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## Investigating child sexual violence among secondary school learners in Wakiso District, Uganda

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### Abstract:

Child Sexual Violence (CSV) is a global challenge, and its prevalence is not well studied in Ugandan schools. This study used a cross-sectional design to investigate CSV prevalence and its relationship with parental care and learners' characteristics among secondary school learners in the Wakiso District. The sample comprised 274 learners from five schools: rural, peri-urban, and urban. A 4-Likert questionnaire comprising parental care, learners' characteristics, and CSV was used to collect data. Data were analysed using means, standard deviation, Chi-square, and Analysis of Variance-ANOVA. The results show high CSV prevalence among learners with low parental care and low personal characteristics, where sexual harassment, defilement, and rape accounted for 60.10%, 55.11%, and 51.10%, respectively. There were no significant differences in CSV prevalence among rural, peri-urban and urban schools (ANOVA,  $p = .25$ ). Implications for schools to minimise CSV in schools are discussed.

**Keywords:** Parental care, Learner characteristics, Self-acceptance, Self-respect, Self-satisfaction, Child sexual violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

CSV occurs between adults and children or between children under 18 (Dayal et al., 2018). In Uganda, the law prohibits sexual activity with anyone below 18 (Kangaude & Skelton, 2018). Few studies in local communities outside the school settings show CSV is prevalent (Bunoti et al., 2021; McGranahan et al., 2021; Woldetsadik et al., 2022). On the one hand, it suggests a challenge regarding parental care given to children; on the other hand, it could relate to learners' characteristics. The school and the community are not separate entities (Abdul-Wahab et al., 2021) because the learners bear the effects of the beliefs and behaviours of the community (Ochen et al., 2019; Kyegombe et al., 2020; 2022). School learners represent the community's values and behaviours (Buller, 2020). Hence, this study on parental care and learners' characteristics concerning CSV of secondary learners.

Child Sexual Violence (CSV) is a global challenge at all ages and levels, including in secondary schools (Singh et al., 2014; Selengia et al., 2020). There are 15 million girls aged between 10-19 who have been forced into sexual intercourse, and nine million were reported in 2017 (Chynoweth, et al., 2017). World Health Organisation-WHO describes CSV as a non-partner who forces a person less than 18 years old into a sexual act (World Health Organization (WHO, 2021). It also includes a broader definition of sexual violence, like attempted rape, inappropriate touching, and verbal sexual harassment, suggesting that many countries may not accurately report all the forms of sexual harassment. It implies that CSV encompasses pornography, sexual stimulation, touching other people's private parts, harassment (verbal and non-verbal threats), intercourse (defilement) with consent, and rape (intercourse by force). However, CSV prevalence for boys and girls differs between girls, 8 - 31% and boys, 3 - 17%, with few studies on boys (Kloppen et al., 2016). For example, a survey of published

articles from 2009 to 2019 in 11 countries regarding CSV shows only 4.0% of studies on boys compared to 28.0% on girls in 11 countries (Nace et al., 2021). CSV is an umbrella term encompassing violence and coercion, threats, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse of children (Chen & Chen, 2020).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, CSV accounted for 44% by 2019, 35.5%, and 14.0% were married and unmarried, respectively (Muluken et al., 2020). The high sexual violence in Africa is related to societal issues, such as rapid changes, avoidance strategies, and patriarchal hegemony (Pareja-Cano et al., 2020; Veit & Bieker, 2022). It is no wonder Uganda recommends schools have the Senior Women and Men Teachers (SWMT) Association to guide children on adolescent, sexuality, and personality (MoES, 2020). According to Uganda, there is a gap between the policy and its implementation (MoES, 2018). Therefore, key stakeholders should address the pubertal concerns to bridge this knowledge gap. CSV happens in almost all contexts, showing that 77% and 82% of primary and secondary school students experienced CSV (MoEs, 2015). Most criminal activities occur in toilets, classrooms, staffrooms, to and from school, and in teachers' houses (Omoding, 2017). In Wakiso District, 10.7% of the children experienced CSV once a week, and 8.3% stated it happened daily (Pfeiffer & Salvagni, 2005). CSV does not occur in a vacuum World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013). It is a combination of many factors, including self-esteem. Brown et al. (2012) state that the self-esteem system keeps us healthy, constructive, and adaptive to life decisions. Also, low self-respect can lead to harmful decisions (Nicholson, 2018), which is why Brewer et al. (2021) explain that low self-respect disturbs all spheres of life. Thus, low self-respect can lead adolescents to CSV. WHO contends CSV is a child's sexual advances not fully understood and consent to. It can occur between adults and children or between

