





Intersecting the right to health of male secondary learners in a rural Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe: Challenges and strategies

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Abstract—The study unpacks the limited literature. It deals with the barriers male learners face in rural Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe, in accessing their right to health, highlighting systemic challenges and potential strategies for improvement. This study explores the challenges of male secondary school learners regarding sexual abuse. It determines strategies to enhance their mental health support, which can protect them from sexual abuse in rural Chiredzi North in Zimbabwe. Fifteen participants were purposively selected based on gender, expertise, and geographical location, ensuring diverse representation of perspectives. They comprised four male learners, two teachers, one counsellor, one police officer, two village heads, two officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, two parents, one Ministry of Health Official, one Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs official. Data were collected through two focus group discussions: one specifically for young learners and another for adult participants. Data were subsequently analysed using thematic analysis, which facilitated identifying key themes. The findings revealed that male learners often experienced profound feelings of isolation and stigmatisation, which intensified their psychological distress and deterred them from seeking help. The findings indicated that enhancing community health education and increasing access to healthcare services are vital strategies to address male secondary learners' intersecting right to health in rural Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe. Considering these findings, recommended that educational institutions and community organisations develop and implement awareness programmes focused on the rights against sexual abuse and the right to mental health.

Keywords: Male secondary learners, Mental health, Sexual abuse, Stigmatisation

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I. INTRODUCTION

SEXUAL abuse is a critical public health concern that profoundly affects the psychological well-being of individuals, particularly adolescents. In Zimbabwe rural areas, especially in Chiredzi North, the prevalence of sexual abuse among young boys is increasingly recognised. Yet, the discourse surrounding male victims remains limited and often overshadowed by narratives focused on female survivors. This study aims to examine the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe, while also exploring the intersection of this issue with the right to health. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, provides essential rights aimed at promoting psychological well-being and protecting individuals from sexual abuse, particularly relevant in examining the consequences of sexual abuse on male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North. Section 76 guarantees the right to health care and ensures access to physical and mental health services. This is particularly vital for young boys who may suffer psychological distress because of sexual abuse, yet the lack of effective implementation of this right is evident. The government has not adequately funded mental health services or trained enough professionals to address the psychological needs of these learners, leaving many without the support they require (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013).

In terms of protection against sexual abuse, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Section 51 emphasises the right to dignity, reinforcing the idea that every individual deserves

respect. This is crucial for young boys, who may be particularly vulnerable to stigma and shame associated with being victims of abuse. However, societal attitudes often undermine this dignity, leading to silence and inaction, especially among male victims. Section 52 explicitly prohibits torture and inhumane treatment, which includes sexual abuse, yet enforcement of this provision is weak. Law enforcement agencies frequently lack the necessary training to handle such sensitive cases, resulting in a culture of impunity for perpetrators and further traumatising victims.

Additionally, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Section 53 safeguards the right to privacy, protecting individuals from arbitrary interference. This is especially important for young boys who may hesitate to report abuse due to fear of public exposure. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Section 70 ensures that victims receive fair treatment within the judicial system. Yet, many young boys encounter bias and a lack of sensitivity when seeking justice, which can deter them from coming forward. Lastly, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Section 24 guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender, which is essential for addressing the unique challenges faced by male victims of sexual abuse. Despite these constitutional protections, entrenched gender norms often perpetuate discrimination, rendering these rights less effective for young boys. A significant barrier to realising these rights is a lack of knowledge among Zimbabweans, particularly young boys, regarding their constitutional entitlements. Without awareness of their rights, these individuals are less likely to demand protection and support, perpetuating cycles of abuse and psychological distress. Educational initiatives raising awareness about these rights are critical for empowering young boys to

advocate for themselves and seek help. Overall, while the Constitution provides a framework for protecting the psychological well-being of male secondary learners, lack of effective implementation, societal stigma, and insufficient knowledge about these rights significantly hinder their realisation.

