



BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

**EXPLORING THE EFFECTS AND WAYS TO MITIGATE CHILD ABUSE ON THE
MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL FEMALE LEARNERS**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN CHEMISTRY**

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DECLARATION

I, Makudza, T Reg Number hereby declare that this research project is my own work and has not been submitted to any University or other Tertiary Institution for the award of a degree.

Signed:

Date: 15 September 2022

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certifies that they have supervised the student, Makudza Tongai entitled EXPLORING THE EFFECTS AND WAYS TO MITIGATE CHILD ABUSE ON THE MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL FEMALE LEARNERS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MASVINGO DISTRICT, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Chemistry at the Bindura University of Science Education

SUPERVISOR`S SIGNATURE

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

DEDICATION

To my beloved wife, Mrs Makudza, with all my love and gratitude for holding a candle for me

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Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Munyaradzi Chidarikire, to whom I feel indebted to the knowledge and advice, patience and guidance which helped me to navigate through the trials and tribulations of this research project. Further gratitude is extended to my parents, Mr and Mrs Chikudza, for their financial support and spurring me on even when the tide was violent.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study looked into the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District. The case study research design was used and open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews were used to solicit data from senior teachers and victims of child abuse respectively. It was revealed that cases of physical and emotional abuse on the rural female learners by their teachers are common as some teachers tend to inflict corporal punishment and label learners as worthless in front of their colleagues. The study also discovered that some learners would come to school with injuries which testifies to them being physically abused within their families. Findings of the study also showed that a majority of abused female learners have been found to develop aggressive behaviours and other negative risk-taking behaviours as a result of the negative modelling their minds have been exposed to. Mental health problems such as emotional insecurities, worthlessness and unexplainable anger towards their peers and teachers were also experienced by rural female learners who have been victims of child abuse. The study also discovered that some victims struggled to cope with learning as a result of disturbed memory and cognitive functioning. The study suggested that educating children about child abuse will empower them to stand for their rights in the wake of victimisation. It was also suggested that school-based prevention must include child abuse at the core of their agenda as this may help create a school culture which has a strong message against all forms of abuse not only against female learners, but all the learners at the school. The study recommended that schools should have regular sessions where senior teachers including the head, speak about various forms of child abuse to learners so as to conscientize all learners in the school about this phenomenon. The study also recommends community leaders to be encouraged by the government to effect stiffer penalties for those adults who abuse children within their localities. The government is also recommended to design schemes that will help to rehabilitate pupils who have been negatively affected by child abuse in all its forms.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.1.Introduction

The study explored into the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in Masvingo District Secondary Schools. This chapter outline the background of the study, statement of the problem, the research objectives and questions. Significance, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study will also be discussed. The chapter also looks at the definitions of terms as well as the organisation of the study.

1.2.Background of the study

Child abuse has been a topical issue since time immemorial and researchers have been trying to find the root cause of it and proffer lasting solutions. Various studies have viewed child abuse from different angles in a bid to show its varying and covert nature (Coghill, Bonnar, Duke, Graham and Seth, 2009; Deborah, 2011; Paulozzi and Melanson, 2008). In Seth et al (2009)'s study, child abuse has been viewed as the physical or psychological/emotional mistreatment of children with the main victims of it being children from broken families and those in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Deborah (2011) abuse of any kind has never been tolerated among children as it increases their likelihood of stunted social, physical and mental development. In line with the above, Paulozzi and Melanson (2008) highlighted that abuse is a complex psychosocial problem that affects large numbers of adults as well as children throughout the world. Basing from the varying but related literature pertaining to child abuse, this study seeks to explore into the effects of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners as well as the ways that can be adopted to mitigate its occurrence in Masvingo District secondary schools.

A study by McCoy and Keen (2013) in Bangladesh rural schools has shown an alarming rate of child abuse. Increases in child abuse cases have been on the increase, with female learners being the majority of those facing rampant acts of abuse. According to Conley (2010) the lack of a committed legal system, the lengthy process of the judicial system, inefficiency of law enforcing agency, perpetration of various forms of abuse among female learners in rural Bangladesh has become so alarming as offenders are committing child-abuse related crimes without hesitation. The above has also been documented by Bonnie, Fisher and Steven (2010) who revealed that poor commitment to the legal system and child protection has resulted in the rural population facing the wrath of child abuse.

Studies have shown that the prevalence of child abuse against females has been due to a combination of factors which include domestic violence and family structure (Baloyi, 2010; Beitchman, Zucker and Hood, 2012; Beutler and Williams, 2014). According to Baloyi (2010) when domestic violence is present, one parent may not be able to protect the child from another parent's abusive behavior because that parent is also being abused. In this case the female child, who is often weak and defenseless may be harmed while trying to protect a parent from domestic violence or as a result of the violence (American Psychiatry Association, 2010). In a study of female child abuse in California, Beutler and Williams (2014) discovered that single parent families were found to create a breeding environment for child abuse and neglect. It has also been highlighted by the above scholar that families with chronic marital discord or spousal abuse have higher rates of child abuse than families without these problems. Female learners from single parent families have also been documented as being at risk of physical abuse and other types of neglect as they tend to be involved in labour related activities for economic survival.

Nigerian studies have also shown that the prevalence of child abuse against female learners has been difficult to ascertain due to many factors such as differing definitions and perceptions on

what constitutes sexual abuse in children (Diallo, 2004; Effa-Chukwuma, 2018; Egbejule, 2016). A study by Egbejule (2016) discovered that some rural communities viewed child abuse in light of contact abuse and intercourse only, whilst others classified some socio-cultural practices like child marriage and female genital cutting as forms of child abuse. Diallo (2004) revealed that in greater parts of rural Nigeria, child abuse against female learners is generally underreported due to the lack of or a delayed disclosure by the victims which may be as a result of the inability of the child to understand that the behavior is inappropriate or harmful, poor communication skills especially in the very young or disabled, feelings of guilt and shame by the victims or fear of the perpetrator.

In Zimbabwe, studies which looked at the prevalence of child abuse of secondary school rural learners discovered that there was a strong link between parental absence and child sexual abuse (Chiroro et al, 2006; Dzikira, 2007). For example, Dzikira (2007)'s study hreported that children whose parents were cross-borders were more likely to report having been sexually abused than those whose parents were present most of the time. In another study, Chiroro et al. (2006) reported that girls who were brought up by their brothers-in-law were at risk of being sexually abused by them. This suggests that the cultural practice whereby the brother-in-law plays with his young sisters-in-law, (as a way of preparing her for marriage) touching their body parts especially breasts, still exists in some sections of the Zimbabwean society and this has been going unreported. It is against such a background that this study seeks to explore into the effects of child abuse on the mental development of female rural learners in Masvingo District secondary schools.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2013) an estimated 903 000 children were victims of child abuse resulting in physical, social and emotional injuries. Effa-Chukwuma (2018) revealed that the impact of child abuse and neglect is often discussed in terms of physical, psychological, behavioral, and societal consequences. In reality, however, it

is impossible to separate them completely. According to Iroanusi (2019) physical consequences (such as damage to a child's growing brain) can have psychological implications (cognitive delays or emotional difficulties, for example). A study by SOURCE revealed that psychological problems often manifest as high-risk behaviors such as depression and anxiety which may make a person more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol or illicit drugs, or overeat.

