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Knowledge and Perceptions on Child Sexual Abuse: A Comparative Study Between Children and Parents in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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Owing to the increasing violence against children's rights, particularly in the cases of child sexual abuse (CSA), this study aimed at assessing the knowledge and perception of children and parents in Morogoro municipality. The Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological system theory was used to guide the study. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to one hundred eighty-eight (188) research subjects, through face-to-face interviews. The findings from this study indicate that 114 (74.5%) of the 153 children interviewed had heard about CSA compared to 32 (91.4%) of the 35 parents who had heard about CSA. The knowledge about CSA, was significantly higher among parents compared to children ($p=0.0302$). The interviewed children reported having known CSA through hearing at school (36.6%), hearing from neighbours (24.8) and experiencing cases of CSA at home (13.1%). Further, parents noted that radio and Television were dependable source of information on CSA. On the other hand, children reported to rely mainly on information received at schools and sometimes from neighbours. It was further observed that mothers played more significant role of passing knowledge to their children about CSA than fathers, the observation which was also statistically significant ($p=0.0101$). Most parents considered forced sexual intercourse (97.1%) with perpetrators and anal penetration (82.9%) to be the most evidence of CSA in children. The study has found that parents believe more in teachers and community members to play a key role in ending CSA than themselves. It is therefore recommended to conduct more in-depth analysis to identify key factors contributing to the prevalence of CSA in Morogoro municipality which would help to devise appropriate and effective intervention strategies to end CSA.

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INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has become a global epidemic whose background is deeply rooted in the violation of rights due to socio-cultural factors, cultural practices and economic constraints (Magesa & Shekuwe, 2024; Xu, 2024). There have been several definitions of the CSA, but most scholars define it as the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to and that violate social taboos of family roles (Buhori, 2024; McCrann, 2017). A number of risk factors such as age, education level, parent's occupation, unemployment, parent's marital status, poverty, traditions and language have been reported to be significant associated with child abuse (Yüksel & Koçtürk, 2020; Assink et al, 2019; Barth, 2009).

Studies indicate variations in the prevalence of CSA from one continent to another and even from one country to another. However, the problem is worldwide regardless of the variations in developed or developing countries (Burrai et al., 2022; Tamarit & Balcells, 2022). Some studies and reviews on CSA indicated global prevalence to range from 20% to 68.7%, with an overall prevalence of 24% reported in female children (Patterson et al., 2022; Karsna & Kelly, 2021). In Tanzania, previous studies reported CSA to range between 3% and 37% (Mwanukuzi & Nyamhanga, 2021; McCrann et al., 2006). Furthermore, some risk factors that have been reported to be associated with CSA in Tanzania including socioeconomic status of parents, community beliefs, use of remedies for HIV, excessive workload and passivity of parents and

guardians as well as their ignorance (Buhori, 2024; Magesa & Shekuwe, 2024).

For children to be protected against sexual abuse, it is essential that both children and parents/guardians understand CSA and different skills on how to protect children (Ferragut et al., 2022; Reuben et al., 2022). Most of the time, these actions take place when the children are too innocent to understand the mechanism or mission behind the abuser. According to WHO (2020), schoolchildren reported feeling unsafe at home, in the school setting, and on their way to and from school, mainly when similar incidences occur. Impliedly, this shows that children lack enough knowledge and techniques abusers can use to reach the target. Some studies carried out in different countries reported different levels of knowledge by parents on child protection against CSA. In some countries, it has been reported that parents have low knowledge of how to prevent and protect children against CSA (Jamaludin, 2022). Furthermore, some studies have gone further to identify factors which contribute to such low knowledge and willingness of parents to prevent CSA. For instance, in El Salvador, it has been shown that parents with lower income were less knowledgeable and not willing to participate in preventing CSA (Salloum et al., 2020 ;). Other factors are the role of parents, age, education, employment status and marital status (Jamaludin, 2022).

If the parents have appropriate knowledge, they can contribute positively to the protection and prevention of child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, the parents might sometimes have inappropriate knowledge influenced by culture and taboo, as reported in Mexico (Rueda et al., 2022). The

myths and beliefs of parents on child sexual abuse might, therefore, not help them to protect their children. Scant information and studies have been carried out to assess parents' knowledge. In addition, it is essential for the parents to have attitudes and practices to protect and prevent child sexual abuse. Some of these include discussing with their children how to protect themselves against child sexual abuse offenders (Prikkhidko and Kenny, 2021).

