

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN WOLDIYA HIGH SCHOOL, NORTH WOLLO, ETHIOPIA 2014.

**Haftu Berhe <sup>1</sup>, Getachew G.<sup>2</sup>, Semaria B <sup>1</sup> & Mulugeta W. <sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> College Health Sciences, Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia

<sup>2</sup>College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Adigrat University, Tigray, Ethiopia

**Email:** [guchosole@yahoo.com](mailto:guchosole@yahoo.com)

(Received on Date: 7th July 2015

Date of Acceptance: 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015)

### ABSTRACT

Background: - Sexual abuse is one of the major problems of students that affect their health and security. Though Sexual abuse of girls is a problem of many developing countries including Ethiopia, its prevalence, associated factors and circumstance in which sexual abuse occurs are largely unknown including in the study area. Objectives: - To assess the prevalence of sexual abuse of female students and associated factors in Woldiya public high school, 2014. Methods: School based cross sectional study design was conducted in May 20-23, 2014. A stratified random sampling method was used to select 314 female students from the school (Grade 9 up to 12) in all sections by using structured self administered questionnaires considering proportional to size allocation. Data collectors were teachers from North East Health Science College near the study area that are recruited and trained for two days by the principal investigator. Data was checked for its completeness, entered and analyzed using SPSS version-20 statistical software. The cross tabulation and Percentage were used to describe the prevalence and forms of female sexual abuse in the school and binary logistic regression was employed to see the association between the dependent and independent variables. Independent variables that had borderline association with the dependent variable were entered into a model to look for confounding effect in a binary logistic regression. Informed consent was obtained both from the students and the school. Finally the result was presented by tables, graphs and text appropriately. Results: Out of 314 female students, 149 (47.5%) of them are sexually abused and the rest 165 (52.5%) are not abused which means its prevalence rate is 47.5%. The odds of experiencing sexual abuse among grade 9 students (AOR=0.026; 95% CI; 0.03-0.254) was 97.4%. Similarly the odds of experiencing sexual abuse in those students who have fear of failure (AOR=0.023; 95% CI; 0.001-0.485) was 97.7%. Conclusions and Recommendations: Sexual abuse of female students is a common problem in Woldiya public high school. Socio-demographic, school, individual and situational factors are predictor variables for female sexual abuse in the study area. Due attention is needed by schools, parents and other concerned bodies and designing a program to fight against sexual abuse should include young school girls

Key words: Female students, sexual abuse, Prevalence

## INTRODUCTION

It has been increasingly recognized that sexual abuse in schools is one of the major concerns with regard to promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (1). Almost all children in Africa are exposed to some form of physical, sexual and psychological abuse at home, at school and in the community (2). "Schools are expected to provide safe and protective environment{s} for students. In this respect, the FDRE Constitution of 1995 and the Federal Ministry of Education guidelines discourage the use of corporal punishment in schools. However sexual and physical attacks persist: "male teachers used their position of authority to influence female students into having sexual affairs with them commonly, male students and neighborhood adolescent boys also perpetrated sexual violence against female students (3). Home, school, community, microcosms of the society at large, sharing cause and effect, as one section of society impacts and color the other. Family sits at the very heart of the community. The values promoted and expressed the nature of relationships within the home and the general attitudes adopted, condition the community at large. Teachers, who move into the school from a home where children are violated, physically beaten and sexually mistreated, will inevitably express these attitudes to their students. The same applies to adolescent boys loitering outside schools intimidating and sexually harassing young girls as the walk to and from school (3).

According to UNICEF report sexual abuse against children is recognized internationally as the most severe violation of their human rights and the worst form of abuse and exploitation (4). In the *WHO multi-country study*, the reported prevalence of sexual abuse before the age of 15 years by someone other than an intimate partner, ranged from 1% in rural Bangladesh to over 21% in urban areas of Namibia (5). Despite the widespread nature of childhood sexual abuse, there have been few studies of the prevalence in certain regions until recently. A number of new studies are currently under way in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2009, a nationally representative sample of 1242 girls and women, aged 13–24 years, in Swaziland, found that 33.2% of respondents reported an incident of sexual abuse before they reached the age of 18 years (6). In recent years, though, some countries have introduced laws prohibiting sexual relations between teachers and pupils. Such measures are important in helping eradicate sexual harassment in schools. At the same time, a wider range of actions is also needed, including changes to teacher training and recruitment and reforms of curricula, so as to transform gender relations in schools (3). There are few concerns of childhood in Ethiopia that are safe it seems. "In schools, some take advantage of their positions and force students to engage in sex with them in return for better grades and other favors. Such instances take place in primary and secondary schools. Attending school even becomes a torture then, everyday filled with uncertainty and the fear of physical violence, verbal insults or sexual