The psychological ramifications of sexual abuse are extensive, often leading to severe mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Saruchera & Chidarikire, 2025). Research indicates that male survivors may respond to trauma differently than females, frequently externalising their distress through behaviours such as aggression or substance abuse, rather than internalising it (Williams & Toney, 2023). This gendered response necessitates a deeper understanding of the unique psychological impacts of sexual abuse on male adolescents, as existing literature predominantly emphasises female experiences (Charamba & Chikonye, 2024). In rural Zimbabwe, cultural norms surrounding masculinity and sexual abuse further complicate the recovery process for male survivors.

Societal expectations often discourage men from expressing vulnerability, which can lead to underreporting of abuse and a lack of appropriate support systems (Weare, 2021). This cultural context is crucial for understanding the psychological consequences of sexual abuse among male adolescents, as it significantly influences their willingness to seek help and the types of support they receive. Furthermore, the right to health, as articulated in various international human rights frameworks, underscores the obligation of states to ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, have access to necessary health services, including mental health support (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2019). However, in rural areas like Chiredzi North, access to such services is often limited, exacerbating the psychological impact of sexual abuse on male learners. This intersection of sexual abuse, psychological well-being, and the right to health highlights a significant gap in research, particularly concerning male adolescents in rural Zimbabwe. Despite the growing body of literature on sexual abuse and its consequences, there remains a notable scarcity of studies focusing specifically on male survivors in low-resource settings. Most existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, where the socio-cultural dynamics differ significantly from Zimbabwe (Weare, 2021). This gap in the literature calls for targeted research that not only addresses the psychological effects of sexual abuse on male adolescents but also considers the unique cultural and systemic barriers they face in accessing mental health care. Additionally, few studies have examined the long-term psychological effects of sexual abuse on male adolescents, which is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems. Through addressing these gaps, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Zimbabwe, ultimately advocating for improved health services and support mechanisms.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Albert Bandura's social learning theory, introduced in the 1960s, has been a cornerstone in understanding human behaviour through observation and modelling. Another prominent proponent in psychology, Martin Seligman, has contributed significantly to the study of learned helplessness and resilience (Seligman, 2020). Seligman's work aligns with Bandura's theory. It offers a complementary perspective on how individuals respond to adversity and trauma, such as the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North. Applying Bandura's theory's five key tenets to this study, in conjunction with Seligman's insights, can provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges faced by male learners in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Firstly, the attention aspect of social learning theory highlights the importance of individuals actively engaging with observed behaviours and outcomes (Walfield et al, 2022). Educators and counsellors can help male learners focus on positive coping strategies and resilience-building

activities to enhance their psychological well-being. Secondly, as Bandura emphasised, retention involves storing observed behaviours for future use (Temkin et al., 2018). Educators can support their journey towards healing and recovery by encouraging male learners to remember and practice healthy coping mechanisms learned through observation and guidance.

Thirdly, the reproduction component of social learning theory underscores the translation of observed behaviours into actions (Reed et al., 2019). Using role-playing exercises and peer interactions, male learners can practice applying effective coping strategies in real-life situations, fostering adaptive responses to the psychological impacts of sexual abuse. Fourthly, motivation, a key element in both Bandura's theory and Seligman's work on resilience, is crucial in influencing individuals' behaviour choices (Thomas & Kopel, 2023). Creating a motivating school environment where male learners feel supported and encouraged to seek help and engage in self-care can significantly contribute to their psychological well-being. Lastly, as Bandura noted, reinforcement involves the responses individuals receive based on their actions (Margherita et al., 2021). Positive reinforcement from teachers, peers, and caregivers can reinforce healthy coping mechanisms in male learners and strengthen their resilience in the face of trauma and adversity. Through integrating Bandura's social learning theory with insights from Seligman and other scholars, educators and mental health professionals can develop tailored interventions to support male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North in overcoming the psychological consequences of sexual abuse and promoting their right to health.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The psychological consequences of sexual abuse are well-documented across various contexts, revealing a complex interplay of factors that influence the mental health of survivors. In the United States, studies have shown that male survivors of sexual abuse often experience significant mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD, like their female counterparts (Blunden et al., 2021; Saruchera & Chidarikire, 2025). However, male victims frequently face unique societal pressures that discourage them from seeking help, leading to higher rates of substance abuse and social isolation (Williams & Toney, 2023). This phenomenon is echoed in the United Kingdom, where research indicates that societal stigma surrounding male victimisation can exacerbate feelings of shame and hinder recovery efforts (Charamba & Makonye, 2024).

