



## SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS: THE NEED FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study explores sexual abuse of school children by teachers in senior secondary schools in Botswana. It adopts a cross-sectional quantitative approach. Data was collected from 3 senior secondary schools in the capital city of Gaborone, where the study was conducted. A survey questionnaire was self-administered to 330 randomly selected participants of which 300 were students and 30 teachers. Each school comprised 100 students and 10 teachers. The study utilised social exchange theory to explain human interactions related to sexual abuse of students by teachers. The findings provide evidence that sexual abuse is hidden and is a detrimental experience for school children. It also emerged from the findings that there were many factors that contribute to sexual abuse of children by teachers in schools, and many victims do not report the abuse for fear of blame or further victimisation by the perpetrators. This paper examines implications for social work practice given that social workers, by the nature of their work, intervene at individual, family and societal level. Lastly, future research, policy direction, and implications are discussed.*

**KEY TERMS:** *Sexual abuse, social work, social exchange theory, Botswana.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse has been considered one of the most serious public health problems facing society and the young themselves. A sizeable amount of literature provides evidence that, to a greater or a lesser extent, child abuse is a historical constant that occurs in all cultures and societies at any level (Boland, 2006; Ryan, 2011; Koome, 2012). Child sexual abuse is therefore not an isolated, sporadic or distant reality, but rather a complex and universal problem which results from the interaction of individuals and families, and social and cultural factors (Flitter et al., 2003). The realisation that child sexual abuse is a common form of maltreatment with significant and lasting psychological effects in both the short and long term has led to increasing social and professional interest being shown over the last decade. It is worth noting that, while there is a paucity of data on positive relations between students and teachers in the education system, there is also little documentation of unprofessional relations, especially sexual abuse of students, by teachers in schools due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon. The problem of sexual abuse of children by teachers in the education system is not new worldwide and Botswana, like other countries, has not been spared in this regard.

Concerns in Botswana have been expressed by media, civil society organizations, practitioners, and the community at large on the plight of these children. The subject thus deserves attention as it threatens to violate children's rights. To this end, it is imperative for all relevant stakeholders to develop context specific strategies to address this issue. While there is acknowledgment that teacher codes of conduct forbid them from engaging in unprofessional relations with their students, these codes have not been explicit in terms of protection of the rights of children in this regard. The overall aim of this present study was to explore sexual abuse of children by teachers in senior secondary schools in Gaborone. Additionally, the study outlined the effects of sexual abuse on students, and considered how social work practice could effectively intervene. Significant numbers of social workers practise in child wellbeing and protection settings in a range of roles including direct clinical social work, management, and policy. As a result, social workers are recognised throughout the world as a core professional group in child protection policy, management, and practice. The theoretical framework to explain factors that might be contributing to sexual abuse of students by teachers is discussed in the next section.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although most researchers do not use explicit theoretical perspectives to explain the incidence or sexual abuse at senior secondary schools, a number of theories can be identified in the biological, developmental, pathological, abuse of power, and cultural domain. Of these, Stein et al (1993) and Lee et al (1996) have mainly applied power theory to empirical research on sexual harassment and hence offer a degree of credibility. One of the tenets of power theory is the "abuse of organizational power". This implies that, within organizations, people have different levels of access to positions of power. The power hierarchy places supervisors in a possible position to misuse their authority. For instance, within schools teachers have power over students. Therefore, according to Jewkes et al (2005) and Jones (2006) who have studied teacher-student sexual relations, this organizational power perspective can explain the phenomenon. However, for purposes of the present study, sexual abuse of school children by teachers is analysed through the application of social exchange theory.

According to Robbins (2000) social exchange theory posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Based on this tenet, it is argued that when a person perceives the costs of an abusive relationship as outweighing the perceived benefits then the person will choose to leave the relationship. The theory posits that, because individuals have different expectations of relationships, an individual's satisfaction with a relationship depends on more than just the outcome. For any two people with the same outcome, their level of satisfaction may differ based on their expectations (Payne, 2005). One person may not expect very large outcomes, and therefore would be more easily satisfied in an abusive relationship than someone who expects less. This notion of satisfaction is formalised as the difference between the outcome and the comparison level. Satisfaction is not enough to determine whether a person stays in an abusive relationship or leaves for an alternative one.

