
Perspectives on Sexual Abuse of School Children in Basic and Secondary Schools in Ghana

By

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Abstract

Objective: To explore and document the extent of sexual abuse of school children in Ghana and initiate an informed dialogue with all stakeholders for solutions. **Method:** This is a descriptive and exploratory survey. Information was collected from 49 public schools (490 school children, 116 parents and 49 head-teachers) from 4 out of the 110 districts in the country. Three sets of interview schedules were used to solicit information from school children, parents and head-teachers. In addition four focus group discussion sessions were held separately for school boys, school girls, male adults and female adults in each study area. Furthermore, relevant existing documents were reviewed for background information. **Results:** There is evidence suggesting the occurrence of sexual abuse in Ghana public schools. About 11.2% of the children who responded had been victims of either rape or defilement which is ‘the natural or unnatural carnal knowledge of any child under sixteen years of age’. The occurrence and severity of abuse are strongly related to gender. 92% of victims were female students. **Conclusions:** The current system of protecting children from sexual abuse in and outside of schools is ineffective. The study suggests strengthening of the existing protection system with community/school-based child protection teams.

Keywords: Perspectives; sexual abuse; school children; Ghana

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Introduction

Sexual abuse is a hidden human rights violation that has existed with human beings for a long time. It came very much to the open in the 1970s, when feminist activists sought ways to address the unwanted sexual attention that women faced in the workforce (Lee, Croninger, Linn and Chen, 1996). Nan Stein, defined sexual harassment in schools and universities as unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that interferes with the right to receive an equal educational opportunity (Stein, 1995). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) had a definition of sexual harassment that elaborated two main types: (i) the more coercive quid pro quo (i.e., pressure for sexual favors as a condition for employment) and (ii) the more common hostile environment, which could be verbal or physical in nature. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), for many young women, the most common place where sexual coercion and harassment are experienced is in schools (WHO, 2002).

Most studies on sexual abuse in schools had focused on higher institutions (Kathree, 1992; Gaidzanwa, 1993; AAUW, 1993; and Stein, 1999). Some early work on girls' low educational participation and achievement correctly noted this phenomenon (Gordon, 1993; Odaja and Heneveld, 1995). People are increasingly realizing that the closed nature of school environment and the general absence of accountability systems mean that children could be at great risks in schools (Leach and Machakanja, 2000). Studies on sexual violation against school children are still limited, especially in Africa; the few existing are mainly in East and Southern Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Niehaus, 2000; Jewkes et al, 2002). These and others have expanded our understanding of the issues of sexual abuse in educational settings.

Substantial improvements have been made in recent years with regard to the promotion and protection of the rights of children through child related legislation in many countries, especially in Ghana which was the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in February, 1990. It strengthened the constitutional and legal framework by adopting provisions relating to children's rights in the 1992 Constitution and the Children's Act (Act 560). But there still remains a wide gap between enactment, on the one hand, and compliance, enforcement and awareness, on the other. For example, a national study on violence against women and children in Ghana shows a prevalence of sexual abuse of children in both rural and urban areas (Coker-Appiah and Cusack, 1999).

There is lack of reliable information on the scale of sexual abuse of children in the country, due partly to the sensitivity of the issue. Without reliable information, government officials have not been challenged to acknowledge and deal decisively with the cases. This is an exploratory, preliminary inquiry on sexual abuse of school children in Ghana from the perspectives of the school actors that hopefully will generate public debate and actions. The work by Valerie Lee and others titled *The*

Culture of Sexual Harassment in Secondary Schools, especially the theoretical explanations of sexual harassment, very much influenced this study.

Theoretical Explanations for Sexual Abuse

Underlying much of the discussion of sexual abuse (its causes and responses to it) are five main theoretical formulations: biological, developmental, pathological, abuse of power, and cultural (Lee, et al, 1996). The *biological perspective* is based on physical differences between the sexes. Such comments as “men will be men” and “boys will be boys” come from this understanding. The *developmental conceptualization* assumes that people learn to communicate feelings through social interactions. Young people have difficulty communicating feelings related to sexual attraction. The inability to express such feelings in socially appropriate ways leads to (wittingly or unwittingly) engaging in harassing behaviors.

The *pathological explanation* posits that sexual harassment is a severely antisocial form of behavior, like domestic violence. The argument here is that trauma created by being victimized causes the individuals to lose the ability to empathize, and they find themselves perpetrating similar hurtful behaviors on others. The *abuse of power theory* has two main views. The first is that sexual abuse is a form of *exclusionary intimidation*, wherein people who usually treat others with kindness may resort to harassment when changing conditions pose a threat to their social privilege. A perpetrator’s motivation, conscious or not, is to intimidate victims. Under this view, sexual abuse would serve to keep women “in their place”. The second view is the *abuse of organizational power* in which individuals are seen as having differing amounts of power in organizations, depending on roles. Supervisors have power over employees, head teachers over teachers, teachers over students; and in the gender dynamics, males over females.

