



Child Protection Concerns: Situation of Girls in Fishing Camps in Binga, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT This paper sought to investigate vulnerability of the girl child as a child protection concern in fishing camps in Binga, Zimbabwe. The paper discusses the factors attracting the girl child in fishing camps, the protection challenges the girl child faced and the vulnerability indicators of the girl child in fishing camps. A qualitative methodology was employed through the use of focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. A purposive sample of 15 girls under the age of 18 years and 5 key informants was drawn. Findings of the study indicated that poverty was the main drive for the girl children to flock to the fishing camps in Binga. Records of early marriages, teenage pregnancies, HIV/ AIDS infection, school dropout and sexual abuse and exploitation were prone in the study area. Girls' vulnerability in fishing camps in Binga creates an alarm for the duty bearers to focus their attention towards assisting the succumbing girl child. Though the study focused on the girl child, there is need to consider a separate study for the other social groups.

INTRODUCTION

While Zimbabwe is lauded for its plausible achievement in setting up of many child protection programmes and policies (Chakaipa 2010; Muzingili 2014); the life of girls in fishing camps remains a big worry in both public and private discourse. Fishing communities can be vibrant centres of economic activity, attracting young people in search of independent lives and incomes for their families (Westaway et al. 2007: 666). In Malawi girls in fishing areas get engaged in sex at an early age (Kambewa et al. 2009). Zimbabwe made a remarkable effort in setting up child protection programmes both in rural and urban communities. Through the Government of Zimbabwe's National Action Plans for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2004-

2010 and 2011-2015) many programmes were designed to improve the lives of all children regardless of sex (Government of Zimbabwe 2010a; Muchenje 2008). Despite such efforts, the lives of children in rural communities continued to deteriorate correspondingly with the continued economic meltdown that affected Zimbabwe. Girls in tribal, rural and impoverished communities are most vulnerable (UNFPA 2007 cited by Raj et al. 2014). Among other vulnerable children, girls have been subjected to a systematic gender discrimination that has affected their rights (Muchenje 2008; Save the Children 2013; UNICEF 2015). High school incompleteness, early marriages, child labour, unwanted pregnancies, food insecurity and gender induced discrimination are major socio-economic problems that are common among girls when compared to boys who receive better attention in rural areas (Muzingili 2014). In Zambia both girls and boys acquire the knowhow to fish, scale, gut and sundry fish at an early age (Rajaratnam et al. 2016). In Malawi teenage girls were increasingly engaging as fish traders, and the trend created potential risks of the spread of HIV, as the girls were involved in sexual activities especially when they sold at night (Kambewa et al. 2009).

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As a result, girls in Binga fishing communities have resorted to infiltrating fishing camps in a desperate effort to save their lives. Fishing camps along the Zambezi River valley provide hope for their lives as a lot of activities take place in those densely populated places. Despite being in a well-resourced environment, the compromised rights of girls in these areas continue to be neglected. Hence, causing a potential threat to girl child protection programmes in the fishing areas in Binga.

Life in fishing camps is perilous for young girls who are still at pre-reproductive stages. It is observed that lot of risky behaviour is engaged in, in-order to raise their standard of living. There is empirical evidence to suggest that fishing communities are associated with high HIV infection prevalence rates among fisher-folk in Africa (Westaway et al. 2007; Edström and Samuels 2007). Government and private sector involvement in child protection have failed to pay attention to this invisible section of young girls in secluded fishing camps. This is very critical since most of those engaged in fishing as an occupation are aged between 15 and 35, the age range of people most vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (Westaway et al. 2007). This has not just affected their health but the camps have become hubs for many social ills. Fundamental rights of children have been ignored in fishing camps where a lot of illegal activities reportedly took place. It is surprising that not many girl child rights activists have made effort to conduct research and interventions on the plight of girl children in these fishing communities.

Fishing camps pose some distinct characteristics that have serious implications on the lives of children. With reference to the Binga community, fishing camps are designated camps where most fishing and marketing of fish take centre stage. These camps have been legalized through the local district administration. A study in Congo revealed that in camps where children are present, these children participate in the fishing activities in a way that reproduces the gendered pattern where young girls participate in the *écopage* activity while young boys help their father and older brothers in fishing on the main river channel (Béné 2008). However, the most striking characteristic of such an overcrowded area is assimilation of diverse cultural entities who are involved in both fishing and buying

fish. Thus, girl child marriage remains socially entrenched, particularly in areas where social and gender development lag (Raj et al. 2014) like fishing camps. In some cases, with fish in short supply and with livelihood opportunities at stake in the highly competitive and female-dominated small-scale fish trade, so-called “sex-for-fish” exchanges take place (Westaway et al. 2007). Report by Save the Children (2002), reveals that fishing camps have become areas of concentration not just for adults but also for children who are either heading families or searching for survival after unfriendly community situations. No documented research has been done before in the fishing camps in Binga to unearth the challenges faced by girl children in these forgotten areas. The reason behind this is that, most child protection programmes have been biased towards targeting easy to reach families and communities that were better off when compared to the affected communities in fishing places.