intimidation. We feel like we are totally at the mercy of our teachers as they beat us for good or bad reasons. More than 90% of students were punished by their teachers, although 70% of teachers were aware of the negative effects of corporal punishment but continue nevertheless, one may rightly then question the degree of their 'awareness' (7). It was found several effects were likely to occur, the major ones were: female student poor performance, pregnancy, early marriage and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) infections (1). Empirical evidence suggested that the sexual abuse as well as the commercial sexual exploitation of children is very rampant in Ethiopia. One recent study conducted in five regional states (Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, and Tigray Addis Ababa) by African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) covered the state of violence against children in Ethiopia including sexual violence (8). It potentially has serious and long term effects on all aspects of a child's development. Children subjected to such type of abuse and exploitation become vulnerable to experience of depression, low self-esteem, problems with trusting others, anger, poor social skills, substance abuse, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), various forms of physical harm and others (9). Furthermore, by robbing children of their ability to reach their full potential, sexual abuse and exploitation of children have negative implications for society's development as a whole (8). Though the above studies explain sexual abuse, they did not show the prevalence and its associated factors of sexual abuse comprehensively at the local, national and global level. It also

failed to give a full insight about the prevalence and its associated factors of child sexual abuse at school level. Secondly, most of the previous studies were done out of Woldiya and not on school based associated factors rather concerned on general factors. Thus, this research was done to fill those gaps through exploring the prevalence and explaining the major associated factors of female sexual abuse in Woldiya public high school. Therefore, this research claims its own uniqueness due to the reason that, it is an additional scientific attempt that assesses the prevalence and associated factors of sexual abuse at school.

### Methods and Materials

A cross sectional study design was conducted in governmental and private high schools in 314 female students from May 20-23, 2014. A stratified random sampling method and self-administered questionnaire was used to select the study participants from all sections (grade 9 up to grade 12) proportional to size allocation. Stratification was made first by grade and sex (Male students were excluded). Then, considering their age further stratification was done. Finally, by simple random sampling techniques study participants were selected from all sections (grade 9 up to grade 12) proportional to size allocation. In order to assure the quality of data, the following measures were undertaken. Questionnaires were prepared first in English then translated to local language (Amharic) by an expert and back to English language to check its consistency. The final questionnaire was Amharic version which was used as a self-

administered one. By conducting repeated revisions, the questions were made as simple as possible to be answered by the students. Further actions were made to ensure the quality of data; the questionnaire underwent pre-testing on 5 % ( 16 students) in the same setup having similar socio-cultural target group, but in non-selected senior secondary school. Vague questions that were difficult to be answered by most of the students were emphasized and corrected accordingly during the pretest and the number of data collectors in need was estimated. Ten data collectors and four supervisors were recruited and were trained about how to obtain informed consent and collect data for two days by the principal investigator. Data collectors and supervisors were teachers from North East Health Science College. The PI and four recruited supervisors were responsible for supportive supervision on the spot and on reviewing all filled questionnaires on daily basis. Data collected through quantitative method was processed and analyzed. To analyze the quantitative data, different statistical techniques were used by using SPSS version

20. Specifically Percentage, cross tabulation, binary logistic regression techniques were used to analyze those computed data. The cross tabulation and Percentage were to describe the prevalence (descriptive statistics) and forms of female sexual abuse in the school .Binary logistic regression was employed to identify and examine the association between the dependent variable and independent variables.

**RESULT**

**Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The data collection was accomplished with full response rate (no missing of cases). Out of the total 314 female students, 285 (90.8%) were 14-18 years of old. Concerning to residence 286 (91.1%) and 28(8.9%) were from urban and rural areas respectively. In terms of religion 273(86.9%) are Orthodox Christian, 34(10.8%) are Muslim and 7(2.2%) have other religions (Protestant and Catholic). From the total respondents, 32(10.2%) of them are married and 273(86.9%) are single.

