

## Students' Sexual Abuse in Public Senior High Schools in Ghana

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### **Abstract**

*Student sexual abuse is a reality in our senior high schools and the perception is that the issue is on the rise. To find how grievous sexual abuse in senior high schools is, the study examined the causes of sexual abuse in public senior high schools. The research was conducted in four (4) different public senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality as one case study. Simple size of 403 students and 20 teachers as participants were employed for the study, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to solicit data from the respondents. Data were coded into Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS version 17) software programme in the computer to give the analysis of the information. The data were presented in the form of percentages and frequency tables to facilitate clearer and easier interpretation of results for the presentation of findings. Perceptions from the respondents of the study indicate that sexual abuse is frequent and female students are mostly the victims of sexual abuse and teachers are the most perpetrators. In the view of the respondents factors responsible for sexual abuse are; age, gender, care arrangement/parental absence, substance abuse and parental level of education, school and schooling environment, demographic risk factor/unemployment of parent, poverty and poor parent- student relationship. The causes of student sexual abuse according to the respondent perception are rooted in the structural, economic and socio-cultural context within our social fibre. Perhaps, today, our senior high schools present a prime target for perpetrators of sexual abuse because most schools have few, if any protective barriers in place.*

**Keywords:** Perception, Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Students, Senior High Schools (SHS)

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

All human beings have some fundamental rights and freedoms that they are entitled to. These human rights and freedoms include: right to life, right to personal liberty, right to dignity of human person, and right to privacy. These rights are supposed to go with responsibilities and obligations such as reporting criminals to the police, respecting the basic human rights of fellow human beings, defending the nations and rendering national service to the nation. In Ghana, however, people seem to be totally ignorant of both their rights and responsibilities. Ignorance and poverty, among other factors make it possible for the government, state agencies and institutions to clamp on human rights and freedoms of citizens without any protest.

Amoah (1988:146) opines, "West African societies are predominantly illiterate and ignorant. Under these circumstances, the people content themselves with anything that emanate from those who head institutions. To the illiterate and ignorant, those in authority are always right". From Amoah's assertion, it is clear that people fail to fight for their rights when deprived of them due to ignorance. For instance, the provision for the rights of children in the Constitution of Ghana (1992: 29), Article 28 (Clause 3), which states that, "A child shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" is hardly respected.

Notwithstanding the Constitution of Ghana (1992: 29), many Ghanaian students are subjected to all forms of inhuman treatment. These include severe flogging, sexual abuse, bullying, corporal punishment, refusing students food and refusing students to classroom due to delay in the payment of school fees. Modern democratic and constitutional countries are faced with these challenges within their educational systems in implementing the universal concepts of human rights and values. According to United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001), children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates. A student or young person, who is bullied, abused physically, sexually and emotionally assaulted, has rights, regardless of the age of the perpetrator or where the incident occurs. Any failure to treat bullying, sexual abuse and violence because it occurs between students, within schools, is a violation of student human rights.

Multiple forms of violence and abuses are silent and unspoken within our educational institutions. These barriers act to prevent adolescent, especially girls from attending schools. Abuse and violence against students in public senior high school especially girls result in low enrolment and attendance of girls in schools, high dropout rates and poor performance at school (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The view is that many of the abuses go unreported and the scale of the problem is largely underestimated, mainly because violence and abuse are used as tools to impose authority and power and students feel powerless to report or complain. Being able to go to school in a secure environment is a basic right of all children, yet it is not guaranteed, particularly in the case of girls (UNESCO, 2011).

However, information on student sexual abuse pertaining to Ghana is limited. The little information available is fragmented and variable. It was in this regard, the researchers conducted a study in student sexual abuse in public senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. The purpose of this study was to examine the causes of student sexual abuse that occur in senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. The research is to answer the question: What are the causes of student sexual abuse in public senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Lalor (2004), every occurrence of student abuse is part of a multifaceted past and present situation that leads to the current problem, something that may have begun years before the student was first abused. There are many factors that contribute to sexual abuse of students. One thing that is very clear is that sexual abuse is not restricted to any particular class, culture, race, religion or gender. Factors examined in this review are reasons why victims are abused, including: age, gender, care arrangement/ parental absence, parental substance abuse, parental level of education, school and schooling environment, socio-demographic risk and poor parent-child relationship.