Previous researches have considered less in terms of the vulnerability of children, for example to HIV AIDS in fishing camps (Westaway et al. 2007). Muzingili (2014) posits that fishing camps in Binga have become economic instability shock absorber centers attracting children leaving school early to seek survival in these places. The study further reveals that many child sensitive social protection programmes initiated and implemented by the government and charitable sectors such as Save the Children, Christian Care and Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) have failed to comprehensively deal with child protection concerns in Binga District. Among other vulnerable children, observations established that girls were more systematically disadvantaged in the communities with a combination of interrelated factors such as inability to cope with life pressures and socio-cultural segregation (Mutale 2015; Muzingili 2014). This is not a surprise, as the problem of the girl child has been a topical agenda at global, regional and national levels resulting in the proliferation of hosts of gender policies in health, education, industrial and other life related sectors (United Nations 2015).

Many studies have demonstrated that fishing is particularly an important economic activity and if well-coordinated it can steer socio-economic development of the society (Henry and Johnson 2015; Kawarazuka 2010). Therefore, the infiltration of fishing camps by girls in Binga

has its genesis in unstable economic fortunes in the communities. For example, Binga was rated amongst the poorest districts in the country with a poor human development index (Zimbabwe National Statistics (ZimStat) 2012). In Binga crop production and animal husbandry is not best practiced due to poor or erratic rains together with soils that are too poor to sustain crops. To this end, children (especially girls) are faced by a plethora of challenges stemming largely from perennial poverty in the society. As a result, fishing becomes the economic mainstay of local communities. While the role of various stakeholders in meeting the rights of girl child is plausible, the current state of life of girls in fishing areas invites a contextual exploration of the problem to refine some of existing child protection policies and programmes in Zimbabwe.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper were:

1. To examine the factors leading to the girl children visiting and or staying in fishing camps in Binga,
2. To assess the challenges by girls encountered in Binga fishing areas and,
3. To examine the indicators of girl child vulnerability in fishing camps in Binga.

Research Questions

The following are key questions for this paper:

1. What drives girls into fishing camps in Binga District, Zimbabwe?
2. What challenges do girls encounter in Binga fishing areas?
3. What are the indicators of girl child vulnerability in fishing camps in Binga?

METHODOLOGY

Location and Design

The study was conducted in 5 fishing camps in Binga District which are Mujele, Chibuyu, Nsengwa, Mweenda and Vanda. The district was purposively selected on the basis that it is faced by many socio-economic challenges (ZimStat 2012), which have also affected the children, especially girls. Life of girls in fishing camps in Binga is very intricate and requires in-depth in-

quiry of situation to gain a broader perspective of the issues. Also, the research adopted qualitative research method in order to obtain the voices, opinions and expressions of the girl children as the vulnerable group in the fishing camps in terms of protection. Therefore, the study adopted qualitative research design to allow the in-depth analysis of situation in fishing camps. The researchers sought to explore the experiences and situations of the girls. To this effect, qualitative research design could give the researchers a better insight on the vulnerability circumstances of girls in fishing camps. Also, the presence of girls of school going age in the study area attracted the researchers to investigate the child protection issues involved with respect to the vulnerability of the girl child. The selection of the study area was also based on its uniqueness in terms of accessibility as it is located far from the center of the district.

Population

The exact number of girls visiting or living in fishing camps was not known. This is because there were no registers which showed the number of girls in fishing camps. However, camp chairpersons assumed that each fishing camp usually holds an average of 40 to 70 girls per given time. This influenced the researchers to select 15 girls from 5 fishing camps as indicated in the next section. In this study, a girl child was considered a female human being aged below 18 years.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

