

## **The Role of a Social Worker in the Mitigation of Child Sexual Abuse in Kisii County**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Child Sexual abuse (CSA) is both a social and public health concern worldwide. A common misconception about CSA is that it is a scarce act perpetrated against girls by male strangers. In spite of a plethora of research on CSA, little is known about its mitigation. In the recent past in Kenya, sexual abuse has been noted in schools most of which the perpetrators go scot-free. It occurs at all levels of society and affects not only girls but also boys in all levels of the society. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the role of a social worker in the mitigation of child sexual abuse among pupils in Kisii County. The study utilized descriptive survey design. The sample size was 100 pupils, 100 parents, 10 Key Informants and 10 practicing Social workers. The findings of the study reveal that in order to curb child sexual abuse, the risk factors such as poverty, parental negligence and harmful traditional cultural practices should be addressed. The Social workers also need to take up their roles in the prevention, restoration and resource provision to curb CSA. The study recommends on offender registration, community notification, mandatory background check for teachers, residency restriction and sentence lengthening as a mitigation strategy to ending sexual violence against pupils.

**KEY WORDS:** Poverty, Harmful traditional practices, offender registration, residency restriction and Social Worker.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to the Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics 2019 census, children between the age of 10-17 comprises of 24.5 percent. This population is in the hands of the adults and caregivers for guidance and mentorship. Social workers, community health volunteers, sociologists and teachers should regularly assess the history of sexual abuse in children and report to the relevant authorities including providing referrals to rescue centers where the abused children can be contained as the healing process both physical and psychological is initiated, (Lindsay and Jennifer 2017).

In developed countries, there is more research on the mitigation of sexual violence against children compared to the developing countries. For instance, in Malaysia, a study on CSA found out that children below the age of eleven would not say no and share their abuse experiences whereas those above fourteen years demonstrate a significant protection skill and refusal approaches, (Tee and Ashley 2020). According to Menjivar & Walsh (2017), a study in El Salvador found out that Topics on sexual violence prevention distributes preventive messages effectively to the public in the museum exhibits. A study by Ayala, *et al.* (2009) demonstrates that in children have insufficient information on the CSA mitigation and self-protection skills. This calls for a need of a study on the preventive strategies of CSA to equip the pupils with the knowledge and skills on the refusal approaches among the adolescents, preschoolers and pupils with mild retardation (Barlow & Schrader-MacMillan, 2010) Education programmes on CSA prevention were found to benefit the learners by equipping them with the skills for self-protection and increasing their knowledge on the effects of sexual abuse (Zhang *et al.*, 2014).

According to Bruce, (2011), even if research demonstrated the ability of pupils to learn the prevention strategies, to demonstrate if sexual abuse mitigation translates to knowledge acquisition is a significant challenge. There is inadequate evidence to show that the reported child sexual abuse victimization can be mitigated by sexual abuse prevention educational programs. Nonetheless, retroactive prospect unfolds that pupils who get involved in the sexual abuse prevention programs in school, reported a higher rate of CSA disclosure and reduced rate of violence, (Butchart, *et.al* 2006). Consequently, the possession of knowledge and

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skills on self-protection is useful to the pupils when they are faced with the threat of sexual abuse. Collin-Vezina & Hebert (2013). found that the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse increases between age 8 to 12 year this suggests that the sexual abuse prevention programs should be started at or before early school age.

In Africa, due to the underdevelopment and poor socio-economic state of many countries, pupils are at a higher risk of sexual abuse as compared to the developed countries. The weak protection policies and the underreporting of cases subjects the pupils to a more severe plight than in the western countries. It is worth noting that when comparing Africa to other continents in the world, the proportion of the pupils at risk of sexual abuse, early marriage, FGM, poverty, labour exploitation, disease, depression, substance abuse and malnutrition is on an increase (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kaiser Permanente 2016). The hostility of the African environment, subjects many pupils to economic struggle as they grow and their childhood is manipulated by factors that adversely limit their physiological, psychological, emotional, social and economic development. This harsh economic condition subjects' children to abject poverty and others end up in the streets to beg and look for other ways of survival which increases their chances of being sexually exploited.