The *Cultural explanation* has three main formulations. One is the *Freudian cultural approach* which sees sexual abuse as a failure of the culture to repress or functionally sublimate the potentially destructive forces of Eros and Thanatos in individuals. The second formulation is the *structural approach* which centers on school norms concerning sexuality and aggression. The key issue here is whether the school management is tough in dealing with issues of sexual abuse. The *critical theory approach* is the third formulation. This focuses on the culture of schools, and situates sexual abuse within the violence and sexual aggression in the larger society, particularly as manipulated by the media. Sexual abuse, according to this perspective, is an expression of student and staff alienation, caused by violence done to them in an oppressive environment.

Underlying these explanations is poverty. An estimated 44 percent of the population live on one dollar per day. Increasing poverty in Ghana as in many African countries could be contributing to a rise in the sexual exploitation of girls. Poverty could drive girls including school children to be trading sex as a currency

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in exchange for food, gifts, money or protection (Human Rights Watch, 2002) thereby laying the context for the manifestations of the various perspectives.

Research Concerns

Beyond newspaper articles, little research attention on child sexual abuse has focused on basic and secondary schools in Ghana or the West African sub-region generally. We have used children's own characterizations to operationalize the construct of sexual abuse. From the perspectives of the school actors –children, parents, and head-teachers – the study was organized to provide information on the following areas: (i) the extent of the incidence of sexual abuse of school children; (ii) the forms of sexual abuse; (iii) the main perpetrators of the abuse; (iv) the main reasons for the abuse; and (v) ways in which the incidence could be minimized or eliminated completely.

Method

Design

The study used a descriptive and exploratory research design to do two things. One, explore the extent of the problem of sexual abuse of school children. Two, categorize and describe the dimensions of sexual abuse, the main perpetrators of the abuse, the reasons for the abuse, and suggested solutions.

Sample

The sampling process followed two slightly different tracks. The first track is *the study areas* in which 4 out of 110 districts were purposely selected based on accessibility. The four districts studied -Cape Coast, Sunyani, Afram Plains, and Bawku East -are districts we had easy contacts. Moreover, these districts represent to a reasonable extent the various main geographical and ecological zones of the country - coastal, forest, lake and transitional, and savannah zones respectively. The ecological approach to sampling has become a conventional way of trying to ensure representation in most studies in Ghana. Kindly see the map of Ghana with the various zones indicated in figure 1.

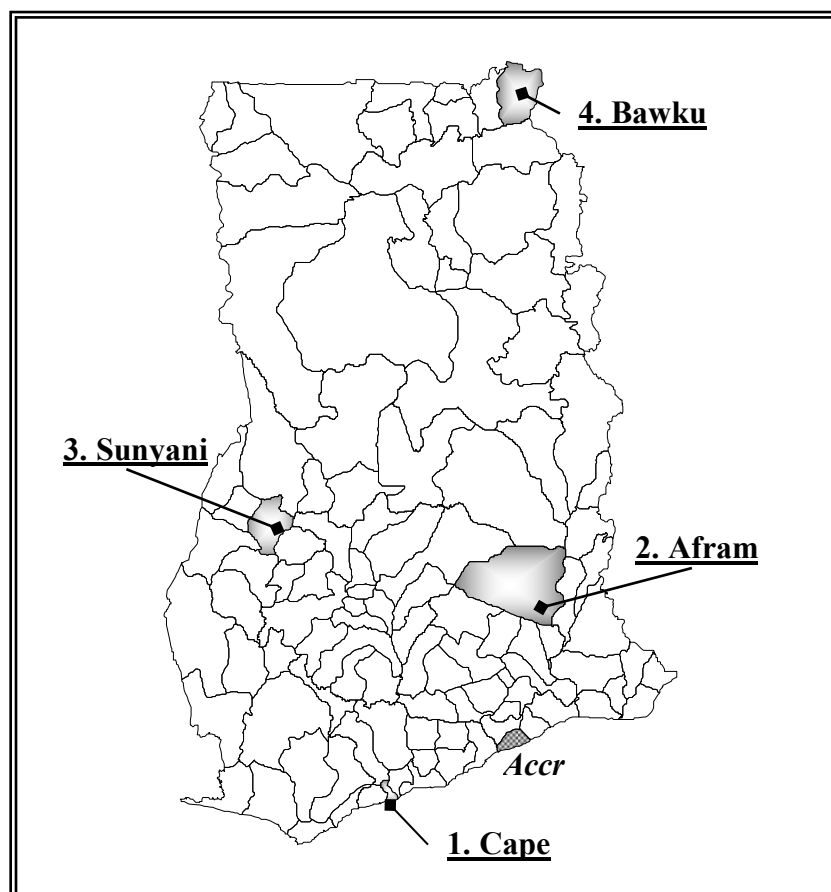
The second track was to obtain a representative sample from the study population of the four districts. Simple random sampling was used to select 49 schools (primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary) studied. In each school, children were selected based on class/grade, age and sex. Since girls are more prone to be abused sexually than boys, a ratio of 4 girls to 1 boy was adopted in the selection of children. That is to say, in each school studied, 8 out of the 10 children selected were girls. All the head-teachers of the studied schools were selected.