A sample of three girls under the age of 18 years was conveniently selected from each fishing camp making a total of 15 girls for the study. This was done to ensure that each selected fishing camp is represented in the data gathering process. The researchers used convenience sampling due to the high mobility nature of the girl child participants. However, only those who have stayed in fishing camp for least 6 months were selected to ensure that their wide experience in fishing camps was utilised. The information on the number of months spent in fishing camp was obtained from the participants themselves. Using purposive sampling, 5 key informants (chairpersons) representing each of the five fishing camps were also selected to provide

information for the study. The sampled key informants were assumed to have knowledge on issues under investigation due to their interaction with the girl child in the selected fishing areas.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The researchers used in-depth interviews to solicit the information from the girls about their vulnerability situation in fishing camps. All 15 selected girls participated in in-depth interviews. In-depth interview guide was used focusing on three key issues; reasons for visiting or staying in fishing camps, challenges faced in fishing camps and child protection vulnerability indicators of girl children in fishing camps. Key informant interviews were also conducted with 5 selected key informants (chairpersons of fishing camps). Using key informant guide, key informants were asked questions pertaining to drivers of girls into fishing camps and the problems which girls were facing. Both in-depth interview guide and key informant guide contained open ended questions to allow broad exploration of issues under the study.

Procedure

Clearance for the entry into the study area was obtained from the Binga District Administrator who is the custodian of fishing camps in the area and from the camp committees. Before commencement of data collection, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, what they were expected to do and participation was voluntary. The researchers also informed the participants that they could discontinue at any point during the process if they felt uncomfortable, that information they gave would be treated with confidentiality and that there were no direct benefits in participation. For those girls who were domestically employed, the researchers sought permission from their respective employers.

Analysis of Data

The collected data was grouped and put into themes that informed the analysis. The findings were analysed in relation to other studies conducted elsewhere in the world using secondary sources. Thematic analysis enabled the research-

ers to contextualize the study to make informed conclusions.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Demographic Characteristics of the Girl Child Respondents

Two of the respondents reported that they were aged 14, five were aged 15, six were aged 16 and two were aged 17. Although there was no documentary evidence of the reported ages (birth registration certificates were reportedly very difficult to get in the area due to bureaucratic procedures), the key informants concurred with the reported ages. Of 15 girls who participated in the study, 6 dropped school at primary level, 5 left the school before completing 'Ordinary level' and 4 were still enrolled at local schools with a plan to go back anytime when they were to raise the school fees. The study discovered that 3 of 14 selected girls had babies though not in marriage.

Factors Leading to Girl Child Concentration in Fishing Camps

Girl children in Binga reportedly went to the fishing camps for varied reasons. There were those who permanently stayed in fishing camps while others went on occasional basis. Among the suggested contributing factors for the girl child living in or visiting fishing camps included but not limited to: visiting relatives and searching for school fees, rejection by parents and/or relatives, and lack of parental care.

Rejection/Abandonment by Parents/Families

There were some girls who were reportedly rejected and abandoned by their parents. Participants raised many reasons for rejection of the girl child in Binga which include; abusive step parents, deceased parents and sometimes being forced to get married. The following is Buhle and Rubio (not their real names) stories indicating parental abandonment.

There were two girls (real names not given) who lived in Gokwe. The two girls were abandoned by their parents. After staying in Gokwe for a while, life hardships forced them to search for their relatives who were nowhere to be found. These girls were neglected by both the

parents and relatives. The girls took a journey to Tyunga area on foot. Upon failing to locate their relatives they stayed at the business centre. For their survival, the two girls decided to engage in commercial sex work as a survival strategy. However, the situation became tenser and tense day after day. The two abandoned girls finally found shelter at one of the fishing camps where they are staying up to now. Now they depend on funds and materials provided by fishermen after having sex with them.

One of the key informants confirmed that fishing camps provide a sanctuary to some girls who did not have enough parental care. The study established that the idea of abandonment of children by parents was largely related to child neglect. There were some parents who stayed together with their children but failed to provide the necessary social and spiritual guidance. This compelled girl children to engage in other activities such as commercial sex work which was detrimental to their lives. Both girls and key informants concurred that, lack of parental care forced girl children to go to fishing camps where they perceived conditions exist that would enable them to earn a living.

Abuse of Children in Communities

Some of the girls confirmed that abuse of children in communities was one factor tied to why girl children resorted to go to fishing camps. The study discovered that some of the girl children in camps have been abused by their relatives in the home. One of the selected girls reported that:

I was staying with my step-mother who abused us all the times. She could beat us all the time even without committing anything wrong. So I decided to run away and come to fishing camp to work for myself.

The narration above shows that some of the girl children were forced to go to fishing camps where they hoped to live better lives. However, the situation they got in the camps was even worse as they experienced verbal and sexual abuse without anyone protecting them.

