



Prevalence and Management of Child Sexual Abuse in Public Schools in Lapai Town, Niger State. A Gender Based Study



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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This gender-based study investigated the prevalence, knowledge, and institutional management of child sexual abuse (CSA) cases among students in public secondary schools in Lapai Town, Niger State, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, data were collected from 97 students (JSS 1–SSS 3) using a structured questionnaire across ten randomly selected schools between January and December 2024. Findings revealed that 10.31% of students experienced some form of CSA, with peer and teacher-perpetrated abuse each accounting for 4.12%. Gender disparities were evident: males reported higher peer abuse (8.0% vs. 0.0%), while females experienced more teacher abuse (6.4% vs. 2.0%). Although institutional reporting mechanisms were widely perceived as available, 97.9% acknowledged guidance offices and 91.8% cited confidential reporting. Actual help-seeking remained low due to barriers like teacher threats (17.5%), community tradition (15.5%), and shame (13.4%), all disproportionately affecting females. Consequently, 4.1% of the students, mostly girls, dropped out due to harassment. While students demonstrated high awareness of overt abuse (e.g., genital mutilation: 88.7%), recognition of subtle grooming behaviours (e.g., “Teacher says I love you”: 52.6%) was critically low, especially among males. The study concludes that despite structural readiness, systemic vulnerabilities persist due to socio cultural silencing and inadequate education on covert abuse tactics. The study recommends gender-sensitive CSA curricula, mandatory teacher training, strengthened child protection protocols, and community engagement to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring safer school environments for all children.

CITATION

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INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a pervasive global issue and a serious violation of human rights, posing significant challenges to the health and well-being of young people (Obi *et al.*, 2023). It includes any sexual activity between an adult and a child, or between children, where there is a significant power imbalance (Mihret *et al.*, 2025). Sexual

abuse can take many forms, including physical contact, exposure to explicit materials, and online exploitation (Mihret *et al.*, 2025; Finkelhor *et al.*, 2024). The consequences of CSA are far-reaching, affecting victims' psychological, emotional, and physical health, often leading to long-term issues such as posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and risky sexual behaviours (Onyishi, 2022; Alix *et al.*, 2017).

CSA remains a major concern in Nigeria, with studies showing differing prevalence rates across regions (Onyishi, 2022; David *et al.*, 2018). In Ibadan, Nigeria, 55% of students reported experiencing CSA. Another study involving university undergraduates in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, aimed to assess the prevalence and factors predicting sexual abuse to inform targeted prevention efforts (Obi *et al.*, 2023). These results highlight the critical need for more specialized research and community-specific intervention strategies within Nigeria.

Schools which are meant to be safe spaces for children, are not immune to CSA risks (Küçükaydinet *al.*, 2023; Walsh *et al.*, 2013). Teachers and principals are vital in detecting and reporting CSA cases (Küçükaydinet *al.*, 2023). However, their willingness to report is influenced by their awareness of CSA, self-efficacy, and access to information about abuse (Küçükaydinet *al.*, 2023). Thus, raising awareness and offering proper support to school staff are crucial for effective CSA prevention and intervention.

Lapai Town in Niger State, Nigeria, needs focused attention due to scarce data on the prevalence and handling of CSA in its public schools (Suleiman, 2023). Grasping the local context is essential for creating effective intervention approaches. This research aims to determine the rate of CSA among students in public schools in Lapai Town and to examine gender differences in experiences and reporting of CSA (Banton and West, 2020). Ultimately, the study intends to supply essential information for educators, policymakers, and parents, aiding in the development of targeted prevention and response strategies to protect children and foster a safer school environment.

Child Sexual Abuse: A Global Perspective

Child sexual abuse (CSA) represents a grave violation of human rights and poses a significant threat to the health and well-being of young individuals worldwide (Obi *et al.*, 2023). CSA encompasses any sexual activity between an adult and a child or between children where a power imbalance exists (Alix *et al.*, 2017). The global prevalence of CSA is a pressing concern, with considerable variations reported across different regions and populations. However, much of the existing literature on CSA prevalence relies on retrospective adult reports or clinical samples, which may underestimate current rates among school-aged populations (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, while international studies provide valuable frameworks, they often reflect Western contexts and may not fully capture the sociocultural dynamics that influence CSA in African settings, where family honour, community silence, and patriarchal structures create unique barriers to disclosure and intervention (UN Women, 2019).