### *Profits within a relationship*

At the heart of social exchange theory is the notion of profit (Robbins, 2000). The theory asserts that people choose to be in relationships from which they expect profitable outcomes. Taking this into consideration, profits can consist of benefits and rewards that may be material (economic) or symbolic (such as attention, advice or status). Robbins et al (2004: 364) simply define rewards as, "things that either have value or bring satisfaction and gratification to the individual". Therefore, in this regard, social exchange theory assumes that children in school engage in sexual relations with teachers for a wide range of reasons which have also been identified in the present study. These include financial gain, material benefits, being given special favours in the school setting, and many others.

### ***Norm of reciprocity in exchanges***

The above tenet refers to the expectations that, if one receives a reward, the favour would be returned in some way, such as in the exchange of gifts (Robbins et al., 2004). The theory therefore recognises the fact that a teacher who attracts school children with material gain ultimately influences the students to reciprocate. It can be concluded that the material gains obtained by students from teachers put students under pressure and coerce them (in a way) to reciprocate, which, in relation to the current study, would be sexual favours. However, social exchange theory should be applied with caution in the case of sexual abuse owing to the fact that it becomes impossible to make an operational distinction between what people value and perceive as rewards. Rewards, values, and actions appear to be defined in terms of each other. Thus, it is impossible to find an instance when a person does not act in way to obtain rewards unless it is to avoid punishment or threat.

### ***Exchange dynamics in a relationship***

In social exchange theory there is the assumption that dependence and power are inversely related while resources and power are positively, and in linear fashions related (Payne, 2005). This is to suggest that social exchange theorists address bases of power by focusing on the constructs of resources and dependence. In relation to the present study, the theory is relevant as it offers an explanation that a teacher, through possessing resources, is a powerful figure as compared to a student in any established sexual relationship between the two because a student does not have resources. The concept of power and dependence further brings out the aspect of least interest which suggests that the person who is less eager to preserve the relationship is the one who dominates it. This suggest that a teacher is a partner who does not place any value on sexual abuse with a student, as he/she is not interested in preserving their professional relationship but only in satisfaction of sexual desires.

## **METHODS**

### ***Participants***

The sample included 330 participants from 3 senior secondary schools in Gaborone, Botswana. Out of the 330 participants, 300 were students (100 school A, 100 school B, and 100 school C) and 30 teachers (10 in each school). There were many students participants owing to the fact that a great deal of insight was sought from the students. In other words, that was where the study was focused. Of all the students who participated in the study, 77% were aged 16-17 years, 22% 18-19 years, and only 1% 20 years. With regard to gender, 141 were males and 159 females. As for teacher participants, 11 were males and 19 females.

### ***Sampling technique***

The survey used a multi-stage stratified sampling design dictating that the analysis should use a complex sample module to account for multiple stages of sampling. It is worth noting that this was a case study of senior secondary schools in Gaborone and not all of them could be studied. The researcher obtained information from the Ministry of Education & Skills Development, which showed a total of 5 government senior secondary schools in Gaborone. For the reason that generally it is impossible to study the entire population, the researcher relied on sampling to acquire a relevant section of senior secondary schools to observe.

In order to produce a representative sample of all government senior secondary schools in Gaborone, out of total of 5 such schools, 3 were selected as primary sampling sites. The second sampling was classrooms within the 3 schools which were selected as study sites. In order to select classrooms, a list of classes in each school (i.e school A, school B, and school C) was ordered by grade while 10 form 4 classes in each sampled school were randomly selected. From the chosen 10 classes, 10 participants were selected using simple random sampling. As for teacher participants, of the 10 classes sampled the class teacher constituted a teacher respondent.