In Kisii County, Child sexual abuse has been tied to several of antagonistic effects which include: hyposexuality, hypersexuality, drug abuse, suicidal tendencies, poor academic performance, anomie and depression. In spite of a surfeit of research on CSA, there is insignificant knowledge about the etiology and mitigation strategies of child sexual abuse which is essentially the research gap that the researcher sort to fill. This is due to the fact that CSA intricates the health development of pupils, yet its etiology, prevalence, awareness and mitigation has been burdensome to establish among pupils in Kisii County schools.

### **Mitigation Strategies of Sexual Abuse**

The strategies for Child sexual abuse prevention are targeted towards a reduction of the underlying causes and the risk factors by strengthening the protective factors (WHO, 2006). In spite of the scientific knowledge on the efficacious of such generalship coming from income countries, an understanding on the confrontation of the risk factors can form a good starting point on designing the intervention of the low-income earning countries in Africa. At societal level, the factors that create an environment for flourishing of CSA such as harmful traditional cultural practices like FGM need to be addressed by all stakeholders. Most early marriages are as a result of this cultural practice that sets a mental apprehension in the CSA perpetrator that after undergoing the 'cut', the victim is ready for marriage.

Reducing economic inequalities is a key strategy to prevention of CSA. Studies show that sexual violence against children oftenly occur in poorer communities and households as compare to the high-income endowed communities. The perpetrators will tend to take advantage of the economic hard times and the inadequacies of the children to meet the basic needs and exchange favours for sexual gratification otherwise known as transactional sex (WHO, 2006). The measures to reduce poverty and inequality ought to be put in place to guarantee the fight against transactional sex among children. Residential mobility that aims at reducing the concentration of poverty to a particular area by providing low-income families with incentives and supportive environment for economic development need to be put in place by the government.

There are two initiatives to stop sexual violence against children that focuses on two main strategies: offender management and school-based educational programs. The offender management initiatives include registering sex offenders, apprising the society on their presence, getting the background history before employment, Limiting and monitoring places where offenders live and lengthening the prison sentences for the offenders. Though there is won approval from the general public, social workers, the government and policy makers on the effectiveness of these initiatives, there is little evidence to show their effectiveness in mitigating sexual violence (Evans, *et.al* 2014). Nonetheless, these initiatives, stereotypes the perpetrators as pedophiles, guileful strangers who plunder children in environments where they cannot be caught or seen but in essence, the population is very dynamic, (Masilo, 2018). Most perpetrators are well known to the victims, many are juveniles. However, once caught, majority have a lower likelihood of re-offending. The prevention strategy is one of the shortcomings of this method of CSA mitigation (Wang, 2017). The most recommend way to catch the perpetrators is by using the law enforcement resources since it concentrates intensive management efforts on the abusers that are at a higher risk of re-offending.

Introducing the School-based educational programs will teach pupils on such skills as how to identify perilous situations, refuse an abuser s approach, break off an interaction, and summon help (Masilo, 2018). These programs also aim to promote disclosure, rise self-esteem, create awareness among the pupils, reduce self-blame, and mobilize observers. These programs achieve part of their goals in prevention of sexual violence against children. According to (Abel & Harlow, 2001), people can acquire these concepts once they are well oriented to them in school. These programs promote disclosure and minimize self-blame among the children who are victims of sexual violence. Nevertheless, studies are inconclusive about whether education programs reduce victimization or not. Consequently, therefore the gap for this study is the mitigation of child sexual abuse.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Table 1: Sample Size

Population category	Target Population	Sample Size	Percentage (percent)
Emesa primary		28040	40
Kabonyo primary	200	29	29
Nyabisase primary		22031	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Kisii County (2019)

### Data collection Instruments

This study used questionnaires and interview schedules as the fundamental research. The questionnaires had open and closed ended questions. According to Abma, *et.al*, (2016), a questionnaire is the most appropriate tool for data collection due to its ability to collect vast information with a rationally accepted span of time. The sources of information are held confidential since it provides anonymity of both the respondents and areas of residence. It guarantees confidentiality of the source of information through anonymity (Graeff, & Baur, 2020). The research interviewed the assistant chief, head teachers and six village heads representing the following six villages in Kisii County; Ababare, Abagisero, Abagwasi, Ababita, Abasinange and Abamachoge.