In Nigeria, studies indicate significant rates of CSA, yet these investigations remain concentrated in major urban centers such as Ibadan and Benin City (Obi *et al.*, 2023; David *et al.*, 2018). While David *et al.* (2018) found that 55% of students in Ibadan reported experiencing CSA, and Obi *et al.* (2023) examined predictors among university undergraduates in Benin City, these studies present methodological limitations that restrict their applicability to smaller towns and rural contexts. Notably, both studies focused on either older adolescents or retrospective accounts, leaving a critical gap in understanding current CSA experiences among younger secondary school students. Additionally, the emphasis on prevalence without adequate examination of institutional responses and management mechanisms limits the practical utility of these findings for educational policymakers.

Child Sexual Abuse in Educational Settings

Schools, which should serve as protective environments, have increasingly been recognized as sites where CSA can occur (Küçükaydinet *al.*, 2023; Walsh *et al.*, 2013). Teachers and school administrators play crucial roles in identifying and reporting CSA cases, yet research reveals significant gaps in their preparedness and willingness to intervene. Küçükaydinet *al.* (2023) demonstrated that teachers' attitudes toward reporting CSA are influenced by their awareness, self-efficacy, and access to information about abuse. However, this study was conducted in Turkey, raising questions about the transferability of findings to Nigerian contexts where teacher training, resources, and accountability mechanisms differ substantially. Moreover, existing studies predominantly examine teachers' perspectives while neglecting students' own perceptions of institutional readiness and the barriers they face in reporting abuse to school authorities.

Walsh *et al.* (2013) reviewed school-based CSA prevention education in Australia, highlighting the importance of comprehensive curricula. Yet their analysis reveals a significant gap: most prevention programs focus on stranger danger and overt physical abuse while inadequately addressing grooming behaviours, peer-to-peer abuse, and the subtle boundary violations that often precede more serious abuse. This limitation is particularly concerning in Nigerian contexts, where research on students' knowledge of CSA indicators remains sparse, and no studies have systematically assessed whether students can recognize both overt and covert forms of abuse across different perpetrator types (teachers, peers, family members).

Online Sexual Abuse and Evolving Threat Landscapes

With increasing internet penetration, online sexual abuse has emerged as a significant concern globally (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2024). Research efforts have focused on measuring various forms of online CSA and incorporating these into

overall prevalence rates, with studies showing gender disparities in victimization. However, the literature on online CSA in Nigerian secondary schools remains virtually non-existent. While Finkelhor *et al.* (2024) provide valuable data on weighted prevalence by gender in developed countries, the applicability of these findings to contexts with different internet access patterns, digital literacy levels, and regulatory frameworks remains unclear. This represents a critical gap, as Nigerian adolescents' increasing smartphone access may expose them to online risks that current school-based interventions do not address.

Gender-Based Differences in Child Sexual Abuse

Gender plays a significant role in CSA experiences, perceptions, and reporting behaviors (Banton and West, 2020; Lebovitz *et al.*, 2021). Banton and West (2020) demonstrated that the gender of victims, offenders, and observers impacts perceptions of offense seriousness, while Lebovitz *et al.* (2021) showed higher frequencies of sexual assault among females compared to males. However, these studies examined perceptions and trauma outcomes rather than investigating how gender influences actual abuse patterns by perpetrator type within specific institutional settings. Furthermore, existing research has not adequately explored how gender intersects with sociocultural factors such as community traditions, shame, and power dynamics to create differential barriers to help-seeking in Nigerian school contexts. While Alix *et al.* (2017) established that shame mediates the relationship between sexual abuse and negative outcomes among adolescent girls, this finding emerged from Western samples. The role of shame and other culturally specific barriers (such as threats by teachers, family intervention, and community pressure to maintain silence) in preventing Nigerian students from accessing institutional support mechanisms remains unexplored. This gap is particularly critical given that Nigerian society's patriarchal structures and honour-based values may create unique gendered barriers not captured in existing international literature.

Research Gaps and Study Justification

Analysis of existing literature reveals significant gaps that this study addresses. Existing Nigerian CSA research concentrates on major urban centers (Ibadan, Benin City, Lagos), while smaller towns and semi-urban areas like Lapai remain understudied. Abdulkadir *et al.* (2011) identified this gap over a decade ago in their review of CSA cases at General Hospital Suleja, Niger State. Yet, no subsequent school-based prevalence studies have been conducted in Niger State, despite its unique sociocultural characteristics and proximity to the Federal Capital Territory.

