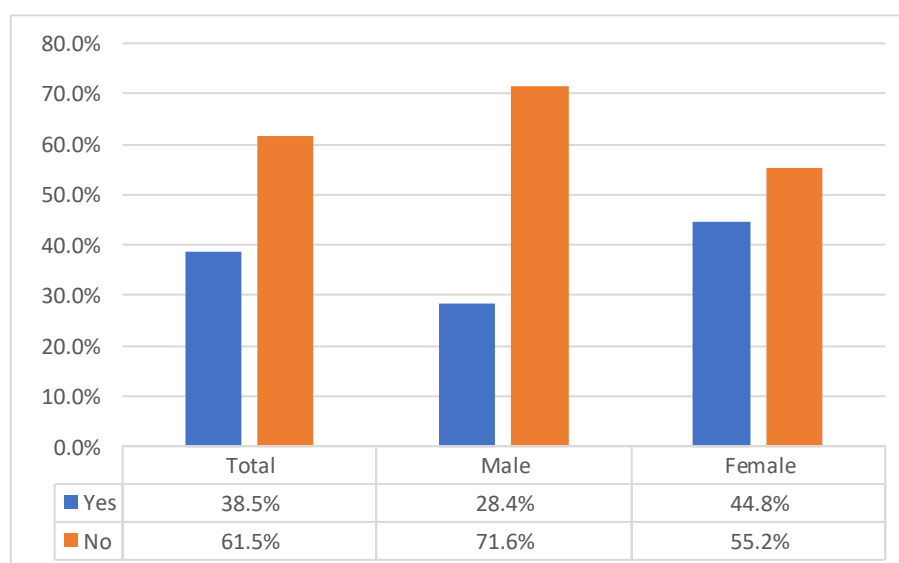


Figure 1: The Prevalence of Sexual Abuse among Young People

Types of Sexual Violence Reported

When asked about the form of sexual violence they had encountered, rape/attempted rape was the most commonly reported form among the girls (48.8%), followed by forced kisses (41.6%) and forced hugs (41.5%). Other forms reported include being forced to undress (35.5%), forceful touching of private parts

(34.4%) as well as forced sex (25.0%) (Table 4.3).

Among the boys, sodomy was the most commonly reported form of sexual violence reported (66.7%) followed by forceful touching of private parts (15.6%). Other forms reported include stalking (13.5%), emotional stress (12.3%) and forced sex (12.5%). Generally, results indicated that

females bear the brunt of sexual violence more than their male counterparts (Table 2).

Table 2: Types of Sexual Violence Reported

| Type of sexual violence | Male | | Female | |
|--|------|-------|--------|-------|
| | n | (%) | n | (%) |
| Forced against their will | 7 | 24.1% | 25 | 34.2% |
| Forced to undress | 24 | 82.8% | 67 | 91.8% |
| Forced to touch or be touched on private parts | 26 | 89.7% | 67 | 91.8% |
| Forced to kiss | 9 | 31.0% | 65 | 89.0% |
| Forced to hug | 5 | 17.2% | 58 | 79.5% |
| Sodomy | 6 | 20.7% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Stalking | 2 | 6.9% | 19 | 26.0% |
| Emotional abuse | 7 | 24.1% | 31 | 42.5% |
| Rape/attempted rape | 0 | 0.0% | 41 | 56.2% |

During the FGD, a discussant had this to say:

“Young people are forced to have many partners by other friends, poverty and alcohol” (FGD 23).

Another discussant added that,

“.... early and premature marriage leads to breakage of marriage forcing one to marry another man” (FGD 7).

Days and Time when Sexual Abuse Occurred

Further, the study findings indicate that with regard to the day and time of occurrence of the violence, majority (64.0%) of the sexual abuse occurred during the daytime mostly over the weekends followed night (63.8%) and evening (60.0%) also over the weekends as illustrated in figure 2.