### ***Survey instrument***

There were 2 questionnaires for the study, one for teachers and one for students. Both questionnaires consisted of 6 sections: (a) demographic details; (b) existence of sexual abuse of children by teachers in the school; (c) factors contributing to this abuse; (d) effects of the abuse; (e) measures in place to address this abuse in the school system; and (f) the need for school social work intervention. Nearly all questions were closed ended, yet there were small sections where participants were asked to describe their experience of this abuse in their schools in more details. It is worth noting that the questionnaire also included a number of vignettes accompanied by a series of closed ended questions.

### ***Procedure***

The instrument (survey questionnaire) was administered to selected participants in their classrooms by the principal investigator with the help of a research assistant. It is of paramount importance to note that, before the survey was to take place, arrangements were made with school heads and teachers with pupils who were to participate in the study. The school heads sent out letters to the participating learners' parents and, on the day of

the survey, there were discussions about the survey to participating classes. Parental/guardian consent was sought and learners assent was obtained before being selected to participate or volunteer to take part in the study.

The research assistant collected all letters sent to parents/guardians and verified that they were signed. The learners whose parents/guardians did not consent were not allowed to take part in the study. The students completed a self-administered questionnaire during study time in the afternoon. Therefore, all participating students did so at the same time to avoid collusion. The aim and purpose of the study was explained to all participants and it was impressed upon them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The researcher also emphasized to participants that the information collected was confidential and would only be used for purposes of the study. It was interesting to note that none of the participants withdrew after agreeing to participate.

### ***Analysis***

Since the research was quantitative in nature, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used in data analysis. Statistical data in the form of tabulations were used due to the fact that the data entry was numeric. All responses to research questions were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and charts. Moreover, for a very few open ended questions, the researcher identified underlying meanings and summarised all data with the aim of identifying major themes. Social exchange theory was used in the data analysis for interpretation of the study results.

It can be concluded that whilst the application of social exchange theory to child sexual abuse is an interesting idea, there is a danger that the complex power dynamics are overlooked. For instance, while children may choose to leave an abusive relationship when the costs of the relationship outweigh the benefits suggests that sexual abuse is something that survivors can opt in and out of, hence opening the door for victim blaming. The theory is also incorporated in the next section on presentation and discussion of results.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Often, though not always, social research represents an invasion of people's lives, as it seeks to gather personal information and, as such, participants should be protected (Babbie, 2010). It is a requirement that everyone undertaking research in Botswana should obtain a research permit from the relevant arm of Government. Therefore, the project was approved by both the Research Ethics Council at the University of Botswana and the Ministry of Education & Skills Development. That is to say permission was sought and granted.

It is worth noting that participants were informed that the study was voluntary and they were not coerced into providing information. They were also fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research. The researcher assured participants that all the information they provided would be kept confidential. To adhere to anonymity, information from each participant was analysed in such a way that it could not be traced to any specific individual. For example, names of participants were not used and they were given numbers instead. Due to the sensitivity of some of the questions, the researcher expected some emotional reactions from students and thus was committed to protecting participants from anything that would harm them, either physically or psychologically during data collection. Guidance and counselling teachers were nearby to assist with counselling during and after the survey if the need arose.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The main purpose of the study was to explore sexual abuse of children by teachers in senior secondary schools in order to inform research, policies, and social work intervention programmes with regard to the issue. It is of utmost importance to note that in the analysis of the results during the coding process four themes emerged. Following demographic characteristics, the themes are discussed; existence of sexual abuse of school children, contributing factors, the effects of sexual abuse, teacher code of conduct, and the need for social work intervention in the school.

### ***Demographic characteristics***

**Table 1:** *Gender of student participants*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Students</i>			<i>Total</i>
School	A	B	C	3 schools
Male	52	31	58	141
Female	48	69	42	159
Total	100	100	100	<b>300</b>

The above table shows the gender distribution of participants. There were more female participant than male as shown by the frequency of females which was 53% in contrast to 47% for males. This is related to the fact that the population of females was more than that of males in all three sampled schools and thus the sample was influenced by this reality.