Purposive sampling was used to select 10 parents (from each of the schools) who have children within the age-group below 18 years.

Data Collection Techniques

Three techniques –interview schedules, focus group discussions (FGD), and document analysis –were used to collect information. The main instrument used to collect data was the interview schedule. Three sets of interview schedules were used to solicit information from school children, head-teachers, and parents separately. Furthermore, in each study area, four focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were held separately for school boys, school girls, male adults and female adults. The intention was to make the discussion free and non-threatening. Each group was made up of between 10 and 15 members. Relevant existing documents were reviewed to have background information on sexual abuse of children, and what the current policies and regulations on it are.

Figure 1: Map of Study Area (4 districts)



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The research was conducted in ways that respected the dignity of the participants. We sought the approval of the Director of Basic Education Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) before embarking on data collection. We have ensured no participants names are used and the schools studied would not be made public. Furthermore, the initial results were shared with the officials of MOES and some of the participants. The results and lessons are currently being used to strengthen strategies for preventing sexual abuse of school children, thereby ensuring the principle of beneficence.

Existing Policies, Legislations and Mechanisms.

The existing Policies, Acts and Regulations on sexual abuse of children in Ghana take their roots from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. The Convention places the responsibility on the State to take appropriate steps to protect both working and non-working children from all forms of physical, mental and sexual abuse through the establishment of protective, investigative and preventive services.

In Ghana, there are comprehensive laws, statutes and regulations which protect children from any form of sexual abuse. These include: (i) The 1992 Constitution; (ii) the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560); (iii) the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 1998 (Act 554); and (iv) the Code of Professional Conduct of the Ghana Education Service (GES, 2000). These collectively constitute the institutional framework and mechanism that are meant to be utilized to address the issues of child abuse in all their forms. Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution spells out the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all citizens including those of children. Article 28 specifically addresses children's rights under the Constitution.

The Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, of 1998 (Act 554) deals with various aspects of sexual offence. The offences include rape, defilement, indecent assault and incest. Section 98 defines rape as "the carnal knowledge of a female of 16 years or above without her consent." Section 97 states: "whoever commits rape shall be guilty of a first-degree felony and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years and not more than 25 years." Section 101, subsection 1, defines defilement as "the natural or unnatural carnal knowledge of any child under 16 years of age." Sub-section 2 further states: "whoever naturally or unnaturally carnally knows any child under 16 years of age, whether with or without his or her consent commits an offence and shall be liable, on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term of not less than 7 years and not more than 25 years."

The Code of Professional Conduct of the Ghana Education Service (GES) addresses the issue of sexual abuse in schools. Section 27 of the Code states: (a) "No teacher shall indulge in immoral relations with a pupil or student in his own school or in any educational institution in which he performs any official duties." (b) "No

teacher shall indulge in immoral relations with a pupil or student in any educational institution. This may result in disciplinary proceedings being taken against the offender.” For the non-teaching staff of the service, Section 53 of the Code states: “No employee shall indulge in immoral relations with a pupil or student in any educational institution. This may result in disciplinary proceedings being taken against the offender.”

The GES has classified sexual offences in schools as a major misconduct and they therefore attract the following penalties: (i) deferment of increment –that is postponement of the date on which the next increment is due with corresponding postponement in subsequent years; (ii) reduction in rank or of salary; (iii) suspension –that is, loss of pay and allowances for a period not exceeding two years; (iv) removal from the GES –that is termination of appointment with forfeiture of all retirement benefits; (v) termination –that is the offender may be treated as in (iv) above; and (vi) striking of name from the Register of Teachers – that is, withdrawal of one’s Certificate or License to teach with consequent termination of appointment for good (GES, 2000).

Results

Description of participants

The 490 Primary, Junior Secondary School (JSS), Senior Secondary School (SSS) children who participated in the study were distributed in the four districts as follows: Cape Coast, 30.6%; Sunyani, 30.2%; Afram Plains, 19.6%; and Bawku East, 19.6%. Because of the peculiar nature of the subject matter, the females constituted the greater majority (74.5%) of the sample. The ages of the respondents ranged from 7 to 17 years with a mean age of 15 years. With regard to their class or form, 1.6% were in Primary, 80% were in JSS, 16.5% were in SSS, while 1.8% were in vocational, technical and training institutions. Majority (90.2%) of the parents and guardians were in some kind of gainful employment, with the greatest proportion in agriculture and related occupations.

