

# Child Sexual Abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Silent Social and Health Emergency

## INTRODUCTION

- Globally, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years have experienced some form of sexual abuse.
- Information on child sexual abuse (CSA) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was sparse, fragmented, inconsistent, and largely anecdotal.

## Definition

- CSA is the involvement of a child (person under 18 years) in sexual activity that he/she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.

- It is a development and human rights issue with immediate and long-term public health consequences.

## Health Consequences of CSA

- Physical injury
- Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS
- Reproductive problems: Fistulas, unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy complications, unsafe abortions
- Psychosocial problems: Debilitating fears, anxieties, regressive and self-injurious behaviours, nightmares, withdrawal, depression, anger and hostility, low self-esteem and inappropriate sexual behaviour

## Determinants and Contexts

CSA occurs in the context of poverty, gender inequalities, gender-based violence; and HIV/AIDS and its consequences.

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand the magnitude and nature of CSA experienced in SSA
- To raise awareness of CSA in SSA
- To inform sector policy and program responses for its prevention and management

## METHODOLOGY

Literature review to analyse the available French and English peer reviewed, published, and 'grey literature' from governments, NGOs, and international agencies from 2000–2010.

## WHY THE SILENCE?

Denial, shame, guilt, embarrassment

*When a man touches me and nobody says anything, I feel nobody cares about me or respects me. I feel so ashamed.*

—15-year-old girl, Iganga, Uganda

Fear of social stigma, family rejection, not being taken seriously, losing the bread winners of the family to prison

*After my mother died, I went to my mother's mother. In 2001, she died, so I stopped school....Then we went to my auntie, my mom's younger sister.... Most girls find that they start keeping up [having sex] with stepfathers or uncles. Most are raped—they have no say. They think if you [go] to the police, there will be no one to [take care of them]. So they keep quiet.*

—16-year old girl, Zambia

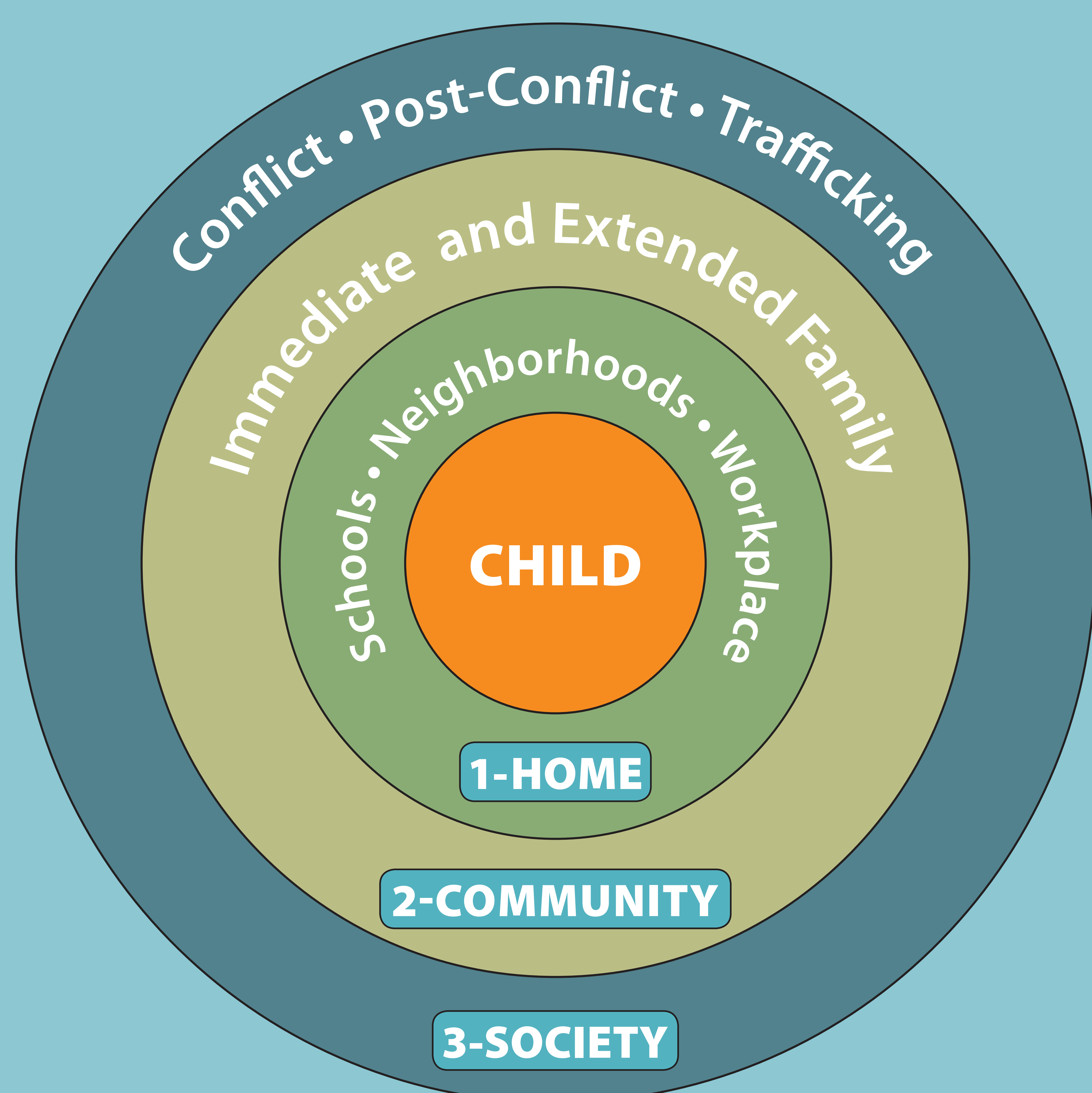
Lack of awareness of individual, especially child's rights, what constitutes abuse and when and how to report it

