

# Child poverty and inequality

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



To what extent has poverty masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa? A study of poverty relief campaigns targeted at, or originating from, western countries”

## Abstract

Child abuse is a global phenomenon that affects all societies and is driven by both the socio-economic factors and psycho-biosocial factors. Studies have, over the past few decades, shown an increasing prevalence of child abuse and a decline in awareness of issues of child abuse, with Africa reported to have the highest prevalence rates. The pervasive nature of child abuse and the lack of progress in creating awareness of issues of child abuse demand for urgent action to address this issue.

The proposed dissertation seeks to examine the extent to which poverty in Africa has masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa. It comprises of an introductory section, rationale of the topic chosen, and literature review and the overall methodological approach that will be taken to address the objectives of the research. The literature review section presents the findings of previous research and identifies gaps or conceptual problems in existing research. The paper proposes the overall methodological approach which will be taken to gather data, and the sampling strategy that will be employed. Further, the paper identifies ethical issues and demonstrates how the validity and reliability of the research findings will be ensured

## Introduction

Child abuse is a global phenomenon that affects all societies and is often driven by both the socio-economic factors and psycho-biosocial factors. The Female children are often the most affected with incidences of child abuse higher among the females than the males. According to a recent review by Pereda et. al (2009) that examined 65 studies from 22 countries, the global prevalence of child abuse was found to be higher among females, with estimates at 19. 7% for females and 7. 9% for male children.

The study also revealed that Africa has the highest prevalence rates of child abuse and that awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa has declined. The pervasive nature of child abuse and the lack of progress in creating awareness of issues of child abuse require urgent action to address this issue. Contributing to this topic, the proposed dissertation will examine issues of child abuse in Africa. In particular, the proposed dissertation will examine the extent to which poverty in Africa has masked awareness of issues of child abuse. This will include an exploration of poverty relief campaigns targeted at, or originating from, Western countries”.

Rationale of the study.

Children have a right to care and protection from abuse as specified under article 18 of the UNCRC (USAID 2011). Their right to protection is also upheld under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (USAID 2011). While the UNCRC and ACRWC ensure the protection of the rights of children and recognize the state’s ultimate responsibility in fulfilling these rights, studies have recently highlighted the alarmingly large number of children who are exploited, abused and neglected (USAID 2011).

Child abuse has become a serious global concern and is particularly pervasive in Africa. Incidences of child abuse that are particularly common in the African continent include child marriage, child trafficking, sexual abuse, child prostitution and pornography; and neglect (Shumba 2007). In spite of its prevalence, there seem to be a lack of progress in creating awareness and addressing issues of child abuse in Africa. Poverty seems to be masking issues of child abuse in Africa.

### Research objectives

The proposed dissertation draws attention to issues of child abuse in Africa. In particular, the analysis examines the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa. As such, the research objectives of the proposed study include.

To understand the magnitude and nature of child abuse in Africa

To examine the extent to which poverty relief campaigns targeted at, or originating from, Western countries” have masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa

To contribute towards reducing child poverty and increasing awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa.

### Literature review

Although child abuse is a global phenomenon, it is particularly pervasive in Africa. There is a widespread concern about the high levels of assault, sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Sub-Saharan Africa. A recent Human Rights Watch report of (2001) documented increasing cases of rape, assault

and sexual harassment of schoolgirls in South Africa. In three provinces in South Africa visited by Human Rights Watch, it was found that schoolgirls were raped by their teachers in empty classrooms, school toilets, and hostels and even in the hallways.

Lema (1997) notes that sexual abuse of children in Sub-Saharan Africa has escalated over the past few decades. He also points out that, the situation seems to have taken a dramatic turn for the worst in Malawi where there have been increased incidences of reported child sexual abuse. A conclusion shared by most of studies is that child abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa is on the increase. Most of these studies have attributed the increase in child abuse to a range of factors such as breakdown of traditional culture, disintegration of clan authority, beliefs and rapid social change (Lalor 2004). Others view child abuse, especially sexual abuse as a product of modernization.