These key informants were purposively sampled because they were leaders of schools where pupils are taking their studies and villages where pupils hail from and therefore and therefore must be privy of the etiology of child sexual abuse cases within their jurisdictions further, they are well conversant with the local cultural knowledge. The questionnaires were issued to the pupils and their parents because they had adequate time to well thought answers while the key informants i.e. head teachers, assistant chief and village elders were interviewed because of the nature of their work and busy schedules.

The questionnaires and interview schedules were divided into two sections that is Section A and B. Section A contained the social demographic data of the respondents while section B focused on questions that were derived from the research objectives on etiology, prevalence, awareness level and mitigation strategies.

## III. FINDINGS

### Age of the Pupils

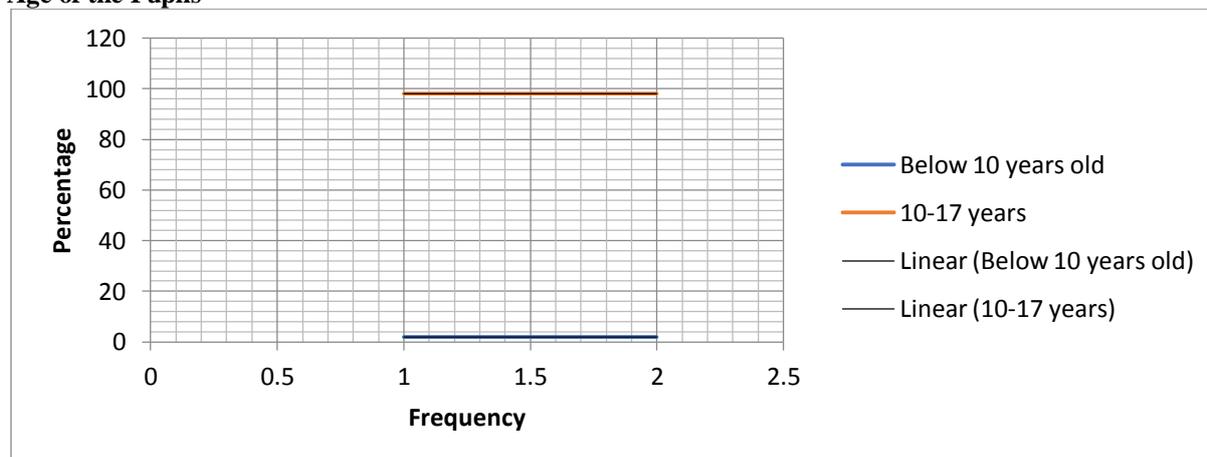


Figure 1: Age of the Pupils

Source: (Author 2020)

Accordingly, it revealed that the majority of the respondents were between 10 and 17 years of age which comprised of 98.06% of the respondents implying that they are of the teenage age thus there is a need to establish or causes of sexual abuse from this age bracket stated.

**Age of the parents**

**Table 2: Age of the Parents**

Age category	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	35	35%
30-39	30	30%
40-49	20	20%
50-59	10	10%
60-69	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: (Author 2020)

The research findings reveal that the majority of parents were between the age of 20-29 which was represented by 35%, 30% of the parents were in the age bracket of 30-39 while 20% represented the parents of age bracket of between 40 - 49. However, the parents in the age brackets of 50-59 and 60-69 each represented 10% and 5% respectively.

**Pupils Opinions on Mitigation Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse**

**Table 3: Mitigation Strategies for Child Sexual Abuse**

	SD		D		NS		A		SA	
	Count	Row N %								
Sex offenders should be registered	4	3.9%	1	1.0%	17	16.7%	15	14.7%	65	63.7%
The community should be notified about the presence of sexual offenders	0	0.0%	3	2.9%	4	3.9%	13	12.7%	82	80.4%
Background employment check should be conducted before employing any teacher	0	0.0%	6	5.9%	18	17.6%	12	11.8%	66	64.7%
Places where sex offenders live should be controlled	4	3.9%	8	7.8%	10	9.8%	12	11.8%	68	66.7%
Long term prison sentences should be imposed for sex offenders	3	2.9%	5	4.9%	1	1.0%	7	6.9%	86	84.3%
The Assistant chief should report the perpetrators brought to her to the police for further legal action.	4	3.9%	2	2.0%	0	0.0%	12	11.8%	84	82.4%
Pupils should be equipped with skills on how to identify dangerous situations	2	2.0%	4	3.9%	11	10.8%	12	11.8%	73	71.6%
Pupils should be educated on refuse an abuse approach	2	2.0%	3	2.9%	8	7.8%	13	12.7%	76	74.5%
Religious institution has a role to play in educating the society on morals to prevent child abuse.	3	2.9%	6	5.9%	15	14.7%	16	15.7%	62	60.8%
	2	2.0%	6	6.1%	7	7.1%	12	12.1%	72	72.7%