**Table 2:** *Gender of teacher participants*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Teacher</i>			<i>Total</i>
School	A	B	C	3 schools
Male	4	3	4	11
Female	6	7	6	19
Total	10	10	10	<b>30</b>

With regard to the gender of the teacher participants, there were also more females than males. This might imply that there are more female teachers in senior secondary schools as compared to male teachers in Botswana. However, that assertion would not be sustainable as this was not a national study.

**Table 3:** *Age of student participants*

Age	A	B	C	3 schools
16-17	76	82	72	230
18-19	24	16	27	67
20+	0	2	1	3
Total	10	10	10	<b>30</b>

The study comprised 300 student participants (100, school A), (100, school B) and (100, school C) aged between 16 -20 years. Most of the participants (77%) were aged 16-17 years, 22% 18-19 years, and only 1% was aged 20. The age distribution of the participants is a true reflection of the current Botswana Education Policy of 1994, which states that a child should enter primary school at age of 6 to 7, then spend almost 10 years in basic education. Therefore, it is expected that from age of 16 to around 19 years the young person would be in a senior secondary school. As stated in the methodology section, consent to use pupils as participants was obtained from parents prior to the study.

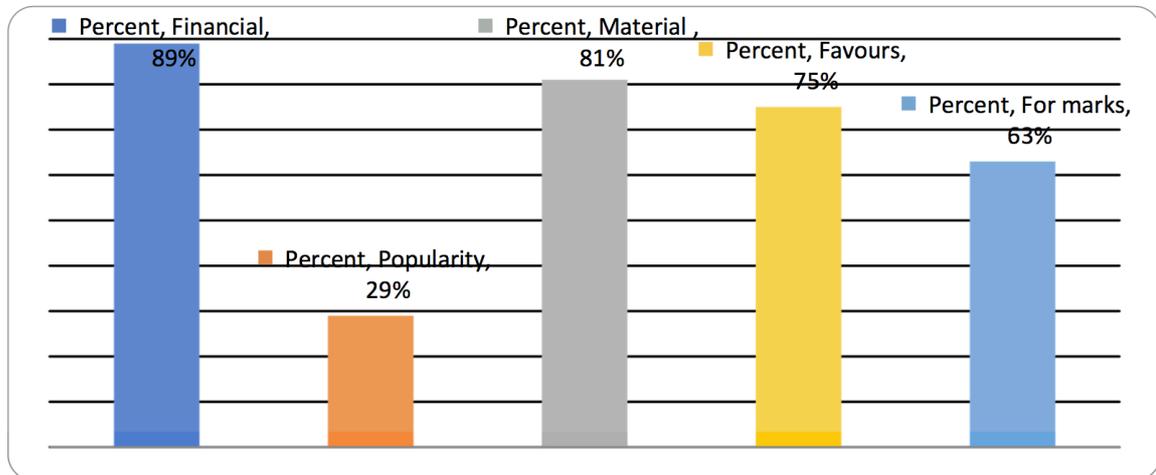
#### ***Existence of sexual abuse of school children in schools***

It is evident from the results that sexual abuse of students exists in senior secondary schools in Botswana. Out of the total population, 83% of participants indicated that sexual abuse of students by teachers takes place. The results agree with Boland (2006) who says that the phenomenon of sexual abuse of students by teachers is not something new; it has existed for a long time in schools as well as in many universities around the world. Similarly, Bagele & Bennell (2003) also confirm that sexual relations between students and teachers take place in Botswana. However, it is important to note that the magnitude of sexual abuse in all senior secondary schools in Botswana is not known. This was a case study of three senior secondary schools and the method adopted cannot be used to generalise results to all other senior secondary schools in the country.

The present study found no significant differences in prevalence rates for most of the moderator variables, and it can therefore be concluded that the findings regarding the experience of sexual abuse by school children are similar when methodological, social, and demographic variables are controlled for. Given that child sexual abuse is, in most cases, a traumatic experience that interferes with the survivor's development and has negative repercussions for his/her physical and psychological wellbeing in both the short and long term, there is thus a need for obtaining unbiased prevalence rates that enable Botswana, and other countries in Africa to develop suitable preventive strategies to curb sexual abuse of children in schools.