Various scholars have discovered how child abuse can cause impaired brain development in learners (Krason, 2007; Taylor and Steward, 2011, Dallam, 2011). In Krason (2007)'s study of Scottish secondary female learners, girls who have been sexually abused were found to develop a hyperarousal response in certain areas of their brains, resulting in sleep disturbances and anxiety. Dallam (2011) highlighted that the development of hyperactivity responses in the brain make the victims of child abuse become vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and learning and memory difficulties. In support of the above, a one long term study by Taylor and Steward (2011) in Mexican schools showed that as many as 80 percent of young adults who had been abused met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21. These young adults exhibited many problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. Other psychological and emotional conditions associated with abuse and neglect include panic disorder, dissociative disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, post- traumatic stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder (Dallam, 2011).

Studies on the impact of child abuse on secondary school learners discovered that a majority were facing psychological related effects after being abused (Shumba and Ahosi, 2011; Gutuza and Mapolisa, 2015; Choga, 2015). A study by Gutuza and Mapolisa showed that after experiencing abuses, all the learners in their study indicated that they felt the effects of abuse on their learning. Those abused by men stated that they did not want to mix with males or even coming close to them. In other words, going to a school with boys and male teachers made

them feel uncomfortable. In Shumba and Ahosi (2011)'s study, it was discovered that the abused learners felt sleepy in the classroom, particularly those who were awakened very early in the morning by step parents particularly step mothers to perform household chores before they left for school. Other studies indicated that victims lost memory about school work because most of the time they were thinking about the abuse they would experience when they got home (Choga, 2015). Considering that child abuse has been found to have disastrous consequences on the social, physical and psychological welfare of the learner, this study has discovered that a majority of studies have been too silent on the prevalence of child abuse perpetrated against rural female learners, thus this acted as a drive to this study.

1.3.Statement of the problem

Child abuse is a common phenomenon in every stratum of society. Although various ways have been put in place to reduce the occurrence of child abuse, cases of child abuse are being reported on a daily basis. Rural schools, are however at a disadvantage in regards to conscientisation pertaining the ways to mitigate child abuse especially against female learners. It is therefore crucial that the rural community and beyond is made aware of the disastrous effects of child abuse on the female learner, and the procedures that can be taken to reduce abuse against female learners. Without this awareness, cases of female child abuse in society and in schools in particular will continue to affect the female learner socially, emotionally and physically. Thus, this study seeks to explore into the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in Masvingo District Secondary Schools.

1.4.Purpose of the study

The study seeks to establish the extent to which child abuse affects the mental development of rural female learners and come up with the ways to mitigate against the perpetration of female child abuse.

1.5. Research objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To establish the prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools
2. To assess the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners.
3. To identify the strategies that can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners.

1.6. Research questions

2. How prevalent is child abuse among rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools?
3. What is the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners?
4. What strategies can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners?

1.7 Significance of the study

The study findings may be of paramount significance to the education fraternity and society as a whole through making relevant stakeholders understand the nature of child abuse, its effects and the strategies that can be adopted to mitigate against its prevalence. The findings may also influence policy planning in Zimbabwe to ensure the adoption of child protection measures in schools and in the wider society.

1.8. Assumptions

The study will be carried under the following assumptions:

1. Female learners face more abuse than males

2. Rural schools have poor child abuse detection and reporting systems.

1.9.Delimitations

The study was carried out in Masvingo District where selected secondary schools in Masvingo North will be used for case studies. The study specifically looked at the effects of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners as well as the strategies that can be used to mitigate its prevalence. Secondary school senior teachers and female learners were the population of this study.

1.10. Limitations

The researcher faced limitations in terms of deriving a sample of abused female learners due to the stigmatisation which usually come with some extreme forms of abuse such as sexual abuse. However, the researcher made use of the school records to identify the female learners who have been abused in one way or the other.

1.11. Definition of terms

Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines child as a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Abuse

Abuse is defined as any action that intentionally harms or injures another person (Krason, 2007).

Abuse is the improper usage or treatment of an entity or a person often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit (Becker-Weidman, 2011). It is however, important to note that abuse of a person

can come in forms such as physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices; crimes, or other types of aggression

Child abuse

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, or psychological mistreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or other caregiver (Taylor and Steward, 2011). According to Wolfe (2011) child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse and child maltreatment as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Mental Development

According to Stark (2015) mental development refers to the progressive changes and improvements during mental maturation. Similarly, Bugger (2014) defines mental development as including the developing of such abilities like attending, perceiving, observing, remembering, imagining, thinking, solving problems and growth of intelligence as well as of language. Thus, mental development can be defined as the progressive changes in mental processes due to maturation, learning, and experience.

1.12. Summary

The chapter outlined the background of the study, statement of the problem, the research objectives and questions. Significance, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study

were also discussed. The chapter also looked at the definitions of terms. The next chapter looks at the review of related literature.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the review of related literature. Focus will be on the contemporary literature and other scholarly ideas in line with the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners. The following themes will be used as subtopics for the review of related literature: Establish the prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners, assessing the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners and identifying the strategies that can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners.

2.2. Prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners

Hosim (2007) `s study of Mexican secondary schools discovered that female learners were exposed to physical. Psychological and sexual abuse. In some instances, it was revealed that teachers would initiate physical aggression to female learners as a form of punishment. This physical aggression was found to include deliberate infliction of serious injuries such as bruises, scratches, burns, broken bones and lacerations. Keenan (2007) also discovered that in schools, female learners face emotional abuse from boys who may try to advance their sexual interests and intimacy. More so, Ajaja (2012) highlighted that female learners have been found being exposed to psychological abuse in the form of degrading treatment such as being yelled at, harsh criticism, denigration of personality, name-calling, ridicule and inattention.