Source: (Author 2020)

78.4% and 93.1% of the pupils feel that sexual offenders should be registered and the community should be notified of the presence of sexual offenders respectively. 76.5% of the pupils expressed their fear that background employment should be checked before employing any teacher and 78.5% of the respondents said that places where offenders stay should be controlled in order to reduce this sexual abuse habit. Also, 91.2% of the respondents said that assistant chief should report the cases of perpetrators brought to her office for further legal action while 94.2% of the respondents agreed that pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify risky situations to enable prevent themselves. Then 83.4% of the pupils felt that pupils should be educated on how to refuse sexual advances and 76.6% of the respondents agreed that religious institution have a role to play in educating the society on morals to prevent child abuse.

Parental Opinion on mitigation Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse

Table 4 : Mitigation Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse

	SD		D		NS		A		SA	
	Count	Row N %								
Sex offenders should be registered	13	12.4%	0	0.0%	33	31.4%	8	7.6%	51	48.6%
The community should be notified about the presence of sexual offenders	0	0.0%	1	1.0%	28	26.7%	33	31.4%	43	41.0%
Background employment check should be conducted before employing any teacher	1	1.0%	4	3.8%	22	21.0%	30	28.6%	48	45.7%
Places where sex offenders live should be controlled	5	4.8%	5	4.8%	10	9.5%	47	44.8%	38	36.2%
Long term prison sentences should be imposed for sex offenders	1	1.0%	3	2.9%	16	15.2%	49	46.7%	36	34.3%
The Assistant chief should report the perpetrators brought to her to the police for further legal action.	2	1.9%	4	3.8%	7	6.7%	39	37.1%	53	50.5%
Pupils should be equipped with skills on how to identify dangerous situations	3	2.9%	0	0.0%	3	2.9%	36	34.3%	63	60.0%
Pupils should be educated on refuse an abuse approach	4	3.8%	3	2.9%	12	11.4%	24	22.9%	61	58.1%
Religious institution has a role to play in educating the society on morals to prevent child abuse.	3	2.9%	0	0.0%	5	4.8%	26	24.8%	71	67.6%
Sex education should be introduced in school to equip learners with information on its effects.	2	1.9%	3	2.9%	12	11.4%	36	34.3%	52	49.5%

Source: (Author 2020)

The research findings show that 56.2% of parents revealed that sexual offenders should be registered while 72.4% of the parents felt that the community should be notified of the presence of sexual offenders. Further, 76.3% of the parents expressed their fear that background employment should be checked before employing any teacher. 81.0% of the respondents said that places where offenders stay should be controlled in order to reduce this sexual abuse habit, 87.6% of the respondents said that assistant chief should report the cases of perpetrators brought to her office for further legal action and 94.3% of the respondents agreed that pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify dangerous situations to enable prevent themselves. Further, 81.0% of the parents reported that pupils should be educated on how to refuse sexual advances, 92.4% of the respondents agreed that religious institution have a role to play in educating the society on morals to prevent child abuse, and 83.9% of the parents agreed that sex education should be introduced in school to equip the learners with information on its effects.

Opinions of Key Informants on mitigation of Child sexual abuse

Further, the researcher sought the opinions of the clan elders, the area assistant chief and the headteachers of the schools that participated in this study. The findings from the interviews showed the clan elders were of the opinion that the offenders should be registered with the chief and the community be notified of their presence. This is in line with the parent’s opinions. One of the clan elders interviewed said that:

“I think the sexual offenders should be registered in the office of the assistant chief and the community be notified of their presence. During the community barazas the clan elders and the assistant chief should make the names of the perpetrators public so that the parents, guardians, teachers, social workers, community health volunteers and pupils are aware to be cautious...” (Clan elder, 2020)