### *Contributing factors to sexual abuse of school children*

**Figure 1:** *Likely contributing factors to sexual abuse*

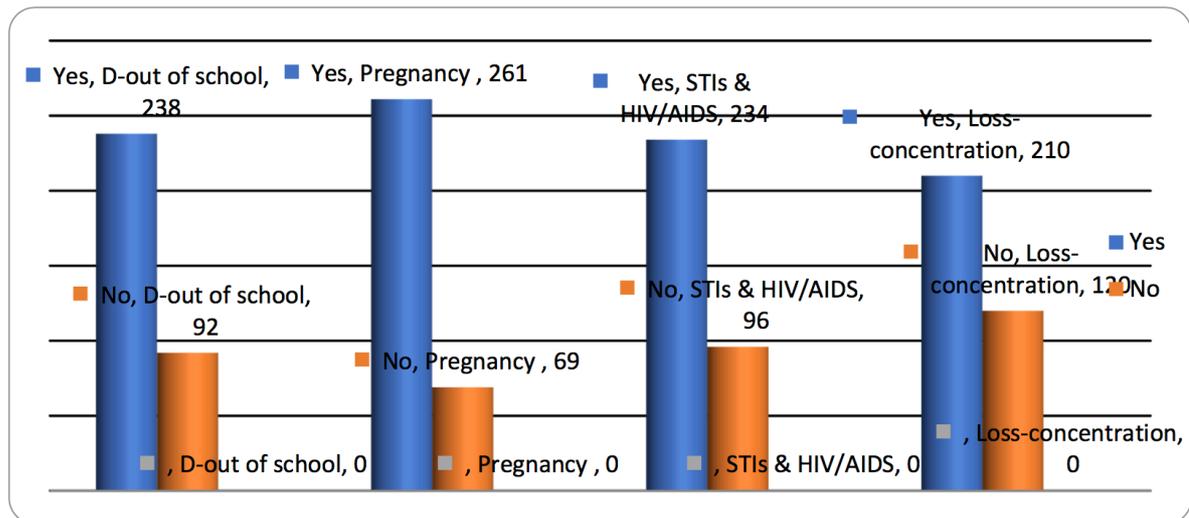


As stated in the above figure, the student participants expressed different views regarding factors that contribute to sexual abuse by teachers. A majority of participants (89%) indicated that financial gain is the main contributing factor, followed by 81% who cited material gains. Favouritism was indicated by 75% of the participants and a minority of 29% indicated popularity as one of the contributory factors. It may be concluded that the results are in line with social exchange theory which posits that people choose to be in a relationship from which they expect profit. The results are supported by the theory in that it states that rewards may be material (economic) or symbolic (such as attention, advice or status). Bobbins et al (2000) further define rewards as things that either have value or bring satisfaction and gratification to the individual.

The results also show that material gains include, being bought expensive gadgets and mobile phones, which according to social exchange theory might be considered as rewards or contributing factors. Similarly, even for teacher participants, results show multiple contributory factors that lead teachers sexually abusing students. Out of the teacher participants, a majority (73%) indicated that students were said to sometimes contribute to their own sexual abuse through their seductive behaviour and mode of dress. Some of the factors mentioned by participants include abuse of power by teachers, and lust on the part of involved teachers in seeking to satisfy their sexual needs. This, according to social exchange theory, is a form of reward for the teacher. It is worth noting that the results are further supported by a study in Uganda by Young People's Voice (2003) that female students were promised good marks in class, money and clothing in exchange for sexual favours with teachers. Some students even reported that they were promised marriage or payment of their school fees and school uniform (Young People's Voice, 2003). It may thus be concluded that with these promises, students tend to be vulnerable and have difficulty in resisting sexual abuse by teachers.