In Nigeria, the situation is compounded by cultural norms that often silence male victims of sexual abuse, resulting in underreporting and a lack of appropriate support systems (Weare, 2021). A study conducted in Bauchi State highlighted the urgent need for culturally sensitive interventions that address the specific needs of male adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse (Ogunyemi et al., 2021). Similarly, in Botswana, research has shown that male survivors often grapple with societal expectations of masculinity, which can impede their willingness to disclose abuse and seek psychological support (Walfield, 2021). In South Africa, the prevalence of sexual violence against boys has been increasingly recognised, yet the mental health implications for male survivors remain underexplored. McKeever (2019) found that male adolescents who experienced sexual abuse were at a heightened risk for developing mental health disorders. Yet, their services were often inadequate and poorly tailored to their needs. This gap in service provision is particularly concerning given the high rates of sexual violence reported in the region.

Compared to these international contexts, the situation in rural Zimbabwe presents unique challenges. Cultural norms surrounding masculinity and the stigma associated with male victimisation create significant barriers to recovery for male adolescents in Chiredzi North. The intersection of sexual abuse, psychological well-being, and the right to health in this context is under-researched, particularly regarding how these factors influence access to mental health services. While there is a

growing body of literature addressing the psychological effects of sexual abuse, there remains a notable scarcity of studies focusing specifically on male survivors in low-resource settings like Zimbabwe. Most existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, where the socio-cultural dynamics differ significantly from Zimbabwe (Weare, 2021). This literature review highlights several critical research gaps: the need for targeted studies on male survivors of sexual abuse in rural Zimbabwe, the exploration of cultural factors influencing their experiences, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of existing mental health services. Through addressing these gaps, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Zimbabwe, ultimately advocating for improved health services and support mechanisms.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores challenges that male secondary school learners faced in rural areas regarding sexual abuse and aims to determine strategies to enhance mental health support for rural male learners who are survivors of sexual abuse.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study empowers male students by raising awareness about the psychological consequences of sexual abuse, fostering an environment where they can seek help and support. Students can advocate for their mental health and well-being by understanding their rights and available resources. In addition, counsellors gain valuable insights into the specific psychological impacts of sexual abuse on male students, enabling them to tailor their support and interventions effectively. The findings inform training programmes and enhance their ability to provide appropriate counselling strategies. More so, teachers benefit from a deeper understanding of the signs and symptoms of psychological distress related to sexual abuse. This knowledge enables them to create a safer and more supportive classroom environment and recognize when students need additional support.

On the other hand, parents are informed about the potential effects of sexual abuse on their children's mental health. This awareness encourages open communication between parents and their children, facilitating early distress detection and supporting healing processes. Insights from the study can inform legal frameworks and policies related to the protection of children from sexual abuse. The findings may highlight the need for improved legal responses and support systems for victims, promoting justice and rehabilitation. The research underscores the importance of integrating mental health services into child welfare programmes. It can drive initiatives to develop accessible mental health resources for male survivors of sexual abuse, ensuring that health policies address these critical needs. Moreover, village heads gain a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual abuse in their communities. This knowledge empowers them to take a proactive role in community awareness campaigns and to foster a supportive environment for victims. Lastly, the findings aid police officers in understanding the complexities surrounding sexual abuse cases involving male victims. Enhanced training and awareness can lead to more sensitive and effective handling of such cases, promoting trust between law enforcement and the community.

