

ASSESSING PUPILS' KNOWLEDGE ON REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN DAR ES SALAAM – TANZANIA

⁴Johnas A. Buhori

Abstract

This study is aimed at assessing pupils' knowledge on child sexual abuse (CSA) reporting points from selected primary schools, namely Buza (Temeke), Mwananyamala B (Kinondoni), Ubungo National Housing (Ubungo), and Tabata (Ilala). The study is exploratory in nature and it uses qualitative research methods to explore pupils' knowledge on reporting sites. The study utilized focus group discussion, where a total of 96 pupils participated in the study. The ages of the recruited pupils ranged between 10 and 14 years. The findings revealed that the pupils had limited knowledge of reporting points. However, they are aware of police and parents to be the individuals who can protect them. Sometimes, they prefer sharing their CSA encounters with teachers because they trust them. This study recommends a school-based programme intended to impart knowledge on reporting points.

KEY WORD: Report Points, Child Sexual Abuse and Warning Signs

Introduction

Globally, several efforts have been made to overcome Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Some of these efforts include the promulgation of various conventions at international and national levels and the inception of child law. Despite these efforts, the cases of CSA are increasing. Further, CSA poses equal problems to many children regardless of their socio-economic status that is why nations call for the global efforts to overcome it. Moreover, the consequences of CSA cannot be easily identified and it takes a long time for the survivors to disclose it and get access to the correct medication. Since CSA has short and long-term consequences to its survivor, preventive measures such as reporting, have to be taken to reduce its magnitude.

Literature Review

Various legal instruments at the local, regional, and international levels have emphasized the significance of protecting children against any violation of their rights. Despite such provisions, children are still exposed to diverse harmful risks (McCrann, 2017). The perpetrators of the ill-practices against children, according to Bilson & Martin (2016), take advantage of their age and cognitive development capacities. It is these facts that aggravate their vulnerability to the point where they are unable to adequately protect themselves. Their vulnerability is further accelerated by the fact that they are defenceless, voiceless, powerless, and helpless, and cannot make decisions on their own (Smith, 2017). Thus, they depend on parents or caregivers for their protection and provision of fundamental human needs. It is from this point of view that the study was conducted to examine the reporting points among children as one of the strategies to end CSA.

Highlighting the importance of protecting children against any abuses, Ng'ondi (2015) noted that the primary function of the social work profession is protecting and advancing the

⁴ Johnas Buhori, Lecturer. Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The Open University of Tanzania, johnas.buhori@out.ac.tz or johnasbuhori@gmail.com
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rights of vulnerable groups, children in particular. In addition, the prevention function, according to Martinello (2019) can be achieved by creating awareness and sensitize not only parents and children but also the entire community on their role in preventing child sexual abuse (CSA). However, the prevention of CSA is informed by the knowledge of warning signs, which, according to Wurtele (2009) entails five “Rs” namely: Recognising the warning signs; reporting any indication of the warning signs; refusing the trickeries used by the perpetrator; resistance to be dragged by the perpetrator, and responding to any recruitment and trickeries used by the perpetrator. This paper focuses on one of the five areas of primary prevention of CSA, which is the knowledge of reporting warning signs among children. Primary prevention entails measures taken before CSA happens to a child, that is, the acquisition of knowledge of the warning signs and indicators of CSA. It is therefore done by imparting CSA knowledge so that children are in a position to identify the CSA indications and take measures to escape any possible trap set before them (Martinello, 2019). According to Mantula & Saloojee (2016), investing prevention measures for CSA among primary school pupils yields more benefits. Its benefit outweighs the cost of responding to secondary and tertiary prevention measures, which deal with the consequences of CSA, including legal systems and services for rehabilitation provided to the survivor. In addition, Wurtele & Kenny (2012) argue that children have to be acquainted with their surrounding environment where they can identify possible support in case they need. Besides, it is worth noting that children cannot just disclose or report CSA warning signs to any person or place.

It is important to emphasize that reporting or disclosing CSA warning signs is primarily informed by the knowledge of warning signs. Work (2016) emphasizes the role of parents, caregivers, and school teachers in creating awareness of CSA warning signs as the main tool which can be used to reduce or combat the increasing incidents of CSA. The common CSA warning signs as observed by Wurtele & Owens (1997) include fear of some people or places, developing new names for genitals, running away from home, delaying to return home from school, and developing a lying habit. From this assertion, it is evident that reporting or disclosing CSA warning signs depends on the knowledge imparted correctly to the survivors about CSA and warning signs. It is the established mutual trust between children and significant others (person or places) which can facilitate the reporting process. On the other hand, Worku (2016) pointed out that the increasing incidents of CSA provide evidence of failing to create awareness of warning signs among parents and expanding gap between parents and their children, where no platform is available for them to share numerous challenges around their welfare.