children under 18 (Dayal et al., 2018). Parental care influences the child's behaviour (Shayesteh et al., 2014). If parents provide for children's needs, their behaviour will be acceptable. Owino (2020) states that child negligence renders children violent in schools, and parents do not discuss CSV protection (Rudolph et al., 2018). Some factors may contribute to CSV in secondary schools. For example, the child's location because a study from western countries shows that 60% of girls report sexual violence before age 18, which may not be the case for the rest of the world. Also, leaving children with uncensored technology and media is tantamount to neglect. A case in point has been reported in Asia, where 41.8% of boys and 39.1% of girls are being neglected by parents (Moody et al., 2018).

Self-acceptance refers to one feeling worth him or herself, and it must radiate to other people in the community (Hannush, 2021). Respect is based on oneself to achieve individual needs (Clucas, 2019). Self-acceptance refers to possessing optimistic self-regard and outlook, conceding positive and negative facets of the self, and keeping a happy life, including the past (Ryff & Singer, 2002). In this study, self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-satisfaction are considered learner characteristics.

Learner characteristics may influence personality traits. First, openness, where an individual is adventurous, usually tackles issues with less thought; second, conscientiousness is good because it makes individuals thoughtful in actions, yet low-level results in doing things with little thinking. Third, extraversion is where one enjoys working with others, while low aspects result in solitude affinity. Fourth, agreeableness is where one feels empathy, and the reverse is that there is no care for what happens to others; finally, unpredictable neurotic behaviours; individuals feel lots of stress and have difficulties gaining stability after stress.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Since different personalities and learner characteristics exist in schools, the researchers used multi-theories to understand learners' characteristics, which may be the determinants of CSV prevalence. This study used four theories that explain evolutionary sentiments and unique reflections of oneself, and these theories complement each other (Buss, 2018; Li et al., 2020). The theories are Sociometer Theory (SMT), Terror Management Theory (TMT), Attachment Theory (AMT) and General Strain Theory (GST). The first two, SMT and TMT, explain adolescent behaviour. Specifically, sociometer theory (SMT) (Leary and Baumeister, 2000) postulates that everyone needs a sense of belonging rooted in the social and historic as either acceptance or negation. These determine the behaviour to please and uplift one's esteem. Terror Management Theory (TMT) (Pyszczynski et al., 2004) proposes that death comes to individuals differently, which results in fear and anxiety. This fear and anxiety determine actions. For instance, someone with high self-respect is a fortified person and acts soberly in various situations, which is not the same with low self-respect individuals. For parental care, AMT deals with secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure, indecisive, and disorganised-disoriented attachments (van der Hart, 2018), and GST deals with the effects of abused children (Iratzoqui, 2018). Against this background, the four theories were used to explain the learners' characteristics and parental care regarding CSV prevalence.

Although Uganda law prohibits sexual activity among individuals below 18 (Kangaude & Skelton, 2018), health studies show that children below the age of 18 engage in sexual activities, as evidenced by the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (MoES, 2020; Nuwematsiko et al., 2022; Kafuko et al., 2022) and among girls from various local communities outside the school settings (Bunoti et al., 2021;