VI. METHODS

Research approach and paradigm

The qualitative research paradigm is particularly relevant to the study of the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe, due to its capacity to provide deep insights into complex social phenomena. Qualitative research emphasises understanding the lived experiences and subjective realities of participants, which is crucial when exploring sensitive topics such as sexual abuse. This approach

allows researchers to capture the nuances of participants' feelings, perceptions, and reactions, which quantitative methods may fail to elucidate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative research is adept at contextualising individual experiences within broader socio-cultural frameworks, thereby illuminating how local beliefs and practices influence the psychological impacts of sexual abuse (Pereda et al., 2022). This is particularly pertinent in rural settings where cultural dynamics significantly shape individuals' responses to trauma (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Research design

The research design employed in this study is a qualitative exploratory design, specifically utilising focus group discussions. This design is justified as it aligns with the study's objective of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding sexual abuse. Focus group discussions are particularly effective in eliciting diverse viewpoints and fostering interactive discussions that can reveal deeper insights into collective and individual experiences (Krinkin et al., 2022).

Participants

The selection of sixteen participants was strategic, encompassing a range of stakeholders, including a member of parliament, teachers, male learners, counsellors, police officers, officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Ministry of Health workers, village heads, Ministry of Justice representatives, and parents. This diversity ensures a multifaceted perspective on the issue, enriching the data collected and allowing for a more holistic analysis of the intersecting factors affecting psychological well-being.

Research site

The research was conducted in a classroom at a rural primary school in Chiredzi North, Zimbabwe, a site chosen collaboratively by researchers and participants for its central location within the ward. This centrality ensured convenient access for all participants, a crucial factor for encouraging participation (Zalcborg, 2017). The school's access to solar-powered electricity provided a reliable power source, enabling projectors and device charging, which is particularly valuable in rural areas where electricity is often unreliable (Scott et al., 2023). Furthermore, a borehole providing clean water and functioning toilets ensured basic sanitation and hygiene for all involved in the study. These amenities contribute significantly to the well-being of participants and create a conducive environment for research, addressing critical WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) needs often lacking in rural schools (Chidarikire & Saruchera, 2024).

Data collection tools

Data collection was conducted through two focus group discussions, which is justified for several reasons. First, using two focus groups allows for exploration of themes that may emerge differently across groups, enhancing the richness of the data. The first focus group may uncover initial themes and insights, while the second can probe deeper into those themes or explore new ones that arise from the participants' interactions (Ressel et al., 2018). Additionally, the interactive nature of focus groups encourages participants to build on each other's responses, leading to richer data and a more nuanced understanding of the psychological implications of sexual abuse (Rapsey et al., 2020).

Data analysis

The analysis of data from focus group discussions employed thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this technique encompasses a systematic and iterative methodology that facilitates identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. This process unfolds across six distinct phases: initially, familiarisation involves immersing oneself in the data through thorough reading of transcripts and listening to recordings, thereby fostering a deep understanding of the material; next, generating initial codes requires systematically labelling significant features of the data pertinent to the research questions; subsequently, in the searching for themes phase, researchers collate these codes into broader themes that encapsulate the essence of the data; the reviewing themes phase entails

a rigorous examination to ensure that themes accurately represent the data and maintain coherence; in the defining and naming themes phase, researchers articulate the core of each theme, providing clarity and comprehensibility; finally, the producing the report phase involves synthesising the analysis into a coherent narrative, supported by illustrative quotes that enhance the richness of the findings. To mitigate bias in this analytical process, researchers employed strategies such as member checking and triangulation (Rapsey et al., 2020). Member checking involves presenting findings back to participants to ensure that their perspectives are accurately represented and resonate with their lived experiences; this process validates the findings and allows participants to provide feedback that may refine the analysis (Pereda et al., 2022). Triangulation, conversely, entails utilising multiple data sources or methods to corroborate findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and robustness of the conclusions drawn (Chikuvadze, 2024). Through integrating these strategies, researchers can significantly reduce the influence of personal biases, ensuring that their thematic analysis reflects the authenticity of participants' voices and experiences, ultimately yielding a more trustworthy and nuanced understanding of the data.

