

## **Trends and patterns of child sexual violence in Kenya with reference to cases treated at Nairobi women and children's hospital**

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### **Abstract:**

This study set out to investigate trends and patterns of sexual violence against children in Kenya with reference to cases treated at Nairobi Women and Children's hospital (NWCH). Its specific objectives were: to establish the magnitude of child sexual violence in Kenya from 2002 to 2006; identify causes and effects of the problem; assess factors associated with children's vulnerability to sexual violence; examine measures used to combat the problems with limitations; as well as establish coping mechanisms adopted by victims of child sexual violence. The study adopted an exploratory research design and mainly used qualitative approaches. NWCH and The CRADLE-The Children Foundation were the sites selected for the study using convenience and Purposive sampling methods. Service providers of both organizations were used as key informants while parents or guardians (relatives) of abused children attended by the organizations within the period of the field study were the respondents representing the abused children. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the study. The study revealed that the problem of child sexual violence had rising trends from the year 2002 to 2006 in all provinces of Kenya. Defilement of female children led all forms of sexual violence against children. Causes of child sexual violence were: a belief in a myth that having sexual intercourse with a virgin cures HIV / AIDs; unemployment and poverty; congestion and overcrowding in most slum settlements; drug abuse and lack of sex education by the children from their parents and school. Effects included adverse physical and psychological trauma of the abused children; psychological and economic effects on families of abused children. The vice also impacts negatively social integration, cohesion and economic development of the society as communities affected are gripped with fear. Vulnerability of children to sexual violence is heightened by their ages, sex and economic or poverty levels of their parents or guardians. Intervention strategies used to combat the vice included the introduction of a sexual violence desk by the police department; enactment of the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) in July 2006 which enhanced punishment for convicted sexual abusers and increased the age of minors from age 14 to 18 years. The Act also broadened the scope of child sexual abuse to include sodomy against male children. Limitations were: laxity of some police officers to apprehend suspected sexual abusers; delays of court cases and further trauma of affected children in courts; lack of corroborative evidence caused by uncooperative police and court officials who were not conversant with the provisions of SOA while many abused cases of sexual violence went unreported due to fear of social stigma. The study recommended more awareness to be created by the government through the Ministries of Public Health, Education, Home Affairs (Police department and Chiefs), increased media coverage, more interventions by civil rights organizations and religious institutions mainly targeting children and parents. The government should alleviate poverty and upgrade unplanned settlements to reduce congestions and overcrowding. The Police and judiciary should be re-trained on the provisions of SOA.