In the Unites States, Balogun (2009) discovered that approximately 15% to 25% of women and 5% to 15% of men were sexually abused when they were children. In line with this, Bandman (2000) revealed that 30% of the offenders were found to be relatives of the female child, mostly brothers, sisters, mothers, uncles or cousins whilst 60% were found to be other acquaintances

such as friends of the family, babysitters, or neighbours. A study by Becker-Weidman (2011) of some ghetto families in New York found that socio-economic factors contributed a lot to the prevalence of child abuse on female learners. In support of this the U.S. government Third National Incidence study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) found that compared to families with income over \$30,000 a year, children in families with incomes less than \$15,000 a year were almost 14 times more likely to be harmed by some variety of abuse, almost 16 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse and almost 18 times more likely to be sexually abused. Further, the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform makes the case that sometimes, economic conditions and the way the laws are written unfairly tarnish the poor with abuse claims.

Various studies in the African continent have shown that there is an increase in the cases of child abuse levelled against girls (Egbejule, 2016; Effa-Chukwuma, 2018). Beckett (2005) highlighted that the girl child today faces challenges that prior generations never had to deal with in addition to traditional peer pressure that comes with being a child (Melton, 2008). According to Egbejule (2016) in some countries in East Africa, girls were not well empowered about abuse, hence have been facing severe abuse scenarios from strangers, teachers, families, friends and their peers in schools. A survey by Effa-Chukwuma (2018) revealed that in some Nigerian secular states, fathers have been raping their own daughters and teachers abusing girls below the age of 18. Benatar (2004) noted that this higher prevalence in cases of child abuse against girls owes much to poor report systems as the criminals have not been put to book. Such a scenario is also worsened by the fact that even when reported, some cases would not be taken seriously by the police or elders as a result of bribes or fear of exposing certain powerful individuals (Berk, 2009).

In Cameroun, it was found that girl child abuse occurred in the form of child labour as girls were forced to do work that was not age appropriate both at home and at school (Ajaja, 2012;

Dzurgba, 2018). In conceptualising child labour, Effa-Chukwuma (2018) described it as the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, or is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. In schools, Bonnie, Fisher and Labs (2010) discovered that some female learners were forced to partake in activities such as cooking for teachers and sweeping in their houses. In extreme circumstances, they would carry out such activities as a form of punishment for poor performances (Bourke, 2001). Within families, Coghill et al (2009) discovered that girls were exposed to domestic duties which were not age appropriate and sometimes were deprived of food in the event that they would have failed to finish such tasks on time.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries which practice female genital mutilation, a practice, as defined by all, which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. This practice has been labelled as both physical and sexual abuse as the reasons behind this practice are based on satisfying the sexual needs of men (Gutuza and Mapolisa, 2015). According to Mangwiro (2014) the consequences of female genital mutilation include physical, emotional and sexual problems, and include serious risks during childbirth. Besides female genital mutilation as a form of abuse against girls, Choga (2013) highlighted that in Zimbabwe, cases of other forms of child abuse have become a common thing in the newspapers, signalling the high prevalence of child abuse, with a majority of it being levelled against the girl child. Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) indicated that religious sects, especially the apostolic sects, have been found abusing the girl child and escape without facing the wrath of the law. This in itself can be seen as a negative message and response to the issues surrounding the protection of the girl child against all forms of abuse. From the given background, the study seeks to establish the prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools.

2.3. Impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners.

Numerous researches have shown that child abuse in all its forms has a devastating impact on the victims (Henning and Warner, 2006). A study by Henning and Warner (2006) revealed that child abuse is associated with physical and mental health challenges, which pose a serious threat to the educational aspirations of the victims. A cross sectional survey by Iroanusi (2019) indicated that victims of abuse were found to have significantly low levels of psychological well-being, social adjustments, high levels of psychological distress and adverse physical health symptoms. Further, Krappmann (2006) revealed that the girls who have been victimised had an unpleasant state of mind, which resulted in them having a low self-esteem. An American study cited by Edward (2004) indicated that girls who had been abused faced emotional consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder, which had a negative toll on their mental development. Examples of such mental disturbances included diminished concentration, sleep disturbances and sudden startling intrusive thoughts. According to Krason (2007) such symptoms, due to their negative effect on the brain, were found to make it more difficult for female learners to attend school lessons due to the lowering of motivation and disruption of the concentration abilities so required to necessarily complete academic tasks.

Further studies have also shown that exposure to abuse is related to difficulties in regulating anger frustration and other negative feelings which have a negative impact on children`s mental development (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). A British study by McCowan (2012) discovered a significant correlation between self-reported level of victimisation and level of scholastic competence. For example, it was highlighted that the victims struggled to perform well in competency tests and exercises, a sign that their mental development has been tampered with. A similar study by McCoy and Keen (2013) revealed that female secondary school learners who have been abused struggled to adjust to the schooling demands such as bonding and making lasting friendships.

A study by Molina (2006) also highlighted that victims of bullying were found to have traumatising mental disturbances such as feeling guilt, self-blame, flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, fear of things associated with the abuse (including objects, smells, places, doctors' visits and many others). Moreover, Noh (2014) also highlighted other negative impacts of abuse on mental development such as suicidal ideation, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, mental illnesses such as borderline personality disorder and dissociative identity disorder, propensity to re-victimisation in adulthood. In support of the above, a study of abused female learners in Singapore by Krappmann (2006) discovered that the victims developed abnormalities or disrupted attachment development and overly passive behaviours which have been found to be very damaging to the mental faculties.

Child abuse in the form of corporal punishment has been found to develop fear in learners. Dzurgba (2006) 's study highlighted that some pupils, worldwide have even failed to complete their education due to factors linked to the use of corporal punishments especially on institutions where the administrators and teachers believe in corporal punishment as the principal strategy to control pupils' behaviour. According to Henning and Warner (2006) learners have been found to develop hostility towards their teachers and such amount of hate can lead to them not willing to be part of the school system. At first learners could resort to absenteeism but as time goes on they may end up quitting school out of fear. Warner (2006) 's study concluded that punishing a wrongdoer by inflicting pain conveys the message that violence is an appropriate way to settle differences or to respond to problems. This is dangerous to peer relations as children often learn from their immediate environment, either consciously or unconsciously. Learners who are exposed to environments where corporal punishment is the norm end up doing the same to their peers whenever they cross each other`s paths (McCoy and Keen, 2013).

Extreme forms of physical abuse have been found to inflict long-term harm both physically and mentally on female learners (Iroanusi, 2019). According to Ogbona (2010) female students who receive physical punishment for their problematic behaviours are more likely to respond with aggression and have problems with attention compared to students who receive other forms of consequences. It is also critical to note that frequent use of corporal punishment on students increases the risks of substance abuse, depression, stress, and anxiety for children of all ages. Students usually take this route as a way of diverting their worries from classroom brutality which comes with extreme forms of mental and physical abuse. Most worryingly, when students start to engage in drug abuse as a way of shifting their attention from the atrocious nature of a hostile school environment, they may end up affecting their mental health. Taylor (2000) also reiterated that students who experience this type of discipline are also more likely to relate to various forms of violence involving power, which means they are more likely than the general population to become abusive later in life or display bullying behaviours. It is from such literature that this study seeks to explore into the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in selected secondary schools in Masvingo District.