Reza, Breiding, Blanton, Mercy, Dahlberg, Anderson and Bamrah (2007) suggest that, though male student and female student can be victims of sexual abuse, female students have been discovered to be more vulnerable and are the primary victims because of their subordinate status of gender and age in the society. The age concept focuses on the number of years and experiences of a student, and in this case, a student is the youngest and most vulnerable human beings within the school environment (Reza et al., 2007).

According to Pinheiro (2006), the UNVAC report suggested that sexual abuse predominantly affects those who have reached certain age within the community settings (i.e. puberty or adolescence group). In other words, age is one of the contributing factors that promote sexual abuse among students (children) who are mostly found in senior high schools. However, authors such as Nhundu and Shumba (2001) suggest that pre-pubertal students or children are often most at risk for sexual abuse compared to other age groups. Pitch (2005), for example, in reviewing the literature pertaining to sexual abuse in sub-Saharan Africa, notes that the average age of victims of student sexual abuse (SSA) was eight years. The varying age classifications in addition to other methodological differences across studies make it challenging to conduct meaningful comparisons. However, the evidence considered in this review clearly suggests that students of all ages appeared to be at risk of student sexual abuse, and even the youngest children are not exempted.

Reza et al. (2007) observed that in a national study on sexual abuse against girls and young women (13 to 24 years) in Swaziland, one in three girls reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse prior to age 18 years. Among girls aged 13 to 17 years, the prevalence of attempted intercourse was 2%, coerced intercourse was 6% and of attempted unwanted intercourse was 17%. To determine whether age is a factor in the student sexual abuse in schools, a retrospective study covering the period 1998 to 2003 was carried out in Congo Brazzaville which indicated that 46.1% of cases of sexual abuse involved children aged 11 to 15 years, and that 37.3% of the aggressors in these cases were aged 21 to 25 years (Buamba-Bamanga, Oyere-Moke, Genekoumou, Nkhouabouga & Ekoundzola, 2005). In the DRC, the same study was conducted to show that age is a factor that promotes sexual abuse among students within the ages of senior high school level. A survey of 1,684 rape survivors (January, 2005 to December, 2007) revealed 25 children under the age of 15 years and 198 children aged between 16 to 20 years had been raped (UNICEF, 2008).

For instance, a report from Djibouti indicates that 50 percent of sexual abuse cases reported involved victims aged 11 to 19 years (UNICEF, 2008). These ages provided in the report fall under the ages for senior high school students in Ghana. In similar study to ascertain the fact that age is a factor in the sexual abuse cases. In Cote D'Ivoire, a sample of 147 students, 56 percent of the cases of sexual abuse against students were reported by students aged 13 to 18 years (Higonnet, 2007). It is emphatically clear in a lot of study that the age of a female student or male student is a facilitating factor for any perpetrator who wishes to engage in sexual abuse in any educational institution or in any agency, affect the role of gender in these aforementioned institutions.

Another critical factor that promotes sexual abuse in senior high schools is the sex of the victim (boy /girl). The gender concept is therefore focused on socially constructed differences between men and women based on shared expectations and norms within a society. It is also based on culturally ascribed set of characteristics that define what it is to be a man or woman looking at their behaviour, characteristics and role (Reza et al., 2007). A review shows that sexual abuse is perpetrated against both girls and boys in Sub-Saharan African, although, in general, girls are more at risk (Pitche, 2005 & Lalor, 2004). For example, the Global School-Based Health Survey Data from Namibia, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe shows that the odds of having been exposed to sexual abuse were greater among girls than boys after age adjustment, although differences between sexes were not large (Brown, Riley, Butchart, Meddings, Kann & Harvey, 2009). Indications are that both sexes do suffer one form of sexual abuse or the other in their lives, but the issue is that female student faces more sexual abuses than their male counterpart.

According to Dev. Tech System, Inc. and Centre for Educational Research and Training (2007), in several countries boys are at higher risk for certain types of sexual abuse. They go further to indicate that a study on safe schools in Malawi, reported that more boys than girls reported being subjected to sexual comments, witnessing genital exposure, being forced to view sexual acts or pornographic materials, being forced to remove their clothing and experiencing insertion of objects into their genitals and anus (Dev Tech System, Inc. and centre for educational Research and Training, 2007). More recent analyses (unpublished) conducted by Polonko, Naeem, Adams and Adinolfi (2010) suggest that while the patterns of sexual abuse for East, West and Central Africa are similar to those of North America and Europe where girls have high victimization rates than boys, it does not appear to be something different from South and Southeast Africa that diverges from this pattern. These authors found comparable rates of student sexual abuse for boys and girls for fondling and penetrative abuse in Zambia and South Africa based upon the living arrangement of the unfortunate girls.