Failure to Raise School Fees

Key informants highlighted that girls went to live in fishing camps after withdrawing from school. Findings revealed that there are circum-

stances where girl children were awarded scholarships or bursary but still lacked other school materials. In turn they withdrew from school. One key informant noted that:

Some girls are supported by scholarships like CAMFED to continue with their education but that sponsorship covers few girls and it doesn't cover many educational costs. This has been the major problem that CAMFED faces in Binga District in supporting girl children. Some children come here to raise school fees but for girls it is not the case all the time as they decide to stay here forever.

In support of this, one of the girls said that:

I was staying with my aged grandmother who was unable to pay my school fees. My parents passed away 5 years ago and I'm struggling to get money for school fees. I want to continue with my education so that I can get a better job after school completion to support my young sisters. So I came here to raise fees for my education.

The study learnt that withdrawal from school came as a result of some social hardships at home and in the community. The in-school girls went to fishing camps during the school holidays to look for school fees and other school materials from their relatives who work there. However, other girls left school due to early marriages and teenage pregnancies.

Poverty

All girls reported that poverty was major factor leading them to stay in fishing camps. One girl child noted that:

Life in the community is not easy because there is no food to eat and no money to buy clothes for ourselves. Here it is better because I can raise money to feed myself and send food to my parents in the village. With situation at home, it is not easy to go back because the situation remains unfriendly for our survival.

Some of key informants reiterated that girls went to fishing camps searching for food and other life necessities. However, some key informants gave a contrasting view by arguing that girls were too attracted with life in the fishing camps. One key informant noted that:

When they reached the fishing camps they 'forgot' to return home. In fishing camps girls were enticed into pleasurable activities which drew them into immoral behaviour and the ac-

tivities that put them at risk. After leaving the school, girls then went to fishing camps where their lives became miserable.

Despite the differences in opinions, the study established that poverty was one of the factors which pushed girls into fishing camps. It was discovered that girls faced challenges of food scarcity, clothing and other life necessities. This forced them to go into fishing camps so that they can meet their basic needs.

Visiting their Relatives

Fishing camps are places where some people go and do fishing and looking for other employment opportunities to earn a living. Those children who attend school usually went there during the holidays when schools were closed to visit their relatives for various missions. Sometimes it was reported that the visit might just be to spend the holiday. One key informant noted that:

Some girls went to visit their brothers working there. Others went there to stay permanently with their parents who lived and worked there. Since some parents and guardians lived at fishing camps, girl children went there to collect school fees.

Some girls refused to go back to the community after getting attracted to 'fast' life in the fishing camps. However, the study established that others who did not have relatives were reported to be going there to generate school fees through engaging in commercial sex work and/or any other work available.

Child Protection Concerns among Girl Children in Fishing Camps

Life of girls in fishing camps was noted to be of misery and in need of correctional measures. The main critical problems faced by girl children in their stay in fishing camps in Binga include those outlined below.

Sexual Abuse and Incidence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

The study established that some of the girls in the fishing camps were employed as house maids. Key informants highlighted that, the power dynamics existing between the girl children and their employers made them vulnerable. This

vulnerability exposed girls to sexual abuse which contributed to several other problems like contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. One girl retorted that:

My employer sometimes asks me to have sex with him. It is not easy because if I refuse I might not get the favors that he is giving me. He is also promising to marry me in future.

Some of girls concurred with key informants that their vulnerability in fishing camps was directly linked to the risk of Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) infection. It was noted that, despite lack of systematically compiled statistical records, empirical evidence in some health centers in Binga confirmed high HIV/AIDS prevalence in fishing camps as compared to other areas. One key informant noted that:

There are many incidences of sexually transmitted infections here especially among girls who are lured by money from foreign traders. To make matter worse, HIV/AIDS infection also brought many forms of vulnerability that affected the girl children's wellbeing in the fishing camps.

It was reported that girls could not negotiate for protected sex when they got involved in sexual activities with the fishermen who were far older than them. This posed high chances of HIV/AIDS infection. It was established that most STIs incidences were not being reported because the next clinic was located at an average of 34 kilometres from the selected fishing camps.

Early Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies

The study revealed that early marriage was another phenomenon common in fishing camps. Findings showed that there were many incidences of teenage marriages and pregnancies in fishing camps. One key informant noted that:

Girls in fishing camps failed to go to school and did not develop any profession or formal career. Because of this, they became the target for sexual abuse by the fishermen. When they are approached by fishermen flashing money they get attracted and they think it is best way to deal with their life challenges.

Unprotected and unsafe sexual practices exposed girl children, in fishing camps, to teenage pregnancies. The study also discovered that, teenage marriages and pregnancies led to the creation of young parents and child headed fam-

ilies in fishing camps. Some cases were reported where the girls got pregnant but failed to identify who the real biological father of the child was. This led to birth of children living in child-headed families. It was also revealed that, when the girls became married during early adolescence there was reportedly a record of high separation and divorce rates.