About the magnitude of CSA incidents, UNICEF (2017) observed that the cases of CSA are increasing at an alarming rate where at least fifteen (15) million children are sexually abused globally every year. Further, UNICEF (2018) reported that 150 million girls and 73 million boys globally were raped or exposed to other forms of sexual abuse including sexual exploitation, early marriage, and phonograph. Moreover, WHO (2020) pointed that 120 million children have suffered some form of forced sexual contact. On the same note, Selengia, Thuy & Mushi (2020) revealed that Africa and Asia are the leading regions globally with cases of CSA. For instance, in Africa the cases range from 2.1% to 68.7% among girls and for boys, it ranges from 4.1% to 60%. In Asia, it ranges from 3.3% - 42.7% for girls and for boys, 4.1%- 58%. All these cases were recorded for children under the age of 14. In the context of Tanzania, 10,551 causes were reported in 2016 whereas 13,457 were reported in 2017. The increase amounted to more than 3000 cases. Furthermore, 14, 491 incidences of CSA were reported, showing an increase from the previous year of more than 1,000 cases. Moreover, in the year 2019, cases of CSA recorded in Tanzania were 15,680, which indicated an increase of more than 1100 cases

(URT -Tanzania Police Force Annual Reports for the years 2019; 2018; 2017; and 2016). It is this thread of CSA cases that call for immediate intervention to end it. Looking at the presented cases of CSA, this paper seeks to assess the contribution that can be made through the knowledge of reporting points on CSA cases among pupils in the Dar es Salaam region.

Additionally, the knowledge of reporting CSA warning signs among children is still limited especially in developing countries, Tanzania in particular. For instance, several authors, such as Martinello (2019); Wurtele & Kenny (2010); Wurtele & Owens (1997); and Wurtele (2009) have conducted studies on signs of CSA and reporting points. However, their studies were carried out in developed countries thus their findings cannot be generalised to developing countries like Tanzania. Further to that, Worku (2016) and Mantula & Saloojee (2016) conducted studies about reporting CSA in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe respectively. In the context of Tanzania, Mlyakado & Li (2018) have written about sexual exploitation; Mlekwa, Nyamhanga, Chalya & Urassa (2016) wrote about knowledge, attitude, and practices around CSA; McCrann (2017) has researched about CSA in Tanzania; Mccrann, Lalor & Katabaro (2006) conducted their study about CSA among University students. Apart from the identified studies from developed and developing countries, so far, no study has been conducted on reporting CSA cases in Tanzania. Hence, this study fills this research gap by examining the signs of CSA and reporting points in Tanzania.

Methodology

The study was conducted in selected primary schools with high incidences of CSA based on cases reported to Police Stations. The primary schools involved were Buza, Mwananyamala B, Tabata and Ubungo National Housing. Records from each Council's Primary Education Officer show that these schools are among the leading top three on incidents of CSA.

The study was exploratory as it intended to collect participants' opinions and perceptions towards reporting or disclosure of CSA warning signs, their trusted individuals and reporting points among children. The data collection process was carried out using key informants' interviews with primary school children from four schools. Data collection methods provided accurate information on the reporting points and trusted individuals or places among children. Further, Petrova (2014) noted that with a purposive selection of participants, the number of interviewees is less important than the criteria used to select them. For this reason, purposive sampling was used to select the participants who were knowledgeable and were exposed to CSA incidents.

The selection of the participants was guided by Tanzania Police Force captured records where the selected pupils had reported CSA encounters at the police stations. The selection targeted pupils who were 10 to 14 years old from class five and six at the time of data collection for this study. The study had a sample size of 96 where 24 children were selected from each school while observing gender, among other factors. Moreover, three focus group discussions composed of 8 pupils each were conducted from each school. Focus group discussions were employed in this study to collect information from pupils in four primary schools. These schools had more incidents of CSA and the selected pupils had first-hand information related to CSA warning signs and the reporting points or trusted individuals around them. According to Dickson, Ryan, Campbell, Jenner & Mortimer (2020), the method allows the researcher to clarify unfolded issues and hidden meanings presented by the participants. Moreover, Petrova (2014) noted that for any qualitative study to clearly identify themes and emerging issues, the software of Atlas.ti is highly recommended though it is not more complex than other software used to save

the same purpose. It is for this reason that the obtained data were analysed using Atlas.ti to generate key themes and emerging issues related to warning signs and reporting points.