Objective of this study was to compare knowledge and perceptions of children and parents residing in Morogoro municipality. Key research questions were: (i) To what extent do children and parents know about child sexual abuse? (ii) Do children and parents have same level of knowledge about Child Sexual Abuse? (iii) What were perceptions of both children and parents on how to end Child Sexual Abuse?

The study was important so as to identify issues and potential areas where interventions could be applied by policy makers and law enforcers to curb CSA in Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

Conduct of this study was guided by the Ecological system theory which was formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 (Chong et al., 2023). The theory explains the importance of studying different social and environmental factors that contribute to the problem of child sexual abuse to children. The environment was categorized into several levels: microsystem, mezzo system, exosystem, chronosystem and macrosystem. It posits that child development is a transactional process in which an individual's development is influenced by interactions with various aspects and spheres of their environment. The theory emphasises that a child's own biology is a primary environment fuelling their development. It focuses on the quality and context of the child's environment and defines complex "layers" of the environment, each affecting a child's development.

Based on Wamuyu's (2022) explanation, the microsystems level refers to individual

characteristics that influence the occurrence of CSA, such as gender, age, attitude, behaviour, cultural beliefs, values, expectations, education level, stigma and fear. On the other hand, the mesosystem level includes formal and informal networks within the interpersonal relationship. It involves friends, families, peers, beliefs and values, and church or social support systems that can influence disclosure. The exosystem level involves relationships among organisations, institutions and informal networks at the community level. Finally, the macrosystem level includes local government institutions and national laws and policies related to child rights and protection.

This theory was considered relevant to this study because children suffer from the problem (sexual abuse) within different environmental settings. From the micro level, the immediate social environment, children become vulnerable as they interact with the family and other extended members. Studies (WHO, 2020; Tufa, 2022) reveal that most perpetrators are rooted in this system. Relatives within the households, neighbours and some teachers and bus attendants have been sexually abusing children. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse may look for weak spots in a family, community or organisation so they can gain unsupervised access to children. They often plan the abuse and start grooming the child, the child's family and the child's environment. The victim may believe they have a sincere or loving relationship with their abuser, and their family and friends may trust and respect the abuser.

In addition, the exosystem consists of interactions between the social environments in which a child is not actively involved and the proximal contexts in which the individual develops (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). The exosystem involving external factors such as parents' job and media contribute to CSA, whereby parents spend much of their time at work and forget their parental role to care for their children. Some incidences could be avoided if parents could be there. Parental obligation has been left to other people, such as caregivers and housemaids (Solehati et al, 2022).

The situation can pave the way to child sexual abuse, especially when the protection is feeble.

The theory is relevant to parents because their knowledge is rooted from the individual to the outer layers. When the immediate social environment, such as family, school and religious institutions, work together, it is easier to eliminate CSA. The macrosystem involving factors such as culture and policies/laws is essential in eliminating CSA. Some policies that have been formulated have contradictions regarding how they should be implemented. For example, the Law of Child Act 2019, which insists that the child's age should be married, contradicts the Law of Marriage Act. Culture plays a huge role in what we do today. Our beliefs and responses to child sexual abuse are heavily influenced by how we were raised. In an environment that 'sold out,' the girl child put food on the table, and because it was a way of life that people saw nothing wrong with, we could do away with such practices by showing and communicating the value that comes with having a girl child.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study employed a mixed approach to collect data by combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order rich information that would have not been collected using one method given the nature of the study and respondents. A qualitative approach, using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), was adopted to collect data and information from experienced officials and individuals dealing with CSA cases for many years. The quantitative approach, involving the use of semi-structured questionnaires as data collection tools, was also used to collect data from primary school children to assess their knowledge of safe protection against sexual abuse. Similarly, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from parents on what they know and practice to ensure child protection against sexual abuse in Morogoro municipality.

