

# **Community perceptions and understanding of the risk factors that affect children who are sexually abused**

**Presented by Alicia Davids**

**Co-authors: Leickness Simbayi, Nolusindiso Ncitakalo, Vuyelwa Mehlomakhulu**

**AIDS Impact Conference, Gaborone  
September 2009**

**HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS**

**10033**

Social science that makes a difference



# Outline of the presentation



- Background
- Objectives of the FGD
- Methods
- Findings
- Conclusions & recommendations

# Background

- Child sexual abuse is defined as being forced, threatened, or deceived into sexual activities ranging from looking or touching to intercourse or rape (Orange & Brodwin, 2005).
- However, child sexual abuse is not just seen as rape but that it includes fondling, voyeurism, and exposure to and participation in child pornography and child prostitution.
- Children are exposed to risky situations on a daily basis that increase the likelihood of HIV transmission, including within homes, schools and communities (Shisana et al., 2005).
- Rape and child sexual abuse directly increases children's risk of contracting HIV, since it usually involves unprotected sex (Crime Information Analysis Centre, 2006).

# Key objectives of the study

- To investigate the phenomenon of child sexual abuse and its association or link to HIV infection
- Exploring the knowledge and perceptions of community members which include, adults and teenagers, regarding child sexual abuse in South Africa
- Providing recommendations that can assist interventions/prevention strategies to alleviate the problem.

# Research Methodology

- A Qualitative approach was used as it presents an environment in which participants influence each other as happens in life in relation to their perceptions, feelings, and thinking about particular issues.
- Informed consent as well as Informed Assent forms was made available to all participants.
- Sessions were digitally audio recorded; data translated and transcribed.
- *Limitation in using focus groups:* Focus groups do not allow for generalization of the findings.
- Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the HSRC's Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the CDC's Institutional Review Boards (IRB).

# Selection of participants

Province	Type of part.	Issue	# of part.	Languages	Race mix
NW	Adult women	Informal settlements, <i>child sexual abuse</i> & teenage pregnancy	12	Tswana & Afrikaans	African & whites
FS	Adult women	<i>Child sexual abuse</i>	12	S. Sotho	African
WC	Male teenagers	Informal settlements & <i>child sexual abuse</i> & teenage pregnancy	11	English & Xhosa	African
WC	Adult women	<i>Child sexual abuse</i>	10	English & Afrikaans	Coloured
NC	Adult men	Informal settlements & <i>child sexual abuse</i> & teenage pregnancy	11	English	African
NC	Female teenagers	Male circumcision, <i>child sexual abuse</i> & sugar daddies	11	English & Afrikaans	Coloured
EC	Adult women	Informal settlements & <i>child sexual abuse</i> & teenage pregnancy	12	Xhosa	African
KZN	Teenagers – both genders	<i>Child sexual abuse</i> & teenage pregnancy	12	Zulu & English	African
KZN	Adults – both genders	<i>Child sexual abuse</i>	12	Zulu	African

# Findings

## Emerging Themes:

- *Extent of child sexual abuse in communities*
- *Perpetrators of child sexual abuse*
- *Reasons child sexual abuse occurs and continues to occur in communities*
- *Risk factors children may experience if sexually abuse*

## **Does child sexual abuse occur in communities?**

*“Yes, children are abused in the form of being smacked and raped. In some instances parents know but cannot speak out for the fear of their lives.” - Adult KZN respondent*



## **Who are the perpetrators of child sexual abuse?**

*“...when the mother works and maybe the father is at home...the father is drunk and the child is at home. The father must look after the child. Now, when the father is tipsy, then the father comes to the girl, like an older person...he bribes the child now and says, “You must not tell mummy, you must keep quiet then I will buy you sweets...its our secret – between the two of us.” You get this happening in the community”*

**- Teenager NC respondent**

# **What are some of the reasons child sexual abuse occurs in communities?**

## ***Theme: Fear of losing financial support***

*“The other reason why it seems acceptable is because sometimes the perpetrator is a breadwinner and the family thinks that would be affected if they open up. The family thinks that if the perpetrator is exposed he would refuse to support them and therefore decides to keep quiet.” Adult FS respondent*

## **Theme: Child sexual abuse = Silence and Shame**

*“You do hear about some homes where this happens, but people hide these things, they are embarrassed to talk about them Because it means the woman of that home will have to leave the husband or she will have to report him to the police and the community will know everything.”*

*- Teenager WC respondent*

**Theme: Police and Justice system does not protect children that are sexually abused**

*“Sometimes they open a case at the police station and files go missing. The truth never comes out...Also, the police should do their job. If a person is supposed to be sent to jail, they should do that and not release the person after a short time. They should keep a person like that for at least 3 years in jail so that he can learn a lesson.”*

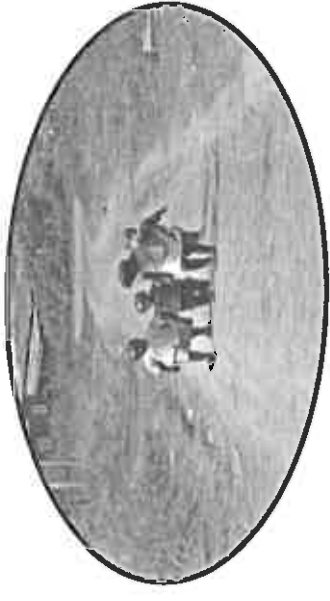
- Teenager FS respondent

# Immediate and long-term risk factors

*“I think that a child gets damaged and there is a disturbance to their minds. Even if the matter is solved privately or within the family it is not done satisfactorily and the problem remains that of the child’s.” - Adult KZN respondent*

- risk of mental illness/disturbance and trauma
- risk of HIV infection
- having sex at an early age
- risk of pregnancy
- risk of emotional stress
- risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- not having good relationships

# Conclusion and Recommendations



## **Policing, the LAW and the Justice system**

- It is imperative that investigations and prosecutions are well coordinated and consistent to prove effectiveness.
- Policemen and policewomen – need to be adequately trained – dealing with sensitive cases.

## **Psychological support services**

- Therapeutic services should be made available and accessible to all who need them and both prevention and protection programmes should be regularly evaluated for their effectiveness.

## **Programmes and community initiatives creating awareness of child sexual abuse**

- Prevention initiatives should promote and support programmes that form part of a long-term strategy of changing societal norms.

Thank you for your attention

