Short Communication

Relationship between the victims and the child sexual abusers in Khartoum State

Duha AA Mahgoub, MBBS*, Hadeel M Halim, MBBS, MPTh, MD first part, PGDRM, PGDCE**, Khalifa A Elmusharaf, MBBS, PGDip, FRSPH***

Medical Officer, Ministry of Health*
Lecturer in Community Medicine, Registrar of Dermatology, Ministry of Health**
Lecturer in Epidemiology & Public Health, Population and International Health Coordinator, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland - Bahrain***

Abstract

The incidents of child sexual abuse reported to the Family and Child Protection Unit (FCPU) are dramatically increasing in Khartoum State, while many others are believed not being reported. The objectives are to determine the relationship between sexually abused victims and their abusers in Khartoum state and to find the distribution of males and females among the victims and as well among their abusers. Data used for this study were obtained through questionnaires distributed to seventy-eight cases that were reported to have sexual abuse incidents.

The study showed that abusers were either parents, uncles, friends, teachers or neighbors. The study also showed that 62.3% of the victims were males and as well the vast majority of the abusers were males (97.4%). The study found that most of the abusers were relatives or known to the victims’ families and that the number of male victims are higher than female victims. However, there is a need for more researches to be done before concluding that female children victims are lower than male children victims in Khartoum state, this might be due to the lower number of reports from the female victims’ families.

Corresponding author

Duha Abuobaida Abdalla Mahgoub
Tel: +249 923308587
Email: doha_madane@yahoo.com
Keywords: Child abuse, perpetrator, victim, relationship, gender

Background

Literature on child maltreatment among adolescent community-based samples shows that boys seem to be at risk of being physically abused more than girls\(^{(1)}\); conversely, girls are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than boys as disclosed by many researchers\(^{(1,2,3,4,5)}\).

Recent studies about Arab and Jewish students in different cultures among college and school-based samples have shown unexpected equivalence in the rate of child sexual abuse among boys and girls on sexual harassment experiences occurring at school setting in Israel\(^{(6)}\). Other two studies among Hong Kong Chinese college students and secondary school students in the Northern Province in South Africa found that sexual harassment were much more common among boys than girls in all measures\(^{(7,8)}\).

Another study done in Los Angeles by Carol\(^{(9)}\) showed that approximately 75% of sexually abused children were females. Although 25% of the reportedly abused victims were males, this may represent a falsely low estimation.

These different findings of the patterns of maltreatment vulnerability for boys and girls shows the influence of different cultural and traditional values from a place to another in the maltreatment vulnerability for boys and girls, which needs further research\(^{(6,7)}\).

Patients and Methods

All cases of child sexual assaults that were reported to Family and Child Protection Units in Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahry during the periods of October, November and December 2010 were reviewed. Out of all cases reported to FCPU, a data sample to carry this study was selected such that to cover the following factors:

- Any child presented with any sexual assault who is less than 18 years old was included in this study regardless of the victim's gender and the abuser's age.
- All the abusers whose victims were aged less than 18 years old.

Afterwards, a structured questionnaire was designed according to FCPU criteria, the questionnaire was distributed to the selected cases, seventy-eight cases, and data obtained from the questionnaire were the victim's gender, abuser's gender, and the type of relationship between the abuser and the victim.

Results

Regarding the required information about the type of relationship between victims and abusers presented in the questionnaire; only 51 out of the 78 cases to which questionnaires were distributed had been filled out. The collected data had shown that there is a relationship between the abuser and the victim in 44 out of the 51 cases (86.3%), while in the other 7 cases (13.7%) the abuser is a stranger for the victim. The study also showed that there were five types of relationships between the victim and the abuser, these were neighbors, friends, cousins, teachers and parents, the highest number of abusers were among the neighbors with a total of 30 cases (68.2%), while the least numbers were teachers and parents with 1 case (2.3%) for each, the rest of the abusers were friends with 9 cases (20.5%) and cousins with 3 cases (6.8%).

As for the victim’s gender; 77 out of the 78 cases to which questionnaires were distributed had been filled out. The results showed that 48 of the victims were male (62.3%), while 29 of the victims were female (37.7%).

While for the abuser’s gender, all the 78 cases to which questionnaires were distributed had been filled out, and the results showed that the vast majority of the abusers were male with 76 cases (97.4%), while females are only 2 cases (2.6%).

Discussion

This study has generated a number of valuable findings regarding the patterns of maltreatment vulnerability for boys and girls.
in Khartoum state, interestingly, unlike what people use to say in our community, the study found that more boys (62.3%) than girls (37.7%) had been exposed to sexual abuse. This finding is similar to the pattern found in other studies on sexual maltreatment in Jewish and Arab schools in Israel\(^{(8)}\).

It also showed that sexual abuse is usually perpetrated by someone who is known to the victims and predominantly by male perpetrators (97.4%). These findings replicate international findings\(^{(10)}\) and could be explainable: because, knowing the victim very well, will allow the abuser to spend more time with him/her and to gain his/her trust. These findings are also similar to what Manal Abdelraheem\(^{(11)}\) found in her research done in Sudan, in which she found that the majority of the abusers who attempted rape (82 cases, 3.2%) and did rape (71 cases, 2.7%) were either neighbors, fathers, male cousins, mothers, and brothers, sisters or strangers.

It would be premature to conclude that the actual incidence of sexual abuse of female children is lower in Sudan. There is a need for further research, especially because the pattern in Sudan and few other countries is strikingly different from the majority of the researches in western countries. Possible explanation for such variation in results or findings can be based upon cultural and traditional values and attitudes in Arabic countries and mainly in Sudan.

The finding of the lower number of girls sexually abused compared to boys in Khartoum state might be due to lower reporting rate by female victims, and that might be because families think reporting will lower their girl’s chances to get married significantly, the shame and stigma that accompanies sexual abuse can also have its effects not only on the victim, but on her family as well and the parent’s relationships in the community will also be affected, in addition, maintaining confidentiality after reporting to the police service is very difficult, as the news can be leaked to tabloids.

A possibility related to cultural norms and boys’ sexual abuse in Sudan is that fondling the private part of young boys is considered as a common cultural practice of adult male relatives and friends in Sudan.

**References**
