



African Journal of Social Work  
 Afri. j. soc. work  
 © National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Autor(s)  
 ISSN Print 1563-3934  
 ISSN Online 2409-5605

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License

Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO

## Exploring the culture of silence on child sexual abuse within the family in Zimbabwe: A review of the literature

G. Nokukhanya NDHLOVU and Magnus MFOAFO-M'CARTHY

### ABSTRACT

*Child sexual abuse within the family, a violation of child rights is one of the most widespread forms of abuse worldwide. Yet, despite its pervasiveness, there is limited research on the phenomena. This paper explored child sexual abuse within the family in Zimbabwe -also known as intrafamilial child sexual abuse. More particularly, it discussed the risk factors, dynamics and the culture of silence surrounding the phenomena and some of the reasons for the silence. There is very little research on child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe, in particular, the dynamics of intrafamilial child sexual abuse and the factors that create a culture of silence. The objectives of this literature review were to contribute in filling this knowledge gap by exploring the dynamics and culture of silence with regards to the issue and to inform program and policy interventions. Researchers agree that even though intrafamilial child sexual abuse is the most pervasive form of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe, it is also the most un/under reported and under researched type of child sexual abuse. This is a literature review that builds on the body of literature concerning intrafamilial child sexual abuse in Africa and specifically Zimbabwe. Using Ubuntu as a framework, the authors attempt to question why children are abused at such an alarming rate in an environment that upholds the principles of Ubuntu. It is recommended that social workers and educators should build children's knowledge on how and where to seek help and protection and also provide safe reporting mechanisms where children can report without the interference of family members.*

**KEY TERMS:** Africa, child rights, culture of silence, intrafamilial child sexual abuse, Ubuntu, Zimbabwe

### KEY DATES

Received: December 2021

Revised: April 2022

Accepted: August 2022

Published: October 2022

Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Permission: None

Ethics approval: Not applicable

### Author/s details:

G. Nokukhanya Ndhlovu (Corresponding author), Postdoctoral fellow, Department of Philosophy, University of Fort Hare, East London, South Africa. [NGNdhlovu@ufh.ac.za](mailto:NGNdhlovu@ufh.ac.za) / [Khanya.nokun@gmail.com](mailto:Khanya.nokun@gmail.com)

Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Associate Professor, Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada. [mmfoafomcarthy@wlu.ca](mailto:mmfoafomcarthy@wlu.ca)

Current and previous volumes are available at:

<https://africasocialwork.net/current-and-past-issues/>



### How to reference using ASWNet style:

Ndhlovu, G. N. and Mfoafo-M'Carthy, M. (2022). Exploring the culture of silence on child sexual abuse within the family in Zimbabwe: A review of the literature . *African Journal of Social Work*, 12(5), 239-248.

## INTRODUCTION

Intrafamilial child sexual abuse (ICSA) is a prevalent form of abuse in Africa, yet it remains hidden, under-researched and undocumented. Despite the magnitude of this violence, very little is known as most incidences remain concealed and socially condoned. However, ignoring or not giving attention to ICSA has negative consequences for children, families, society and nations. In addition to destroying lives, it significantly impacts the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, it has severe short and long-lasting outcomes for survivors and negatively impacts their health, school performance, development and quality of life. There is very little research on ICSA in Zimbabwe, the dynamics and culture of silence on the issue in particular remain under researched. This paper discusses intrafamilial child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe. It explores the risk factors, dynamics and the culture of silence surrounding ICSA and reasons for this silence. This literature review builds on the body of literature concerning ICSA in Africa and Zimbabwe. The authors note the paucity of Zimbabwe-specific scholarly work that addresses this phenomenon. The questions we sought to answer were: what are the dynamics of ICSA and what are the factors that create a culture of silence around ICSA in Zimbabwe? The purpose of this paper is to shine a light on this silent epidemic and to change and reshape perceptions and conversations on the issue. We begin by discussing the background of the study, this is followed by a discussion of the methodology and theoretical framework. The literature review is discussed next while the final part unpacks some recommendations and conclusion.

## BACKGROUND

ICSA is not confined to certain parts of the world, it happens all over the world irrespective of religion, culture, class and race. Despite its magnitude, there is no shared understanding or consistency regarding its definition. Researchers have used various definitions, for example it has been defined as incest, sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member or sexual abuse by someone close to the family (Mantula and Saloojee, 2016; Gqabi, 2016; Mbokazi, 2006). For this paper however, ICSA is child sexual abuse perpetrated by a child's close family members, for example, a parent, an uncle, cousin, sibling, or grandparent. The authors acknowledge that ICSA is perpetrated by men and women on both girls and boys, however, this paper focuses on the abuse of girls by men.