Incidence of Sexual Abuse of School Children

We started with the children by looking at the issue of safety in schools. The great majority of children (88.4%) indicated that they felt safe at school; the rest (11.6%) indicated not feeling safe. But the percentage of girls (13.6%) that expressed not feeling safe was greater than that of the boys. The main reasons advanced for not feeling safe were: (i) disturbed by advances of suitors (48.8%); (ii) constant objects of ridicule (9.8%); (iii) financial problems (9.8%); (iv) punishment meted out by teachers (9.7%); (v) not comfortable with threatening letters sent to them (2.4%). Examining the reasons deeply, one could see that the burden of fear points more towards the girl children. When probed, the girls mentioned several forms of

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sexual abuse on them by both their peers and some teachers. These include: (i) fondling of their breasts by boys; (ii) pinching of buttocks by boys; (iii) proposal of love by both boys and teachers; (iv) receipt of love letters from both boys and teachers; (vi) lesbianism among girls in second cycle boarding institutions; and (vii) using the cane to lift girl's dresses and looking at pants and thighs when caning by teachers

We also tried to find out from children whether they were afraid that they might be sexually assaulted while in school. The great majority (82.8%) expressed not afraid; while (17.2%) indicated being afraid. More of the females (20.4%) than males (7.6%) entertained such fears.

Having cleared the psychological barrier that might inhibit the respondents from giving the relevant answers to the questions on sexual abuse, they were asked to indicate whether any of the things (under activities) on Table 1 had happened to them at school. The information shows incidence of various types of sexual abuse. On average, about 5.3% of the respondents (children) have experienced actual sex at school. The incidents at 10.8% and 7.3% in Sunyani and Bawku East districts of experiencing actual sex at school need closer examination and quick decisive actions taken.

Table 1
Incidence of Sexual Abuse in the School Environment

Aspects of Sexual Abuse	Sunyani %	Bawku East %	Cape Coast %	Afram Plains %	Total %
1.Unwelcome Sexual advances (verbal or non-verbal)	15.15	8.3	6.0	34.4	14.9
2. Requests for sexual favours	16.9	17.7	2.0	33.3	15.7
3. Sexually motivated physical conduct	10.8	4.2	0.7	3.1	4.9
4. Clothing pulled in a sexual way	11.5	1.0	-	20.8	7.8
5. Fondled, touched, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way at school	12.2	10.4	5.3	17.7	10.8
6. Threatened by a teacher/school employee that schooling will suffer if did not have sex with them	8.8	5.2	0.7	1.0	4.5
7. Physically intimidated by another student	6.1	6.3	0.7	1.0	4.7
8. Stayed at home or cut class because of sexual harassment/intimidation	6.1	5.2	-	3.1	3.5
9. Been shown, given or left sexual photographs, messages or notes at school	10.8	4.2	-	2.1	4.5
10. Experienced actual sex at school	10.8	7.3	0.7	2.1	5.3
Number of respondents	148	96	150	96	490

Source: Field Survey

We differentiated between children who have been coercively sexually abused from those who have been indecently assaulted by asking the question: ‘have you been forced to have sex?’ The information in Table 2 shows that while 88.8% replied that they had never been forced to have sex, 11.2% answered in the affirmative. That is to say, 11.2% of the respondents had been victims of either rape (16 years and above) or defilement (under 16 years of age). The Criminal Code Amendment Act of the Republic of Ghana (1998) has defined defilement as ‘the natural or unnatural carnal knowledge of any child under 16 years of age’ (Republic of Ghana, 1998). Furthermore, more female (13.5%) than male (4.2%) students indicated that they had been victims of forced sexual abuse.

Table 2
Victims of Sexual Abuse by Gender

Being a Victim of Sexual Abuse at School	Gender						
		Male		Female		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	5	4.2	47	13.5	52	11.2	
No	114	95.8	300	86.5	414	88.8	
Total	119	100.0	347	100.0	466	100.0	

Source: Field Survey,

$X^2 = 7.8, p < 0.01$

The earliest age at which the school children were sexually abused was 4 years, with a modal age of 14 years, and a range of 4-17 years. The respondents (abused children) mentioned the perpetrators of sexual abuse as: boy/girl friend (37.7%); school mates (28.3%); relatives (15.1%); teachers (5.7%); parents (3.8%); and strangers (3.8%). For the majority (75%) of the children who had been sexually abused, the act took place only once. It happened twice for 14.6% of the respondents and thrice for 6.3% of the abused children.