### *Effects of student's sexual abuse*

**Figure 2:** *Likely effects of student's sexual abuse*



The results of the present study indicate that child abuse by teachers has a host of negative physical, emotional, psychological, and educational repercussions for the sexually abused learner. It can be concluded that sexual abuse undermines the development of students’ cognitive competencies and skills, and it can also have a detrimental effect on their level of trust in others. As shown in the above figure, a majority of participants reported pregnancy as the main likely effects of sexual abuse, followed by dropping out of school, risk of STIs and HIV infection, and loss of concentration. This finding is consistent with Hyman & Snook (2000) who assert that abuse of this nature can lead to lower motivation for school attendance, incompleteness of academic assignments, and negative student-teacher interaction.

It can further be deduced from the present study findings that students may also experience difficulty paying attention; staying on task; thinking clearly; focusing on schoolwork in general; and performing at lower levels, academically, in measures of ability and achievement. The factors cited according to the present study can significantly affect academic progress and impede promotion to subsequent grade levels, placing students who have been sexually abused at risk of failing in school and potentially dropping out of the education system. It follows that these results can be strong indicators to social workers that a student may be experiencing some level of abuse at school.

The effects of abuse perpetrated by teachers can be generalised from the findings of other researchers (Noel & Malinga, 2015) that emotionally maltreated students may feel isolated and withdrawn from other students. Magiolo (1998) reported that both emotionally and sexually abused children not only remain excluded during opportunities for free play with other children but also exhibit withdrawal symptoms. It can be argued that some of these sexually abused children tend to interact only rarely with their peers and lack a sense of humour. Their ability to perceive, feel, understand, and express emotions can be significantly impaired. Hyman & Snook (2000) reveal that students who experience abuse in the classroom display behavioural problems in school. Students may thus become rebellious and belligerent towards teachers or display impulsive aggressive behaviours. Additionally, the study findings indicate that students who are sexually abused by teachers eventually have lost respect for them.

**Teacher codes of conduct regarding sexual abuse of students**

The most significant finding from the present study is that such codes are unclear regarding sexual abuse of students by teachers which was reflected by 78% of teacher participants. The results indicate that these codes are broad and nonspecific on the issue of sexual abuse of students by teachers. The Botswana Teaching Act chapter 62:01 state that where disciplinary proceedings taken against a teacher the appropriate procedures (*which are not defined according to the Act*) shall be commenced as soon as possible. In addition, section 13 states that, where the director becomes aware of allegations of misconduct against a teacher, s/he may institute disciplinary proceedings to investigate such allegations.

There is no clear statement as to what the misconduct may be and whether or not sexual abuse of students by teachers should be regarded as misconduct. Currently, if a teacher is caught engaging in nonprofessional conduct with a student, school authorities can resort to giving warnings or possible transfers of the teacher concerned. However, this does not solve the problem on the grounds that a transferred teacher may continue with such behaviour in his/her new teaching environment. Moreover, it leaves the opportunity for manifestations of sexual abuse to continue to be tolerated in schools.

### *The need for social workers in schools*

Towards the end of the survey questionnaire, there was a section on whether there is need to employ social workers in schools to address the issue of sexual abuse of children by teachers. All the teacher participants (100%) indicated that there is urgent need for social workers in the school system. This was also supported by a majority of student participants (92%). In developed Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea, social workers are employed in the schools on full time basis. Moreover, school social work is offered as an area of specialisation in tertiary education institutions. Perhaps African countries such as Botswana and elsewhere can draw valuable lessons from these Asian countries. It is worth noting that, though the current study results did not clearly elaborate on how the role of social workers in schools could be operationalized, it is important to draw valuable information in the literature on sub-Saharan concerning sexual relationships between students and teachers as there has been interesting debates in this regard (see Jewkes, 2002; Luke, 2004, 2006; Manos, 2005; Maundeni & Ntseane, 2004; Diraditsile, 2012). These scholars recognise the need for social workers in schools to address the plight of affected children.

Based on the presentation and discussion of the results of the present study the next section will address the abuse of children in schools. It succinctly explains the kind of support that school social workers can offer to children and families affected by the practice.