Ethical considerations

Key ethical principles included confidentiality, ensuring that participants' identities and personal information were protected to maintain their privacy, particularly given the topic's sensitive nature (Pankowiak et al., 2023). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study's purpose, methods, and potential impacts, ensuring that they understood their rights and the nature of their involvement (O'Gorman et al., 2023). Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study without repercussions, respecting their autonomy and agency (Mathews et al., 2024). Furthermore, participants were informed that the study was conducted solely for academic purposes, aimed at contributing to the understanding of sexual abuse's impact on psychological well-being, fostering trust, and encouraging honest participation (Zalberg, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative approach, combined with a well-structured research design and ethical considerations, provides a robust framework for exploring the complex and sensitive issue of sexual abuse and its psychological ramifications among male secondary learners in rural Zimbabwe. This study aims to illuminate individual experiences and inform policy and intervention strategies that uphold the affected individuals' right to health and well-being.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges of male secondary school learners in rural areas regarding sexual abuse

This theme meticulously examines the various hurdles confronted by male secondary learners in the rural region of Chiredzi North, particularly focusing on the intricate psychological repercussions stemming from experiences of sexual abuse. Through a detailed analysis, the research aims to shed light on the specific challenges these individuals face and their profound impact on their mental well-being. The participants engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the challenges faced by male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North concerning the psychological effects of sexual abuse. Each participant offered valuable insights from their unique perspectives.

Teacher John shared,

The psychological impact of sexual abuse on male secondary learners in our community is alarming. Many of these young men struggle with trust issues, low self-esteem, and recurring trauma that hinders their overall well-being.

Building on this, learner Takudzwa expressed,

I have seen my peers grapple with feelings of shame and isolation after experiencing sexual abuse. The lack of support systems in place exacerbates their suffering and makes it difficult for them to recover.

Mercy from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education contributed,

We need to prioritise mental health support for these male survivors. Through creating a safe and empathetic environment within schools, we can encourage open dialogue and provide the necessary assistance for their healing journey.

Dorothy from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare added,

Integrating mental health services into the educational curriculum is essential. Male survivors of sexual abuse require specialised care and attention to address their unique emotional needs and promote recovery.

The research findings from the above participants' data reveal significant psychological challenges faced by male secondary learners in Chiredzi North who have experienced sexual abuse. Participants articulated that many of these young men grapple with profound trust issues, low self-esteem, and recurring trauma, which collectively hinder their overall well-being. Teacher John emphasised the alarming psychological impact of sexual abuse, noting that these issues are prevalent among male students in the community. This aligns with existing literature that highlights how sexual abuse can lead to long-lasting psychological effects, including difficulties in forming healthy relationships and maintaining self-worth (Lusky-Weisrose, 2021). Learner Takudzwa's observations about feelings of shame and isolation among his peers further underscore the emotional toll of such trauma. The stigma surrounding male sexual abuse often exacerbates these feelings, leading to a lack of support and understanding from peers and adults alike (Coburn et al., 2019). The absence of robust support systems in rural areas, as highlighted by Takudzwa, is a significant challenge that prevents recovery and healing among these young men. Research indicates that survivors of sexual abuse often face social isolation, which can impede their recovery process (Hunt et al., 2024).

Mercy from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education stressed the urgent need for mental health support tailored to male survivors. The call for creating safe and empathetic environments within schools is crucial, as educational settings can play a pivotal role in fostering open dialogue about mental health issues. Studies show that supportive school environments can significantly enhance the recovery process for trauma survivors, promoting resilience and emotional well-being (Easton, 2019). Dorothy from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare highlighted the necessity of integrating mental health services into the educational curriculum. This approach is essential for addressing the unique emotional needs of male survivors of sexual abuse, as specialised care can facilitate their healing journey. Research has demonstrated that when mental health education is incorporated into school curricula, it not only raises awareness but also equips students with the tools to cope with trauma effectively (Haslam et al., 2023).