A sizeable proportion (31.4%) of the children who had not experienced sexual abuse indicated that they knew of cases of sexual abuse in their schools. They stated that 91.8% of the victims were female students; and that the sexual acts took place mainly outside the school premises. However, those sexual acts that took place on the premises of the school occurred in the classroom (16.9%), in the teachers’ rooms (1.5%), and at the garages (0.7%). The main perpetrators were given as boy/girl friends (38.1%), school and play mates (16.4%), neighbours (14.9%), and teachers (9.7%).

Parents were quite apprehensive of the safety of their children at school. Most of the reasons are sex-related. The parents were generally of the view that there was a great deal of sexual abuse in the schools, especially among older students and children. They particularly mentioned the situation in secondary schools where girls were forced into lesbianism and boys into homosexuality. Head teachers also

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saw sexual abuse as a problem in their schools. The various types of sexual abuse mentioned by the head teachers are similar as the students. They include in the order of magnitude of occurrence: love letters, notes and messages (35.7%); sexual acts resulting in pregnancy (21.5%) and; actual sex in school (14.3%). Those who were involved in sexual abuse in the schools were mainly the students themselves (75%). However, 12.5% of the head teachers indicated that some of their teachers were among the perpetrators of sexual abuse in the schools.

Actions Taken on Situations of Sexual Abuse in Schools

Most of the abused children reported the cases to parents/relatives (48.1%), to friends (13.5%) and not reported/or did nothing (15.4%) as indicated in Table 3.. The victims were of the view that nothing would have been done if the matter had been reported to the school authorities. What is still intriguing is that only a small proportion of the cases were reported by the parents to either the school authorities or the law enforcement agencies.

Table 3
Actions Taken by the Victims after Sexual Abuse

Actions Taken	Number	Percentage
1. Reported to parents/relatives	25	48.1
2. Not reported/did nothing	8	15.4
3. Reported to friends	7	13.5
4. Reported to the head teacher	6	11.5
5. Reported to other school personnel	4	3.8
6. Reported to the police	1	1.9
7. Reported to brother/sister	1	1.9
8. Reported to grand parents	1	1.9
9. Assaulted the perpetrator	1	1.9
10. Total	52	100

Source: Field Survey,

Children's perceptions of the actions taken by the school authorities is not encouraging. The majority (52.7%) were of the view that the actions taken by the school authorities in cases of sexual abuse was far from being satisfactory. While 29.8% of the children indicated that the school authorities did not take any action, 22.9% were not sure that the incidents were even reported to the law enforcement agencies, the Ghana Education Services (GES), or the parents of both the perpetrators (when school children) and the victims. They, however, pointed out that some of the perpetrators, (that were students), were suspended or dismissed (13.0%), punished by the authorities (6.1%), warned and reprimanded by the authorities (5.3%), reported to the parents of the victims (3.1%) and to the parents of the perpetrators (1.5%). When the perpetrators were adults, the school authorities found it harder to deal with. About 5.3% of the students indicated cases were reported to the police.

Table 4
Actions Taken by Parents when their Children were sexually abused

Actions Taken	Number	Percentage
1.Nothing was done	5	27.7
2. Reported to the police, WAJU, went to court	4	22.2
3. Reported to the District Director of GES	3	16.7
4. Reported to the School Authorities	3	16.7
5. The perpetrator absconded	2	11.1
6. Warned the perpetrator	1	5.6
Total	18	100

Source: Field Survey,

Parents seemed to be very willing to report the cases to the police (22.2%) when their children and wards were involved. The head teachers as indicated in Table 5 expressed the view that school authorities did take action when acts got reported. Some of the actions taken, such as: (i) reported to the parents of the victim (25.0%); (ii) dismissed student (16.7%); (iii) counseled victim and perpetrator (16.7%) seem to be designed for the perpetrators who are students.

Table 5
Action Taken by Headteachers against Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse

Actions Taken	Number	Percentage
1. Reported to the parents of the victim	3	25.0
2. Dismissed the student	2	16.7
3. Counseled victim and perpetrator	2	16.7
4. Allowed student to continue school after giving birth	1	8.3
5. Reported the staff to Ghana Education Services (GES)	1	8.3
6. Reported to PTA and School Management Committee	1	8.3
7. Punished the perpetrator	1	8.3
8. Dismissed the staff or employee	1	8.3
Total	12	100

Source: Field Survey,

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Suggestions for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse in Schools

The children suggested a variety of actions (indicated in Table 6) which should be taken to prevent sexual abuse and ensure their safety in the school environment. From the actions suggested, it seems clear that the majority of the students would want some kind of institutional and/ or parental interventions. 25.6% of the children suggested that students should inform or write to school authorities about incidents, while 19.1% and 17.9% of the children suggested that incidents be reported to law enforcement agencies and to parents/guardians respectively.