Research Design

This study adopted both descriptive and analytical study designs. The descriptive part of the study design was adopted so as to provide information on the current status of CSA in Morogoro municipality as perceived by both children and parents/guardians. In order to compare similarities and differences in the level of knowledge possessed by the two groups (children vs parents/guardian), comparative analytical approach was adopted. This was achieved through comparing level of knowledge and source of information on CSA by children and parents. In addition, comparison of perceptions of the two groups on how to end CSA was made. Comparative approach was considered suitable for this study in order to identify existing challenges so as to guide on how to devise interventions aiming at reducing risks of CSA through targeting supporting both children and parents/guardians in their respective roles to protect children against CSA.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Morogoro municipality between November and December 2023. Morogoro municipality is one among nine Councils of the Morogoro region in Tanzania. Administratively, Morogoro municipality has 29 wards (City Population, 2023). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), Morogoro Municipality has a more significant population of 471,409 compared to other councils (Kilosa DC, Ulanga DC, Morogoro DC, Morogoro MC, Mvomero DC, Gairo DC, Ifakara TC, Malinyi DC, and Mlimba DC). It has a vast number of sexually abused children (City Population, 2023). The population density in the municipality stands at 1,635 persons per kilometre. Reidy et al. (2021) suggest that street sexually abused children are found in areas with high population density and hence the basis for selecting Morogoro municipality as the study area.

Study Population

The study purposefully targeted a population of primary school children, because they were the primary victims of the problem, i.e, CSA and Primary school teachers because of their professional obligations to protect children. In addition, parents were also a target population of the study due to their parental role and child protection obligations. Another targeted group of the respondents was police gender and children's desk officials and social welfare officers based on their professional roles because they handle different cases, including child violence as well as child protection cases.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to determine the study sample size. The first stage involved randomly sampling of six wards with high CSA incidences in Morogoro municipality. According to the statistics from the Police Gender and Children Desk, the six wards with high CSA for one past year are Chamwino, Mwembesongo, Mazimbu, Lukobe, Kichangani and Kihonda were purposively sampled. The second stage involved determining the sample size from a given population from sampled six wards. The target population from selected wards of Morogoro municipality is 130,043 (URT, 2023). Using the sample determination formula below as proposed by Kothari (2004), the sample size was 137 respondents as calculated from the formula below:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pqN}{e^2(N-1) + z^2 pq}$$

Where,

z = confidence interval (1.96)

e = error term (0.05)

p = estimate proportion (0.9)

q = degree of accuracy (0.1)

n = sample size

N = total population (130,043)

Furthermore, the third step involved sampling the respondents, especially children and parents, using simple random sampling, whereby all households or individuals in the ward were given an equal chance of being selected for the study. This led to the sampling of the representative sample for the study. We adopted a ratio of 3:1 for Children to Parents due to limited resources as well as practical challenges of recruiting many parents under the urban setting as they were busy at work as well as other income generating activities. Based on the calculated sample size ($n=137$), we targeted to recruit 103 children and 34 parents. Such ratio was also based on the likelihood of interviewing more than one child at school from the same household. During data collection, a total number of 153 and 35 children and parents were interviewed, respectively.

For the children, one public and one private primary school in each ward in the selected wards were recruited using simple random sampling where pupils were interviewed. Primary schools which participated in the study were Bernard Mbendel (Private) and Mkwajuni primary school (Public) from Kichangani Ward, Mafisa A Primary School (Public), Alhakibar (Private) from Mwembesongo Ward, Kihonda Primary School (Public), Top Star (Private) from Kihonda ward, Lukobe Primary School (Public), St. Dennis Primary school (Private) from Lukobe Ward, Chamino A Primary School (Public), and Chamwino B Primary school (Public) from Chamwino Ward, Mazimbu A Primary School and Mazimbu B Primary (Public) from Mazimbu Ward. All primary schools in Chamwino and Mzimbu wards were public as there was no private school in the two wards.

Data Collection Methods

Based on the mixed research approach that was adopted in this study, different data collection methods and tools were adopted.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire in this study was employed for children and adult respondents (parents) to collect data in this study. The questionnaire was

developed to capture the key variables to assess knowledge, awareness and perception of children and parents on CSA, such as age, location, education level (for children and parents), marital status and occupation (for parents). Other variables that were captured in the questionnaire were awareness and type of CSA. The questionnaires were pre-tested to improve their ability to collect the correct data by ensuring respondents understood the questions and estimating the time to collect data. The questionnaires were digitized and uploaded on the *Afya Data app* to collect data during face-to-face interviews with respondents.

Interviews

This study prepared a checklist of questions for the selected children, parents and other critical informants concerning CSA in Morogoro municipality. The interview method of data collection enabled the researcher to probe or conduct in-depth interviews to get the information's inner part.