Furthermore, while existing studies report overall CSA prevalence, they inadequately disaggregate abuse by perpetrator categories (teachers, peers, parents) and fail to examine how these patterns differ by gender. No Nigerian study has systematically compared rates of teacher-perpetrated versus peer-perpetrated abuse among male and female students, despite the distinct prevention and intervention implications of each perpetrator type.

Although existing studies acknowledge gender differences in abuse rates, but do not systematically examine how gender intersects with specific barriers (threats, shame, family pressure, tradition) to inhibit help-seeking differentially. Understanding these gendered patterns is essential for designing effective, culturally appropriate interventions in Nigerian schools. This study addresses these gaps by providing the first comprehensive, gender-disaggregated analysis of CSA in Lapai Town's public secondary schools, examining prevalence by perpetrator type, assessing students' knowledge of abuse indicators, evaluating institutional readiness, and identifying gender-specific barriers to help-seeking.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional descriptive research design to examine the prevalence and management of child sexual abuse (CSA) among students in public secondary schools in Lapai Town, Niger State. The cross-sectional approach was chosen for its effectiveness in collecting data at a specific point in time, enabling the assessment of the current state of CSA prevalence, students' knowledge, and institutional responses within the study area. This design is especially suitable for exploring relationships between variables such as gender differences in abuse experiences, knowledge levels, and barriers to reporting. The descriptive nature of the study allows for systematic documentation and characterisation of CSA in the school environment without manipulating variables.

Study Population and Sample Size

The study population comprised students enrolled in public secondary schools in Lapai town in Niger State, Nigeria. Specifically, the target population included students in both Junior Secondary School (JSS 1–3) and Senior Secondary School (SSS 1–3) attending schools registered with the Niger State Ministry of Education. This population was selected based on the developmental maturity of adolescents at this educational level, who are considered capable of understanding and discussing sensitive topics related to sexual abuse experiences. The senior secondary school system in Nigeria comprises predominantly middle and late adolescents, age groups that constitute the majority of the study population and are

at a critical developmental stage for understanding consent, boundaries, and abuse (David *et al.*, 2018). A total sample of 97 students participated in the study. This sample size was determined to be adequate for a descriptive study of this nature, providing sufficient data for meaningful analysis of prevalence rates, gender-based differences, and patterns of knowledge and reporting behaviours. The sample included representation from both male and female students across different class levels (JSS 1–SSS 3) to ensure diversity in age, gender, and educational experience within the secondary school system.

Sampling Procedure and Technique

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representative coverage across the geographical and administrative divisions of Lapai metropolis. Lapai Local Government Area is divided into ten (10) administrative wards, namely: Arewa/Yamma, Birnin Maza/Tashiba, Ebbo/Gbacinku, Evuti/Kpada, Gulu/Anguwan Vatsa, Gupa/Abugi, Gurdi/Zago, Kudu/Gabas, Muye/Egba, and Takuti/Shaku. Each of these wards was identified as a stratum to ensure geographical representation and account for potential socio-cultural variations across different areas of the metropolis. From each of the ten wards, one public secondary school was randomly selected, resulting in a total of ten schools included in the study. This stratified approach ensured that every ward was represented in the sample, thereby enhancing the generalizability of findings across the entire Lapai metropolis. The random selection within each stratum minimized selection bias and provided equal opportunity for all public secondary schools within each ward to participate in the study. Following the selection of schools, students from JSS 1 to SSS 3 were recruited from each of the selected schools. The recruitment process involved obtaining necessary ethical approvals and permissions from school authorities, parents/guardians, and the students themselves. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent/assent procedures were strictly followed to ensure ethical compliance and protection of participants' rights and welfare.