Table 6
Suggested Actions by Children for Prevention of Sexual Abuse

Actions to be Taken	Number	Percentage
1. Students should inform school authorities of incidents	356	25.6
2. Incidents to be reported to law enforcement agencies	265	19.1
3. Report to parents and guardians	249	17.9
4. School to have and implement sexual abuse policy	163	11.7
5. A trusted friend should be told about incident	75	5.4
6. The student leadership should be involved in the issue	65	4.7
7. Students should record incidents to substantiate cases	31	2.2
8. Give guidance and counseling	31	2.2
9. Restrict the movement of children	12	0.9
10. Publicize rape incidents to serve as deterrent	4	0.3
11. Parents should cater for the needs of children	3	0.2
12. Children should not move with sexual offenders	3	0.2
13. Children to be monitored by school authorities	2	0.1
14. Girls should eschew pupil-teacher relationships	2	0.1
15. Children should choose friends carefully	2	0.1
16. Victims should report incidents without delay	1	0.07
17. Teachers should be screened before being employed	1	0.07
18. Moral education should be strengthened	1	0.07
Total	1,388	100

Source: Field Survey,

Asked to indicate what they could do to prevent sexual abuse in their schools, the pupils/students made various suggestions. **From the girls**, the main suggestions made were: (i) Pupils should report anyone who makes sexual advances on them to the school authorities; (ii) girls should wear descent dresses/uniforms according

to the prescribed length so as not to attract boys; (iii) girls should know how to play with boys to avoid temptation; (iv) girls should not be allowed to visit the houses of male teachers. In case the girl has to go to the house, she should be accompanied by two or three other girls; (v) the teacher/student relationship should be purely on academic and formal basis.

The suggestions **from the boys** were: (i) sex education must be taught as an examinable subject; (ii) pupils should constantly be made aware of the dangers of boy/girl relationships; (iii) students who indulge in sexual misconduct should be made to face severe punishment from school authorities. This can take the form of suspension or even dismissal.

Furthermore, the children made a number of suggestions as to the types of punishment to be meted out to perpetrators as indicated in Table 7. The main suggested punishments are: (i) criminal prosecution, imprisonment and death sentence (69.5%); (ii) dismissal of school teachers (5.7%); (iii) suspension or sacking of school children (5.3%); and (iv) castration or vasectomy (5.3%).

Table 7
Types of Punishment Suggested by Children for Perpetrators

Types of Punishment	Number	Percentage
1. Criminal prosecution, imprisonment and death	393	69.5
2. Dismissal of school teachers	32	5.7
3. Suspension or sacking of school children	30	5.3
4. Castration or Vasectomy	30	5.3
5. Fine, financial sanctions	20	3.5
6. Physical assault	16	2.8
7. Pay compensation to victim	13	2.3
8. Ostracism from the society	12	2.1
9. Counseling and advice	4	1.4
10. Pass a separate law for sexual offenders	4	0.7
11. Undergo psychiatric examination	3	0.5
12. Jeering by the public	3	0.5
13. Publicise the incidents of abusers	2	0.4
14. Demotion of teacher offenders	1	0.2
15. Perpetrators to cater for the needs of victims	1	0.2
16. Weeding	1	0.2
Total	565	100

Source: Field Survey,

Parental suggestions on prevention strategies are of two types. One area of suggestions focused on what generally can be done; the second area emphasized what parents can also do. On what generally should be done, the parent's main suggestions are that: (i) policy on sexual abuse in schools should be enforced

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(17.2%); (ii) sex education to be part of the curricula; (iii) legal action against perpetrators; and (iv) parents to provide financial and material needs, as indicated in Table 8. With respect to what parents should do, the key suggestions included: (i) supply children with all their needs (25.2%); (ii) provide sex education at home (24.4%); (iii) parental advice and guidance (20.5%).

The head teachers suggestions for the prevention of sexual abuse in schools are categorized into three, namely: (i) what head teachers could do to prevent sexual abuse; (ii) what teachers, guidance counselors and other school staff could do; and (iii) what school children could do?

What Head-teachers should do? They were of the view that the school environment would be free from the incidence of sexual abuse if the following measures were taken: (i) sex education to be made part of the school curricula in which children are educated of sexual rights and the consequences of sexual abuse; (ii) punishment of sexual abuse perpetrators should include dismissal and institution of legal action; (iii) banning students from going to teachers' quarters or homes and discouraging relationship between teachers and students.