2.4. Ways to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners.

According to Ross (2006) there is need to reduce social isolation and low community involvement as a way of helping teachers, parents and caretakers with a proper support structure to help deal with stressful situations which usually trigger various forms of abuse. From Shumba and Abosi (2011)'s understanding, the lack of community contacts usually makes parents less likely to change their behaviour to conform to community values and standards. In areas where child care is the responsibility of the community, it has been discovered that child abuse cases are relatively low (Taylor and Steward, 2011). In the United States, Theoklitou, Kabitis and Kabitsi (2011) discovered that parents usually shoulder child-

care demands by themselves and this has been found to result in a higher risk of stress and child abuse. In Wolfe (2011) 's terms, it therefore become very important for communities to come up with a culture of integration where child-care becomes every member's responsibility, thus reducing the pressure on such parents or families which may be struggling to offer a conducive environment for children.

Preventive methods have also been discovered to be highly important in reducing child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners (Taylor and Steward, 2011; Wolfe, 2011). According to Shumba and Abosi (2011), to prevent child abuse, it is highly important to make the rural female learner exposed to the brief idea of what constitute sexual and other forms of abusive behaviour. In line with this, Taylor and Steward (2011) added that teaching children what appropriate sexual behavior is and when to say 'no' if someone tries to touch sexual parts of their bodies or touch them in any way that makes them feel uncomfortable is critical in making them understand themselves as sexual beings much better. It is also paramount for teachers to observe certain patterns in learners as they interact, for example, whether they are hesitant or particularly uncomfortable around certain adults (Shumba and Abosi, 2011).

The use of resource persons to teach children about various forms of abuse in rural schools was also discovered as an important step in ensuring that rural female learners receive helpful information that can make them alert to potential victimisation (Ajaja, 2012). In the context of rural schools in Madagascar, Balogun (2009) noted that helping make girls become familiar with sexual abuse by masterminding proficient visitor speakers to make presentations in schools and in the community seems a noble idea that can help discuss critical and hidden issues surrounding various forms of abuse and the hidden consequences on the mental development of such learners. It is through such dialogues that the girl child can be sensitised on the need for reporting any suggestive behaviour that can create child abuse scenarios. In

countries such as Bangladesh, Bandman (2000) reported that TV programs have been highly relied upon to raise awareness about child abuse via cartoons, advertisements and other kids' programs. This was done to gain the attention of the mass people who need to develop some awareness and ideas about child abuse, its impact on mental development as well as the ways to reduce it in rural schools. It is against such literature that the current study explores into the ways to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners in three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District.

2.5. Summary

This chapter provided a description of the review of related literature. Focus was on the contemporary literature and other scholarly ideas in line with the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the description of the research process. It gives information concerning the methods that will be used in undertaking this research as well as reasons for the use of the methods. It also describes the various stages of the research which includes the selection of participants, the data collection process and the process of data analysis.

3.2. Research design

A research design is an overall strategy that one chooses in a proper and systematic manner to carry out a research study (Creswell, 2005). Terrel (2012) argues that a research design is a road map that determines the most appropriate route to take when carrying out the study. According to Gordon and Browne (2006) a design is a summary of procedures that researchers use to collect, analyze, interpret and present their research data. This study made use of the case study research design. According to Muranda (2004), a case study research design is an in depth examination of a unit of interest such as an individual or company, in this case, the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in Masvingo District Secondary Schools. The case study design was used because it provided detailed and rich information which provided an insight for further research.

3.3. Population

Berk (2009) states that population is any group of people or individuals having one or more characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. Thus, the study population refers to all individuals, units objects are events that might be considered in a research project. Three schools were selected from a population of 6 schools in the district. It is from these three schools that the researcher selected the population of his study. A population of 15 senior

teachers and 30 female learners was used to come up with a sample for this study. This population was found to be crucial for data collection as it constituted the senior teachers who have been in direct control with the abused children as well as the female learners who have been the direct victims of various forms of abuse.

3.4 Sample and sampling procedures

Patton (2002) describes a sample as a representative fraction selected for a study which characterizes and exemplify a larger group from which it was selected. Tuckman (2001) views a sample as a subset of a population that the researcher chooses so that he or she can be able to draw conclusions about a specific population. For this study, the sample constituted 9 senior teachers with three selected from each school, and 15 female learners who were the victims of various forms of child abuse. The total sample constituted 24 participants.

The researcher used simple random sampling to come up with the required sample for the study. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling where everyone in the entire target population has an equal chance of being selected (Sunders, 2009). To randomly select the senior teachers and the female learners, the researcher used some sort of naming and numbering the target population and then use some type of raffle method to choose the required number for the current study. According to Gray (2004) this is done to ensure that the sample is fairly represents the target population and eliminate sampling bias.

3.5. Data collection instruments

3.5.1. Open-ended questionnaire

Open ended questionnaires were used to solicit information from the senior teachers from the three selected secondary schools in line with the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners in Masvingo District Secondary Schools. For clarity`s sake, the questionnaires were written in simple and easy to interpret language for the

respondents. Open ended questionnaires were used because they provided the respondents the capacity to freely express their views. Open-ended questions were also used because they allowed respondents to include more information, such as feelings, attitudes, and their understanding of the subject. Open-ended questions yielded more candid information and unique insight for researchers as respondents may find them less threatening than scaled questions.

3.5.2. Focus group interviews

These are a type of interviews where participants respond to the same question all at once. The researcher used focus group discussions on the rural female learners as a way of discovering in-depth information where the victims of abuse discussed their various plight. This helped to save the researcher time during the data gathering process. The responses from focus group interviews were recorded to ensure that a correct record was kept in preparation of data presentation.

3.6. Data collection procedures

Data was collected using various data sources. Open ended questionnaires were hand-distributed to the senior teachers in their respective schools. Focus group interviews with the female learners were conducted at the particular schools.

3.7. Ethical considerations

According to Magwa and Magwa (2015), when conducting research with human subjects, the researcher needs to conduct the research in accordance with ethical considerations. Ethics in research therefore can be taken to mean the fairness, respect and honest behaviour shown by the researcher before, during and after the entire research process. As such, the researcher first sought permission from the gatekeepers in the 3 selected secondary schools in Masvingo District. The researcher also respected the privacy and feelings of the participants before,

during and after the entire research process. No one was forced to take part in this study against his/her will.