School Dropouts

Key informants reported that girls spent most of their time in fishing camps in Binga. Findings established that, when they got to the fishing camps, girls developed a myopic view to think life in the camp is better than going to school. One girl child noted that:

I will not go back to school because in fishing camps life is better. Even if I try to go back to school; there is no way I will get the school fees. It is better to stay here.

The problem was exacerbated by lack of schools in the identified fishing camps except for Chibuyu which had a school opened in January 2014. However, the study learnt that low attendance was a major problem at that school which finally closed and no longer operated. During the school holidays many school going girls from other parts of the district also visited the fishing camps and did not return after schools re-opened. One of the key informants further noted that, the benefits from scholarships like CAMFED, Joshua Nkomo Scholarship Fund (JNSF) and Capernaum Trust (CT) supported those children who were already at school. This means those girls who stayed in fishing camps had no chance to get educational support from social support groups and/ or organisations.

Lack of Formal Social Security Protection

The study established that girls living in fishing camps reportedly did not have access to social security and protection schemes such as government cash transfers programmes. This was because some of them lived far away from their parents. This further exposed them to other risks like sexual abuse and sexual exploitation since they were not in contact with legal protection. One key informant highlighted that:

Child abuse is reportedly a common phenomenon in fishing camps. Due to lack of knowledge on identification of child abuse cases there was no reporting of such cases. Also, there is a

distance of at least 60 km to the nearest police station located at Siabuwa.

Girl children participants in the study echoed the same sentiments when they said that the government was reluctant to protect the lives of children in fishing camps. One girl child noted that:

There is nowhere we can report child abuse cases here. Camp chairpersons don't have knowledge on child protection issues. Some of them are told about these issues but rarely report them.

Participants presented that it was also difficult to report some of the cases as there was no active child protection structures in fishing camps. Lack of structures to support girls in fishing camps exposed them to several types of abuse such as sexual, economic, emotional and physical. There were reported cases where fishermen in fishing camps sometimes put drugs in food they gave to girls to induce them into sexual activities. The study observed that child protection is a weak phenomenon in fishing camps in Zimbabwe.

Accommodation Crisis

The study also observed that accommodation was a major problem for girls in fishing camps. In order to meet the demand of accommodation girls tended to share single rooms leading to congestion. One girl confirmed that;

Due to lack of accommodation, boys sometimes sleep in the same rooms with girls resulting in many unreported cases of sexual harassment and abuse of the girl children.

It was observed that abuse was rampant when the girls became pregnant or contracted sexually transmitted infections due to shortage of accommodation. The crisis of accommodation shortage was very high. Apart from space shortage, girls also slept in dilapidated structures that were built long back and this exposed them to elements of the weather especially in winter, adding to their vulnerability.

Vulnerability Indicators of the Girl Children in Fishing Camps

Selling Firewood and Fetching Water

Girls in fishing camps resorted to selling firewood to fishermen so that they could raise funds

for their survival and to meet other pressing needs of life such as food, clothes and accommodation. One key informant noted that:

Girls fetch water and are paid 50 cents. However, the money given to girls and the type of activities which they do is not fair.

Findings revealed that girls went into the forest to cut firewood and sell to the fishermen and traders in the fishing camps. On the same note, girl children fetched water and were rewarded with a meager remuneration.

Child Labour

Some of the girls who lived in fishing camps were employed as house maids. These were given a very small remuneration of US\$25 per month. In this case, the girl children were suffering much from 'child labour' as they were engaged in payable work let alone given meager remunerations. One girl noted that:

I do a lot of activities and I'm always getting tired every day. I fetch firewood and clean the fish apart from cooking. I rarely sit down and rest during the day.

Some girls in fishing camps participated in the actual fishing in order to earn a living. Most of them used hooks to catch fish. There were a few extreme cases reported of girls doing fishing using gill nets in a process locally known as "kukkukkuza" (fishing method of dragging nets to catch fish). Despite the fact that the study did not have legal definition of child labour girls in fishing camps were exploited for the economic benefit of fishermen in fishing camps. Their labour was not commensurate with what they earned.

Commercial Sex Work

Commercial sex work was reported to be a norm in fishing camps. Most of the girls viewed prostitution as a common economic activity that enabled girl children in fishing camps to adjust to life difficulties they faced in the fishing camps. Although some girls regarded commercial sex work as "unwelcome and bad" they practiced it for them to meet their basic needs. Girls indulged into sexual intercourse with any man but mostly the fishermen and the traders who had money. One key informant noted that;

After dark some girl children stay indoors... if a girl child comes out boys long for her to

propose love. Many girls in fishing camps do prostitution in order to buy food, clothing and other essentials.