FINDINGS

The results of this study are presented in three sub-sections namely knowledge of child sexual abuse, reporting points, and trusted individuals among pupils. Specifically, the participants are from Buza, Tabata, Mwananyamala, and Ubungo National Housing. The study had 96 participants, 24 from each school. The participants were given codes for research anonymity. All pupils from Buza primary school were given codes from B1 to B24; codes M1 to M24 for Mwananyamala, T1 to T24 for Tabata and U1 to U24 for Ubungo National Housing.

Knowledge of Child Sexual Abuse Warning Signs

The findings show that children have limited knowledge of CSA warning signs. They have no one to talk to about the signs. Further, the findings show that some parents and teachers do not take time to learn from children's behaviour. For instance, some parents still have trust in some relatives when they visit their homes. Children are forced to seat closer to them even in a situation where they are not comfortable. The findings further revealed that children are abused by close relatives while at their home. However, due to limited knowledge of CSA warning signs, parents are not able to identify it before causing unbearable pain to the child. Moreover, it was revealed that some teachers are occupied with their routine work and therefore they have no time to observe changes in behaviour among children.

Reporting Point of Child Sexual Abuse Warning Signs The findings revealed that children always report the signs of CSA warning to places where they are valued. Actually, children showed how challenging it is for them to report to the police station or community office while others indicated a school as the only place where they can easily report. It was also observed and pointed out by some pupils that some schools have suggestion boxes for them to drop messages related to CSA warning signs. It was further revealed that sometimes when they observe their fellow children with some of these signs or developing some behaviour that relates to sexual abuse, his or her name is also reported using the dropping boxes. Further, the findings indicated that children considered police stations as a place for people who have committed serious crimes. For them, the police station is not the right place for reporting incidents of CSA. On the same note, other children indicated not to have access to their parents' phones so that they can directly call the child helpline to report the CSA warning signs or accidents.

Discussion of Findings Knowledge of Child Sexual Abuse Warning Signs

The findings generally reveal that most of the participants in this study did not know the CSA warning signs before they encountered CSA victimisation. During the time of data collection, these children were in classes 5 and 6. This gives an impression that many other children are still lacking the knowledge of CSA warning signs thus, justifying the reasons for the increase of CSA incidents. The findings of this study support Hill's (2016) study that argues that the prevention of CSA has to shift from its traditional focus from addressing the consequences of CSA to imparting knowledge of CSA warning signs as a preventive measure.

The findings further observed the surrounding environment which does not support the process of imparting knowledge of CSA warning signs. When children are at home they depend on their parents or caregivers to impart CSA knowledge of warning signs while at school teachers are expected to do the same. However, the findings indicated that all participants become aware of the warning signs after their CSA victimisation. In reality, the process of imparting knowledge of warning signs cannot wait until victimisation takes

place. The findings of this study agree with Martinello (2019) whose study noted that children are always in constant interaction with the surrounding environment which may include the immediate or distant environment. However, their interaction has to facilitate the learning process. The imparting of CSA warning signs has to take place in order to protect them against the increasing incidents of CSA. In addition, Cirik, Efe, and Velipaşaoğlu (2019) recognised the role of parents and teachers. According to them, for any programme intending to successfully impart CSA knowledge of warning signs to children, it has to actively involve parents and teachers. This is because children have more time at home or school and it is also in the two places where CSA victimisation mostly occurs.

Thus, any intervention to combat CSA must take into account the role of parents and teachers with whom children spend most of their time. Moreover, the findings show that some children are exposed to CSA due to their parents forcing them to remain around the perpetrator just because they were close relatives or respected guests. For this reason, we have noted many children are forced to stay with people whom they are not comfortable with as they have already demonstrated sexual advances. In addition, when a child drags her/ his feet to return home, it is easy for the peers or teacher to identify the child given the fact that the peer knows CSA warning signs. In the absence of this, the child is more likely to be victimised. These findings are in line with the findings by Worku (2016) who noted that many parents have no time to follow up on their children's time to return home from school. Many of the parents are occupied with socio- economic activities and the lives of children are left on the shoulders of teachers. Furthermore, children are forced to remain loyal to any guest or relative at home. Due to limited knowledge of CSA warning signs among parents, when a child tries to stay away from guests because of their unwanted sexual advances, they are considered as being disrespectful and shaming them. This situation has led to increased incidents of CSA as the perpetrators take advantage of the inadequate knowledge of CSA warning signs.