3.8. Summary

This chapter presented the description of the research process. It also provided information concerning the methods that will be used in undertaking this research as well as reasons for the use of the methods. It also describes the various stages of the research which includes the selection of participants, the data collection process and the ethical considerations to be taken. The next chapter is focused on data presentation, discussion and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents data which was collected from 9 senior teachers and 15 rural female learners selected in the secondary schools in Masvingo District. Data was collected using open ended questionnaires and focus group interviews. Data is qualitatively presented, interpreted and analysed through the use of themes.

4.2. Biographic data of participants

N=9

Biographical Variable	Variable Description	Participants	
Gender	Male	3	33%
	Female	6	37%
	Total	9	100%
Age	20-25 years	-	-
	26-30 years	2	22%
	31-35 years	4	44%
	36-40 years	1	11%
	Over 40 years	2	22%
	Total	9	100%
Professional Qualification	Certificate In Education	-	-
	Diploma In Education	3	33%
	Bachelor's Degree	4	44%
	Honor's Degree	1	11%
	Master's Degree	1	11%
	Total	9	100%
	Less than 5 years	-	-

Teaching Experience	6-10 years	2	22%
	11-15 years	5	56%
	Over 15 years	2	22%
	Total	9	100%

4.3. Participants codes

Senior teachers were coded as ST 1-9

Rural female learners were coded as RLF 1-15

4.4. Presentation of findings

4.4.1. How prevalent is child abuse among rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools?

This sub-research question investigated the existence or occurrence of child abuse at the three selected schools. The question sought to establish how often child abuse cases were witnessed or reported, as well as the nature of the child abuse cases. Data collected from the open-ended questionnaires revealed that a majority of cases of abuse were emotional and physical with the teachers and the parents of the caregivers being the major perpetrators. Below are the excerpts from the questionnaire findings:

‘Cases of emotional abuse on the rural female learners by their teachers are common as some teachers tend to label learners as worthless in front of her colleagues’. **ST1**

ST6 also stated that, *‘some teachers have been found to cause emotional injury to the rural female learners through being too hostile to them during outdoor activities as they expected them to perform at the same level with boys’*.

‘Issues of teachers who call negative names to female learners after failing certain tasks have also been noted and rebuked as this has been found to embarrass and shame the female learners’. **ST9**

‘There are some teachers who also yell or scream at learners to vent their disapproval of their behaviour and this kind of maltreatment has been found to make learners live in perpetual fear’. **ST2**.

‘Physical abuse is also being experienced by learners as they got severely hit by their teachers. At times, the learners are exposed to physical abuse by their peers in the absence of the teacher or adults’. **ST8**

ST3 also added that, *‘incidences of female learners being subjected to hidden corporal punishment have been emerging and this is against the regulations of the school’*.

‘some learners come to school with injuries which testifies to them being physically abused within their families. However, some of them do not wish to share their experiences with the school authorities in fear of further victimisation’. **ST7**

In support of the above findings, focus group data also showed that the rural female learners have been experiencing incidences of abuse, with physical and emotional abuse being the two common forms. From the focus group interviews, **RFL1** echoed that, *‘boys sometimes physically victimise us on our way home if we refuse to give in to some of their demands’*.

RFL15 also confirmed that, *‘issues of being physically hit by objects are also common in the classroom as teachers resort to the use of physical violence to punish us after failing given classroom tasks’*.

At home, **RFL4** stated that, *‘I am being always severely punished when I do something wrong and sometimes I get injured from being consistently hit by rough objects’*.

In line with the prevalence of emotional abuse, **RFL10** indicated that, *“teachers often call us negative names basing on our socio-economic status. This has also led to some of the students calling us these harsh and negative names”*.

“At home I always witness acts of domestic violence and this sometimes creates a lot of fear in me on a daily basis”. **RFL11**

“Sometimes the violent criticism we receive from the teachers when they want us to outperform boys in certain tasks is unbearable and it has made us to feel like we are not of any reasonable worth”. **RFL3**.

In a bid to get an insight into what constituted child abuse, the researcher, from the focus group discussions discovered that some of the rural female learners were not aware that certain actions constitute abuse. In particular, **RFL9** responded that, *“I have been experiencing some degree of emotional and physical abuse both at school and at home but was not sure that they were acts which would need to be reported as a violation of my rights”*.

4.4.1.1. Discussion of findings on the prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners in selected Masvingo District secondary schools

This section focused on discussing and analysing the findings related to the prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners in the three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District. a critical analysis of the findings was done, making references and inferences to what other studies and theories on child abuse have said. Data from literature review was also used to add more credibility to the discussion and analysis of findings.

Findings have shown that cases of emotional abuse on rural female learners by their teachers are common. It was indicated that some teachers were too hostile on the learners, thus ending up calling them negative names to embarrass and shame them in front of their peers. More so, the findings have shown that some learners have been victims of emotional abuse within their

families as their guardians would sometimes expose them to violent and traumatising scenarios. Deducing from the above findings, it can be seen that rural female learners were facing the wrath of their teachers and parents who would emotionally abuse them either knowingly or unknowingly. To validate the above acts as emotional abuse scenarios, Haralambos and Holborn (2008) highlighted that emotional abuse can occur through shouting often at the child, withholding kindness or affection, extended periods of silence, and harsh jokes at the expense of the child. Acts such as name-calling and negative labelling have not been given the condemnation they deserve, resulting in the higher prevalence of such cases against the female learners. Findings from review of related literature also showed that in Mexican schools, female learners were exposed to emotional abuse as teachers would initiate emotional aggression as a way of punishing the girls for poor performances. Such deliberate infliction of emotional torture has been noted by Keenan (2007) as being rampant especially in schools where there is a porous system of detecting and rebuking all forms of abuse against learners.

The findings from both open-ended questionnaire and focus group interviews have indicated that physical abuse is also being experienced in the form of severe hitting of female learners by their teachers. Corporal punishment was found to be used in some cases as a method of punishing learners for misconduct or poor performances. It was also indicated that some female learners would come to school with injuries which testifies to them being physically abused within their families. The unwillingness to share what have transpired has also been found to clearly point out towards their lack of understanding of the forms which child abuse can take. The above concurs with a study by Bussien (2011) which showed that physical and emotional abuse have been rampant in schools but a majority of learners thought that abuse was normal treatment and adults have every right to use severe forms of corporal punishment. African studies by Egbejule (2016) and Efa-Chukwuma (2018) indicated that in Africa, the girl child has been facing challenges of abuse at home and in school. This is a sign that girls are usually

not empowered to speak and defend themselves. Worse still, being in rural set ups, female learners are marginalised from sources of information. This has created a breeding system of abuse which mostly go unnoticed or underreported.