Commercial sex work remained one survival means that girls in fishing camps used as mentioned by some respondents. The girls in fishing camps engaged in commercial sex work as a means to earn a living. This further exposed them to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

DISCUSSION

While various scholars observe that Government of Zimbabwe has done a remarkable work in steering child protection programmes (Marongwe 2010; Muzingili 2014); the study discovered that girls living or visiting fishing camps have faced superfluity of challenges. The study established many factors which drive girls into fishing camps in Binga District, Zimbabwe. Poverty, with its varied perspectives in defining it (Savadogo et al. 2015), was mentioned as one key driver of girl child concentration in fishing camps of Binga in Zimbabwe. Fishing camps in Binga were centres of attraction for economic interests among young girls where they went to explore income making opportunities due to socio-economic insecurity in their households and communities. However, fishing may even represent the only source of cash for households who have adopted a multi-activity livelihood strategy (Béné 2008). Hence, the need to diversify livelihoods justifies the presence of girls in fishing areas in Binga. From the study, poverty was also linked to lack of parental care and failure to raise school fees by girls. The negative impact of poverty on girl child has been noted by many scholars (De-Muro and Burchi 2007; Karabo and Natal 2013) who argue that extreme economic marginality put the girl child at risk. In this case, poverty drove girl children to fishing camps where they hoped their economic marginality could end. As a result of promising fishing industry, girls go to fishing camps to seek employment opportunities for their survival. Both in and out of school girl children go to fishing camps. Thorsen (2012) further observes that, in East and Central Africa, three quarters of children are involved in unpaid agricultural activities due to economic hardships. While the study established that girl children could be visiting their relatives in fishing camps, poverty was a major factor in driving them into fishing camps

The study found out that the unprecedented level of child abuse, lack of parental care and general abandonment was also a key driver forcing girls into fishing camps. Some of the girls went into fishing camps after they faced social rejection and abandonment from their parents and relatives. The magnitude of parental abandonment or rejection is well documented as indicated in several previous studies (Government of Zimbabwe 2010). However, the abandonment and lack of parental care is not well documented for the community near Zimbabwe's fishing camps. Muzingili (2014) argues that there is no doubt that girl children are more vulnerable than their male counterpart after receiving rejection and social exclusion. From the study, girls in fishing camps cited lack of parental care as one factor that is in the same line with abandonment. This created an avenue for girl children to be abused further in the fishing areas. This is in concurrence with several scholars who argue that both sporadic and prolonged absence of parental guidance often leads to an increased risk of children dropping out of school to care for their younger siblings and risk of abuse, especially among girls (Khanam 2008; Mutale 2015; Zimbabwe Government 2004; UNICEF 2010). Therefore, the absence or lack of parental guidance was seen as a major driver of girl children into fishing camps in Binga. Faulty at home and in the community increases the vulnerability children especially girls whose support is always minimal in rural areas of Zimbabwe.

This paper sought to find out the problems faced by girls in fishing camps in Binga District of Zimbabwe. The problems ranged from sexual abuse, teenage marriages and pregnancies, failure to attend school, congestion in sleeping rooms and sexually transmitted infections. Child sexual abuse as confirmed through this study is a commonly practiced phenomenon in fishing camps in Binga. Girls were sexually abused by fishermen, young boys and their relatives. In contrast, Haarr (2012) reports that the sexual abuse of girls was more likely to be perpetrated by close acquaintances. A study in fishing area in Uganda revealed that the girlfriends of the younger school drop-outs (aged 14-17) were often school girls (Westaway et al. 2007). On the same note, Scott and Neish (2014) extend the argument to say that abuse is a risk factor for negative outcomes and it is a more common experience in girls. There is no doubt on arguing

the extent to which child sexual abuse is a "norm" in fishing camps. Studies confirm that when left in vulnerable situations, girls often become victims of sexual abuse and subsequently might get pregnant (Chakaipa 2010; Karabo and Natal 2013; Muzingili 2014; UNICEF 2015). Sexual abuse further exposed girls to Sexual Transmitted Infection including HIV/AIDS. Scott and Neish (2014) further argue that the early teenage years are a critical point of transition for girls. Thus the 'Uganda Strategy for Reducing the Impact of HIV and AIDS on Fishing Communities' talks of fishing communities as being a 'hot-spot for HIV and AIDS' (Westaway et al. 2007). Hence of paramount note is to appreciate the problem of sexual abuse among girls in fishing camps in Zimbabwe as a fact. Thus, early sexual experience during adolescence may result in girls being propelled into a premature adulthood with the associated risks of sexual exploitation and/or being drawn into gangs (Beckett and Schubotz 2013).