One important issue that serves as a platform for student to be sexually abused in schools is the kind of living arrangement they found themselves. According to Skinner, Tsheko, Mtero-Munyati, Seloabe, Chibatamoto, Mfecane, Chandiwana, Nkomo, Tlou and Chitiy (2006) living arrangement are core component of vulnerability, referring particularly to a large number of student no longer living with their biological parents (and in particular their biological mother). Parental absence alone can have serious negative implications for student development and protection. This is especially true in situation of conflict, displacement, divorce and death. In the view of Lalor (2004), for instance, a study on refugee children in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia found that the children most vulnerable to sexual abuse were those without the care of their parents, children in child-headed household, students in foster care, students living with extended family members and children living with just one parent (Lalor, 2004). The style of a care arrangement that a student found himself/herself, according to the researcher determines the kind of behaviour changes he/she put up. It could be that a student without the care and protection from biological parent may have confidence in his/her peers and caregivers like teachers, and school administrators.

Madu (2002) noted that there is substantial agreement concerning family structure and student's behaviour, living without both biological parents' that indicate that student who find themselves in such places are at high risk of sexual abuse. Nevertheless, Richket, Wiemann, Vaughan and White (2004) found no association between sexual abuse of student and living together with both, one, or no parent. However, evidence contrary seems to be overwhelming. For example, several studies have shown student to be at higher risk of sexual abuse when they live in single-parent (Dubowitz, 1999) or reconstituted families (Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormstad, 2007).

In the same vein, several studies have reported that student living with divorced or single parents or stepfamilies were at two to three times higher risk of sexual abuse (Brown, Cohen & Johnson, 1998; Black, Heyman & Smith, 2001). Out of the contradiction, the researcher is of the view that living without one biological parent may necessarily lead a student into a state of discomfort and inadequate necessities for life. In other words such students fall on others for his or her needs and want, which could serve as platform for the perpetrator to abuse the students. Also divorced or single parents who neglect their parental responsibilities and abuse substance put their female children into hands of these sexual abusers.

Studies have linked parental substance abuse to sexual abuse of children who are mostly students (Horwitz, Wisdom, McLaughlin & White, 2001). One prospective study conducted by Horwitz, Wisdom, McLaughlin and White (2001) suggested that students who had experienced sexual abuse often grew up in families where parents used drugs or alcohol. In addition, a retrospective study that was conducted in Canada, by Walsh, MacMillan and Jamieson, (2003), reported that respondents with sexual abuse increased by two fold among those reporting parental substance abuse histories. Yen, Yang, Su, Wang and Lan (2008) argued in support of the assertion that an adult who is abusing substances sometimes does not make rational choices in life. The clear implications of such character are that, the behaviour of such parent will negatively affect any decision he or she takes in respect of the student. There is also the possibility that such parent's behaviour will have influence on the student.

According to a research conducted by Hampton, Senatore, and Gullota (1998) shows that in cases where the substance abuser is a parent, substance dependence is likely to lead to parenting styles that are detrimental to student life. They go on to suggest that parents who abuse substances may face tremendous obstacles in providing the safe home environment and warm care-giving that have been identified as buffers against sexual abuse. A critical inference from this study is that parental substance abuse may create an environment that is favourable for the perpetration of sexual abuse of students. This is possible because incapacitated parents do not render the necessary monitoring and supervision of students. It could be a normal procedure that if a student loses trust and confidence in the parent, the next caregiver is the teacher or any adult around him or her. This lack of monitoring and supervision may force the student to fall on the caregiver (adult) who may take advantage of the situation and abuse the student sexually. This posits that the low level of education of parents for see that the abuse of girls by the caregivers is normal.

Several studies have confirmed the link between parental level of education and risk of a student being sexually abused (Finkelhor, 1979). For instance, in a study that was conducted in United State of America by Chaffin, Keller and Hollenberg (1996), they found that families with lower education levels were more likely to be significant features of cases encountered in child protection agencies. This finding is further supported by studies which have reported that mothers of those sexually abused students are less likely to have finished high school (Finkelhor, 1979).