**Table:-1.Socio-demographic characteristics of female students in Woldiya public high school in 2014(n=314).**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age		
≤ 18years	285	90.8
>18 years	29	9.2
Educational status(Grade)		
Grade 9	79	25.2
Grade 10	79	25.2

Grade 11	78	24.8
Grade 12	78	24.8
Marital status		<<
Married	32	10.2
Single	273	86.9
Others	9	2.9
Religion		
Orthodox	273	86.9
Muslim	34	10.8
Others	7	2.2
Residence		
Urban	286	91.1
Rural	28	8.9
Family income		
< or =1000ETB	114	36.3
>1000ETB	200	63.7

**Prevalence of Sexual Abuse**

The result shows female respondents who had experienced at least one of the five major forms of sexual abuses were 149(47.5%). The prevalence of the problem in terms of their age is explained as: out of 149(47.5%) abused female students,

138(92.6%) are less than or equal to 18 years old. Based on their educational status, out of 149(47.5%) abused female students, 53(35.6%) are from grade nine, 38(25.5 %) from grade ten, 40(26.8 %) from grade eleven, 18(12.1%) are from grade twelve.

**Table:-2 Prevalence of female sexual abuse in Woldiya Public High School in 2014(n=314).**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
14-18years	138	92.6
>18 years	11	7.4
Grade 9	53	35.6
Grade 10	38	25.5
Grade 11	40	26.8
Grade 12	18	12.1
Married	16	10.7
Single	126	84.6

Others	7	4.7
Orthodox	139	93.3
Muslim	6	4
Others	4	2.7
Urban	131	87.9
Rural	18	12.1
Total	149	100

**Forms of sexual abuse**

The forms of sexual abuse identified in the study area includes sexual kissing, complete sexual intercourse, touching genital organs, verbal sexual insult, showing sex films, photos and pictures.

The result identified that the most common perpetrators were teachers, male students, family and community members.

**Table:-3. Forms of Sexual abuse in Woldiya Public High School in 2014(n=314).**

Forms of sexual abuse	By Teachers		By Male students		BY Family members		By Community members	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Sexual kissing	9	2.9	32	10.2	10	3.2	17	5.4
Complete sexual intercourse	11	3.5	7	2.2	3	1	7	2.2
Touching genital organs	1	6.1	18	5.7	11	3.5	22	7
Showing sex films	19	1	5	1.6	3	1	7	2.2
Verbal sexual insult	52	16.6	59	18.8	47	15	41	13.1
Not abused	222	70.7	193	61.5	240	76.4	220	70.1
Total	314	100	314	100	314	100	314	100

**Associated Factors for Female Sexual Abuse**

The associated factors of female sexual abuse are examined through the binary logistic regression

model that is being abused or not. After entering all the predicted variables in multivariable logistic regression, the model revealed socio-demographic

(grade 9, AOR=0.025(0.002-0.332), school (fear of failure, AOR=0.023(0.001-0.499) and absence of measure taken, AOR=0.000(0.000-0.082)), individual (having sexual exposure in their living status, AOR=0.127(0.016-0.992), situational (living

with low income family, AOR=0.0052(0.004-0.724, presence of student maladaptive behavior AOR=0.008(0.000-0.186)) are the associated factors for female sexual abuse in the study area.

**Table:-4.Factors associated with female sexual abuse in Woldiya Public High School in 2014(n=314).**

Variables	Sexual abuse		COR	AOR(95%CI)
	Yes	No		
<b>Age</b>				
14-18years	138	147	0.651	1.065(0.034-33.298)
>18 years	11	18	1	1
<b>Grade</b>				
G-9	53	26	0.147	0.025(0.002-0.332)*
G-10	38	41	0.324	
G-11	40	38	0.285	
G-12	18	60	1	1
<b>Family Income</b>				
≤1000 ETB	62	87	0.646	1.212(0.412-3.569)
>1000 ETB	52	113	1	1
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	16	16	3.5	6.642(0.253-174.056)
Single	126	147	4.083	5.035(0.367-69.059)
Others	7	2	1	1
<b>Religion</b>				
Orthodox	139	134	1.285	0.000
Muslim	6	28	6.222	0.000
Others	4	3	1	1
<b>Residence</b>				
Urban	131	155	2.130	2.009(0.390-10.358)
Rural	18	10	1	1
<b>Individual factors</b>				
Close r/p with male students	13	69	1	1