Documentary Review

Secondary data were collected by reviewing relevant information from various official reports at Morogoro municipality. Morogoro Central Police Gender Desk reports, policies, and guidelines are also included. This study involved documents, including both governmental and non-governmental, such as the Morogoro Socio-Economic Profile 2019, Law of the Child Act No.21/2009, and other empirical reports as well as Surveys relating to the problem of child sexual abuse.

Data Analysis

For quantitative data that were collected using questionnaire, both descriptive and analytical data analyses were made. The data were presented in either tabular format or bar charts produced as figures using Excel programme. In order to assess statistical significance between proportions, Chi squared test was used where online calculator (<https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/chisquare/default2.aspx>) was applied to compute p-value at 0.05 significance level. For qualitative data,

perceptions and testimonials from respondents were synthesized and summarized to support the quantitative analysis results and were presented narrative statements or comparative opinions between children and parents.

Ethical Consideration

To comply with the research ethics requirement, institutional research research clearance was obtained from the Open University of Tanzania. In addition, data collection permission as sought from the Morogoro Municipal Director, who approved data collection in writing. This was followed by visiting study wards where Ward Executive Officers (WEOs) provided Ward Education Coordinators to assist in introducing the researcher to the primary school Head Teacher so that the data collection exercise is smooth. Consent from interviewed children was obtained from all children who were selected to participated in the study as well as through calling their parents or guardians to give permission before the interview. In order to observe confidentiality, a private room was provided by each school and children were interviewed individually. For a few children who were victim of CSA, counselling support was provided by the Ward Social Worker who accompanied the researcher or by respective counselling and guidance teacher at those schools where they were in place.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic characteristics of children and parents who participated in the study are summarized in Table 1a and Table 1b, respectively. A total number of 153 children from 12 schools were interviewed. Out of these schools, 8 were government and 4 were private schools. A similar proportion of male and female children were interviewed. The average age of children interviewed was 10.8 ± 1.67 (mean \pm StDev) years, ranging from 10 to 14 years old. The majority of them (81.7%) were staying with their parents. Whereas most parents and guardians were married (68.6%), others were single,

divorced or widows/widows. Sixty-eight percent of the interviewed children attended government schools while only 32.0% attended private schools belonging to private owners or faith-based organizations.

A total of 35 parents from different streets of Morogoro municipality were interviewed. The distribution of interviewed parents by sex, marital

status, education and occupation is summarized in Table 1b. A similar proportion of male and female parents were interviewed. The majority of interviewed parents (45.7%) were married. Most of them had attained primary education (31.5%), and a good number had also attained university (28.6). Most of them depended on salaried employment (40.0%) and business (31.4%) as their primary source of income.

Table 1 a: Demographic information of children interviewed in Morogoro municipality (n = 153)

Characteristic	Level	Number	Per cent
Sex	Male	76	49.7
	Female	77	50.3
Staying with	Parents	125	81.7
	Guardians	28	18.3
Marital status of their parents	Married	105	68.6
	Divorced	17	11.1
	Widow/widower	9	5.9
	Single	22	14.4
Type of school	Government/Public	104	68.0
	Private	49	32.0

Source: Field data (2023)

Table 1b: Demographic information of parents interviewed in Morogoro municipality (n = 35)

Characteristic	Level	Number	Per cent
Sex	Male	16	45.7
	Female	19	54.3
Marital status	Married	16	45.7
	Divorced	5	14.3
	Widow/widower	5	14.3
	Single	6	17.1
	Separated	3	8.6
	University	10	28.6
Highest level of education	Diploma holder	6	17.7
	Certificate holder	5	14.3
	Primary school	11	31.4
	Adult education	1	2.9
	No formal education	2	5.7
	Salaried employment	14	40.0
Occupation	Business	11	31.4
	Agriculture (crop & livestock)	3	8.6
	Informal sector	5	14.3
	Other	2	5.7