Table 8
Parents Suggestions to Prevent Sexual Abuse in Schools

Suggestions	Number	Percentage
1. Enforce policy of sexual abuse in schools	11	17.2
2. Sex education to be part of the curricula	10	15.6
3. Legal action against perpetrators	9	14.1
4. Parents to provide financial and material needs	9	14.1
5. Censorship against TV/Video on sex	5	7.8
6. Restriction of children during the night	4	6.3
7. Offending teachers to be severely punished	3	4.7
8. Students to be content with what they have	3	4.7
9. Guidance and counseling on sex education	2	3.1
10. Castration of perpetrator	2	3.1
11. Perpetrators to take full responsibility of victim	2	3.1
12. Girls to be careful when moving with boys	2	3.1
13. Teachers to enforce discipline	2	3.1
Total	64	100

Source: Field Survey,

What teachers, guidance counselors and other school personnel could do? The head teachers were of the view that these school actors have crucial roles to play in preventing sexual abuse. To play these roles effectively, they suggested the school actors should: (i) exhibit a high sense of discipline; (ii) provide answers to questions and clarify issues on sex; (iii) organize talks and debates on sexual abuse;

(iv) educate students on sex and abuse including STI and HIV/AIDS; (v) promote Life-skills, moral and spiritual education.

What school children could do? The head teachers were of the view that since the main victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse in the schools were the students themselves, the prevention of sexual abuse and its future occurrence would depend a great deal on the students themselves. They advised that students should concentrate on studies and avoid: boyfriend/girl friend relationships; enticement with money and gifts and; watching pornographic films.

Discussion

The results show incidence of various types of sexual abuse. It seems clear that sexual abuse of school children, both its occurrence and severity, is strongly related to gender. The probability of girls' experiencing sexual abuse is considerably higher than for boys. About 91.8% of the victims were female students. The earliest age at which the school children were sexually abused was 4 years, with a modal age of 14 years, and a range of 4-17 years.

Relevance of the theoretical explanations

We found that, except for the 'pathological theory', all the other perspectives have varying degrees of applications and implications to the Ghana situation. The 'pathological theory' was not supported by the results. The same was found to be true in the USA (Lee et al, 1996).

The biological perspective is, to a large extent, useful. The fact that 91.8% of the victims were girls raises the issue of physical differences and attractiveness between the sexes. Furthermore, some of the suggestions on prevention from the girls that: girls should wear 'decent' dresses; girls should know how to play with boys to avoid temptation; and girls should not be allowed to visit the houses of male teachers tend to support the power of the physical differences and attractiveness perspective.

The relevance of the developmental conceptualization is mixed. On the one hand, the fact that the main perpetrators of sexual abuse in the school environment were school children and the aspects of abuse exhibited being mainly, pulling of clothes, touching, pinching et cetera suggests lack of knowledge of appropriate sexual behavior. On the other, the finding that adults and teachers were involved limits the explanatory power of the developmental model.

The 'abuse of power theories' seem to be supported by results. Some of the students (especially girls) were abused by school officials –teachers and staff. Because teachers occupy positions of authority over students, harassment by them is a clear

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abuse of organizational power. Teacher's complicity in sexual abuse of children strongly raises the issue of 'who will guard the guardians'. It could also be possible that senior students in some positions in schools harass younger ones.

The 'cultural theories' of sexual harassment were also found very relevant, especially those formed around the structural and ethical views, which center on school norms concerning sexuality. Children and parents indicated that the incidence of sexual abuse was rising because school authorities had been complacent. They nevertheless, still expect the school authorities to do something about the phenomenon. These theories offer great possibilities for action/s at the school level. They could be helpful in guiding effective responses to the problems in schools because of the importance they afford school norms in influencing the behaviors of school members.

Poverty was found to be the basic underlying cause. One of the main reasons the girls advanced for not feeling safe in school is financial problems. Furthermore, one of the prevention strategies suggested by parents to reduce sexual abuse is to 'provide material and financial needs to school children. One could argue that some of the girls might not be resisting stubbornly some of the sexual advances because of the potential rewards. We did not collect information to stretch this line of thought. Our immediate objective was to find ways of protecting these children in school by strengthening the policies and legislations and suggesting ways to make them work.

Policy Implications for Sexual Abuse in Schools

The pervasiveness of abuse in the schools definitely raises the question of how effective the laws, statutes and the regulations which are meant to protect children from sexual abuse are. These laws and statutes make sense when applied in cases with clear power differentials, as unequal power is sometimes used to coerce the less powerful into unwanted sexual activity. The laws could be more effective when directed toward adults in schools, such as teachers, head-teachers, and school staff, because these people fill roles with power over school children. But it is important to note that the large majority of school-based sexual abuse occurs between school children. Sexual abuse policies designed on this structural model are inadequate in dealing with this category.

Strengthening Policy Framework. We suggest that the general laws and statutes be strengthened with school policies. We agree that isolating the guilty, especially the adults, and punishing them should be part of the policy. But very crucial is that sexuality among adolescents should become an important and upfront subject of discussion in schools.