School dropout among girls also emerged as key concern for girls living in fishing camps. This was also intertwined with teenage pregnancies and early marriage as key challenges facing girls in fishing camps. Some of the girls who enrolled in school when they visited fishing camps during school holidays did not go back to school. However, some of those girls decided to stay permanently in fishing camps without returning to school. Other studies found out that, girl children leave school due to; early marriage motivated to improve socio-economic status (Karabo and Natal 2013); abuse from home (Khanam 2008); lack of career guidance (Muzingili 2014) and faulty school systems (Gitter and Barham 2007). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2010) noted that girls dropped out of secondary schools, mainly due to early marriage, and pregnancy. School dropout was key factor which can result in poor human and social development of a child (Mtetwa and Nyikahadzoi 2013) and early marriages deprive girls of their future (Mutale 2015). More so, the study found out that, shortage of shelter in fishing camps for girls increased the level of vulnerability which also led to sexual abuse and unwanted teenage pregnancies. To this effect, girls in fishing camps were overwhelmed by glut of the problems and engaged in sexual practices which increased the life risks. This was exacerbated by lack of formal social security and child protec-

tion structures in fishing camps to ensure that the plight of girl child is heard. Scholars like Mutale (2015) and Muzingili (2014) argue that the rural areas of Zimbabwe lack proper child protection structures to ensure that every child is protected. However, Girl Empowerment Movement (GEM) (2010) believes that girls lack skills to resist peer pressure on various issues that affect them and they become easy target on issues of sexual abuse. Cooper (2015) further notes that those girls who already have a number of risk factors in their lives reach a 'breaking point' between the ages of 12 and 14. Such scenario, therefore, requires that girls are protected and granted optimum environment for development.

The study found out that girls were exposed to various vulnerabilities in the fishing camps noted through vulnerability indicators. Some of the girls in fishing camps sustained themselves through engaging in commercial sex work, selling firewood, engaging in fishing activities and through child labour. Commercial sex work was found to be common among girls in fishing camps. While commercial sex work was a vulnerability indicator; the study by United Nations (UN) (2013) found out that child prostitution came with many problems such as unwanted pregnancies, incidences of STIs infection, increased incidences of gender based violence and premature death. In concurrence, various scholars (Government of Zimbabwe 2012; UNICEF 2010; Save the Children 2013) acknowledge that children's involvement in sexual activities is one of the major contributors to child morbidity and mortality. The study further revealed that girls involved in laborious activities which often involved fetching firewood and water while getting paltry wages from their employers (fishermen). Thompson (2012) defines child labour as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children. The prevalence of child labour and exploitation in agricultural sector is also prevalent in countries like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon (Thorsen 2012). Khanam (2008) found that, in Bangladesh, there is positive correlation between child labour and poor school attendance. The Indian study by World Vision (2015) concluded that child labour results in long term health problems, psychological harm, isolation from the family and subsequent trapping in vicious cycle of

poverty. Young girls who were involved in labour practices to earn a living have negativity which impedes their physical and mental development.

Fishing camps are known to be places where girl children hang around. Their lives in those areas bring a lot of concerns that affect them, the communities and even to the overall development of Zimbabwe as a country. Girl children have drawn a lot of attention in Zimbabwe particularly on issues regarding their abuse and lack of protection. Even the government itself is committed as indicated by the formulation and adoption of various legal instruments and policies like the Children's Act (Chapter 5: 06) of 2001 and the National Gender Policy of 2013-2017. Much is unveiled in the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Phase 2 (NAP for OVC II). Of note in this paper is the discussion on the factors that pushed girls to go and live in fishing camps.

The findings of the study indicate the failure of the department of social welfare and the social reform groups to come up with context specific and comprehensive measures to counter the challenges facing girls in fishing camps. As far as fishing camps pose an attraction for lucrative livelihood opportunities in fishing business, the exposure of girls to risk factors adds on their vulnerability. This paper therefore suggests that the department of social welfare and all other child protection stakeholders at local, regional and international scales need to extend their services into the secluded places (fishing camps). Intensifying vulnerability and risk reduction education in fishing camps may go a long way in alleviating the suffering of girl children in those areas.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated on the challenges affecting girl children in fishing camps in Binga. Issues that pose vulnerability to girl children in terms of abuse include increased level of poverty, attraction of the fishing as a lucrative for a livelihood choice and the presence of family members in those areas. The communities appeared powerless to deal with the problems affecting especially girl-children as noted by non-existent of functional child protection structures in fishing areas. The existing child protection systems in the fishing camps were weak to man-