Proper comparison of both studies shows that parental low education level was linked to increased risk for sexual abuse among students. This is possible because parental successful academic experiences may play a protective role in preventing sexual victimization among their children. A possible explanation is that educated parents are likely to make use of suggested prevention programmes and other available resources. The measures and programmes could help students to guard against any signs of sexual abuse perpetrator. On other hand, parent with lower educational level may not be aware of the suggested prevention programmes that will aid his/her children when it comes to sexual abuse in their schools. Many African students are at risk of experiencing sexual abuse in their immediate environments- their own homes and communities, including schools. In the views of Reza et al. (2007), school and schooling environment is a contributing factor to the student sexual abuse phenomena. Student sexual abuse in school settings is described by many writers and researchers in the region as a serious problem which mostly impacts on girls, but not exclusively. They go on to suggest that school environments are high-risk locations for student sexual abuse, even though homes were found to be riskier (Reza et al., 2007).

An observation made by Taylor and Conrad (2008) indicates that student sexual abuse in school settings involves sexual favours in exchange for good grades as well as transactional sex where the victim is coerced into sexual activity in return for educational benefits such as school fees and material things. It must be understood that this kind of sexual

abuse where perpetrators of sexual abuse or caregivers take advantage of their students and trade with them for sex gains in return give out grades and materials things is obviously against the basic fundamental human rights of students. The basic human rights of these students are that: no employee of a school shall indulge in immoral relations or have sexual intercourse (either with or without consent of the student) with a pupil or student in pre-tertiary public or private institution (Code of conduct, GES, 2000). This simply implies that students should not be discriminated against on any grounds for sex or any other benefits without their natural consent. A situation where victims' right of consent is subdued due to power differentials and material considerations are put first for any sexual gains really undermines the basic rights and freedoms of victims of sexual abuse.

UNICEF (2006) has observed that in West and Central Africa sexual abuse in school settings occur in all regions; they suggest that teachers were found to be seducing school girls in 21 of the 22 countries studied; verbal harassment of school girls by school boys was identified as a problem in 20 of the 22 countries and sexual favours in exchange for marks was prevalent in 20 of the 22 countries (Dakar, UNICEF, 2006). Findings from the study give concern to every gender activist and student protection agency. This is because the studies show that female students are at high risk of being sexually abused by teachers. This assertion has been confirmed by UNICEF (2004). The study indicated that ministries of education were aware of the problem where teachers abuse female students sexually and considered it to be one of the main reasons why girls drop out of school.

Another aspect in which the school environment act as a risk factor for sexual abuse of students are the distance to school and school practices. A considerable amount of sexual abuse occurred when learners are in the process of going to school. For instance in the school system spaces such as the bush around the school were preferred venues of abuse while in most schools road transport, the hostels and boarding systems were recipe for sexual abuses in the school (Chege et al., 1994). One critical school practice that needs attention, according to the researcher, is the practice where students need to travel to school early to beat time for morning study time and leave after evening study exacerbated the situation. According to the researcher, the issue of morning and evening study allocations need re-examination because of the threats to student safety. Female students whose basic provisions were unmet were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse by perpetrators of the act. In order to sustain themselves, they accept "gifts" which potentially lend them to be victims of sexual abuse. Lack of basic needs therefore acts as a cause that creates conducive atmosphere for student sexual abuse in schools. It is fuelled by a salient expectation or acceptance that girls can use their sexuality to benefit themselves (Chege et al., 1994). This shows that the socio-economic status of parents can never be underestimated as far as sexual abuse is concerned in pre-tertiary institutions.

A review of socio-demographic risk factors of parents and sexual abuse of a student is based on a retrospective community study in the USA by Black, Heyman and Smith (2001) the study revealed that parental occupational status was moderately related to having a student who will be sexually abused. In the same vein, unemployment has been reported as a risk factor for sexual abuse, unemployed parent would not be able to meet the needs of his or her ward in school. According to Chege et al. (1994), for students to survive in school, they accept gifts which potentially lend them to be victims of sexual abuse, in other words, lack of basic needs therefore acts as a cause that creates conducive atmosphere for student sexual abuse in schools. One prospective study suggested that student who had experienced sexual abuse often grew up with parents who were unemployed (Horwitz, et al. 2001). Unemployment may affect risk factors through the stress of reduced material resources a sense of powerlessness in the unemployed parent or through reduced parent-child contact Maternal employment brings significant stresses into the parent-child relationship and has implications in terms of student care arrangements, but may also act as a protective factor through a range of social-psychological benefits (Sidebotham & Heron, 2006). This shows that the poor socio-economic status of parents can't afford them to nurture their children well.