Studies indicate that ICSA is a very severe and pervasive issue in many families. However, Ebuanyi, Chikezie & Dariah (2018), contend that numerous cases are never reported to law enforcement agencies and the numbers could be higher in Nigeria and other low-income countries where cultural dynamics hinder the reporting of incidences. Consequently, many perpetrators go unpunished and the abuse never stops. The East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (2011: n.p) propounds that "although the evidence base for child sexual abuse in sub-Saharan Africa has steadily been growing, the information tends to be fragmented, focused on certain types of CSA in a limited number of countries, and largely anecdotal." Accordingly, the fragmented data on ICSA and underreporting by both survivors and their families, make it difficult to adequately determine the patterns and trends of the abuse.

According to the African Partnership to End Violence against Children (APEVAC) and African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) (2021), UNICEF (2020) daily, in all countries, cultures, and levels of society, millions of girls and boys are subjected to the disturbingly predominant childhood experience of sexual abuse, and this often happens at the hands of someone they know and trust. In Africa, this violence is closely linked with gender power relations and patriarchal systems ingrained in society (African Union, 2021). Consequently, UNICEF (2020) notes that about 120 million girls under the age of 20 – approximately 1 in 10 – have been forced to engage in sex or perform other sexual acts, however, this figure is likely much higher as many cases go unreported. Although the United Nations (2020) notes that the worst affected are those facing poverty, marginalisation, conflict, social exclusion, or discrimination, Fambasayi (2021) suggests that it happens in families from all socio-economic, educational, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The African Union (1999) notes with concern the precarious conditions of the continent's children as a result of their unique cultural, traditional, socio-economic exploitation and developmental circumstances. Expounding on the dynamics of the issue, APEVAC and ACPF (2021), argue that in every society, violence against children manifests in different ways, due to the various economic, political and socio-cultural factors operating across rural/urban location, age and gender among other status markers. According to the African Union (2021), this violence obstructs women and children's realisation of their fundamental human rights such as rights to life, human dignity, peace, justice, socio-economic and political development. However, it remains one of the most overlooked and ignored atrocities in African families. Unfortunately, this has dire effects on survivors as well as society. Fang et al. (2017) highlight that due to the pervasiveness of violence against children, the economic costs are substantial, and therefore violence against children is not only a human rights and moral issue but an economic one too. To this end, Fambasayi (2021) indicates that research suggests that in South Africa, the economic value of violence against children in the year 2015 was approximately R173 billion (4.3% of the country's GDP) while in Nigeria it is estimated that the country lost around 967 billion naira (1.07% of the country's GDP). A significant

point highlighted by Fambasayi (2021) is the exorbitant costs linked with sexual exploitation in particular – which create astronomical costs in psycho-social support, professional medical services, criminal justice and legal services. APEVAC and ACPF (2021) also unpack the social and financial implications on society noting the significant costs to the health-care system of treating both physical and mental injuries as well as the lost human capital and reduced productivity.

## METHODOLOGY

The paper was a desk study drawing from existing literature. The researchers accessed academic journals and books, reports, relevant media sources, and electronic databases like African Journals OnLine, Sabinet African Journals, Scopus, Science Direct, JSTOR, EBSCO, Pro Quest and PubMed on ICSA. Only literature that was deemed relevant to the study from the various sources was used. Our inclusion criteria included literature focusing on ICSA in Africa and Zimbabwe mainly, studies using qualitative methods and peer reviewed literature. The exclusion criteria included quantitative studies and non-peer reviewed journals. We used key words that included ICSA in Zimbabwe and Africa, Ubuntu, child rights, child sexual abuse, and culture of silence on ICSA among others to finding existing literature on the topic. Our search included trawling through a number of electronic data bases. Additionally, Google and Google Scholar were also consulted. While literature from Africa and other parts of the world was easily accessible, the study notes the paucity of literature from Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Literature summary table