Woldetsadik et al., 2022). It suggests that some may come to school with the disease, which causes stress and depression that affects learning in schools (Nabunya et al., 2020). Most studies are from the health sector addressing health-related issues, and none addressed the prevalence of CSV of boys and girls in rural, peri-urban, and urban secondary schools from socio-psychological and educational perspectives. It is a knowledge gap this study addresses. Therefore, the purpose was to investigate CSV prevalence and its relationship between parental care and learner characteristics among five secondary school learners in Wakiso District. To fulfil the above purpose, the researcher posed four questions: 1) What are the types of child sexual violence exhibited among secondary school learners in Wakiso District?; 2) What are the levels of the learner characteristics and parental care among secondary school learners involved in CSV in the Wakiso District, Uganda? 3) To what extent do these factors explain the Child Sexual Violence of secondary school learners in the Wakiso District? 4) Does CSV prevalence differ among rural, peri-urban and urban schools? 5) What are relationship between parental care and learner characteristics. This study contributes to understanding the CSV prevalence among boys and girls in five selected secondary schools in the Wakiso District in Uganda.

### Null Hypotheses

There are no differences in CSV prevalence among rural, peri-urban and urban schools in Wakiso District.

There are no relationships between parental care and learner characteristics.

### METHODS

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. The design was used to

generate an overview of the CSV and objectivity (Cohen et al., 2013) among the study sample.

### Population and Sample

A population of 950 learners from seniors two, three and four was selected out of 476,500 learners in Wakiso District. This population was from five schools randomly selected from 139 schools in the district. The five schools were randomly picked from three types of schools: rural, peri-urban and urban boxes. The researcher closed her eyes and picked papers with names of schools in the boxes: two from rural, one from peri-urban, and two from urban schools.

A sample was calculated considering the target population of 950, and the researchers applied the following formula to arrive at a sample of 274 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 Np(1-p)}{e^2(N-1) + \chi^2 p(1-p)}$$

Where:

$n$  is the sample

$\chi^2$  is the chi-square 1 degree of freedom at the chosen confidence level of 3.84,  $N$  is the population size,  $P$  is the population proportion where .50 is assumed maximum sample size for the study,  $e$  is the accuracy at .05. Thus, a sample of 274 (129 boys and 145 girls) senior two to senior four (Table 1) with ages between 14 and 19 years with an average age of 16.

### Data Collection

The second author designed a 4-point Likert questionnaire based on the literature on the Hostile Hallways questionnaire (Lichty & Campbell, 2012) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). The questionnaire comprised three sections: 1) parental care, which includes provision of basic needs, emotional needs, and parent-child communication; 2) learner characteristics with self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-respect; 3) CSV

encompassing sexual harassment and defilement and rape. The Likert scale used the following ratings: Strongly Agree – SA was 4, Agree - A was 3, Disagree - D was 2, and Strongly Disagree - SD was 1. For validity, a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.90 was reliable, considering any value over 0.7 (Sullivan, 2011). For reliability, a test with 25 items was piloted on 10 learners who were not part of the study. A Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for the pilot study was 0.88, which was acceptable. All questions targeted verbal, visual, and physical violence participants experienced (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

The first author distributed the questionnaire to the respective schools. After two days, the schoolteachers collected and submitted the filled-in questionnaires to the researchers. The participants could withdraw anytime with no negative consequences. Since the study participants were O-level learners, Senior 1 - 4 (minors), a Consent Form for their parents was obtained for learners to engage in the research.

For ethical issues, the second author obtained a clearance with reference number MHREC 1735 to collect data on parental involvement, self-esteem and sexual violence in secondary schools in Wakiso District from August 14, 2019 to August 13, 2020.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, percentages, means standard deviations, and frequencies were used to analyse the data from the questionnaires. A Chi-Square was used to identify the association between CSV and parental care and learner characteristics. In addition, Analysis of Variance-ANOVA to establish differences in CSV prevalence between three types of schools: rural, peri-urban and urban, and to establish relationships among parental care and learner characteristics variables, respectively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show low parental care, namely provision of basic needs, emotional support, and parent-child communication. There was low self-satisfaction, acceptance, and respect among learners, which might have resulted in CSV, such as sexual harassment, defilement, and rape, which concur with the Attachment theory that learners who lack parental care or attachments are highly likely to engage in CSV (van der Hart, 2018).