The headteachers and the assistant chiefs agreed that that background employment should be checked before employing any teacher. The clan elders noted that places where offenders stay should be controlled in order to reduce the risk of sexual abuse. The headteachers noted that the assistant chief should report sexual abuse cases presented to her to the police to ensure that the perpetrators are aligned in court. They also noted agreed that pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify dangerous situations for personal protection and prevention. In an interview with the assistant chief, she noted that:

“I have some cases in my office where teachers have abused the learners sexually through coercion and threats of physical injury or punishment to the learner... I think it’s important to do background survey of a teacher before recruiting them in schools...The teachers that have been found with sufficient evidence of abusing children should be deregistered from the teachers service commission and be charged in court according to the law” (Assistant chief, 2020)

All the Key informants reported that pupils should be educated on how to refuse sexual advances and demonstrated that religious institution have a role to play in educating the society on morals thus preventing child sexual abuse. The headteachers noted that sex education should be introduced in school to equip the learners with information on its effects. The headteachers were of the opinion that the family should take the pivotal role in helping the victims avoid getting abused by the perpetrators, this is due to the fact that the family is closely linked with the children owing to the fact that it’s the first agent of socialization and the genesis of the society thus it can closely monitor the behaviors of children. One of the head teachers stated that:

“Once sexual abuse cases have been reported to the assistant chief’s office and the perpetrators found, she should report them to the police to ensure that they are aligned in court... In school, pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify”, (Head teacher, 2020)

### **Opinions of Practicing social workers on their role in Mitigation of CSA**

Onerespondent reflected that CSA can be mitigated by the social workers through, creation of public awareness, involving all the stakeholders in the fight and keeping students in schools as indicated in the following plate.

“Social workers play a very instrumental role in the society. In ending child sexual abuse, I think social work practitioners should engage with children to assess challenges in social functioning, process information in ways that enhance their ability to discover solutions, develop skills to resolve problems in living, and create support for change.”

Social workers link people with resources and services, a vital strategy in any change effort. More than simply connecting people with services, workers advocate optimal benefits, develop networks of communication among organizations in the social service delivery network, and establish access to resources. When necessary resources do not exist, practitioners generate new opportunities, programs, and services. This was indicated in the following excerpt

“ A social worker needs to link any child who is at a risk of sexual abuse to a safer place, for example children’s home, both private or public. The worker also need to find resources for the children both internal and external in ensuring that the wellbeing of the children at risk is taken care of” (Social worker 2020)

Social Workers champion the forecasting of germane plans by advocating Children centeredness, synchronization, efficacy, and productivity in the conveyance of services. Outstandingly, they reinforce ranks of culpability and certify the submission of proficient ethics, integrity, and values in service delivery towards ensuring that the children are protected from sexual abuse as observed below

“ I think social workers in mitigating child sexual abuse, they need to play mainly the advocacy role on behalf of the children to the authorities. This will guarantee the children safety for one, when the authorities are made aware of the abuse, they can send the law enforcement officers for the arrest of the perpetrators before the cases are kept under cover or solved locally to the disadvantage of the child.” (Social Worker 2020)

**Box 1: Interview excerpts with Social workers on their role in the mitigation of CSA**

The Children Social worker clan noted that;

“I think Social workers should register the sexual offenders in the office of the assistant chief and notify the community of their presence. During the community barazas the Social workers together with the clan elders and the assistant chief should make the names of the perpetrator’s public so that the parents, guardians, teachers, social workers, community health volunteers and pupils are aware to be cautious...” (Interview 2020)

In another interview, a social worker who is also an assistant chief noted that;

“I have some cases in my office where teachers have abused the learners sexually through coercion and threats of physical injury or punishment to the learner... I think it’s important for social workers to collaborate with the board of management of the various schools and the ministry of education in doing background survey of a teacher before recruiting them in schools...The teachers that have been found with sufficient evidence of abusing children should be deregistered from the teachers service commission and be charged in court according to the law” (Interview 2020)

Another Social worker observed that;

“I also want to say that we as social advocates and the community watch dogs, we need to work with the government in controlling the places where offenders stay in order to reduce the risk of sexual abuse...(Interview 2020)

Two School social workers were in agreement upon interviewing them. One of them stated that:

“Once sexual abuse cases have been reported to the assistant chief’s office and the perpetrators found, she should report them to the police to ensure that they are aligned in court... In school, pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify dangerous situations for personal protection and prevention...”(Interview 2020)

One of the headteachers noted that:

“I agree that we need to introduce sex education in schools to equip the learners with information on its effects...The family should take the pivotal role in helping the victims avoid getting abused by the perpetrators...”(Interview 2020)

**Source: Research, 2020**

#### **IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

##### **Mitigation Strategies of Child Sexual Abuse**

According to Evans,*et.al*(2014), there are two initiatives to stop sexual violence against children that focuses on offender management and school-based educational programs as the major strategies. The offender management initiatives include registering sex offenders, apprising the society on their presence, getting the background history before employment, limiting and monitoring places where offenders live and lengthening the prison sentences for the offenders. Though there is won approval from the general public, social workers, the government and policy makers on the effectiveness of these initiatives, there is little evidence to show their effectiveness in mitigating sexual violence. This study found out that 78.4% of pupils suggested that sexual offenders must be taken through the legal process while the community should be notified of the presence of sexual offenders as 93.1% of the pupils recommended. 76.5% of the pupils expressed their fear that background employment should be checked before employing any teacher. It was also discovered that 78.5% of the respondents were for the opinion that places where offenders stay should be controlled in order to reduce this sexual abuse habit. 91.2% of the respondents said that assistant chief should report the cases of perpetrators brought to her office for further legal action 94.2% of the respondents agreed that pupils should be taught skills that will help them identify dangerous situations to enable prevent themselves. 83.4% of the pupils reported that pupils should be educated on how to refuse sexual abuse approach. 76.6% of the respondents agreed that religious institution has a role to play in educating the society on morals to prevent child abuse, this finding is a cause for concern to policy formulators.

A study by Finkelhor, (2009) outlines the mitigation strategies to curbing CSA abuse as: offender registration, community notification, mandatory background check, residency restriction, sentence lengthening and civil commitment, enhanced detection and arrest, mental treatment community reintegration. The WHO (2006) highlights the prevention strategies of CSA as those efforts targeted towards the prevention of the underlying causes and risk factors such as harmful traditional cultural practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), reducing economic inequality, reducing the environmental risk factors and relationship strategies such as adequate parenting. The findings of this study are in agreement with the studies done by Finkelhor, (2009) and WHO (2006) since they point out that to curb child sexual abuse, the risk factors such as poverty, parental negligence and harmful traditional cultural practices should be addressed. The findings also recommend on offender registration, community notification, mandatory background check for teachers, residency restriction

and sentence lengthening which is in line with the literature review. Additional knowledge is brought forth by the findings on the role of the religious institutions on the morality of members in the society and nourishing them on the religious expectations and what it means to be morally upright which in return will fight CSA. Secondly, the findings point out new knowledge on a need for a dialogue between the key stakeholders in education such as parents, teachers, policy formulators and social workers on the introduction of sex education in all the key social institutions to equip children on the refusal approaches and perpetrator identification.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study found out that social workers together with other stakeholders such as parents/guardians, local administrators and the government play a key role in the mitigation of child sexual abuse. It found out that there are two initiatives to mitigate sexual violence against children that focus on offender management and school-based educational programs as the major strategies. The offender management initiatives include registering sex offenders, appraising the society on their presence, getting the background history before employment of teachers, limiting and monitoring places where offenders live and lengthening the prison sentences for the offenders. However, it was noted that, the long legal system in Kenya on dealing with the sexual violence related cases has motivated child sexual abuse. This should be a great concern to the social workers, social policy formulators and community health volunteers to open a dialogue on how this can be shortened for the interest of safeguarding the rights of the children and ensuring that the victims get justice. It was also noted that these cases are settled by alternative dispute resolution at the community level by paying the survivor's family or forcing the perpetrator to marry the victim, which further endangers the life of the pupil since two wrongs do not make a right. This is done to avoid bring shame both to the victim and the perpetrator

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

The focus on the protection and assistance of children and women should be held by government policies, Social welfare programs and research. The male chauvinism culture should be condemned and the society dialogue on what it is to be a man. Men should view women and children as persons of equal right to theirs and not feel the sexual entitlement on children and women dominance. The recognition of children and women's rights and the improvement of their social position play a key role in the prevention of CSA

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