Comparative knowledge of Children and Parents on Child Sexual Abuse

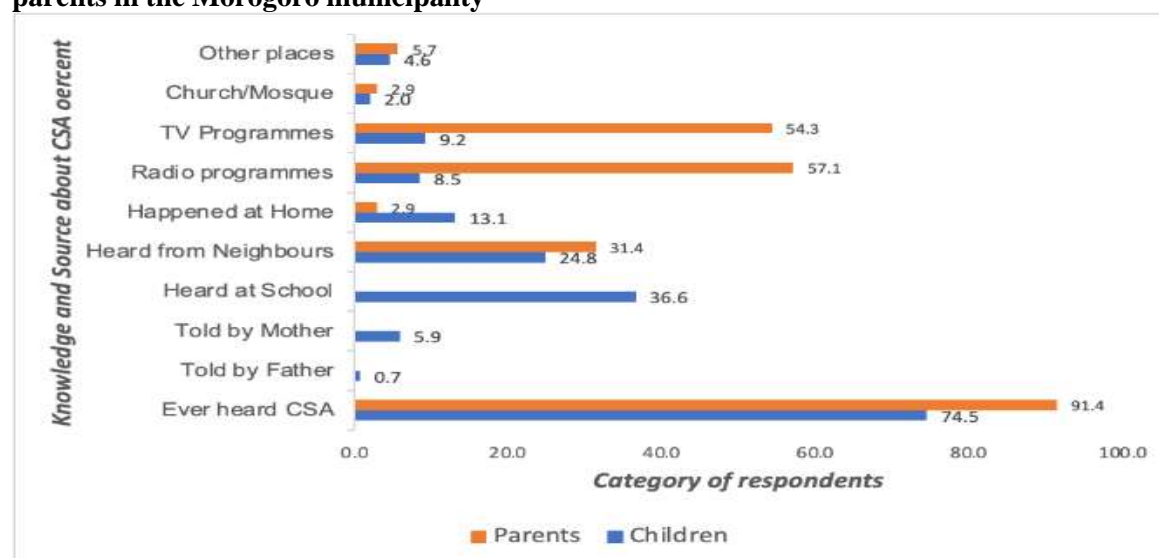
The current status of knowledge of children and parents in the Morogoro municipality is summarized in Figure 1. The knowledge about

CSA, defined by the proportion of respondents who reported to had heard about it, was significantly higher among parents compared to children ($p=0.0302$). Different sources were reported by children as main source of information about CSA. Radio and TV

programmes were mainly reported by parents as their dependable source of information about CSA. On the other hand, children reported to rely mainly from information received at schools and sometimes from neighbours. It was further

observed that mothers played more significant role of passing knowledge to their children about CSA than fathers, the observation which was also statistically significant ($p=0.0101$).

Figure 1: Knowledge and source of information on child sexual abuse as reported by children and parents in the Morogoro municipality



When conducting this study, one female pupil during the interview said,

“I am living with my grandparents, and they always tell me I should not allow a boy to enter his private part in me. They are saying I will get pregnant and bad diseases” (A 10-year girl November 2023)

The other female pupil said:

“We often have a lesson at school, our teacher said we don’t allow a boy to enter his private parts to ours, it is for married people like our parents and guardians only. She said we should protect each other when you see your fellow being victimized you should report to the teacher” (An 11-year girl, November 2023)

From the above quotations, it is evident that most of the children interviewed know CSA, primarily related to the penetration of sexual organs.

A statement from one female parent said:

“In different situations, I usually like to sit and talk to my child.... I ask if she is suffering from any pain in her physical body.... And sometimes I usually tell the house girl to let me give her a bath.... The essence is to inspect and check her body.....” (Parent, December 2023)

Perceived evidence of Child Sexual Abuse as reported by parents

Parents reported different evidences which could be used to confirm CSA. The majority of parents considered forced sexual intercourse with perpetrators and anal penetration to be the most evidence of CSA as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Evidence of Child Sexual abuse as perceived by parents interviewed in Morogoro municipality (n= 35)

Type of evidence of CSA	No. respondents	Per cent
Anal penetration	29	82.9
Forced to touch own private parts	20	57.1
Forced to look at the private parts of offenders	17	48.5
Forced to have sex with offenders	34	97.1
Forced to touch the private parts of offenders	17	48.6
Forced to watch pornographic movies or video	13	37.1

Perceptions from Children and Parents on how to end Child Sexual Abuse

Children and Parents reported different ways they think could be used to end CSA in Morogoro municipality as presented in Table 3. Relatively higher proportion of children consider holding discussion between children and parents at home to be the most appropriate way to end CSA. On the other hand, the majority of parents (68.6%) prefer this challenge to be solved at school where

teachers could teach children on ways to end CSA. Other options reported by children only as ways to end CSA were avoidance of risky areas, reporting to the police and intervention by religious leaders to teach children at mosque or church. For parents, other ways to end CSA were reported as educating the community, educating parents, using traditional media such as TV and radio programmes as well as social media to educate the society.