Table 1: Knowledge of Sexual Abuse

Knowledge of Sexual Abuse	Male (%)	Female (%)	Overall (%)
Mutilation of male or female genital organs.	90.0	87.2	88.7
Adult engage in sexual talk with a child.	78.0	91.5	84.5
Students have sexual relation with anybody	60.0	78.7	69.1
Having sexual relationship with another child	72.0	85.1	78.4
Parents mutilate the genitals of their child.	66.0	63.8	64.9
Teacher mutilated the genital of his students.	70.0	61.7	66.0
Teachers have sexual relationships with students	88.0	93.6	90.7
The teachersays to the students I love you	32.0	74.5	52.6
Other students say I love you	18.0	70.2	43.3
The teacherplays and touchesthe student's body	74.0	89.4	81.4

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted between January and December 2024 using structured questionnaires designed to assess students' experiences of child sexual abuse, their knowledge of CSA indicators and behaviours, awareness of institutional reporting mechanisms, and barriers to seeking help. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert-scale items to capture quantitative data on prevalence rates and attitudinal measures. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to examine gender-based differences and patterns in CSA experiences, knowledge levels, and reporting behaviours. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for data entry and analysis. Results were presented in tables and figures to facilitate clear interpretation and comparison of findings across gender groups and other demographic variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Disparities in Students' Knowledge of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

The results in Table1 reveal gender disparities in students' knowledge of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Lapai's public schools. Overall, female students demonstrated higher awareness across most indicators, notably in recognizing inappropriate teacher-student interactions (e.g., "Teacher has a sexual relationship with students": 93.6% females vs. 88.0% males; "Teacher plays and touches the student's body": 89.4% vs. 74.0%). This aligns with global literature suggesting girls are more frequently socialized to identify boundary violations (UNICEF, 2020). The limited awareness of subtle grooming cues, like verbal affection ("Teacher say I love you": 52.6% overall; "Other students say I love you": 43.3%), highlights a significant knowledge gap, particularly among males. This implies students might see emotionally manipulative behaviours as normal, which could heighten their risk of experiencing abuse.

High awareness of extreme acts (e.g., genital mutilation: 88.7%) contrasts with lower recognition of peer-to-peer abuse (“Students have sexual relations with anybody”: 69.1%), revealing a tendency to associate CSA only with adult perpetrators or violent acts. The result shows the need for gender-sensitive, comprehensive CSA education that addresses covert grooming tactics and peer abuse, particularly targeting male students who showed consistently lower awareness. School-based interventions must move beyond extreme examples to include relational and emotional boundary violations.

Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Public Secondary Schools

Figure 1 illustrates the prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) experiences and awareness among students in public schools in Lapai, Niger State. The highest reported

rate (10.31%) indicates that over 10% of respondents had experienced any form of sexual abuse, highlighting a significant public health concern in the school environment. Notably, 6.19% of students reported knowing others who had been abused, suggesting exposure and potential underreporting. Abuse by teachers and peers was equally prevalent at 4.12% each, indicating that both authority figures and peers pose substantial risks. This finding aligns with global studies showing educators as frequent perpetrators due to power imbalances (UNICEF, 2018). Peer abuse shows the need for peer education and bystander intervention programs. Abuse by parents was the least reported at 2.06%, possibly due to cultural taboos, fear of family disruption, or underreporting. However, even this low figure reflects a serious issue requiring attention.

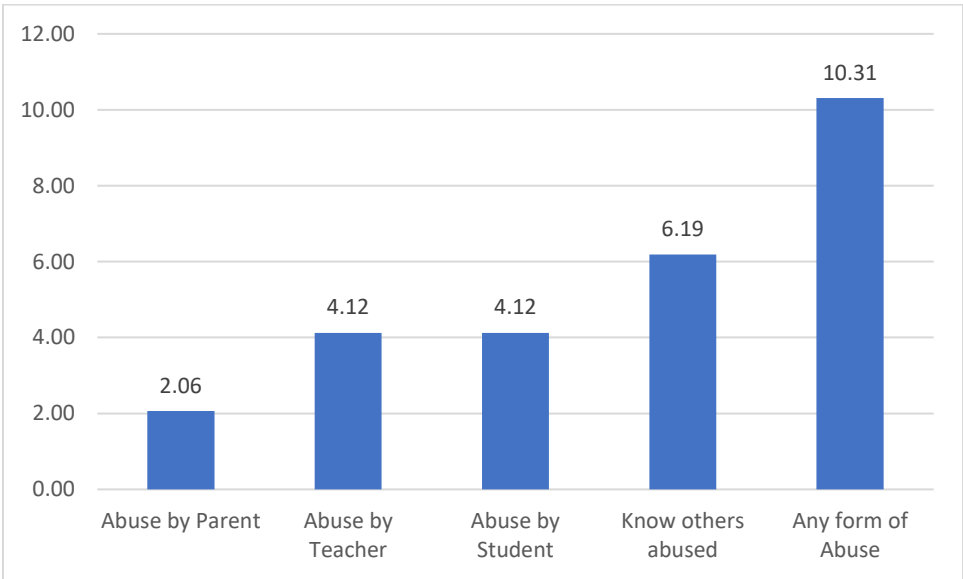


Figure 1: Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Public Secondary Schools