A feature of most of the African literature on child abuse is the perception that the abuse can in part be attributed to beliefs in the ‘cleansing’ nature of sex with children (Lalor 2004). As Lema (1997) and Meursing et al. (1995) note, there seem to be a wider perception that sex with virgin girls may cure STDs and bring good fortune. While this finding may certainly seem true, the authors did not provide any empirical evidence in their studies. The extent to which such practices are carried out remain uncertain.

Lema’s speculations also reappear in the work of Madu & Peltzer (2000). While these authors acknowledge that the evidence is anecdotal, there is a danger in citing unsubstantiated anecdote as this leads to an undeserved credibility of the position held (Lalor 2004). Although a number of studies

have identified a range of contributory factors causing the prevalence of child abuse, there remains disquiet in academia on the extent to which poverty has masked the awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa.

However, some authors have explored on the link between poverty and child abuse. Clark et al. (2007) & Larchman et al. (2002) have argued that the increase in prevalence of child abuse is largely attributable to increased levels of poverty. In fact, the mere existence of poverty has been labeled by Clark et al. (2007) as a form of abuse. They argue that when children from poor backgrounds are deprived of their basic elements, they suffer the same consequences as those whom these elements have been withheld intentionally (Clark et al. 2007).

Larchman et. al (2002) argues that the high levels of poverty in Africa have led to children being subjected to exploitative child labour, child trafficking and child prostitution. These authors also argue that while progress has been made to develop child protection programs, without the necessary steps to eradicate poverty in Africa, child protection will continue to be an academic issue.

A similar study on child abuse in Zambia by UNICEF (2001) showed that girls at the age of 12 to 15 years were forced by their parents to work in hotels, bars and brothels. Subsequently, a Human Rights Watch report (2009) showed that in 2004, more than 820, 000 orphaned children in Congo were driven into prostitution for the survival of their families. Whilst it's difficult to ascertain the scale of the problem, it is clear that poverty is masking issues of child abuse in Africa.

Children from poor backgrounds are being caught up in the daily struggle for survival and material gain (Larchman et al. 2002). This is the case especially in Kenya and Nigeria where parents send their children to the street to sell food, clothing and general merchandise, resulting in them becoming part-time street traders. Others are sent by their parents to beg in the streets. Whereas some others lead handicapped adults as they beg on the streets (Lalor 2004). Such practices in many respects are damaging to the lives of children and hold great danger for them. Some people may lure children by buying their wares and paying them to run errands.

Further, children from poor backgrounds who are sexually abused are often denied justice by parents who accept payoffs. When children are sexually abused, the persons responsible for the evil act pay their parents so that they won't press charge (Shumba 2007). And since most of the African families are poor, they accept such pay offs and remain silent. Such a culture of child abuse is very common in Africa.

Clearly, poverty seems to be masking awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa. There is an urgent need to address the issue of child poverty and increase child abuse awareness in Africa. Given the close association between poverty and child abuse, it can be argued that the most effective way to address issues of child abuse would be to eradicate poverty.

Methodology

## **Research design**

A key element of any research is to ensure an appropriate research design. As pointed out by Bickman et al. (1997), research design serves as the “architectural blueprint” of a research study. It comprises of the overall research approach, data collection methods and analyses of data. It links data collection and analysis activities to the research questions. In fact, the credibility and reliability of a research rests with the design implemented. For the proposed dissertation, the research design will be as follows:

### **Research philosophy**

The research is going to take an interpretive philosophical approach. Not only will the researcher interact with the participants, but will also take into account the multiple versions of reality. Besides seeking the views of the participant on the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of child abuse issues, the researcher will also take into account counter-opposing views, explaining how poverty may not be masking issues of child abuse. The interpretive philosophical approach will enable the research to critically engage with the research topic, thereby providing rich insights.