Several studies suggest that sexual abuse often takes place in non-nurturing environmental and familial contexts such as poor parent-child relationships and family stress (Meyerson, Long, Miranda & Marx, 2002; Brown et al., 1999). In a study that was conducted by Alexander (1992), it was noted that insecure interpersonal attachment in a family such as between a daughter and a father who seems to reject her may increase the risk of sexual abuse in that family. This finding has far reaching implications on intra-familial sexual abuse, in that, adult perpetrators like teachers who are

not strongly attached to their students may have poor control of their impulses and libido towards their students. It is natural that students at times build trust and confidence in their teachers but at times teachers and workers of the school pay these students back with unwanted sexual advances.

On the other hand, non-offending parents or teachers who are not attached to their children or students respectively may not notice that the students are being sexually abused. As a result students may be more willing to submit to sexual abuse if it seems a way to build attachments they otherwise lack (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). For instance, students may end up seeking advice from their teachers, peers, sugar daddies or mummies, who are likely to mislead and expose them to sexual abuse. Brown et al, (1998) further argue that families characterised by considerable chaos and lack of interpersonal attachment, multiple ongoing problems and/or conflicts, students may be poorly supervised and subjected to a considerable amount of dislocation that exposes them to victimisation in different contexts.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study covered the Mfantseman Municipality which is located along the Atlantic coastline of the Central Region of Ghana and stretching for about 21 kilometres along the coastline and for about 13 kilometres inland and constituting an area of 612 square kilometres. The study was carried out in four Senior High Schools in the Mfantseman Municipality in Central Region of Ghana as one case study.

The population for this study comprised four hundred and three (403) students and twenty (20) teachers from all the four public senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. The study employed the simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to select the participants for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select student participants from each class of a given academic programme from the four selected senior high schools in Mfantseman Municipality. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 teachers for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used because the researchers wanted a sample of teachers who hold accurate responses on the information on sexual abuse in the school as a result of their long service and position they hold in each of the schools and experiences in the teaching service profession.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questions that formed the questionnaires were close-ended and answers were outlined, giving respondents the opportunity to respond to these simple dichotomous questions (questions that require 'yes' or 'no').

The data analysis for the study involved the quantitative data collected from the field during the study. The data were coded into Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS version 17) software programme in the computer to give the analysis of the information. The data were presented in the form of percentages and frequency tables to facilitate clearer and easier interpretation of results for the presentation of findings based on themes.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *Causes of Student Sexual Abuse in Public Senior High schools in the Mfantseman Municipality*

This study aimed at identifying the factors that are responsible for sexual abuse in public senior high schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the factors responsible for sexual abuse in public Senior High Schools in the Mfantseman Municipality in the central region of Ghana. The views of the respondents on factors responsible for sexual abuse in public senior high school are summarized in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The responses from the two main respondents of this study (i.e. students and teachers) are combined in the analysis and in the interpretations.

**Table 1: Age and Gender**

Responses	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	347	86.1	19	95.5
No	56	13.9	1	5.0

<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>
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Table 1 indicates that the large majority of the respondents, 347 students (86.1%) and 19 teachers (95%) were of the view that age and gender are some of the factors that are responsible for sexual abuse in schools. 56 students (13.9%) and 1 teacher (5%) in the sample responded that the age and gender are not factors that promote sexual abuse in schools. According to the finding of the study, a large majority of the respondents are of the view that age and gender are factors that promote sexual abuse between perpetrators and the victims.