Close r/p with teachers	9	73	0.999	0.000
Living alone	2	80	0.000	0.000
Being a female	18	64	0.000	0.000
Being sexual abuser	40	42	0.001	0.127(0.016-0.992)*
<b>Family factors</b>	8	71	1	1
Loss of Mother/Father	11	68	0.000	0.000
Broken family	21	58	0.002	2.298
Departure from family	39	40	0.000	0.000
Lack of support from family				
<b>School factors</b>				
Fear of academic failure	32	80	0.008	0.023(0.001-0.499)*
Fear of teachers				
Less attention given to female students	8	104	0.035	1.678
Absence of gender education	10	102	1	1
Absence of inadequate measures taken in the school	31	81	0.000	0.000
	31	81	0.008	0.000(0.000-0.082)*
<b>Situational factors</b>				
Living without parent	13	69	1	1
Living with low income family	9	73	0.054	0.052(0.004-0.724)*
Physical location of the school far from the centre	2	80	0.000	01.965
Loose r/p b/n the school & family	18	64	0.000	0.000
Presence of student maladaptive behavior	40	42	0.023	0.008(0.000-0.186)*



## DISCUSSIONS

The prevalence of female students' sexual abuse at Woldiya public high school was 47.5%. That means out of 314 female students 149 (47.5%) of age between 14-20 years are abused in at least one form of sexual abuse by either of community members, family members, male students and teachers. This is comparable with a study conducted in Sweden high schools in which 49% girls are abused. Another study conducted in U.S southeast machigan high schools revealed that 53% of female students are sexually abused. This might be due to differences in socio-cultural backgrounds of the study area and the number of schools taken is greater than one. Similar study conducted in Swaziland high schools in 2009 revealed that the problem was prevalent (33.2%) at the age of 18 and below. This difference might be in our study it includes both under and above 18 years old but in Swaziland it was under 18 only. Another study conducted in Malawi female high schools between ages 14-21 showed that the problem is prevalent (42.2%). This might be from differences in socio-cultural backgrounds of the study area. Similar study conducted in our country Gondar town high schools by Kelemu Fenta in 2013 showed that the prevalence of sexual abuse among female high school students was 49.6%. This is comparable with this study.

Forms of sexual abuse in this study area includes sexual kissing, complete sexual intercourse, touching genital organs, showing sex films, and verbal sexual insult. Another study conducted in Malawi high schools of age between 14-21 years

showed that sexual touch, unwanted sex, sexual comments are a common form which is consistent with this study. Similar study conducted in Gondar town high schools, the result revealed the same forms of sexual abuse but it doesn't assess the prevalence in terms of the types of perpetrators rather it showed the total prevalence. The major factors that are responsible for female students' sexual abuse were examined based on binary logistic regression which is used to explain and predict the relation between categorical predicted variable (status of sexual abuse) and the predictor variables. In our study, socio-demographic (grade 9, AOR=0.025(0.002-0.332), school (fear of failure, AOR=0.023(0.001-0.499), individual (having sexual exposure in their living status, AOR=0.127(0.016-0.992), situational (living with low income family and presence of student maladaptive behavior in the school, AOR=0.0052(0.004-0.724) are the associated factors for female sexual abuse. Similar study conducted in Gondar town high schools, it revealed that female sexual abuse was as a result of socio-demographic, individual, school and situational factors which is in line with this study.

## CONCLUSIONS

The problem of female sexual abuse among Woldiya high school students were more prevalent having different forms of which majority of the students were faced the abuse of: Sexual kissing, complete sexual intercourse, touching genital organs , verbal sexual insult and showing films,

photos and pictures. Female students were exposed to different forms of sexual abuse at: School, Community and their homes. From those sexually abused female students, the majority were between 14-18 years of old.

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