| <i>Authors</i>  | <i>Focus</i> | <i>Summary points</i>   |
|---|--------------|---|
| United Nations (2020)                                     | Global       | Children worst affected are those facing poverty, marginalisation, conflict, social exclusion, or discrimination.                       |
| UNICEF (2020)   | Global       | Millions of girls and boys are sexually abused by people they know and trust.   |
| African Union (2021)                                      | Africa       | In many African communities violence against women and girls is linked with gender power relations.                                     |
| African Union (1999)                                      | Africa       | African children are vulnerable due to their unique cultural, traditional, socio-economic exploitation and developmental circumstances. |
| APEVAC and ACPF (2021)                                    | Africa       | Sexual abuse, exploitation and neglect are extensive in Africa.   |
| Badoe (2017)  | Africa       | In SSA, many girls' first sexual experience is forced and unwanted.   |
| Bowman and Brundige (2014)                                | Africa       | Child sexual abuse within the family is very pervasive.   |
| Ebuenyi et al. (2018)                                     | Africa       | In many CSA incidences, the offender is known to the family but families opt for silence instead of reporting cases.                    |
| East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (2011) | Africa       | Existing qualitative and quantitative research shows that ICSA is rampant in sub-Saharan Africa.  |
| Fang et al. (2017)  | Africa       | Violence against children is not only a human rights and moral issue but an economic one too.   |
| Fambasayi (2021)  | Africa       | Violence against children carries a huge cost for Africa.   |
| Gqabi, B. R. M. (2016)                                    | Africa       | Father-daughter incest is increasingly becoming a pervasive social ill in South Africa.   |
| Jewkes et al. (2010)                                      | Africa       | Some of the consequences of CSA include pregnancy complications, suicidal thoughts, depression and substance abuse.                     |
| Letseka (2014))   | Africa       | Ubuntu encapsulates social justice, fairness and dignity.   |
| Letseka (2012)  | Africa       | Ubuntu is about treating each other with Ubuntu and valuing other people's lives.   |
| Letseka (2000)  | Africa       | Ubuntu is grounded in moral values and norms that include caring, intense humanness and concern for others.                             |
| Lalor (2008)  | Africa       | Child sexual abuse increases the risk of experiencing sexual revictimisation and low self-esteem.                                       |
| Matthews et al. (2012).                                   | Africa       | Child sexual abuse has immediate and long term impacts on the child's mental health   |
| Mbokazi (2006)  | Africa       | A very tragic consequence of incest is on the relationship between a mother and her daughter.   |

|                             |          |   |
|-----------------------------|----------|---|
| Meten et al. (2020)         | Africa   | Even though ICSA is a prevalent public health issue, it is underreported and normalised for various reasons.  |
| Motsoeneng (2015)           | Africa   | Africa has the highest incidences of ICSA primarily because of the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms which foster sexual violence.   |
| Birdthistle et al. (2011)   | Zimbabwe | Countless children under 12 in Harare, Zimbabwe, experience ICSA and orphanhood is a potential risk factor.   |
| Chitereka (2012)            | Zimbabwe | Even though Zimbabwe has ratified many regional and international conventions aimed at child protection, CSA remains endemic.   |
| Dube (2013)                 | Zimbabwe | The practice of Umlamu, is one of the harmful cultural practices driving ICSA.  |
| Gwirayi (2013a; 2013b)      | Zimbabwe | Despite national and international laws, CSA remains a challenge in Zimbabwe.   |
| Mantula and Saloojee (2016) | Zimbabwe | Many children in Zimbabwe experience ICSA at alarming levels.   |
| Mhlanga (2016)              | Zimbabwe | More than 100 girls are sexually abused every day, however these numbers could be higher as many cases go unreported.   |
| Musiwa (2020; 2019)         | Zimbabwe | In Zimbabwe, ICSA is the most common type of sexual abuse. However, it is under reported.   |
| Muridzo et al. (2021)       | Zimbabwe | CSA is multidimensional with adverse psychological, medical, behavioural and socioeconomic outcomes.  |
| Muridzo and Chikadzi (2020) | Zimbabwe | In Zimbabwe poverty is one of the significant drivers and root causes of the violence.  |
| Muridzo (2018)              | Zimbabwe | Most perpetrators of CSA are related to or close to the survivors.  |
| Muridzo (2014)              | Zimbabwe | Sexual dysfunction and problematic sexual behaviour are some of the effects of CSA  |
| Shamu et al. 2019           | Zimbabwe | Some drivers of CSA include orphanhood, the failure of families to protect children, family dysfunction intertwined with poverty and structural violence as well as cultural factors and community norms that normalise violence. |