The respondents admitted that sexual abuse predominately affects those who have reached certain age within the community settings (i.e. puberty or adolescent group). It is even clearer from Table 1 that female students are more victims of sexual abuse than their male group. The opinion from the respondents is confirmed by Pinheiro (2006) that age is one of the contributing factors that promote sexual abuse of students in public senior high schools. To confirm the finding of the study with regards to age as a factor in sexual abuse a case study conducted in Cote D' Ivoire by Higonnet (2007) with sample of 147 students revealed that 56 % of the cases of sexual abuse against students were reported by students aged between 13 years to 18 years. These ages fall between secondary school going age in Ghana. In respect to the admissions of respondents in the study about gender being a factor for sexual abuse in schools, Brown, *et al.* (2009) buttressed this opinion. From a Global School-Based Health Survey Data from Namibia, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe the odds of having been exposed to sexual abuse were greater among female students.

**Table 2: Care Arrangement/Parental Absence, Substance Abuse and Parental Level of Education**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Students</b>		<b>Teachers</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	308	76.4	19	95.0
No	95	23.6	1	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 shows another group of factors that are perceived to be responsible for sexual abuse of students in public senior high schools. From Table 2 respondents perceive that care arrangement/parental absence, substance abuse by parents and parental level of education are factors that facilitate sexual abuse in public senior high schools. Table 2 depicts that 308 students (76.4%) and 9 teachers (95%) of the respondents share the above view. Meanwhile, 95 students (23.6%) and 1 teacher (5%) of the respondents do not agree with those factors. Large majority of the students (76.4%) and teachers (95%) are of the view that care arrangement and parental absence could have serious negative implications for student development and protection while a parent with lower educational level may not be aware of suggested prevention programmes that will aid his/ her ward when it comes to sexual abuse.

These admissions are affirmed by a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa by Thurman, *et al.* (2006) and Forster and Williamson (2002). According to the study, students who live with extended family, students who live in foster care, and students who live with just one parent face greater risk of sexual abuse than students who live with both biological parents. Jewkes, *et al.* (2002) go further to admit in a study conducted in South Africa that adolescents who were not living with a biological father reported an increased risk of teenage pregnancy in their schooling as a result of sexual abuse.

Another indication of the respondents is the link between parental substance abuse and sexual abuse of students. This view is confirmed by one prospective study that suggested that students who had experienced sexual abuse often grew up in families where parents used drugs or alcohol (Horwitz, *et al.* 2001). In addition, a retrospective study that was conducted in Canada by Walsh, *et al.* (2003) reported that respondents with sexual abuse increased by two-fold among those reporting parental substance abuse histories. In the view of the researchers, the findings made imply that parental substance abuse may create an environment that is favourable for the perpetration of sexual abuse by incapacitating parents from giving the necessary monitoring and supervision. The opinion of the respondents suggests that there is a link that exists between parental level of education and sexual abuse of students. The admission is congruent with a finding made by Finkelhor (1979) that mothers of those sexually abuse students are less likely to have finished high school.

**Table 3: School Environment**

Responses	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	326	80.9	20	100
No	77	19.1	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 provides the descriptive statistical results of the admissions of respondents on school environment as a factor that promotes students sexual abuse in senior high schools. From Table 3, large majority of 326 students (80.9%) and 20 teachers (100%) of the respondents admitted that the school environment could be responsible for sexual abuse in high senior schools. Meanwhile 77 students (19.1%) are with opposite view. The admissions of students and teachers are confirmed by Taylor and Conrad (2008) who stated that student sexual abuse in school setting involves sexual favours in exchange for good grades as well as transactional sex where the victim is coerced into sexual activity in return for educational benefits such as school fees and material things.

**Table 4: Demographic risk factor of Parents / Unemployment of Parents and Poverty**

Responses	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	333	82.6	19	95.0
No	70	17.4	1	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 indicates that large majority of the respondents of 333 students (82.6%) and 19 teachers (95%) admitted that socio-demographic risk factors of parents could be responsible for the sexual abuse of students in public senior high schools. On other hand, 70 students (17.4%) and 1 teacher (5%) among the respondents holds different view against the admissions of the large majority of the participants.

According to the admissions of the majority of respondents, one of the factors responsible for sexual abuse in senior high schools is the socio-demographic risk factors of parents which include unemployment of parent and poverty level of parent. One can deduct from Table 4 that unemployment is a risk factor for sexual abuse Horwitz *et al.* (2001) argue that students who had experienced sexual abuse sometimes grew up with parents who were unemployed. Belsky (1980) confirms the above assertion that unemployment may be a risk factor through stress of reduced material resources (i.e. resource dilution) a sense of powerlessness in the unemployed parent, who cannot afford the resources of their wards and their wards then seeking help from outside especially from their immediate environment.