4.4.2. What is the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners?

This sub-research question looked at issues surrounding the mental consequences of emotional and physical abuse, as they have been mentioned the common forms of abuse prevalent in the three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District. Open-ended questionnaire findings from the senior teachers in the three schools revealed that both emotional and physical abuse contributed to a lot of unwanted negative mental consequences on the female learners. The excerpts below have been taken from the responses by the senior teachers:

“A majority of abused female learners have been found to develop aggressive behaviours and other negative risk-taking behaviours as a result of the negative modelling their minds have been exposed to”. **ST8**.

“There have been signs of mental health problems on some victimised female learners, especially the development of eating disorders and self-harm behaviours.”. **ST3**.

“Some of the victims of abuse struggle a lot to communicate their emotions properly due to the negative exposure to traumatising situations on their mental emotions”. **ST1**.

ST7 also added that, *“female learners who have been abused and grew up being exposed to violent circumstances exhibited mental problems such as insecurity, worthlessness and unexplainable anger towards their peers and teachers”*.

“It has also proven to be extremely difficult for victims of physical and emotional abuse to form and maintain healthy relationships with other people. This was caused by the development of lower satisfaction with life due to the traumatic situations they have faced”. **ST2**

ST7 explained that, “*some of the female learners seemed to have developed an altered mental functioning as they have become soaked in depression and other cognitive disorders such as memory impairments, panic disorder and hyperactivity disorder*”.

Focus group findings also indicated that the rural female learners were suffering mental-related consequences as a result of being exposed to physical and emotional abuse. **RFL13** responded that, “*sometimes I feel like I do not have to care about how I act or even the consequences of my behaviour because the mental pain I always receive from the people around me is unbearable*”

“*Sometimes my mind just tells me that I have to isolate myself from the rest because of the shame which comes with the negative labels which we get from the teachers who are supposed to protect us*”. **RFL3**

RFL1 expressed that, “*being a victim of abuse has affected my capacity to learn as my mind is always telling me that I am different from others*”.

“*Being a victim of abuse for too long has affected my memory about school work as most of the times I will be thinking about the abuse I would have experienced at home*”. **RFL5**

RFL8 also added that, “*sometimes I feel traumatised when in the company of older people whom I do not know. When I am alone, I always cry and this is seriously affecting my capacity to understand some of the things taught in the classroom*”.

“*I have come to understand that it is normal to bully others or even injure them when I feel like doing so*”. **RFL10**

4.4.2.1. Discussion of findings on the impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners

The findings have indicated that child abuse had a negative impact on the mental development of rural female learners in selected secondary schools in Masvingo District as evidenced by some learners who developed aggressive behaviours and other signs of mental health problems such as eating disorders and self-harm behaviours. It was also discovered that some female learners developed altered mental functioning problems due to being overly soaked in depression and other cognitive disorders such as memory impairments and hyperactivity disorder. According to a NSCDC report (2017 and 2012) physical and emotional abuse have been associated with chronic and toxic stress on children, thus affecting their growing brains. Worse still, in the absence of supportive and interactive relationships with adult caregivers, rural female learners have been found to cope with such mental damages all alone. It is an undeniable fact that too much exposure to complex and chronic trauma can result in persistent psychological problems especially for these young learners who are still mastering to regulate their emotions.

Literature findings also concur with the findings of this study as a study by Henning and Warner (2006) revealed that child abuse is associated with physical and mental health challenges, which pose a serious threat to the educational aspirations of the victims. A cross sectional survey by Iroanusi (2019) indicated that victims of abuse were found to have significantly low levels of psychological well-being, social adjustments, high levels of psychological distress and adverse physical health symptoms. Krappmann (2006)'s study is also in tandem with the current study's findings as it revealed that the girls who have been victimised had an unpleasant state of mind, which resulted in them having a low self-esteem. An American study cited by Edward (2004) indicated that girls who had been abused faced emotional consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder, which had a negative toll on their mental development.

Further findings have also indicated that victims of physical and emotional abuse developed some struggles to communicate their emotions properly due to the negative exposure to traumatising situations on their mental emotions. The findings also pointed out how some of these rural female learners exhibited mental problems such as insecurity, worthlessness and unexplainable anger towards their peers and teachers. Further, it was also revealed that the victims of physical and emotional child abuse struggled to maintain and form healthy relationships with other people. In severe consequences, it was revealed that some of the victims struggled to cope up with learning due to memory loss and feelings of indifference. Howe (2011) also explained how being a victim of abuse affect the bond between the child and the perpetrator and this poor attachment with those around the child negatively impact the child`s capacity to have lasting and trusting relationships with teachers, parents and peers. Deducing from the findings and supporting literature, it can be seen that the psychological harm which comes with emotional and emotional abuse often create a scenario where such learners lose their self-esteem. The most painful part of all this is that the victims suffer more from visible depression and at most times they are seen seeking affection which at times never come.

4.4.3. What strategies can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners?

This sub-research question intended to establish the ways in which child abuse can be reduced in the three selected secondary school. More so, it was the intention of the researcher to investigate the ways suggested by senior teachers and the rural female learners on how to reduce the effects of child abuse. From the findings, it was discovered that sensitizing teachers, the community and learners on what constitute child abuse and the actions which have to be taken in the event of victimisation were crucial in helping reduce the incidence and effects of child abuse. Below are the excerpts to corroborate the above:

ST9 stated that, *“there is need to educate children about child abuse as they are the ones who are supposed to detect that certain actions constitute abuse”*.

“Parents are encouraged to work with the school authorities especially after seeing certain developmental anomalies as this may help detect any occurrence of physical or emotional abuse”. **ST3**.

“School-based prevention must also include child abuse at the core of their agenda as this may help create a school culture which has a strong message against all forms of abuse not only against female learners, but all the learners at the school”. **ST5**

ST1 also explained that, *“programs that include awareness camps about child abuse are important as they may be used to train female learners to be assertive enough to say not to acts that threaten their physical and emotional well-being”*.

“In the event that the impact of abuse has become sever, there is need to seek expert help from medical and mental health professionals to avoid reduce the seriousness of the injury”. **ST2**

ST8 stated that, *“a whole school policy is needed and should be available for everyone in the school community. This should clearly define what is abuse, all its forms and state the responsibilities of all stakeholders in the school and clearly explain the actions that will be taken to reduce child abuse”*.

Focus group findings also showed that the school and the nation at large should not just play lip-service to the prevention of child abuse as this has resulted in the high prevalence of such cases. One of the female learners **RFL1** echoed that, *“the school authorities should strictly send a strong message to teachers who use violence and other forms of corporal punishment on us as this will desist them from practising such inhuman acts”*.

‘I also believe that teachers should work in collaboration with the community as a way of alerting families on how certain acts they commit can be criminalised as child abuse.’ **RFL12.**

RFL3 highlighted that, *‘it is better for organisations which deals with the well-being of children to take custody of those who have been victimised as this may help reduce the torture of living with abusive caregivers and guardians’*.