Table 3: Perceptions of children (n=153) and parents (n=35) on how to end Child Sexual Abuse in Morogoro municipality

Way to end CSA	Children (%)	Parents (%)
Discussion between children and parents at home	74.5	42.9
Teachers at schools to teach children	56.2	68.6
Children to avoid risky areas	52.9	-
Report perpetrators to police	33.3	-
Religious leaders to teach children	18.3	-
Educate community	-	54.3
Educate parents about CSA	-	57.1
Use TV and radio programmes to educate the society	-	42.9
Use social media	-	34.3

Additionally, during an interview, some children described the role of teachers and parents in fighting CSA as follows;

“Mother and father should live together, provide basic needs so that children cannot be bribed or given gifts which could end up being traps for children to be victims of child sexual abuse” (12-year-old pupil, November 2023).

Another child made said:

“We love our teachers because they take care of us. They also teach us how to protect ourselves against bad people who sometimes can force us to get involved in sexual activities

while we are still young. They tell us negative effects such as getting diseases or unwanted pregnancies which result in getting chased out of schools (13-year-old girl, November 2023).”

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study indicated parents to be more aware about CSA than children. This finding is important especially when the authority need to promote child-focused interventions to end CSA as parents have critical role in success of such intervention programmes (Wurtele and Kenny, 2010; Mabetshe et al., 2022). It was further interesting to note that contrary to these

expectations, the majority of parents in Morogoro considered to use alternative ways, mainly using teachers, community members and media to educate their children against CSA. Other studies have reported reluctance of parents to educate their children at home contributed to various factors such as culture and norms where other family members would not support efforts of one parent to educate children about CSA (Apaydın Cırık et al., 2020). Other possible reasons that could explain limited role of parents in educating their children against CSA is due to them being busy with work then have no time to discuss sensitive sexual matters with their children. This has also been reported in other parts of Tanzania and other countries (Eelmaa, 2021; Prikhidko and Kenny, 2021).

Parent perceptions on forced sexual intercourse and anal penetration as evidence of CSA could have been influenced by the role of media which in most cases report these malpractices in the society as it has been documented in other studies (Quarshie *et al.*, 2022). In most cases as there are limited studies on CSA, parents and the general society in most cases rely on what is been broadcasted in the traditional and social media. While these media could be used as outlets to share information about prevalence of CSA, they also have potential role to educate the society on how to prevent CSA.

Opinion given by parents including using traditional media (TV and radio), social media, and educating the community has also been in other studies to increase knowledge of CSA (Sharma, 2020). This approach could be more relevant in urban areas such as Morogoro municipality than in rural areas because of access to such media by both parents and children. Other studies in Tanzania have reported the problem of sexual violence and CSA to be relatively higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Abeid et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that children and parents are aware of CSA in Morogoro municipality. Based on the Ecological system theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner, social and environmental factors

at different levels, i.e., microsystem, mezzo system, exosystem, chronosystem and macrosystem, still play a crucial role in contributing to the persistence of CSA in Morogoro municipality. Key findings of this study are that parents believe more in teachers and community members to play a key role in ending CSA than themselves. This attitude needs to be changed through promoting more interventions that target parents as they have crucial role in supporting their children in reducing risks associated with CSA. In addition, the surrounding environment of both children and parents do influence their level of knowledge on CSA such as hearing from schools and neighbours for children and; the role of media i.e, TV and Radio programmes in influencing knowledge of parents. From the results on perception on how to end CSA, it is obvious that the majority of parents do not consider discussion with their children at home to be one of potential intervention to end CSA. This finding is likely to be influenced by the parents being busy with works and other income generating activities.

This study focused on establishing status and level of knowledge of children and parents on CSA under the urban setting of Morogoro municipality which could be different from rural areas. Another limitation of this study was low number of parents who participated in the study. These limitations could be addressed in future studies targeting to address CSA in Tanzania and beyond. It is also important to conduct more in-depth analysis to identify key determinants of the prevalence of CSA in Morogoro municipality which will help to devise appropriate and effective intervention strategies to end CSA in the municipality.

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