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: UBUNTU

Using Ubuntu as a framework, the authors attempt to question why children are sexually abused at such an alarming rate in an environment that upholds these principles. Ubuntu is a Nguni word that encapsulates love, valuing other people's lives, and treating each other as respectable human beings. In support of this argument, Letseka (2012) argues that the concept of Ubuntu which is about humanness, personhood, and morality, can possibly be used as a moral theory and a public policy. Ubuntu, a spiritual foundation for many African cultures, is about ethics, respect, humanity, and the connections between human beings. *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning: a person is a person through other persons, serves as a rule of social conduct while promoting respect and compassion for others. Furthermore, Ubuntu is grounded in moral values and norms, including caring, benevolence, intense humanness, concern for others, and associated values (Letseka, 2000). Thus, Ubuntu depicts value for human life and dignity and treating others as fellow human beings. The common point is that Ubuntu is grounded in moral and ethical values and treating each other with Ubuntu (Letseka, 2014; 2012).

Since Ubuntu depicts compassion, justice, fairness, and human dignity, one would expect communities to respect and value all human life (including children) and conduct themselves in morally upright ways. In Zimbabwe, where child rights abuses are rampant, this concept can be a useful resource to instil a sense of Ubuntu in people where they value and acknowledge the humanity of children. For this paper, the concept is used to question the conduct of Zimbabwean men who have normalised ICSA and Zimbabwean families who do not respect children's rights. Ubuntu is used to show the importance of placing value in children and acknowledging that they too are human and should therefore be treated as such. This includes respecting child rights over beliefs, taboos, family names and other attitudes that create a culture of silence which have allowed ICSA to thrive, unabated. Ubuntu is used as a framework to stress the need to humanise children instead of dehumanising them through sexual abuse. It should also be seen as an ethical theory that adults must imbibe and practice if they must realise their personhood. It articulates that children are persons too and should be treated as such.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Themes

The themes and their corresponding subthemes are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

| <i>Themes</i>   | <i>Subthemes</i>  |
|---|---|
| The dynamics of ICSA  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICSA is not limited to Zimbabwe, it is an African challenge.</li> <li>• Even though many African countries practice Ubuntu, children are dehumanised.</li> <li>• ICSA is rampant in Africa; however, the topic is avoided, disregarded, and underreported.</li> <li>• Since ICSA is perpetrated by trusted family members, it may go on for many years unreported.</li> <li>• Research suggests that the first sexual experience of many girls is either forced or unwanted.</li> <li>• High levels of secrecy, stigma, and betrayal underpin ICSA.</li> </ul> |
| Reasons for the secrecy and denial surrounding ICSA in Zimbabwe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social and cultural barriers which prevent people from speaking of the home as anything but a safe haven</li> <li>• Many African families tend to view behaviours that threaten social order as taboo</li> <li>• ICSA is a shameful act that families believe should never be discussed.</li> <li>• In many families, it matters who you marry, so sometimes the silence is linked to the shame and the fear of the aftermath on the survivor.</li> <li>• Families don't believe in 'hanging their dirty laundry in public'.</li> </ul>                    |
| The impact of intrafamilial CSA on survivors                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression and anxiety</li> <li>• Suicidal thoughts</li> <li>• Impaired relationships and sexuality</li> <li>• Sexual revictimisation</li> <li>• Anti-social behaviour and offending</li> <li>• Risky sexual behaviours</li> </ul>   |

### An open secret: The dynamics of intrafamilial CSA in Africa

Many African countries subscribe to Ubuntu tenets however, it seems that these tenets are ignored where children are concerned. Thus even though Ubuntu represents value for human life and dignity, morality and the need to treat others as fellow human beings, it appears that many children in Africa are treated dishonourably and dehumanised. Scores of them are exposed to sexual abuse within families (Bowman and Brundige, 2014). East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (2011) add that even though there is very little research on ICSA, existing qualitative and quantitative research confirms the high rates of this type of abuse in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the topic is avoided, disregarded, and underreported. The tragedy surrounding ICSA, is that since it is perpetrated by family members, it may go on for many years as much of the abuse remain unreported; and for many of the survivors, this is particularly traumatic because of the high levels of secrecy, stigma, and betrayal linked to it. A study on child sexual violence in Nigeria found that in many ICSA incidences, parents, guardians and families opt for silence instead of confronting offenders or reporting the cases. The authors add that Nigerian laws, parents and survivors are silent which has exacerbated the issue, allowing perpetrators to continue the abuse, unabated (Ebuenyi et al., 2018). In many African communities, children are 'often seen not heard' as a result according to Meten et al. (2020) their decision making and bargaining is very limited – on top of that the topic of sex is off limits consequently child sexual abuse remains normalised. ICSA is one of the most atrocious and 'best kept secrets' in Africa hence, even though family members seem to be aware, they do not discuss it, rather, it is neglected, dismissed and people pretend it never happened due to stigma and society taboo associated with it. This could be attributed to many reasons, for example, the ethics of shame that dominate traditional African moral consciousness. However, this cannot be justified if it infringes on the rights of children. Another reason is the culture of silence in many African communities, where families believe in keeping family issues within the family. As a result survivors of ICSA are sacrificed. Additionally, although sexual abuse against children within the family is pervasive, it is rarely reported due to the dominant patriarchal gender norms. Despite the paucity of data, Africa