Gender Distribution of Prevalence of CSA by Perpetrator Type

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of child sexual abuse (CSA) among male students in public schools in Lapai, Niger State, by perpetrator type. The majority (88.0%) of male respondents reported no abuse, indicating a relatively lower prevalence compared to other groups or forms of abuse. However, 8.0% reported abuse by fellow students, which is the most common form of abuse experienced by males in this study. This suggests that peer-to-peer sexual abuse is a significant concern within

school settings, possibly due to power dynamics, lack of supervision, or inadequate gender-sensitive education. Abuse by teachers and parents was reported at 2.0% each, indicating that while less frequent than peer abuse, it remains a serious issue. Teacher-perpetrated abuse is particularly alarming given the trust and authority teachers hold, and its occurrence may reflect systemic failures in oversight and ethical training. Parental abuse, though low, underscores the need for family-based interventions and support systems.

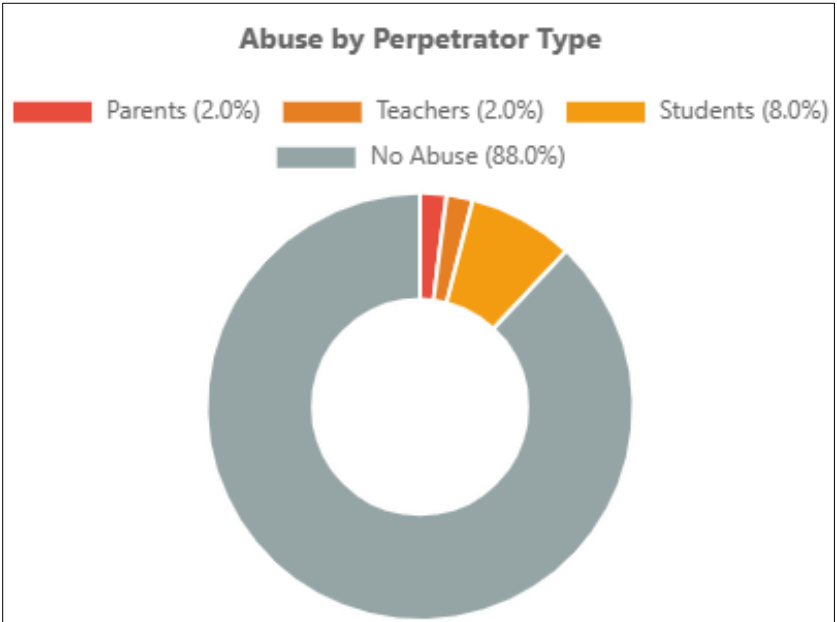


Figure 2: Distribution of child sexual abuse (CSA) among male students

The pie chart (Figure 2) presents the distribution of child sexual abuse (CSA) among female students in public schools in Lapai, Niger State, by perpetrator type. The majority of female respondents (91.5%) reported no abuse, indicating a relatively low prevalence of documented CSA experiences. However, the remaining cases reveal concerning patterns: 6.4% reported abuse by teachers and 2.1% by parents, with no reported abuse by fellow students.

Parental abuse at 2.1% reflects intrafamilial risks, which may be underreported due to fear, shame, or cultural stigma. The absence of peer abuse cases may stem from underreporting or social norms discouraging disclosure of such incidents among girls. Males report higher overall abuse (12.0%) but different perpetrator patterns - teachers abuse more females (6.4% vs 2.0%), while peer abuse only affects males (8.0% vs 0.0%).