*A teacher defiled a girl in our school and the parents refused to take him to court. They just accepted 700,000/- he paid them. Nothing happened to the teacher.*

—12-year old boy, Wakiso, Uganda

## Magnitude of Child Sexual Abuse Across Multiple Settings

Evidence suggests that children are in danger, particularly in the home, school and immediate neighbourhood



### 1 - Home

- **Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Mali, & Niger:** More than 60% of women enter marriage before their 18th birthday.
- **Namibia:** 21% women experienced CSA, of these, 47% indicated a family member as the perpetrator.
- **South Africa:** Among high school students in the Northern Province, 1 in 5 victims of CSA report abuse by a parent or guardian.
- **Nigeria:** 85% of female domestic workers, as young as 10 years old, reported being coerced into sexual intercourse within the household where they worked.
- **FGM/C prevalence rates** for 15-19 years olds range from 2% in Niger, 36% in Liberia, 62% in Ethiopia, 89% in Guinea and 97% in Somalia.

### 2 - Community

- **Swaziland:** 1 in 3 females (13-24 years) experienced sexual violence. Prior to age 18, 33% of the incidents occurred in females' own home; 23% in the house of a friend, relative, or neighbor; 19% in a public area/field; 10% in a school building/school grounds; 9.5% to/from school.
- **Malawi:** 24% of school children (13-18 years) were forced into penetrative or non-penetrative sex; 14% were touched on their breasts and genitals against their will; and 4% were forced into oral sex.
- **Nigeria:** Nearly 70% of female juvenile street hawkers (average age 13 years) were sexually abused and the perpetrators were overwhelmingly adult males.
- **South Africa:** 33% of women who were forced or persuaded into sex prior to the age of 15 years, reported that the perpetrator was a teacher.
- **FGM/C:** While the majority of girls are cut by traditional practitioners, health care providers are increasingly performing FGM/C, especially in Guinea (10%).

### 3 - Society

- **Kenya:** An estimated 10,000 to 15,000, 12-18 year old girls living in coastal areas are being sexually exploited in the seasonal tourist industry; another 2,000-3,000 girls and boys are sexually exploited year-round by sex tourists.
- **Côte d'Ivoire:** 58% of trafficked girls interviewed were younger than 16 years, and 52% of them were living with a sexually transmitted disease.

## BREAKING THE SILENCE

### Policy & Legal Framework

### Programmatic Responses

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE

### Global

- 52 of 53 African countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- **Plan International** is implementing **Learn Without Fear**, a global campaign to end violence in schools, focusing on sexual violence, corporal punishment, and bullying in schools

### Regional

- 45 of 53 African countries have signed, ratified, and/or acceded to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- The World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa 2004 CSA resolution and strategic direction

- **First International Conference on CSA** held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2007
- **ECSA-HC** and **WHO-AFRO** are developing generic regional guidelines for the Clinical Management of CSA

### National

- At least 13 countries have laws against FGM/C, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ghana, Guinea, Central African Republic, Senegal, Togo, Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria
- South Africa passed the Children's Act in 2007; Senegal's Penal Code provides for prison sentences of 10 years for rape of a child less than 13 years old

- **Kenyan Advocacy Campaign** "Be a champion for children" calls upon families, schools, FBOs, the private sector, and mass media to protect children from violence
- 'One-stop' integrated approach to the care of rape survivors, as found in the child-friendly spaces at the Thuthuzela Care Centres in South Africa

- Increase awareness and dialogue at all levels of the health system and the community about CSA and its negative consequences
- Advocate for national level action to develop protocols and guidelines for health workers to manage survivors of CSA
- Strengthen capacity of health workers to identify and treat CSA cases
- Increase national and local resources (financial, human, material) to implement comprehensive prevention, care and support services
- Improve CSA data collection, documentation, information, and utilisation to promote evidence-based CSA-related legislation, policy formulation and programming

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