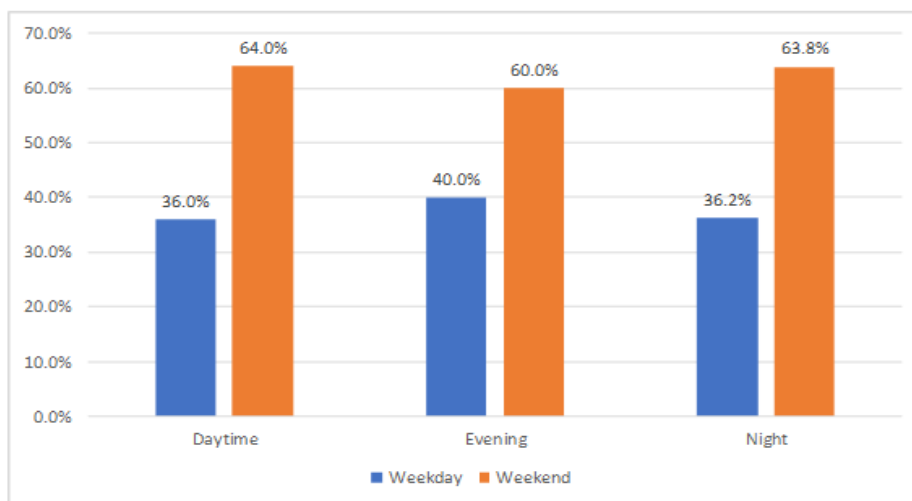


Figure 2: Days and Time when Sexual Abuse Occurred

Among the FGD participants,

“Sexual abuse occurs at night especially around 7:00 pm” (FGD 5), *with a number of them happening “over the weekends and holidays”* (FGD 3), *“during ceremonies as burials and weddings”* (FGD 11), *“in parties* (FGD 14), *“during the day when parents are at work”* (FGD 16), and *“in the evening* (FGD 14) *and Cold days or seasons”* (FGD 18). In addition, *“in boarding schools sexual abuse occur at*

night, during evening and morning preps” (FGD 3),

A Key informant had this to say,

“Most cases of sexual violence occur in the evening hours and weekends when children are not in school” (KII 9) others occur at *“night and end month,”* (KII 7).

Cultural Factors Associated with Sexual Abuse

Among cultural factors associated with sexual abuse according to the study were divorce ($\chi^2=5.732$; df 1; $p=0.031$) as well as weak laws ($p=0.001$), were found to be associated with sexual abuse according to Fischer's Exact Test (Table 3). When asked whether divorce is allowed in the community, 29.7% were negative indicating that once a woman is married cannot come out of the marriage. Concerning resolving marital/family conflicts, result show that marital/family conflicts were resolved through relatives, elders or chiefs (66%), mutual understanding (9%). The rest had no

idea. Further, the study indicated that 36% of respondents were aware that divorce was allowed by law as a form of marital/family conflict resolution (Table 3). Sixty-seven (67%) percent of the respondents who were aware of the existence of divorce indicated that it was done locally under the guidance of elders/chiefs and only 33% said it was done in a court of law ($n=265$). The findings of the study showed that, 33% of the survivors reported that at the time of abuse, either they or the perpetrators were drunk. Further analysis showed there was a statistically significant association between alcohol consumption and sexual abuse ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3: Cultural Factors Associated with Sexual Abuse

| Variable | YES | NO | Statistic |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| | n=102 (%) | n=163 (%) | |
| Permission to divorce | | | $\chi^2=5.732$; df 1; $p=0.031$ |
| Allowed | 51(54.8%) | 42(45.2%) | |
| Not allowed | 51(29.7%) | 121(70.3%) | |
| Attitude against girls/women | | | $\chi^2=1.966$; df 1; $p=0.190$ |
| Positive | 63(43.8%) | 81(56.3%) | |
| Negative | 39(32.2%) | 82(67.8%) | |
| Fischer's Exact Test | | | |
| Variables | YES | NO | Statistics |
| | n=102 (%) | n=163 (%) | |
| Sanctions against perpetrators | | | $p=0.001$ |
| Warned | 77(100.0%) | 0(0.0%) | |
| Nothing | 25(100.0%) | 0(0.0%) | |
| Alcohol consumption | | | $p=0.001$ |
| Take alcohol | 45(100.0%) | 0(0.0%) | |
| Doesn't take alcohol | 57(100.0%) | 0(0.0%) | |