ANOVA revealed no differences in CSV prevalence among rural, peri-urban and urban schools in Wakiso District ( $p = .25$ ), suggesting that CSV was similar among the three types of schools

### Demographic Distributions

**Table 1.** Learners profile in the study from Wakiso District.

Variable	Group	Frequency (N = 274)	Percentage (%)
Class (Senior)	2	88	32.2
	3	89	32.6
	4	97	35.2
Sex (Gender)	Boys	129	47.3
	Girls	145	52.7
Age (Years)	14	56	20.4
	15	54	19.7
	16	57	20.7
	17	55	20.6
	18	52	18.6

The three types of CSV: sexual harassment, sexual defilement, and rape among adolescents in Wakiso District and CSV (Tables 2).

**Table 2.** Participants CSV experiences rating  
SH= Sexual Harassment; DF=Defilement; RP=Rape.

CSV	Mean	SD	Type of school (%)			
			R	PU	U	%
SH	2.81	0.36	20.10	19.50	20.50	60.10
DF	2.81	0.51	18.6	17.6	19.0	55.11
RP	2.92	0.51	18.8	17.4	18.9	51.10

Legend: (>3.25 to 4.0) = Very high, (>2.50 to 3.24) = High, (>1.75 to 2.49) = Low, (>1.00 to 1.74) = Very low. R = Rural, PU = Peri-urban, U = Urban

Table 2 show high CSV ratings and CSV frequencies among the three types of schools.

The most prevalent form of CSV in the rural, peri-urban and urban schools was sexual harassment, 60% followed by defilement by 55.11%, and rape accounted for 51.10% of the study sample (Table 2). These results show that the prevalence of sexual harassment, defilement, and rape accounts for over 50% across the board. The results suggest CSV is prevalent among secondary school learners in Uganda, which concerns all education stakeholders.

The means, SD and rating of learners' characteristics and parental care (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Learners' characteristics and parental care ratings.

Learners' characteristics	Mean	SD	Rating
Self-acceptance	2.42	1.10	Low
Self-satisfaction	2.30	1.04	Low
Self-Respect	1.85	0.86	Low
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>Low</b>

Legend: (>3.25 to 4.0) = Very high, (>2.50 to 3.24) = High, (>1.75 to 2.49) = Low, (>1.00 to 1.74) = Very low.

Table 3 shows low ratings in all learners' characteristics (mean 2.22, SD = 1.00) and low in parental care (mean 2.31; SD = 1.05).

The comparison between learners' characteristics and parental care, and CSV among secondary school learners (Table 4).

**Table 4.** The Chi-square results between parental care and learner characteristics.

	Parental care		$\chi^2$	df	p-value
	Yes N(%)	No N (%)			
needs	85 (40.5)	125 (59.5)	45.48	1	0.00*
R Basic	56 (88.1)	56 (11.1)	-	-	-
O Emotional support	113 (66.2)	21 (33.8)	0.58	1	0.04*

R	108 (89.3)	13 (10.7)			
O	83 (86.5)	13 (13.5)	0.16	1	0.02*

Parental care

	Learner characteristics		$\chi^2$	df	p-value
	Yes N(%)	No N(%)			
H Self-acceptance	127 (88.2)	17 (11.8)	0.12	1	0.73
L Self-satisfaction	112 (86.8)	17 (13.2)			
H Self-respect	113 (85.0)	20 (15.0)	1.59	1	0.21
L Self-esteem	126 (90.0)	14 (10.0)			
H Self-efficacy	53 (71.4)	5 (28.6)	0.99	1	0.03*
L Self-efficacy	186 (86.5)	29 (13.5)			

\*Significant at .05 level;

Legend: H= High, L= Low, O= often, R= Rarely

Table 4 shows that apart from self-acceptance and self-satisfaction, the rest show an association between parental care, self-esteem and sexual harassment  $\chi^2 (1, N = 274) =$  ranging from 0.16 to 45.48, with *p-values less than .05*. These results show there are associations between parental care and learners' characteristics. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, which states that there are no relationships between parental care and learner characteristics. There were associations between parental care, self-esteem and CSV among learners from selected secondary schools in Wakiso District, but no association (Tables 4). These results agree with DREAMS (2016) that child neglect encourages sexual violence in schools. Sexual violence among young girls engaged in transactional sex implies that these learners lacked basic needs and emotional support compared to those with those facilities. These results agree with Kerr (2012), who shows that learners with low self-esteem are



vulnerable to sexual violence.