has the highest incidences of ICSA primarily because of the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms which foster sexual violence while giving men power over women within the family and normalising the sexual abuse of women and girls (Badoe, 2017; Motsoeneng, 2015). Badoe (2017) suggests that in SSA, many girls' first sexual experience is forced and unwanted. Researchers believe that rates of ICSA are likely to be high in Africa because of a lack of moral values and ethically sound mind sets, inequality, rapid social change, poverty, HIV/AIDS, cultural and religious practices, weak family structures, male dominance and deeply ingrained patriarchal norms (Mhlanga, 2016; Mantula & Saloojee, 2016; Motsoeneng; 2015; Matthews et al., 2012). There seem to be an unwritten code in many African homes that justify and brush CSA under the carpet. Considering this, Musiwa (2020) highlights that the factors linked with secrecy, non-disclosure, and not reporting make ICSA very challenging to comprehend.

### Secrecy, denial, and shame: Exploring intrafamilial sexual abuse in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has a sound legal and regulatory framework aimed at child protection (Mantula & Saloojee, 2016). In addition, the country has ratified numerous child protection instruments, including the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC) and the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among others (World Vision International and Child Rights Network for Southern Africa (CRNSA), 2018). Even though the country has ratified many regional and international conventions aimed at child protection, research suggests that ICSA is pervasive, but it is the most under-reported type of child sexual abuse (Musiwa, 2020; 2019; Muridzo, 2018; Chitereka, 2012). Gwirayi (2013a; 2013b) asserts that it is both a social and public health concern and despite national and international laws, it remains a challenge in Zimbabwe. Similar sentiments are echoed by Mantula and Saloojee (2016) who note that even though the country has well-established legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at the protection of children from sexual abuse, implementation is weak. Consequently, abuse against children is a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe (Dube, 2013). Mhlanga (2016) notes that law enforcement authorities indicate that more than 100 girls are sexually abused every day, however these numbers could be higher as many cases go unreported.

In line with Ubuntu tenets, one would expect benevolence, kindness, concern and respect of child rights from adults and that adults within the family act in morally and ethically upright ways. However, contrary to the concept of Ubuntu, family members have become sources of risk for children, violating their rights with impunity. Since most of the perpetrators are related or close to the survivors for example fathers, uncles and brothers as a result, it is rarely reported (Chitereka, 2012). Thus many children in Zimbabwe experience ICSA at alarming levels (Musiwa, 2020; Mantula & Saloojee 2016). Even though not much is known about what drives ICSA, it has been argued that the absence of parents, domestic violence, substance abuse, the presence of step-parents, disability and social isolation are some of the risk factors (Musiwa, 2020). Illustrating the complex nature of issue, APEVAC and ACPF (xiii: 2021) highlight that, "...unpacking the drivers of violence and how they interact among themselves and with the risk or protective factors that children face daily does not begin to explain the complexities of VAC and its potential solutions." Muridzo and Chikadzi (2020) found that in Zimbabwe even though there are various factors driving CSA, poverty is one of the significant drivers and root causes of the violence. Birdthistle et al. (2011) also found that countless children under 12 in Harare are survivors of intrafamilial child sexual abuse and that orphanhood is a potential risk factor. This is buttressed by Shamu et al. (2019) who postulated that the limited number of studies on sexual violence in Zimbabwe reveal that sexual violence against girls is very high with more than one in five reporting that their first sexual experience was forced or coerced. Some of the reasons for sexual violence identified by the authors include orphanhood, non-attendance of school, maternal challenges, the failure of families to protect children, family dysfunction intertwined with poverty and structural violence as well as cultural factors and community norms that have normalised violence. In Zimbabwe, cultural practices are some of the drivers of ICSA. Thus, the prevalence of ICSA in Zimbabwe is high due to its numerous beliefs, customs and taboos. According to Dube (2013), the practice of *Umlamu* is one of the harmful cultural practices which allow an elder sister or aunt's husband to fondle a younger sister or niece. In many cases, this practice begins with fondling the young girl's breasts and ends in rape. In these instances, young girls are forbidden from reporting the rape (Dube, 2013).