The other side of the admission is that employment brings significant stress into the parent-student relationship and this has implications for students' care arrangement. Perhaps, this argument could serve as a protective factor through a range of social-psychological benefits (Sidebotham & Heron, 2006). The finding of the study is inconsistent with a study conducted in Israel by Elbedor *et al.* (2006) among female senior high school students.

This study found that a higher occupational status of the parent was associated with higher likelihood of sexual abuse of student of those parents. This assertion in itself is puzzling. However, it is possible that daughters of such parents with high occupational status may actually experience higher rates of sexual abuse. If it happens, the cause could be the busy nature of the parents and poor child-parent relationship. The demanding nature of parents' occupation could lead to a disconnection with their wards thereby leading students to build trust in someone else in the school which leads sexual abuse.

**Table 5: Non- Nurturing environment and Poor Parent- Student Relationship**

Responses	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	325	80.6	18	90.0
No	78	19.4	2	10.0

<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>
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Table 5 provides the results of the findings on non-nurturing environment as one of the factors that promote student sexual abuse in public senior high schools. From Table 5, 325 students (80.6%) and 18 teachers (90%) of the respondents admitted that non-nurturing environment is one of reasons why students are sexually abused in senior high schools by perpetrators of the act. In the view of the researchers, a family characterised by absence of interpersonal attachment and good relationship may lead to bad supervision which in turn could result in insecure relationship with parents. Brown *et al.* (1998) buttress this assertion by arguing that families in considerable chaos and absence of personal connection could subject the students to emotional distress; students without this secure parental relationship may feel reluctant to disclose sexual abuse experiences to their parents or other adults, thereby perpetuating the act.

The respondents in the study hold a strong assertion that non-nurturing environment is a greater factor that makes sexual abuse conducive in the senior high schools. The perception is also confirmed by a study conducted by Alexander (1992), it was noted in the study that insecure interpersonal attachment in a family may increase the risk of sexual abuse in that family. Alexander goes further to argue that if adult perpetrators of sexual abuse are not strongly attached to their students they may have poor control of their impulses and libido towards their students. This argument has been supported by Buckley *et al.* (2008) who argue that, as a result of this, students who face non-attachment to family may be more willing to submit to sexual abuse if it seems a way to build attachment they otherwise lack. The possibility is clear in this scenario because such students may end up seeking advice from their teachers, peers, sugar daddies or mummies who are likely to mislead and expose them to sexual abuse expedition.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

With regard to the various causes of student sexual abuse in public senior high schools the following could be inferred: Majority of students and teachers are of the view that non – contact sexual abuse which may include, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual phone calls, unwanted sexual messages, unwanted sexual jokes and frequent request for sexual favours are common in public senior high schools. The study revealed that majority of students and teachers are of the opinion that sexual assault, attempted rape and rape which are under the contact sexual abuse are not common in public senior high schools. Penetrative form of sexual abuse which may include unwanted oral sex, anal or vaginal intercourse were admitted by the students and teachers as frequent form of student sexual abuse in public senior high schools.

It is recommended that student sexual abuse which exists in the public senior high schools should be addressed without any further delay. Teachers, civil society organisations, human rights organizations and Government should raise awareness of the unacceptability of student sexual abuse, and promoting the notion that stopping student sexual abuse is everyone’s responsibility. Gender and human rights advocacy clubs should be established and one teacher in each school should be trained as a gender and human rights facilitator to support these clubs. Policymakers and stakeholders in student rights activities should adopt a comprehensive and analytic approach that takes cognisance of the contextual situation that causes student sexual abuse in public senior high schools.

There should be proper policy implementation in our educational institutions. School rules and regulations, Teachers code of conduct, District bye laws and National laws on sexual abuse should be enforced by relevant authorities in collaboration with the local communities. (i) Every school child, teacher and school worker should be educated on the school rules and regulations on student sexual abuse, reporting procedures of such abuse and the appropriate sanctions associated with such abuse. This can serve as a deterrent for potential perpetrators of student sexual abuse. (ii) PTAs and SMCs should be equipped with knowledge and skills in student sexual abuse to monitor incidence of sexual abuse in schools.

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