## **Research approach**

The overall methodological approach to the proposed dissertation will take the form of a mixed method research design involving a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The advantage of the mixed method approach is that it combines the strength of both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches. As pointed out by Connelly



(2009), the mixed approach is important as it draws on the strength and minimizes the weaknesses of the two research approaches.

Another important point to note is that the mixed approach will enrich the study by promoting clarity, accuracy and nuance (Connelly 2009). Research is more robust where it involves mix methods and more ethical in the sense that the plurality of interests and perspectives are represented (Connelly 2009). By combining both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the researcher will be able to produce a more comprehensive analysis of the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of child abuse in Africa

Interviews will be used to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants, particularly international NGOs that deal with issues of child abuse such as the Coalition Against Child Abuse & Neglect (CACAN), Coalition of African NGO working with Children (CANGOC), Coalition Against Child Labour in Zimbabwe (CACLAZ), and African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (anppcan). Interviews with such key informants will help in developing rich insights on the topic under investigation.

The researcher will also scour through published and peer-reviewed literature on child abuse in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the limited number of peer-reviewed studies that examine the extent to which poverty has masked the awareness of child abuse in Africa, the researcher have to utilize grey literature as well including unpublished data and research reports. Whilst the secondary data will be based on a systematic review, the researcher

recognizes that a full systematic review of the relevant literature may not be possible owing to the lack of availability of resources. Nonetheless, much of the relevant literature will be captured from a range sources. The collated evidence will then be used to address the research objectives.

## **Sampling**

Purposive sampling method will be employed in selecting the participants to be interviewed. Purposive sampling method has been chosen for this analysis as it gives the researcher latitude in selecting the sample according to the purpose of the study which is to examine the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa. The study will be confined to four African countries: Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa and Kenya. A sample of 40 participants will be selected, 10 from each of the coalitions. The participants will be subjected to semi-structured interviews and asked questions about the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of issues of child abuse in the four selected African countries.

## **Reliability and validity**

Interviews with key informants such as CACLAZ, CACAN, ANPPCAN and CANGOC will ensure reliability and trustworthiness of the research finding given their expertise in the field of child abuse. Also, the use of mixed method approach will be particularly useful in achieving triangulation thereby increasing the study's reliability and validity. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data will enable the research to cross-check reliability and validity of the research findings.

## **Ethical issues**

It is important to take into consideration ethical issues when conducting a research as ethical considerations provide a basis for the credibility and objectivity of a research. By ethics, we imply the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour towards the subjects or rather the application of moral standards when conducting and reporting of the findings of a research. For the proposed research, the researcher will first seek consent of the participants and ensure that participants are treated with respect and due consideration.

Participants will be assured of confidentiality of their information. The researcher will also assure the participants that the findings obtained will not be used for other purposes other than to investigate the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of issues of child abuse in Africa. Also when conducting the systematic reviews of published and peer-reviewed studies and other relevant documented materials, the researcher will acknowledge the authors' contributions.

## **Possible limitations to the study**

While the study has laid out the framework to achieving the research objective, it is without doubt that there are likely to be certain drawbacks. These include:

The research findings of the 4 African countries may not be generalized to represent the entire African continent

The research is also likely to be faced with time and budgetary constraints. Given the dearth of information on how poverty masks awareness of issues

of child abuse, achieving the objectives of the research is likely to be challenging.

### Conclusion

To this end, the paper has laid out the overall approach to addressing the research questions of the proposed dissertation and the rationale for the chosen topic and research method. The paper has also identified the main ethical issues that must be taken into consideration. Further, the paper has shown how the validity and reliability of the research findings will be ensured.

While the objectives of the study seem achievable, it is without doubt that the research will be constrained by certain factors such as availability of resources, budgetary and time constraints. Nonetheless, the researcher is positive that the primary objective of the research, which is to examine the extent to which poverty has masked awareness of issues of child abuse, will be achieved.

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