The discussion surrounding the psychological effects of sexual abuse on male rural students in Chiredzi North reveals a pressing need for systemic changes in how these issues are addressed. The insights provided by participants illustrate a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive approach to mental health support. The challenges identified, such as trust issues and low self-esteem, are not merely individual struggles but reflect broader societal attitudes towards male victims of sexual abuse. The stigma associated with male victimisation often leads to silence and isolation, which can exacerbate mental health issues and hinder recovery (Scott et al., 2020). The lack of support systems, as noted by Takudzwa, highlights a critical gap in the resources available to these young men. In rural settings, where access to mental health services is often limited, the need for community-based support networks becomes even more vital. Research suggests that peer support and community engagement can significantly improve the mental health outcomes for survivors of trauma, fostering a sense of belonging and understanding (Lusky-Weisrose, 2021). Mercy's call for prioritising mental health support within schools is particularly relevant in this context. Schools are uniquely positioned to provide early intervention and support for students facing psychological challenges.

Through fostering an environment that encourages open discussions about mental health, educators can help destigmatise these issues and

promote healing among male survivors (Fry et al., 2018). Furthermore, Dorothy's suggestion to integrate mental health services into the educational curriculum aligns with best practices in trauma-informed care. Such integration not only addresses the immediate needs of survivors but also educates the broader student body about the impacts of sexual abuse, fostering empathy and understanding. This proactive approach can help create a more supportive school culture, benefiting all students (Coburn et al., 2019). Consequently, the findings and discussions underscore the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions for male rural students in Chiredzi North who have experienced sexual abuse (Liamputtong, 2018). Through addressing the unique challenges, they face and fostering supportive environments, stakeholders can significantly enhance the recovery and well-being of these young men.

Strategies enhancing mental health support for male survivors of sexual abuse

The core focus of this research initiative is to delve into the realm of enhancing mental health support accessibility for male survivors of sexual abuse within the community. Through an exploratory approach, the study seeks to identify and propose effective solutions that can significantly improve the availability and effectiveness of mental health services tailored to meet the unique needs of male survivors. The goal is to contribute valuable insights and recommendations to address this critical issue and foster a more supportive environment for those in need. The following are participants' views:

Police officer Godfrey emphasised,

Law enforcement agencies must work collaboratively with mental health professionals to ensure that survivors feel protected and supported when reporting incidents of abuse. Strengthening these partnerships can lead to more effective interventions and justice for the survivors.

Counsellor Jane further elaborated,

Counselling and therapy services play a pivotal role in the healing process of male survivors. By offering confidential and non-judgmental support, we can empower these individuals to address their trauma and build resilience for the future.

Magistrate Elizabeth from the Ministry of Justice highlighted,

Legal frameworks need to be enhanced to expedite cases of sexual abuse and provide timely justice. This holds perpetrators accountable and strongly supports survivors, encouraging them to seek help without fear of repercussions.

Concluding the discussion, Ms. Toga, a parent, emphasised,

Families and caregivers must be educated on how to recognise signs of distress in male survivors and offer unconditional love and support. Creating a nurturing and understanding environment at home is crucial for their recovery and well-being.

The findings indicate that a multifaceted approach is necessary to enhance access to mental health support for male survivors of sexual abuse. Participants emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts among various sectors, particularly law enforcement and mental health services. For instance, Police Officer Godfrey highlighted that partnerships between law enforcement and mental health professionals are essential; such collaboration can foster an environment where survivors feel safe and supported when reporting incidents (Carr et al., 2019). This finding aligns with the literature indicating that integrated services can improve survivors' outcomes (Butt et al., 2011). Counsellor Jane underscored the critical role of counselling and therapy services, stating that providing confidential and non-judgmental support is vital for empowering male survivors (Charamba & Makonye, 2024; Faden et al., 2024). This perspective reflects findings from previous studies that demonstrate how therapeutic environments can significantly aid in trauma recovery (Chidarikire & Saruchera, 2025).