age and tackle the vulnerability circumstances that exposed girl children as indicated by various vulnerability factors. The lack of adequate literature on vulnerability of girls in fishing camps in Zimbabwe calls for researchers to conduct more studies. Despite the fact that the debates on the rights of a girl child are overdue across the globe, the situation of girl child in some obscure places like fishing camps remains a great concern. As deliberated in the study, there are myriad of problems affecting girl children in fishing camps which largely remain unaccounted in most public and private child protection arena. These problems have threatened the efforts invested towards the realization of girl child's rights and its subsequent impact on the realization of gender equality in developing countries. The study, therefore, discovered that these challenges are intricately intertwined and they cannot be interpreted from mono-causal perspective. Thus, the issue of the girl child in Zimbabwe's fishing areas is a terrain still filled with political, social and economic vicissitudes which invites all stakeholders involved in gender based issues to act with immediacy. It is to these findings that this study concluded that a holistic approach is necessary as it provides multi-lenses in addressing and redressing these problems due to their complexities. It requires individual, local community, civil society and political collaboration to tackle the problems of girl child in fishing camps in Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate the problems faced by girl children in fishing camps in Binga District, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Networking and Stakeholder Collaboration

Strong networking and coordination is required among government, civil society, communities and other concerned stakeholders to complement each other's efforts to fight against child abuse in its various forms. Development practitioners need to reach the hard to reach areas like fishing camps in Binga and intervene in helping people there to uplift their economic situation. The legal framework for intervention established through the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children needs political will and commitment to be implemented.

2. Setting of Child Protection Structures in Fishing Camps

The cascading of child protection interventions into the fishing camps may best help scoop girl children out of the melancholy faced today. Establishing the functional Child Protection Committees (CPCs) would help steer child protection in fishing camps. It is through child protection interventions that girl children in fishing camps become equipped with life skills and protection.

3. Family Empowerment

Families and communities from where girls come need to be actively involved in efforts to improve the situation of their children. Parents need to take an ultimate responsibility to fulfill the girl child's right to be educated and protected. Home centered social security must be provided by the family or guardians. Girls, as minors, should not be allowed to go and work, including doing fish trading. These interventions may help deter them from going to the fishing camps where they are subjected to risky conditions.

4. Girl Child Empowerment

Schools have to equip girl children with knowledge and skills for survival. Teaching children and the fishing camps' residents on their reproductive health and other rights might help both the victims and perpetrators of child abuse to break the sexual and other abuses' cycles which are reportedly prevalent in the fishing camps in Binga.

5. Sensitization Programmes in Fishing Camps

Adolescent Sexual Reproductive and Health (ASRH) education should be imparted to all children along with HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns which are not being taken seriously in fishing camps in Binga. The fishermen committees in fishing areas must be enlightened to be real advocates for child protection. The committees need to be comprised of males and females from both children and adults. A platform should be created where camp residents (both children and adults) can present their problems to the fishing committees.

6. Expanding of Social Services into Fishing Camps

Establishment of schools is needed in fishing camps to enable children there to have access to education. As noted in this study, some girl children visited camps during school holidays and had to return to home areas when holidays ended. There is a need for health centres/health posts in these fishing camps to ensure that certain infections are controlled through accessibility and availability of conventional medicines.

7. Action by Government and Reform Groups

The government and social reforms groups need to take necessary context specific steps to save the girls in fishing areas. This goes in line with the need for the international organisations concerned with the welfare of children like UNICEF to provide a watchdog role in child protection and child safeguarding in fishing areas.

FUTURE STUDIES

It is important to also conduct a research that focuses on the boy child as they make the part of the population in fishing camps in Zimbabwe. Such a study might help come up with a comparative approach that could establish solutions for improving the lives of both girls and boys in fishing camps. Also, further research need to be conducted to establish the specific solutions to counter the vulnerability factors that affect the girl children in the secluded places.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the fact that the study managed to meet its objectives, the researchers noted few limitations which can be considered in future to improve the study. The study targeted the girl children without the incorporation of boys' views on the same topic. Therefore generalization of the results to male counterparts may be difficult. While this was inevitable, the size of sample may also make it difficult to globalize the findings of the study. Finally, the study relied on qualitative opinions of the participants. However, with use of mixed methodology in the study could understand better some of demographic information to understand statistical issues such

as correlations, regressions, and standard deviation in order to come up with multiple insights of girls' vulnerability in fishing camps.

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