

# Unpacking Forms, Causes and Effects of Abuse on Child Development in Southern Malawi Communities

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**Received date:** February 04, 2015, **Accepted date:** March 06, 2015, **Published date:** March 10, 2015

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## Abstract

physical recovery; it is, nevertheless, a short term on one hand while implications of psychological or emotional abuse are long term.

Limited information on comprehensive abusive actions encourages long term effects of psychosocial abuse among children. Most recent studies have presented scanty information at national level and without any at district and community levels [1]. In addition, these studies have not inclusively approached child abuse from psychosocial dimensions. This implies that no data exist to unpack forms, causes and effects of abuse on child development in Malawi. This negates psychosocial abuse on child development and associated implications [8]. This paper will therefore examine forms, causes and implications of abuse on child development. The paper understands the role that information plays in the entire program life cycle of child development.

It believes that provision of information on forms, causes and implications of child abuse is important for designing of both national and community level programs. In addition, this paper also reveals the effects of neglected abuse on child development such as psychosocial abuse. Therefore, this investigation is valid in Malawi because it brings

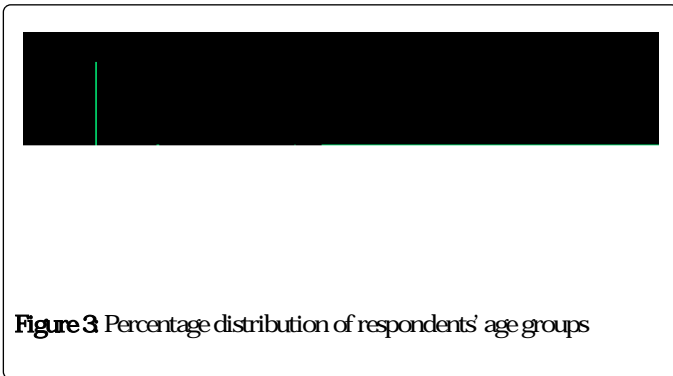
awareness and theory of change to different stakeholders such as health practitioners, faith based institutions and other private organizations. It is for this reason that this paper believes to make a contribution knowledge and information available on catalysing child development in Malawi. It is to this effect that our children will be cared, protected and find justice as they grow and become citizens.

g g d d d i

The paper adopts Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Theory as a guiding therapy in identifying and mitigating effects of physical,

respondents aged between 310 and 400 were part of the study sample size than other age groups.

experienced, have knowledge or been aware of and if they have dealt with in helping survivors or victims of child abuse. Table 1 shows that frequency distribution of forms of abuse that respondents have experienced, are aware of and have dealt with in the study area. The paper findings show that about 90 percent of respondents (n=360)



Specifically, the

hence,

The participants were asked common forms of abuse on child development. Questions were related to whether respondents have

	SD	D	DK	A	SA
Some perpetrators abuse without knowing	120	0	80	130	70
Abusers are victims of abuse	0	40	10	260	90
Child abuse can be inform of child discipline	120	60	10	150	60
Abuse can happen when one is stressed or depressed	20	30	40	170	140
People abuse children because they want to have power and control	50	40	0	190	120
People abuse children because they angry with someone	10	40	0	230	120
People abuse children when they are drunk with alcohol	30	80	20	180	90
People abuse children when they are drug users	30	70	60	130	110
People abuse because of culture and customs	50	60	20	150	120
People abuse children because of some beliefs about HIV & AIDS	40	60	10	200	90
People abuse children because the victim is poor	20	70	30	130	150
Lack of policies on abolishing child abuse	0	40	20	140	200

Source: Author's calculation

Table 3 Frequency distribution of causes of child abuse by respondents in the study area

### Effects of abuse

The study also solicited information on effects of abuse on child development. Respondents based their scale-choices on statements that the study provided to them such as 5 indicated Strongly Agree (SA), 4 indicated Agree (A), 3 indicated Don't Know (DK), 2 indicated Disagree (D) and 1 indicated Strongly Disagree (SD). Table 4 displays frequency distribution of effects of abuse on child development by respondents. About 70 percent of respondents (n=280) agreed that victims of child abuse will often have flashbacks and this was followed by victims of child abuse becoming abusers when they grow up (Table 4). Worrisomely, 50 percent of respondents (n=200) strongly reported that victims of abuse will never forget about the abuse they underwent. In other words, Table 4 indicates that most respondents agree that child abuse has consequences on the victim. Figure 4 validates that effects could range from mental illness, post traumatic disorders, behavioural problems, infectious diseases and early marriages.