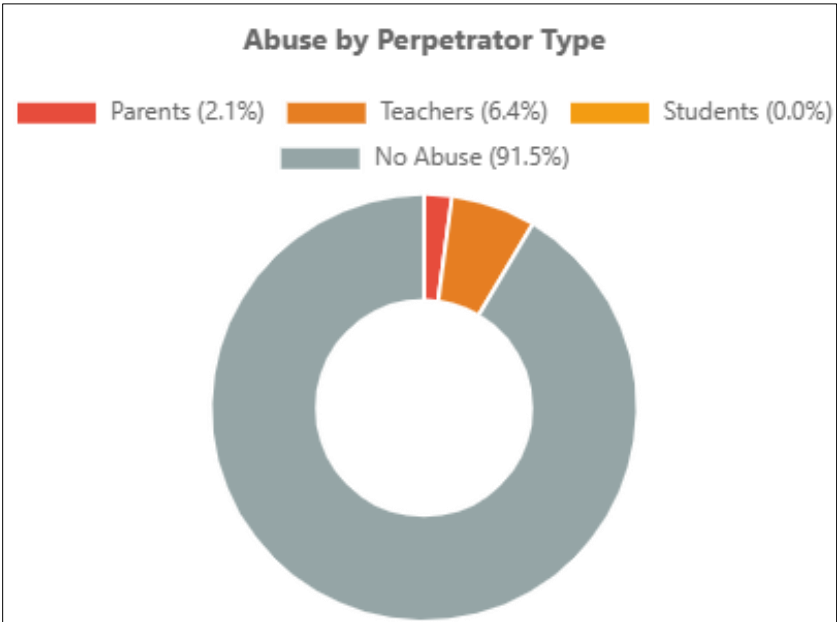


Figure 3: Distribution of child sexual abuse (CSA) among female students

Table 2 reveals critical gendered barriers preventing child sexual abuse (CSA) victims in Lapai’s public schools from seeking help. Female students consistently reported

higher rates of inhibition across most factors, particularly threats by teachers (21.3% vs. 14.0% males), community tradition (19.1% vs. 12.0%), and shame (17.0% vs. 10.0%).

Threats by teachers are the most cited barrier overall (17.5%), which highlights the abuse of institutional power, with girls more vulnerable to coercion. Community tradition (15.5%) suggests cultural norms discourage disclosure, framing abuse as a “family matter” or taboo. Shame (13.4%) equally affected both genders, indicating internalized stigma remains a universal obstacle. Notably,

while parental intervention was a barrier for males (10.0%), it was less so for females (6.4%), possibly reflecting greater parental control over boys’ decisions or underreporting by girls fearing retaliation. The result also shows that 4.1% of students, mostly girls, dropped out of school due to harassment, signalling education disruption as a direct consequence of unaddressed CSA.

Table 2: Factors Prevent Victims from Seeking Help

Factors	Male	Female	Overall
Threats by my teacher	14.0	21.3	17.5
Community tradition	12.0	19.1	15.5
Parent stopped me	10.0	6.4	8.2
I drop school due to sexual harassment in our school	2.0	6.4	4.1
Fear and panic	12.0	14.9	13.4
Shame	10.0	17.0	13.4

Source: Author’s Fieldwork (2024)

Institutional Readiness of CSA Reporting

Table 3 reveals a high level of perceived institutional readiness for reporting child sexual abuse (CSA) in Lapai’s public schools, with over 90% of students, both male and female, affirming the existence of reporting mechanisms. Notably, 97.9% reported the presence of a guidance and counselling office, while 96.9% felt encouraged to report peer abuse and 95.9% to report abusive teachers, indicating strong institutional messaging. Confidential reporting arrangements were acknowledged by 91.8%, while gender differences were minimal, though

females showed marginally higher confidence (89.4% vs. 88.0%) in reporting, possibly reflecting greater engagement with support systems. However, this perceived readiness contrasts sharply with earlier findings showing low actual reporting and high barriers (e.g., threats, shame). This gap suggests that while structures exist, trust in their effectiveness, safety, or responsiveness may be lacking. Students may doubt confidentiality, fear retaliation, or perceive inaction, rendering formal mechanisms underutilized.

Table 3: Institutional Readiness of CSA Reporting

Mechanisms for Reportage	Male	Female	Overall
Confidence to report any act of sexual abuse	88.0	89.4	88.7
We have guidance and counseling office to report any act of sexual abuse.	98.0	97.9	97.9
We are encourage to report any act of sexual abuse among students.	98.0	95.7	96.9
We are encourage to report any teacher who sexually abuse any student in our school.	96.0	95.7	95.9
There is confidential arrangement to report sexual abuse in my school	92.0	91.5	91.8

Source: Author’s Fieldwork (2024)