‘The police should apply their laws without any favour as this will remind the perpetrators that their acts do not have a place in the modern society’. **RFL4**

RF7 also added that, *‘our teachers should communicate with the parents, revealing to them how their abusive behaviours can negatively impact on our mental development, thus causing us to fail in schools’*.

4.4.3.1. Discussion of findings on strategies that can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners

Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires and the focus group interviews has clearly outlined the need for educating female learners about child abuse, its forms and how they can be protected. It was also indicated that there is great need to encourage parents to work with the school authorities in the campaign against child abuse. The findings also indicated the need for developing a whole school policy which would be available for everyone in the school community to clearly see the nature of child abuse and the responsibilities of all involved stakeholders in reducing its occurrence. This also concurs with findings from the review of related literature where Ajaja (2012)`s study revealed that the use of resource persons to teach children about various forms of abuse in rural schools is an important step in ensuring that rural female learners receive helpful information that can make them alert to potential victimisation. Further validation of the current study`s findings also comes from Balogun (2009)`s study in Madagascar which stipulated that helping make girls become familiar with physical, emotional

and sexual abuse by masterminding proficient visitor speakers to make presentations in schools and in the community seems a noble idea that can help discuss critical and hidden issues surrounding various forms of abuse and the hidden consequences on the mental development of such learners. From the above supporting information, it can be deduced that enhancing awareness becomes crucial if there is to be a reduction of child abuse cases against rural female learners in the three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District.

Findings have also pointed out the need to seek expert help in the form of medical and mental health professionals to help reduce the seriousness of the physical and emotional injury. Further findings also highlighted the need for the school and the nation at large not to play lip-service to the prevention and reporting of child abuse cases in schools. Findings also showed that law enforcement agencies should apprehend the perpetrators of child abuse to show their seriousness in reducing the prevalence of child abuse against female learners. Ross (2006) revealed that there is need for the application of the rehabilitative method when dealing with physically and emotionally abused female learners as this would help create a nurturing environment that can reduce the occurrence of traumatic experiences on the victim. Shumba and Abosi (2011) also added that there is need for support where the victimised learners can find someone to talk to and being counselled and consoled such that may not develop feelings of anger, disgrace or self-blame. Putting in place such measures becomes the responsibility of the school, parents, the community, learners and the nation at large as child abuse cases can be so difficult to dictate. Therefore, making sure that everyone is involved will help lay a fertile ground on which child abuse and its disastrous effects on mental development can be reduced beyond the three selected secondary schools in Masvingo District.

4.5. Summary

The chapter presented, discussed and analysed data in line with the effects and ways of reducing child abuse against rural female learners in three selected secondary schools in Masvingo

District. Data generated from open-ended questionnaires was presented and discussed through the thematic approach to ensure that each theme is addressed thoroughly, making references to literature review during the discussion and analysis section. The next chapter will look at the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of chapters and findings, research conclusions and recommendations for practice and further research.

5.2. Summary of Chapters

Chapter one looked at the problem and its setting, paying particular attention to the motivation behind the carrying out of this study. It provided a background of the study through presenting literature from across the world as a way of situating the current study into broader literature. Key issues such as research objectives and questions, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations were also outlined in chapter one.

Chapter two provided a review of related literature in line with the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners. Various studies and scholarly articles were cited as a way of adding depth to the current study. Various gaps were also noted and this chapter proved beneficial as it provided some important literature for discussion and analysis of findings.

Chapter 3 focused its attention on research methodology. It was revealed in chapter 3 that the case study research design would be used. Purposive sampling was also used to select the senior teachers and the female learners who have been victims of different forms of abuse. The chapter also showed the benefits of using focus group interviews and open-ended-questionnaires for data collection. Ethical considerations taken were also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4 provided a presentation of findings, analysis and discussion of data. Data collected from focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires was presented in thematic fashion.

Discussion of findings was also done in this chapter. The findings will be summarized in the following subsection.

5.3. Summary of findings

5.3.1. Prevalence of child abuse among rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools

The findings of this study indicated that:

- Cases of emotional abuse on the rural female learners by their teachers are common as some teachers tend to label learners as worthless in front of her colleagues
- Some teachers have been found to cause emotional injury to the rural female learners through being too hostile to them during outdoor activities as they expected them to perform at the same level with boys
- Physical abuse was also being experienced by learners as they got severely hit by their teachers. At times, the learners are exposed to physical abuse by their peers in the absence of the teacher or adults.
- Incidences of female learners being subjected to hidden corporal punishment have been emerging and this is against the regulations of the school.
- Some learners come to school with injuries which testifies to them being physically abused within their families. However, some of them do not wish to share their experiences with the school authorities in fear of further victimisation.

5.3.2. Impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners

The findings of the study showed that:

- A majority of abused female learners have been found to develop aggressive behaviours and other negative risk-taking behaviours as a result of the negative modelling their minds have been exposed to.

- Mental health problems such as eating disorders and self-harm behaviours were observed on some of the victims of child abuse
- Female learners who have been abused and grew up being exposed to violent circumstances exhibited mental problems such as insecurity, worthlessness and unexplainable anger towards their peers and teachers
- It was found to be extremely difficult for victims of physical and emotional abuse to form and maintain healthy relationships with other people.
- Some of the female learners seemed to have developed an altered mental functioning as they have become soaked in depression and other cognitive disorders such as memory impairments, panic disorder and hyperactivity disorder
- Some victims struggled to cope with learning as a result of disturbed memory and cognitive functioning

5.3.3. Strategies can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners

On this theme, the findings have shown that:

- There is need to educate children about child abuse as they are the ones who are supposed to detect that certain actions constitute abuse
- Parents are encouraged to work with the school authorities especially after seeing certain developmental anomalies as this may help detect any occurrence of physical or emotional abuse.
- School-based prevention must include child abuse at the core of their agenda as this may help create a school culture which has a strong message against all forms of abuse not only against female learners, but all the learners at the school.

- In the event that the impact of abuse has become severe, there is need to seek expert help from medical and mental health professionals to avoid reduce the seriousness of the injury.
- A whole school policy is needed and should be available for everyone in the school community to clearly define what is abuse, all its forms and state the responsibilities of all stakeholders in the school and clearly explain the actions that will be taken to reduce child abuse.
- The police should apply their laws without any favour as this will remind the perpetrators that their acts do not have a place in the modern society.