Society tends to avoid some topics or view behaviours that threaten social order as taboo. ICSA is a shameful act that many families believe should never be practiced or discussed. This is the justification for trying to hide it when it occurs. Many families may not be able to bear the shame when it is exposed to the public. The point is that traditional African ethics is a morality of fear and shame. This theory of morality also applies to sex. As a result, ICSA is met with shame. However, guarding it as a family secret, exacerbates an already dire situation as it exposes children to further harm, destroys lives and perpetrators are left to continue committing this 'shameful' act with impunity.

In essence, rapists get away with it because family members have not stopped them, instead they prioritise the family name above all else. Statements like '*ungayithi vu,*' (don't say a word to anyone), '*ayitshukelwa ebandla,*'

(don't hang our dirty laundry in public) '*ayihlale emulini*' (this should remain in the family), '*xola ngane ukudlulise*' (forgive them child and move on) and '*qina*' (be strong) serve to silence survivors, keep the issue within the family while excusing the perpetrator. Bowman and Brundige (2014) explain the shame that accompanies the nondisclosure of ICSA indicating that mothers are unwilling to disclose the abuse because they fear further victimising their daughters or bringing shame to the family due to the incestuous nature of the cases. In many African families, it matters who you marry, so sometimes the silence is linked to the shame and the fear of the aftermath on the survivor. Many who come to know that a girl was sexually abused by her family member/relative may never wish their children/relative to marry such a child. Mhlanga (2016) also noted the complicity of guardians or parents in the silence where they prefer to have an out of court settlement with perpetrators. Studies also suggest the culture of silence on ICSA can be attributed to the social and cultural barriers which prevent people from speaking of the home as anything but a haven and if the perpetrator is the breadwinner, the child is sacrificed so that the family has food on the table and a roof over their heads. Musiwa (2019)'s study also revealed that ICSA is intertwined with understated structural dynamics which put children at risk and hinder them, their families and communities from reporting. Moreover, ICSA remains unreported and normalised because many African communities still view it as a taboo that should never be discussed; some societies do not view it as a crime or social ill and this could be a result of ignorance on child rights; beliefs, misconceptions and customs also deter people from reporting (Meten et al., 2020).

### **The impact of intrafamilial CSA on survivors**

As already noted, the concept of Ubuntu is a central part of many African communities. It symbolises the important role played by people in a person's life. While it is normally perceived from a positive perspective accentuating support, care, respect and compassion among others. It can also take on the negative role, where a person becomes who they are because of the injustice done to them; in this case, the harm done to the identity and future of children because of sexual abuse and a lack of support, justice and protection. The impacts of ICSA are dire. A study by Bowman and Brundige (2014) found that in ICSA abuse cases, the psychological consequences are grave and highly linked with emotional distress and mental harm; all of which are intertwined with feelings of betrayal and breaking of trust. Muridzo (2014) agrees that sexual dysfunction, problematic sexual behaviour, including aggressive sexual behaviours, promiscuity and prostitution (because of low-self-esteem) are some of the effects. Gqabi (2016), Jewkes et al. (2010) and Lalor (2008) further add that child sexual abuse increases the risk of engaging in anti-social and high risk behaviours like having multiple sexual partners, experiencing sexual revictimisation and drug abuse. Jewkes et al. (2010) also note that children who have been sexually abused are likely to experience maladies that follow them into adulthood like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal thoughts, insomnia and substance abuse. Matthews, et al (2012) reiterates on the negative impacts that abuse has on the mental health of children. Mbokazi (2006) and Gqabi (2016) also note the severity of the psychological consequences of child sexual abuse in the case of a child sexually abused by a trusted family member, a father in particular. Muridzo et al. (2021) add that the issue is multidimensional with adverse psychological, medical, behavioural and socioeconomic outcomes and that it is connected to a multitude of destructive aftereffects for the survivors and their ecological environments. Moreover, Mbokazi (2006) points out that a very tragic and dire consequence of incest is on the relationship between a mother and her daughter.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper provides some recommendations on what could be done / steps taken to stem the tide of this menace in Zimbabwean society and other African countries. We recommend government and NGOs to invest in programmes that would change attitudes and socio-cultural norms that promote sexual violence. The government in partnership with NGOs, religious and local leaders could conduct educational sessions with family and community members (where they are educated on good parenting, respecting the rights of children and child protection). At community and educational level –the government can invest in public programmes where ICSA issues are openly discussed, destigmatised and the culture of silence broken. Community/traditional leaders are valued and prominent in their communities. Capacity building should be provided for these leaders to effectively investigate and punish cases of child sexual violence. Social workers and educators should educate children on their rights and make them aware that ICSA is a criminal offense which must be reported even if family members insist on silence. Social workers and educators should also build children's knowledge on how and where to seek help and protection and also provide safe reporting mechanisms where children can report without the interference of family members.