Reporting Points

It was revealed that disclosing CSA warning signs and trust are closely linked. Knowing the reporting points was one thing and reporting CSA was completely another thing. Participants indicated that one cannot disclose warning signs to individuals whom they do not trust. It is, therefore trust that is needed before disclosing any CSA warning signs. School teachers were mentioned as the best option for children to disclose the CSA encounters and warning signs. This implies that teachers had won the trust of the children ostensibly because they had more time with them. Since parents have no time to talk to their children about CSA warning signs, this task has been taken over by the school teachers who are trusted by children as they can confide in them about issues of sex and sexuality. In support of the findings, Plummer & Njuguna (2009) also noted that it is trust and friendly relationship between the child and parents or caregivers that facilitates reporting of CSA warning signs. However, due to strong traditions and taboos, children are not allowed to talk about sexual matters with or before adults.

Additionally, the findings show that children do not use the national child helpline as an alternative when their parents or caregivers cannot be accessible for various reasons. It was further indicated that due to limited knowledge of using the phone even when it has a password, children cannot report any CSA incidence as their parents' phones were inaccessible. These findings are in line with the African Child Policy Forum (2016) which argues that there is a limited accessibility to the national child helpline in many parts of Tanzania. Further, Al-Eissa (2018) indicated limited knowledge among children as to how to access their services using various phones, especially the cell-phone with a password or

which is locked. This may imply that inaccessibility and limited knowledge of using cell-phone, which is locked, makes children find it difficult to report any incident related to CSA warning signs.

Furthermore, children underscored the usefulness of message-dropping boxes in schools in bringing to light CSA-related tendencies. Children can write and drop their messages in the box. The responsible teacher then collects the messages and deals with each of them while observing all required ethics so as not to cause harm to all parts involved. This method is very useful, especially in a situation where the perpetrator is a family member or trusted person. This observation supports the study conducted by UNICEF (2020) that noted that the method of message-dropping boxes helps shy children to open up by writing and dropping the message into the box at school. It may also help to save other children who are seen in unsafe environments because their peers may just drop a message in the box for them to be supported out of possible victimisation.

The participants, i.e., children also identified the Child and Women Police Gender Desk as one of the points where CSA warning signs can be reported. However, it was indicated that lack of confidence prevents children from visiting the office which is within the police stations. Police officers at the desk have not taken time to visit schools so that children can develop trust and confidence in them. The officers come to schools when there is a CSA incident to handle. This practice does not build trust between children and police officers hence students cannot report any CSA that they encounter. Supporting these results, Mussa & Mohamed (2019) indicated that police officers normally remain indoors waiting for the social problems to happen or to be reported for them to jump into action. With such an approach, it becomes difficult for children to be aware of their services since they cannot just visit the police station. Besides, this approach should be discouraged because it seeks to provide remedy instead of preventing CSA. Police officers, therefore, have to revive community outreach programmes. They should be visiting schools to create awareness of warning signs and build trust and confidence among children. This would make it easier for them to report any warning signs to the police desk as soon as they notice them. This will help to prevent CSA incidents from happening.

Conclusion and Implication

The study findings have revealed the inadequate knowledge of warning signs among children before falling victims of CSA thus rendering them difficult to report. Despite the age of a child, it is therefore important to impart the said knowledge so that children can be informed. It is from this point of view, therefore, that CSA can be brought to an end in Tanzania when the knowledge of CSA warning signs is imparted to children, parents, teachers and significant others.

Recommendations

There are various efforts taken by the government and stakeholders to end CSA although they have not been successful. Most of these efforts have not placed the child at the centre. Children are treated as partakers of the decision made to protect them. It is therefore high time gave priority to the aspects of imparting knowledge of CSA warning signs and reporting points to children so that they are well versed with it.

Limitations

The presented findings are from the selected primary schools in Dar es Salaam where teachers, parents, police officers, community leaders and members were not involved. It can be said that their knowledge of CSA warning signs and reporting points is still not known. This is a limitation as it is hard to develop an inclusive intervention that takes into account all the stakeholders concerned.

Areas for Further Study

To have a comprehensive prevention of CSA, there is a need to conduct studies around CSA warning signs and reporting points where various stakeholders around children are involved. It may include parents, teachers, siblings, community leaders, and religious leaders, government officials, especially decision and policymakers, and community members. Further, it should be conducted in various locations especially in rural areas where it seems few studies on CSA have been carried out.

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