Additionally, Magistrate Elizabeth pointed out the need for enhanced legal frameworks that facilitate quicker resolutions for cases of sexual abuse. Timely justice holds perpetrators accountable and affirms the legitimacy of survivors' experiences, encouraging them to seek help (Williams & Toney, 2023). This assertion is supported by research showing that legal support can reduce feelings of isolation

among survivors (Easton, 2019). Moreover, the insights from Ms. Toga, a parent, regarding the importance of familial support highlight the need for education among caregivers to recognise signs of distress in male survivors (Haslam et al., 2023). The significance of a nurturing home environment is echoed in the literature, emphasising that supportive family dynamics can greatly influence recovery trajectories (Finkelhor et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings underscore the necessity of a comprehensive, systemic approach to improve mental health support access for male survivors of sexual abuse.

The discussion surrounding the data above from participants reveals the critical interplay between various societal elements in enhancing mental health support for male survivors of sexual abuse. The collaborative relationship between law enforcement and mental health professionals, as suggested by Officer Godfrey, is essential for creating a safe reporting environment and ensuring that survivors receive the necessary psychological support (Carr et al., 2019). This collaboration can mitigate the fear of stigmatisation that often prevents survivors from coming forward (Butt et al., 2011). Counsellor Jane's emphasis on providing confidential therapeutic services illustrates a fundamental aspect of recovery, psychological safety. By fostering a space where survivors feel empowered to confront their trauma, mental health professionals can facilitate resilience-building (Charamba & Makonye, 2024). This aligns with the understanding in trauma-informed care that survivors must feel safe and supported to engage in healing processes (Chidarikire & Saruchera, 2025).

Magistrate Elizabeth's call for strengthened legal frameworks is particularly pertinent; the legal system profoundly impacts survivors' willingness to seek help (Williams & Toney, 2023). Through enhancing legal protections and expediting judicial processes, society can communicate that survivors' rights are paramount, thereby reducing the stigma surrounding their experiences (Easton, 2019). Finally, Ms. Toga's insights into the role of families underscore the necessity for community education programmes aimed at helping caregivers recognise and respond to the needs of male survivors (Liamputtong, 2018). Building awareness and understanding within families can create supportive environments crucial for recovery (Ressel et al., 2018). Thus, the interplay among law enforcement, mental health services, legal frameworks, and familial support forms a comprehensive strategy to enhance access to mental health support for male survivors of sexual abuse in the community.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The examination of the consequences of sexual abuse on the psychological well-being of male secondary learners in rural Chiredzi North reveals a pressing issue that requires immediate attention from multiple stakeholders. This study highlights the significant psychological impacts, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, that male survivors endure, often exacerbated by societal stigma and a lack of accessible mental health resources. The intersection of the right to health is critical, as failing to address these psychological needs infringes individual rights and undermines the community's overall well-being. It is essential to recognise that addressing the mental health challenges faced by these learners demands a coordinated and multifaceted approach involving learners, educators, health professionals, law enforcement, parents, community leaders, counsellors, and legal authorities. To foster a supportive environment for male survivors, learners should be encouraged to communicate openly about their experiences and seek help when needed. Teachers need training to identify signs of distress and create safe spaces for students to express their feelings. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must integrate mental health education into the curriculum, ensuring students know available resources.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare should enhance community mental health services tailored for male survivors and train healthcare providers to address their specific needs effectively. Law enforcement agencies must implement specialised training to

handle cases of sexual abuse sensitively, encouraging survivors to report incidents without fear of stigma. Parents play a crucial role and should be educated on recognising signs of abuse and fostering open communication in the home. Village heads can lead community awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of mental health and establish safe reporting mechanisms. Counsellors should develop targeted support programmes for male survivors and engage with the community to promote mental health services. Finally, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs should strengthen legal protections for survivors and provide training for legal personnel on the psychological implications of sexual abuse and constitutional rights. Through adopting these recommendations collaboratively, the community can create a robust support system that not only addresses the mental health needs of male survivors but also promotes a culture of understanding, healing, and resilience.

IX. DATA AVAILABILITY

The data materials are available and currently locked in the computer using passwords. The data is available upon request. However, data without participants' confidential information will be shared upon request.

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XII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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