## CONCLUSION

Many African proverbs talk of the family home as a safe haven for children, a place where they are nurtured, and loved-where they can develop and grow into happy, healthy individuals. Yet, in some family homes *uthango ludla amakhomane* which loosely translated means that homes have become places of secrecy and terror where children continue to experience sexual abuse. Even though many survivors report the abuse, their reality is normally denied. Their experience is silenced by both the abuser and by the denial and complicity of the people meant to protect them. This review of the literature explored intrafamilial child sexual abuse with emphasis on Zimbabwe. The discourse focused on the risk factors, the nature and magnitude of ICSEA and the culture of silence surrounding the phenomena and some of the reasons. It also discussed the impact of ICSEA on girls. Using the concept of Ubuntu, it questioned the conduct of Zimbabwean men who have normalised ICSEA and Zimbabwean families who do not respect children's rights.

## REFERENCES

- African Partnership to End Violence against Children (APEVAC) and African Child Policy Forum (ACPF). (2021). Violence against Children in Africa: A Report on Progress and Challenges. Retrieved on 22 June 2022. [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence\\_against\\_children\\_in\\_africa\\_a\\_report\\_on\\_progress\\_and\\_challenges.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence_against_children_in_africa_a_report_on_progress_and_challenges.pdf)
- African Union. (2021). African Union Legal Frameworks aim to break the cycle of violence against women and girls. Retrieved on 22 June 2022. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20211125/african-union-legal-frameworks-aim-break-cycle-violence-against-women-and>
- African Union. (1999). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Retrieved on 23 June 2022. [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african\\_charter\\_on\\_rights\\_welfare\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf)
- Badoe, E. (2017). A critical review of child abuse and its management in Africa. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 7(Supplement), 32-35.
- Birdthistle, I. J., Floyd, S., Mwanasa, S., Nyagadza, A., Gwiza, E., and Glynn, J. R. (2011). Child sexual abuse and links to HIV and orphanhood in urban Zimbabwe. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 65(12), 1075–1082.
- Bowman, C., and Brundige, E. (2014). Child sex abuse within the family in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and change in current legal and mental health responses. *Cornell International Law Journal*, 47, 231-297.
- Chitereka, C. (2012). Child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe: The agenda for social workers. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 20(1), 29-40.
- Dube, R. (2013). "She probably asked for it!" A preliminary study into Zimbabwean societal perceptions of rape. Retrieved on 30 September 2021 from [http://archive.kubatana.net/docs/demgg/rau\\_study\\_into\\_zim\\_perceptions\\_of\\_rape\\_130418.pdf](http://archive.kubatana.net/docs/demgg/rau_study_into_zim_perceptions_of_rape_130418.pdf)
- Ebuenyi, I. D., Chikezie, U. E., and Dariah, G. O. (2018). Implications of Silence in the Face of Child Sexual Abuse: Observations from Yenagoa, Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de La Santé Reproductive*, 22(2), 83–87.
- East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community. (2011). Child Sexual Abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of the Literature. Retrieved on 18 February 2022. <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-07-16/Draft%20Child%20Sexual%20Abuse%20In%20Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20A%20Review%20Of%20The%20Literature.pdf>
- Fambasayi, R. (2021). Violence against children carries a huge cost for Africa: Governments must act urgently. The Conversation, 28 July. <https://theconversation.com/violence-against-children-carries-a-huge-cost-for-africa-governments-need-to-act-urgently-164899>
- Fang, X., Zheng, X., Fry, D. A., Ganz, G., Casey, T., Hsiao, C., and Ward, C. L. (2017). The Economic Burden of Violence against Children in South Africa. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(11), 1431.
- Gqabi, B. R. M. (2016). Psychosocial effects on victims of father-daughter incest in Ngaka Modiri Molema District. Mafikeng. North-West University. Masters thesis.
- Gwirayi, P. (2013a). The prevalence of child sexual abuse among secondary school pupils in Gweru, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 19, 253 - 263.
- Gwirayi, P. (2013b). Fighting child sexual abuse: perspectives of pupils from a developing country. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012472687>
- Jewkes, R. K., Dunkle, K., Nduna, M., Jama, P. N., & Puren, A. (2010). Associations between childhood adversity and depression, substance abuse and HIV and HSV2 incident infections in rural South African youth. *Child abuse & neglect*, 34(11), 833–841.
- Lalor, K. (2008). Child Sexual Abuse and HIV Transmission in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse Review*, 17(2), 94-107.
- Letseka, M. (2014). Ubuntu and justice as fairness. *Mediterranean journal of social sciences* 5 (9), 544.
- Letseka, M. (2012). In defence of ubuntu. *Studies in philosophy and education volume*. 31, 47–60.
- Letseka, M. (2000). African philosophy and educational discourse. *African voices in education*. Eds P. Higgs, N. C. G. Vakalisa, T. V. Mda and N. T. Assie-Lumumba. Cape Town: Juta.
- Mantula, F., and Saloojee, H. (2016). Child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 25(8), 866–880.
- Matthews, S., Loots, L., Sikweyiya, Y and Jewkes, R. (2012). Sexual Abuse. *Crime, Violence and Injury in South Africa: 21st Century Solutions for Child Safety*. Eds A. Van Niekerk, S. Suffla and M. Seedat. PsySSA Press.
- Mbokazi, F. (2006). The impact of father-daughter incest on the mother-daughter relationship. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. (PhD thesis).