As part of the strengthening process, we offer the following recommendations:

1. The GES Policy (Code of Conduct) should be modified to reflect social change and the law. The objective should be to establish functional linkages with the nation's criminal judicial process.
2. Every school in the country should be mandated to develop a written sexual harassment policy for staff and students. This will be displayed prominently in all classes and other important places in the school and officially given to each teacher and parent. The head teacher should be empowered to suspend/and or expel students who engage in sexual abuse. Public awareness of each school's commitment to an abuse-free environment must be created through the actions of school personnel in enforcing existing sexual abuse policies. In fact it should be part of the school peer review process.
3. Breaking the culture of silence by encouraging/facilitating open and frank discussions on sexuality, power and domination in schools. This implies that relevant and appropriate childhood/adolescent/adult sexuality and dominance must enter the literature, writing, and social studies curriculum at all grade levels. The emerging Life-skills programs provide possibilities for addressing all issues touching on sexuality, power and HIV/AIDS.
4. Related to recommendation two, develop and publish a curriculum on sexual abuse for children. This will help school children understand, recognize, and address their own ambivalence with respect to sexual abuse. Girls should not accept sexual abuse as inevitable. The sexual teasing, grabbing merely reinforces other more subtle lessons. It reminds the girls that they are defined by their bodies; it underscores their lack of entitlement in the school; it confirms that belief that boy's sexuality is uncontrollable while their own must remain in check. Without encouragement and proper information, these girls, who already feel diminished, have little reason to believe that they could have recourse against harassment from boys.
5. Encourage children to form groups (anti sexual abuse squad). The opinion of some of the girls was that they were not safe at school to a great extent due to sexual abuse. Girls who are afraid of being harassed and those who have started experiencing the initial sexual harassments, such as teasing, touching of breasts and buttocks should be enabled by the school to form a group or groups depending on the size. The hope is that the girls through group discussions with the guidance counselor or any person will not only start identifying the perpetrators but begin to build a sense of cohesion and power among themselves. The girls as a group or groups could write open letters to the perpetrators about harassment that could be read in the school assembly and placed in the public places and to the parents (especially fathers) of the perpetrators.

Conclusion: Towards a Community-Based Child Protection Team

Considering all the above evidence, we could conclusively argue that the current system of protecting children from sexual abuse in society generally and in schools in particular is ineffective. This is because the current protective system is too bureaucratic; on paper, says all the good things; but is very weak at the operational level. Getting modern laws and policies to work in communities that barely understand what the laws and policies say; where the institutions (like the law enforcement agencies, health services, social welfare etc.) are to say the least deficient, is a tall order. This calls for a new paradigm or reviving an old forgotten one for child protection.

The new paradigm proposed is the 'Community Based Child Protection Teams (CBCPT). The team could be made up of community members with representations from the schools including children, village traditional government, prevailing Church or Mosque. This composition is strictly applicable to the rural areas where there are no social workers. In the villages where there are social workers, they should be part of the team.

The team when constituted will, in partnership with other formal and informal resources in each community, respond to child abuse cases on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, the system proposed could potentially serve a wider range of children because it would have the capacity to offer services to children, schools and families earlier before the children's situation deteriorates into full blown sexual abuse. As noticed from the study, the abuse in schools ranges from pinching to sexual act. Most of these cases could be addressed at the initial stages, such as the pinching stage. But this will depend on the improvement of the system of reporting.

Establishment of teams will not be difficult. The hard job is making teams to work. Getting the Community Based Child Protection Teams to function could be difficult. But we have to protect our children. We can only suggest a roadmap to initiate the process, allowing possibilities of making adjustments on the strategies. We propose the following elements to help getting the teams to function after they had been successfully formed.

- *Strengthen the knowledge and information capacity of teams.* . This could be done by orienting the teams on : (i) human rights; (ii) the relevant portions of the legal instruments/framework dealing with the abuse including the teacher's code of conduct; and (iii) the negative impacts of the abuses on children.
- *Strengthen Partnership between teams and the professional groups dealing with cases of abuse.* The basic weakness of the existing framework for dealing with abuses is the disconnection with the realities and structures in the communities. The modern bureaucratic structures are still very weak in most African communities. The police, social workers, teachers are not

enough to monitor the billions of transactions that occur every day in our communities. But with partnership between the two groups – community teams and the bureaucratic structure/s, possibilities for effectiveness could be increased.

- *Increased public awareness of children sexual abuse.* The teams could hold public forums and provide speakers for groups such as parent-teacher associations and other community organizations.
- *Strengthen the institution of child government in schools.* This institution could be the front line to which a child under pressure in school settings could take the report to. Children’s governments should reflect actual good governance structures on the ground: An executive, legislature and Judiciary under which decisions, bye-laws and disputes are settled among children. Very critical will be the formation of a Cabinet of children, consisting of key “ministers”, notably the ministers of education, health, finance, women and children’s affairs. The latter group shall be responsible for thematic issues affecting children including sexual abuse. The government will agree on a complaints structure or mechanism which will make it possible for children to disclose such problems with their peers before it is presented to the school authorities.

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