Discussion of Results

This study reveals that child sexual abuse remains a significant concern in Lapai’s public secondary schools, with 10.31% of students reporting victimization. This prevalence aligns with findings from similar Nigerian contexts, including studies in Ibadan and Benin City (Obi *et al.*, 2023; David *et al.*, 2018), confirming that CSA is not isolated to urban centres but permeates smaller towns like Lapai. The equal prevalence of teacher-perpetrated and peer-perpetrated abuse (4.12% each) underscores that vulnerability exists across multiple relational contexts within schools, contradicting assumptions that abuse primarily involves adult perpetrators. Gender disparities in abuse patterns are striking. Males predominantly experienced peer abuse (8.0% vs. 0.0% for

females), while females were more vulnerable to teacher abuse (6.4% vs. 2.0% for males). This pattern reflects gendered power dynamics where girls face exploitation by authority figures due to hierarchical vulnerability, while boys encounter peer-based abuse within horizontal social structures (Banton and West, 2020). The absence of reported peer abuse among girls may indicate underreporting rather than absence, given sociocultural stigma surrounding female sexuality in Nigerian contexts. A critical finding is the disconnect between institutional readiness and actual help-seeking behaviour. Despite 97.9% of students acknowledging guidance offices and 91.8% citing confidential reporting mechanisms, disclosure remains suppressed by formidable barriers. Females face disproportionate silencing through teacher

threats (21.3%), community traditions (19.1%), and shame (17.0%), reflecting entrenched patriarchal norms that protect institutional reputation over victim welfare (UN Women, 2019). The 4.1% dropout rate due to harassment, predominantly affecting girls, demonstrates how unaddressed abuse directly disrupts educational access, perpetuating gender inequality.

Students' knowledge gaps are equally concerning. While awareness of overt physical abuse is high (88.7% for genital mutilation), recognition of subtle grooming behaviours remains critically low, particularly among males, who showed only 52.6% awareness of inappropriate verbal affection. This suggests that prevention education focuses excessively on extreme violence while neglecting the relational boundary violations that often precede physical abuse (Finkelhor et al., 2024). The lower awareness among males indicates gender-specific socialization patterns that may normalize certain boundary transgressions, increasing vulnerability. These findings collectively reveal that structural mechanisms alone cannot address CSA without confronting the sociocultural norms that silence victims and the educational deficits that prevent recognition of covert abuse. Effective intervention requires culturally grounded, gender-responsive approaches that build trust, dismantle harmful traditions, and educate students on the full spectrum of abusive behaviours.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that child sexual abuse is a tangible reality in Lapai's public secondary schools, with one in ten students (10.31%) reporting victimization. Three critical findings emerge with significant implications for policy and practice. First, abuse manifests through distinct gendered patterns: males experience predominantly peer-perpetrated abuse (8.0%), while females face teacher-perpetrated abuse at triple the male rate (6.4% vs. 2.0%). This divergence demands perpetrator-specific interventions rather than generic prevention programs. Second, a dangerous paradox exists between institutional infrastructure and student utilization, despite near-universal awareness of reporting mechanisms (97.9%), actual disclosure remains suppressed by gender-differentiated barriers, with females experiencing significantly higher rates of teacher threats (21.3%), community tradition pressures (19.1%), and shame (17.0%). Thirdly, students demonstrate knowledge deficits in recognising covert grooming behaviours, with only 52.6% identifying inappropriate verbal affection, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation that precedes physical abuse.

These findings reveal that Lapai's schools operate in a state of structural readiness without functional protection. The 4.1% dropout rate due to harassment predominantly affecting girls demonstrates that unaddressed CSA

directly disrupts educational access and perpetuates gender inequality. The study's significance extends beyond documentation of prevalence to exposing the mechanisms through which sociocultural norms, power hierarchies, and knowledge gaps converge to silence victims and enable perpetrators. Without targeted intervention addressing these specific vulnerabilities, existing institutional structures will remain symbolic rather than substantive safeguards. This study provides the evidence base necessary for transforming Lapai's schools from potential sites of harm into genuinely protective environments where all children can learn safely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To bridge this gap, the study recommends: (1) gender-sensitive CSA curricula that teach recognition of covert grooming; (2) mandatory, trauma-informed training for teachers and staff; (3) community engagement to dismantle harmful norms; and (4) survivor-centered, confidential reporting systems with visible accountability measures. Only through coordinated, culturally grounded, and gender-responsive interventions can Lapai's schools transform from potential sites of harm into sanctuaries of safety and healing for all children.

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