- Meten, E., Tchouamo, A.A.S., Niba, L.L., and Chiabi, A. (2020). Child Sexual Abuse in the African Context: The African Perception. *A Epidemiol Public Health*, 3(1): 1041.
- Mhlanga, J (2016) Child sexual abuse in Zim: Call for action. NewsDay, 23 September 23  
<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2016/09/child-sexual-abuse-zim-call-action/>
- Motsoeneng, B. (2015). Rape within families remains under-reported. News24, 21 August.  
<https://www.news24.com/health24/news/public-health/rape-within-families-remains-under-reported-20150821-2>
- Muridzo, G. N., Mahunste, L. S.; Chikadzi, V. and Mafa I. (2021). Legal shortcomings in multisectoral forums responding to child sexual abuse (CSA): Lessons from a Zimbabwe case study. *African Journal of Social Work*, 11(1), 32-39.
- Muridzo, N., and Chikadzi, V. (2020). Zimbabwe's poverty and child sexual abuse. *Children Australia*, 45(4), 222-228. doi:10.1017/cha.2020.41
- Muridzo, N. G. (2018). An exploration of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. (PhD thesis).
- Muridzo, N. G. (2014). Child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe: An agenda for social workers. *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, 75 (1), 49 -68.
- Musiwa, A.S. (2020). Addressing intrafamilial child sexual abuse: Lessons from the victim-friendly court in Marondera District, Zimbabwe. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal volume*, 37, 207–225.
- Musiwa A. S. (2019). Intrafamilial child sexual abuse: A unique silent epidemic. Perspectives of victim-friendly court professionals in Marondera District, Zimbabwe. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 28(7), 860–884.
- Shamu, S., Shamu, P., Zarowsky, C., Temmerman, M., Shefer, T., and Abrahams, N. (2019). Does a history of sexual and physical childhood abuse contribute to HIV infection risk in adulthood? A study among post-natal women in Harare, Zimbabwe. *PLoS ONE*, 14(1), e0198866. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0198866>
- UNICEF. (2020). *Sexual violence against children*. Retrieved on 18 September 2021  
<https://www.unicef.org/protection/sexual-violence-against-children>
- United Nations. (2020). No country is free from child sexual abuse, exploitation, UN's top rights forum hears. Retrieved on 18 September 2021 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1058501>
- World Vision International and Child Rights Network for Southern Africa (CRNSA). (2018). *Child rights barometer, Zimbabwe: Measuring government efforts to protect girls and boys*. Retrieved on 18 October 2021. <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/zimbabwe.pdf>