5.4. Conclusions

5.4.1. Prevalence of child abuse among rural female learners in Masvingo District secondary schools

Deducing from the findings on the above them, it can be concluded that:

- The prevalence of child abuse against rural female learners is enhanced by limited knowledge on the part of the victims that certain actions against them constitute child abuse offences.
- Teachers and parents are the most perpetrators of child abuse against rural female learners in some selected secondary schools in Masvingo District
- Violent family environments sometimes expose learners to traumatic situations and experiences which constitute serious cases of emotional abuse
- The continued use of corporal punishment is increasing the incidences of physical child abuse which has also a bearing on the mental development of rural female learners.
- Victims who were unwilling to share their experiences create opportunities for increased cases of child abuse against the rural female learners.

5.4.2. Impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners

From the data generated under this subheading, it can be concluded that:

- Rural female learners developed aggressive behaviours and other mental health problems such as eating disorders and self-harm behaviours.
- Continued exposure to abuse caused some rural female learners to develop altered mental functioning problems due to being overly soaked in depression and other cognitive disorders such as memory impairments and hyperactivity disorder.
- The absence of supportive and interactive relationships with adult caregivers endangered rural female learners as they have to cope with such mental damages all alone.
- The victims of child abuse in the three selected schools developed some struggles in communicating their emotions properly due to the negative exposure to traumatising situations on their mental emotions.
- Mental problems such as insecurity, worthlessness and unexplainable anger towards their peers and teachers are some of the unwanted consequences of being a victim of child abuse for too long.
- Victims of physical and emotional abuse struggled to cope up with learning due to memory loss and feelings of indifference.

5.4.3. Strategies that can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners

The study concludes that:

- There is great need for educating female learners about child abuse, its forms and how they can be protected. It was also indicated that there is great need to encourage parents to work with the school authorities in the campaign against child abuse.

- Developing a whole school policy and making it available for everyone in the school community to clearly see the nature of child abuse and the responsibilities of all involved stakeholders is of paramount importance in reducing the occurrence of child abuse.
- Where there is fear of the worst, seeking expert help from medical and mental health professionals will help to reduce the seriousness of the physical and emotional injury.
- Making the perpetrators of abuse pay hefty prices and sanctions for their barbaric acts can help to send a warning that laws against child abuse are functioning and they should be diligently observed.

5.5. Recommendations

From the above conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

- Schools should have regular sessions where senior teachers including the head, speak about various forms of child abuse to learners so as to conscientize all learners in the school about this phenomenon.
- Community leaders should be encouraged by the government to effect stiffer penalties for those adults who abuse children within their localities especially under the guise of cultural beliefs for example on child marriages, beating up of children, neglect of children through failure to provide basic necessities like food, clothing or school fees and / or child labour in order to protect children.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should reconfigure the primary school curriculum so as to include information on child abuse on pupils' learning.
- Schools should be encouraged to establish peer educator clubs for all age groups to provide awareness about child abuse to all pupils.

- The Government of Zimbabwe, through the Department of Social Welfare should make child line facilities accessible to all pupils particularly those in rural areas so as to enable pupils to report cases of abuse anonymously without fear of victimisation.
- Government should design schemes that will help to rehabilitate pupils who have been negatively affected by child abuse in all its forms.
- Future researchers should also look at gaps within researchers on child abuse and find more ways of unearthing the underlying causes as well as other hidden consequences of child abuse, not only against female learners but everyone in society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P Bag 1020
BINDURA
ZIMBABWE

Tel: 0271 - 7531 ext 1038
Fax: 261 - 71 - 7616



BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

NAME: MAKUDZA TONGA REG NUMBER: B211423B1

PROGRAMME: HBScEd Physics/Maths/Chemistry/Biology PART: 2-2

This serves to confirm that the above is a bona fide student at Bindura University of Science Education in the Faculty of Science Education.

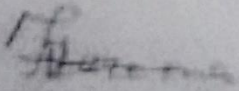
The student has to undertake research and thereafter present a Research Thesis in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Science Education Honours Degree programme. The research topic

Exploring the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female headteachers

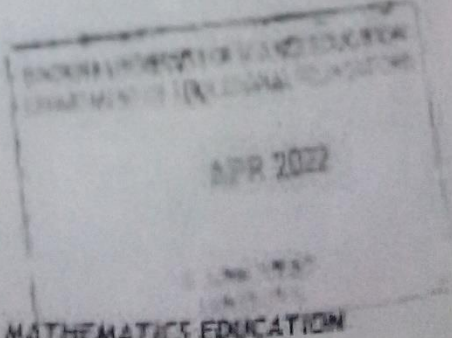
In this regard, the department kindly requests your permission to allow the student to carry out his/her research in your institutions.

Your co-operation and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Thank you



N Zvekwa (Dr.)
CHAIRPERSON - DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS EDUCATION



APPENDIX 2: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SENIOR TEACHERS

This open-ended questionnaire seeks your opinion on the effects and ways to mitigate child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners. You were selected to participate in this study because you are involved in the teaching of secondary school learners. No names should be written on the questionnaire as no individuals will be identified or traced from this investigation. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. The researcher is only interested in your own opinion. All information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. You are therefore kindly requested to complete the questionnaire as honestly as you can.

SECTION A

Biographic Information

Kindly fill in the blank spaces or tick (√) the appropriate box (es).

i. Age:

Below 30 years	
30 – 40 years	√
41 – 50 years	
Over 50years	

ii. Gender:

Male	
Female	√

iii. Teaching Experience

Below 10 years	√
10 to 20 years	
21 to 30 years	
Above 30 years	

iv. Highest educational qualification

Diploma level	
Bachelor of Education	√
Masters of Education	
Any other	

SECTION B

The prevalence of child abuse on rural female learners

1. How often do you witness cases of child abuse?

.....

.....

.....

2. What is the nature of the child abuse cases noticed at your school?

.....
.....
.....

SECTION C

The impact of child abuse on the mental development of rural female learners.

1. How have the victims of child abuse responded to this victimisation with particular reference to their mental development?

.....
.....
.....

2. To what extent have you noticed some serious negative effects on the psychological well-being of the victims?

.....
.....
.....

SECTION D

Strategies that can be used to reduce child abuse and its effects on the mental development of rural female learners.

1. What can be done at school and community level to reduce child abuse among rural female learners?

.....
.....
.....

2. What can be done at national level to reduce child abuse among rural female learners?

.....
.....
.....

3. How can the victims of child abuse be helped to reduce the negative consequences of abuse?

.....
.....
.....

The End!!!

APPENDIX 3: FOCUS INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEARNERS

What is the nature of the child abuse cases noticed at your school?

How often have you been abused?

How have you responded to this victimisation with particular reference to your mental development?

To what extent have you noticed some serious negative effects on your psychological well-being?

What do you think can be done at school, community and national level to reduce child abuse among rural female learners?

How can the victims of child abuse be helped to reduce the negative consequences of abuse?