Effects of abuse	SD	D	DK	A	SA
Victims of abuse will never forget about abuse	0	0	50	150	200
Survivors will never be happy	50	100	30	130	90
Victims of abuse suffer from memory loss	20	120	80	120	60
Victims will often have flashbacks	0	10	0	280	110
Survivors will become abusers themselves	30	90	50	210	20

Source: Author's calculation

Table 4 Frequency distribution of effects of abuse on child development by respondents



## Guidance and counselling

The paper asked respondents on how would guidance and counselling help in minimizing or mitigating the effects of abuse on child development. Table 5 shows frequency distribution of roles of guidance and counselling in mitigating effects of child abuse on child development by respondents in the study area. Approximately 88 percent of respondents (n=35) mentioned guidance and counselling to focus on ensuring self-worthiness. Just half of respondents mentioned that guidance and counselling to target on policy making and lobbying. One in every four respondents urged guidance and counselling to concentrate on emotional stability of the victimised.

ROLES	Frequency	Proportions (%)
Self-worthiness	350	86
Policy making and lobbying	200	50
Mental stability	150	38
Career path	140	35
Improve relationships	130	33
Emotional stability	100	25
BEST MECHANISMS		
Counselling	240	60
Helpline to report abuse	270	68
Social support	200	50
Provide safe place	150	38
Spiritual encouragement	100	25
other best Ways		
Civic education on abuse	330	83
Part of education in schools	300	75
Punishment to abusers	280	70
Clear policies	150	38
Clear laws on abuse	100	25
Source: Author's calculation		

**Table 5.** Frequency distribution and proportions of roles, mechanisms and other ways of guidance and counselling in mitigating effects of child abuse by respondents.

In general, respondents reported that guidance and counselling could provide emotional stability, mental stability, self worthness, improve relationships, policy making and can help victims of abuse chose career path in their lives. In addition, the study asked the respondents on other best ways of helping the victims of abuse. Above 50 percent of respondents outlined counselling helpline to report abuse and social support as best mechanisms in helping the victim of abuse (Table 5).

Furthermore, Table 5 shows civic education, abuse being part of education in schools, punishment to abusers, clear policies and laws on child abuse as some of key means through which effects of abuse can

be mitigated. About 83 percent of respondents indicated that civic education on abuse could effectively help in mitigative effects of child abuse above half of the respondents highlighted the importance of clear legislations on child care and protection to mitigate effects of abuse on child development.

## Forms of abuse

The study shows that there are five forms of abuse discussed. These are physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and negligence abuse. The study has shown that all these are well recognised forms of abuse. On the other hand the study has shown that negligence abuse and emotional abuse are the least common forms of abuse. For instance, the study found that 75 percent of respondents mentioned negligence abuse as the least common form of abuse. However, this could be because there's less knowledge of negligence and some cultural barriers may contribute to limited identification of negligence forms of abuse (Cicchetti, 1989). The study recommends that communities should take part in teaching their communities of abuse and its forms. In addition, Government should also make sure that forms of abuse should also be embedded in education syllabus and that policies are in place to curb their incidences. Furthermore, the study recommends that institutions engaged in guidance and counselling should continue lobbying Government to enact most legislations that protect child welfare.

Therefore

powerlessness in the past, may also underestimate sense self-efficacy and self-worth in dealing with both real and perceived danger and feel that there is nothing to be done. Cognitive distortions can contribute emotional distress and increase the risk of depression.

Behavioural effects include; unhealthy behaviours such as alcohol