The results of ANOVA regarding CSV prevalence among the three types of schools in Wakiso District (Table 5).

**Table 5.** A two-way ANOVA results of CSV prevalence and types of CSV in three types of schools: rural, peri-urban and urban (\*Significant at  $p < .05$ ).

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Type III SS Source	df	MS	F	Sign.	Partial Eta <sup>2</sup> ( $\eta$ )	
		3077.90	9709.45	.01*	.97	
Intercept	1	.45	1.41	.25	.01	
CSV	2					
Error	271	.32				

Table 5 shows no significant primary effect of the type of CSV prevalence among rural peri-urban and urban, and type of CSV in schools  $F(2, 271) = .25, p = .97, \eta^2 < .01$ , but there was a significant interaction between types of CSV, namely sexual harassment, defilement and rape in schools ( $F(2, 271) = 10.59, p = .01$ ).

The ANOVA results show no differences in CSV frequency among the three types of schools: rural, peri-urban and urban (Table 5). Thus, the null hypothesis that 'There are no differences in CSV prevalence among rural, peri-urban and urban schools in Wakiso District' is accepted. The lack of differences in the CSV prevalence among the three types of schools could be because of several factors: the size of learner enrolment, parental substance abuse, and poor parenting styles (Gubi et al., 2020). These observations concur with Ward et al. (2018) that these

issues in South Africa increase learners' chances of being involved in CSV during their childhood. Also, it could be true that studies deal with CSV towards girls and miss out on boys. In this study there were no differences between the three types of schools. It suggests that all boys and girls experienced CSV, though it may be not at the same level. This observation concurs with the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020), which found that 67% of women and 65% of men experience sexual violence in Uganda.

The infiltration of social media into all school contexts and the increase in viewing of pornography and other media could explain the lack of differences in CSV prevalence among the schools in the Wakiso District. This observation agrees with Yanti et al. (2020), who contend that children exposed to social media, the internet and other technology gadgets engage in CSV more than those not exposed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Therefore, all the schools exhibited similar CSV prevalence in the five schools.

Other factors that are not investigated may contribute to CSV among adolescents in secondary in Wakiso District. These include school setups, locations, community and religious involvements, and learners' attitudes toward CSV (Dickman-Burnett et al., 2021). The setup is where young boys and men believe in male hegemony. This observation agrees with the theoretical framework of sexual violence, which sustains the hierarchical status of males (Pareja-Cano et al., 2020). Finally, our study contributes to the literature on sexual violence. Over 40% of African countries lack laws and policies to address CSV (African Child Policy Forum, 2014). Thus, studies are needed to comprehend the offenders' views and other stakeholders in a school setting.

## CONCLUSION

The findings show the importance of parental care and learner characteristics in Uganda. This study was conducted in secondary school settings. Thus, these

findings offer basic tenets of CSV prevalence in schools. Therefore, education stakeholders should be aware of the CSV prevalence in schools and be ready to start sexual violence prevention initiatives in schools and communities.

This study's limitations are that the sample included only five schools, was limited to victims in one province, and cannot be generalised to the rest of the country. The cross-sectional design may not capture the social dynamics. The absence of perpetrators often known to the victims and other stakeholders who may have had information regarding CSV prevalence in their schools means this study may have missed some important information that could have added value to the study. Therefore, the study recommends longitudinal studies, including other school stakeholders from all the country's provinces using qualitative and quantitative approaches, are needed to understand the extent of CSV in secondary schools.

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