According to one FGD participant, survivors of sexual violence do not report the incidents because

"No action is taken against perpetrators as chief, police and parents are bribed" (FGD 1). Another participant said *"when the perpetrators are arrested, they are freed without the knowledge of the affected parties"* (FGD 14). *"Perpetrators go scot free since the survivor decides to go silent about the harassment because of shame"* added another participant (FGD 9).

According to an FGD participants, some survivors

"Fear being hurt by the perpetrator while others feel ashamed or shy" (FGD 8).

Among the 7% of the cases reported, the perpetrators were warned never to repeat the

act again while nothing was done on the rest of the cases. One Key Informant said:

"Some sexual violence cases are solved at family or community level and compensation may be given (KII 5). Only a few of the survivor's report to police or chief", (KII, 3).

In response to sexual abuse, the community mostly responds by

"Mob justice, that is, lynching by the villagers or being beaten to death" (FGD 10). *"Some community members fear being witnesses since they can be victimized"*, (FGD 3). *"Sexual abuse is too common, the community views it as normal so no action is taken in case of an incidence"*, (FGD 4). *"The community protests to attract the attention of concerned authority or just report to the authority"*, (FGD 9).

One KI felt that the community members some community members

“Fear the perpetrators or protect them” (KII 2). *“Some community members solve cases of sexual violence with the survivors and the perpetrators at home while a few others report to the police”* (KII 7).

DISCUSSION

Cultural factors associated with sexual abuse according to the study were divorce as well as weak laws, were found to be associated with sexual abuse. At least 30% were negative on community acceptance of divorce indicating that once a woman is married cannot come out of the marriage. Concerning resolving marital/family conflicts, result show that marital/family conflicts were resolved through relatives, elders or chiefs (66%), mutual understanding (9%). According to Koop (12), weak laws for perpetrators of sexual violence are a contributing factor to the repetition of such a crime. Moreover, weak community sanctions, lack of institutional support from police and judicial systems, and restrictive laws on divorce are associated with sexual violence(2).

The findings of the study showed that, 33% of the survivors reported that at the time of abuse, either they or the perpetrators were drunk. Further analysis showed there was a statistically significant association between alcohol consumption and sexual abuse ($p < 0.001$). Alcohol and other drugs consumption/abuse may increase vulnerability to sexual violence. Consuming alcohol or drugs by women makes it difficult for them to protect themselves by interpreting and effectively acting on warning signs. It may also place women in settings where chances of encountering a potential offender are greater(13). Alcohol may act as a cultural leisure time, providing the opportunity for antisocial behaviour that led men to act violently when drunk as they do not consider being held accountable for their behaviour. Group sexual violence are associated with drinking where consuming alcohol is an act of group bonding and

inhibitions are collectively reduced with individual judgement made in favour of the group (14–16). According to results, 44% of the respondent said culture is negative towards females. Though it was not found to have any statistical significance with sexual violence, other studies have shown that community beliefs in male superiority and male entitlement to sex greatly affects the likelihood of sexual violence taking place and the general tolerance in the community of child marriage (9,17). Another study reported that young men who are raised in families with strongly patriarchal structures are likely to become violent, rapist and use sexual coercion against women (11).

CONCLUSION

Sexual violence among young people in Kibera slums is high with females being more affected than males. The study revealed that most of the perpetrators were known to the survivors. Further, based on the study findings, majority of sexual abuse was shown to daytime mostly over the weekends followed by those that occurred during night and evening over the weekends. Cultural factors such as denial of legal rights to women such as right to divorce, weak laws and alcohol consumption were significantly associated with sexual violence.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: Approvals were obtained from GLUK Graduate School, KNH-UoN-ERC, the National Committee of Science, Technology and Innovation, Nairobi County Director of Health Services and written informed consent was obtained from all the participating parents.

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