### **THE NEED FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION**

The social work profession has a long tradition of involvement with the child welfare system, working to support thousands of children and their families who are victims of child abuse and neglect every year (Jacques, 2003). Social work seeks to enhance the social functioning of individuals, groups, and communities. According to IFSW (2014) social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (IFSW, 2014). As such, social workers draw on a broad range of theories, knowledge, research, and skills to ensure comprehensive and holistic analysis of a client's situation. Social work assessments range from targeted and brief specific needs analyses through comprehensive holistic psychosocial and risk assessments of the full range of social and psychological needs, strengths and stressors (Hepworth, 2002). These assessments underpin targeted and needs based interventions to address the social and emotional issues that are impacting the individual's health, development and wellbeing.

Based on the above and the roles of social workers in general, it is the contention of this paper that it is essential that the Botswana Government employs social workers in state schools in addressing child abuse. Maundeni & Ntseane (2004) posit that school social work is an area of specialisation within the social work profession that aims to help children develop their social, emotional and intellectual abilities as fully as possible within the context of the school system. The authors further contend that it aims to confront complex issues facing children and helping them to acquire the knowledge and skills to deal with their problems, succeed in their school careers, and become responsible citizens in the future. The literature also shows that school social workers are concerned with a wide range of social problems that children face as they interact with their environment (Diraditsile & Mabote, 2017). Hence, it can be argued that school social workers do not only work with children but also engage parents, teachers, and school administrators, utilising a variety of professional skills and techniques to intervene effectively in different situations.

However, it should be noted that, despite the structural and socio-economic factors that are deemed to be responsible for the plight of children, Baah (2000) asserts that it is imperative to consider deep-seated cultural norms that also constitute impediments to the implementation and enforcement of universal ideals such as the protection of girls from sexual abuse. For instance, in many African countries the taboo and silence concerning sex make it difficult for young girls to disclose issues of sexual abuse to their parents or guardians for fear of being labelled as bad. Maundeni & Diraditsile (2016) state that social workers strive to be culturally responsive yet at times this puts them at odds with their human rights culture, the authors further indicated that, in Botswana, it is commonly believed that children should be seen and not heard and adults should make decisions for them. This contradicts social workers' attempts to give children a voice and engage them in decisions that affect their lives. Therefore, this paper argues that, should trained social workers in Botswana be employed in schools, they would be able to challenge these cultural taboos and practices through critical mass education of parents, teachers, and the general public. This would raise awareness of the seriousness and the psychosocial effects of sexual abuse on the mental and emotional development of children and long-term implications in adult life.

It is worth of mention that child welfare services in Botswana continue to follow the British model of statutory care as outlined in the Children's Act (Government of Botswana, 2009). The Children's Act has given legitimacy to the social work profession and opened the door for the participation of social workers in the design and implementation of programmes for children. It has also created a demand for trained child protection and child welfare workers, which has, in turn, increased the demand for social work education (Mupedziswa & Jacques,

2011). This Children's Act stipulates various provisions for the protection of children from abuse and exploitation in Botswana.

It is noteworthy that this law takes into account the unique socio-cultural context of Botswana, prohibiting (among other practices) exploitative labour, child neglect and many other forums of child abusive and neglect. However, budgetary allocation for the implementation of this policy by the Department of Social Protection in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development which have been designated as the institutions responsible for the protection of children in the country has been woefully inadequate. Moreover, the findings of the study have shown that, there has not been any allocation for research to critically examine the issues, incidences, and prevalence of the various types of abuse, neglect, and exploitation suffered by children in schools. In fact, the provision of funding by UNICEF and other foreign donor agencies for child welfare initiatives and general welfare provision in Botswana often surpasses government agencies contribution.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

A glaring gap exists between research and programme intervention activities in Botswana. Social work intervention programmes are no exception. Evidence abounds suggesting that many social work interventions and programmes meant to address child welfare issues in Botswana are not based on any grounded research or empirical evidence. It is imperative that all social work interventions be informed and guided by research. It is only through the use of scientific data thus generated that government can design well informed policies and social work intervention programmes to effectively meet the needs and aspirations of children and thus reduce the number of the school "dropouts" and the rate of child abuse, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and sexual harassment.

It is worthy of note that the sample size in this current study cannot claim to represent all focus of sexual abuse of school going children in all senior secondary schools in Botswana owing to the fact that it was not a national study. It was location specific as it was conducted in Gaborone. The findings of this research may contribute to the existing body of knowledge in many professional areas, education in particular, with respect to sexual abuse and its consequences for the overall performance of the education system and society in general. Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah (1999) assert that research is key to public enlightenment which, in turn, is the key to prevention. Therefore, since there are multiple causes for the maltreatment and abuse of children, there is a need to establish multidisciplinary national and regional scientific databases on the incidence, prevalence, dimensions, and consequences of all forms of child abuse and neglect to enable a more organized and collaborative approach towards finding permanent, durable, and sustainable solutions to the problem.

As has been mentioned, several factors such as a culture of silence, non-acknowledgment of sexual abuse of school-going children by teachers as a social problem, and unreliable or inadequate records from law enforcement agencies have been identified as impediments. Therefore, it is pertinent to consider how social work intervention programmes, in line with the Children's Act can produce desired results and impact positively the lives of children in Botswana. To arrive at solutions, academic institutions, medical and social work professionals, nurses, psychologists, and sociologists need to conduct epidemiological research to provide scientific baseline data on problems in Botswana and Africa in general. The starting point should be a robust, rigorous, scientific, and social research on all social and human problems plaguing the entire continent. Armed with empirical research findings, social workers and other human service professionals in Africa may be able to influence political decisions and also advocate effectively for appropriate child centered policy formulation and implementation.

The primary mission of social work is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular reference to the needs of vulnerable children (Sossou & Yogtiba, 2008). It is the argument of this paper that social workers should be active in drawing attention to the socio-cultural and economic factors that create inequality, unfair distribution of resources and disregard for social justice and human rights of women, children, and the disabled and other vulnerable groups. Parents should also be well educated on the fundamental needs of their children by ensuring the quality of their children's education, nutrition and personal safety. They should also be assisted to break the cultural taboo of not talking to their children about issues concerning sexuality.

### *Limitations of the study*

The study findings should be cautiously interpreted due to some limitations. Firstly, using the quantitative research method was disadvantageous as it led to collection of much narrower data since participants were mostly given options from which to choose. This could have limited the reliability of the scales as participants might have under-reported sexual abuse due to social norms. Secondly, results were limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and less elaborate accounts of the magnitude of sexual abuse in schools. Lastly, the sample size was small as this was not a national study, thus limiting external validity of the findings to other senior secondary schools elsewhere in Botswana.

## CONCLUSION

The study sought to understand sexual abuse of school-going children by teachers, factors contributing to this abuse, the effects, and the need for school based social work intervention. The problem of sexual abuse of students by teachers has been noted as a global concern. Literature has proved that the abuse and neglect of children in the Africa region is one of the most serious violations of social justice and an abuse of the rights of children. Irrespective of the prevailing socio-economic conditions in Botswana, the best interests of children should be a priority for African governments through the provision of adequate resources to ensure the healthy development of young people.

Based on the results of this study, it is concluded that children deserve protection and humane treatment by their parents, guardians, teachers, and society as a whole, as young people are particularly sensitive to the conditions under which they live and are vulnerable to the effects of exposure to violence, abuse, and maltreatment. Lastly, having established that children face numerous psychosocial problems that affect their wellbeing, it is only reasonable to suggest that social workers should be attached or preferably, employed in schools. This gesture could go a long way to making schools centres of service provision to families owing to the fact that most educators agree that the family's role is critical to student success, schools are generally not equipped to involve parents effectively or to intervene in the problems of troubled families. Therefore, school social workers would be better placed to support educational responsibilities of parents because of their training in interpersonal skills, family dynamics, the ecological perspective, and cultural diversity.

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