

Risk Factors for Vulnerability towards Sexual Exploitation among Children: Narratives of Girl Survivors of Sexual Exploitation

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Abstract

Introduction: Sexual exploitation of children (SEC) has got devastating impact on children's physical, mental, reproductive health and wellbeing. There are underlying conditions which facilitate an increase or decrease of SEC. The Global estimate of children affected by sexual exploitation reduced from 1.8 million in 2004 to 1.0. There is a lot of literature on effects, strategies to prevent and protect children from abuse; and less on voices of survivor's on causes of sexual exploitation of children. These causes need or threats need to be discussed and highlighted for preventive purpose.

Methods: The study used a descriptive case study design and examined in depth how the children ended up in sexual exploitation. The descriptive and retrospective study also employed child friendly tools to explore the causes for SEC from the children perspectives. Research was conducted in three (3) NGOs during the period of March to April, 2019. A total of six (6) female cases were studied, with five aged 17 years and one 16 years.

Findings: Indicated that despite few cases covered in the study, many factors including violence in homes, early sexual exposure, peer factors, poverty, toxic community factors appeared as key triggers to SEC. The risk factors for sexual exploitation were intermittent and multiple in nature for the girls interviewed. There are risk factors that are similar to those in the US as well as specific context factors unique to Uganda.

Conclusion: The study discusses key risk factors to sexual exploitation including individual, dysfunctional families and community factors. This provides prevention and intervention answers to practitioners as their context is critical in designing interventions. In terms of programming, child survivors of sexual exploitation need holistic contextual interventional support to enable them to build resilience in areas of psychological, social, moral and economic interventions in order to be able to return to normal life. Survivors need to boost their capacity in terms of decision making, be optimistic, be able to identify risks and protective factors in order to navigate positively into their future.

Keywords: Risk Factors; Violence; Sexual Exploitation Children

Introduction

Childhood should be enjoyable and time of innocence, unfortunately sexual exploitation (SEC) negatively alters the whole childhood health, justice and productivity experiences. A child is a victim of sexual exploitation after unintentional engaging in sexual activity for a gain, benefit, or even the promise of such from a third party, the perpetrator [1]. Whether for commercial or other gains of sex coercion, SEC constitute a crime in international law under article. 3 of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) [2]. SEC is associated with trafficking, prostitution, pornography, stripping, incest, rape and sexual harassment [1]. The 2030 Global agenda for sustainable Development Goals (SDG) contains a clear call to eliminate violence against children as expressed in target 16.2 “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”. Specifically target 5.2 “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” [3].

Despite the Global estimate of children under sexual exploitation reducing from 1.8 million in 2004 to 1.0 million [4]. Women and Girls account for 99 percent of all victims of forced sexual exploitation [4]. ILO continue to report that 1 million of the victims of forced sexual exploitation, 21 percent children under 18 years of age. Many investigations about SEC in Uganda have been done and studies by [5] and [6] point out that the number of children affected had jumped to 18,000 children in 2011 from 12,000 in 2004 in urban centres and across the country. Uganda still emerges as a country with high prevalence of children who are sexually exploited [7]; despite the fact that SEC is hidden problem and more in the hard to reach areas is difficult to estimate [8] and still persist which justifies our intervention. The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) survey on Violence Against Children (VAC) [9] conducted in Uganda indicates an unacceptably high level of physical, sexual, and emotional violence against children. In some instances, the exploitation was short and prolonged for some; with deceit, violence, assault and gang rape as well as psychological abuse. There was likelihood that these children affected by SEC presented some Post Stress Traumatic Disorder (PTSD) and mental depressions. While the cause of this vulnerability has not been fully elucidated, it is compounded by structural, social factors rooted at individual family and community levels.

Factors responsible for initiation and entry of sexual exploitation of children (SEC) are being globally articulated for their impact in SEC problems [10] as well as the local social and regional manifestations. There is a dearth of information coming from Africa and Uganda in particular from the voices of SEC survivors articulating the causal issues themselves. Social scientists have all along debated the risk factors responsible for escalating the vice of SEC because of its adverse severe effects and long-lasting impact which most times affect the vulnerable children and youth [11]. Some consider social, cultural and economic aspects while others attribute it to the family set up [12]. The family background and parenting of the abused and neglected children are also likely to be important as risk factors [13]. The absence of a caring and safe home environment brings more challenges and affect the way children adapt in future [14]. As noted by Murphy [15] children with poorer psychological functioning result in increased participation in risky behaviour. These children’s personal vulnerability is heightened further by their previous experiences of violence to sexual exploitation, early sexual involvement, childhood sexual abuse[16], running away or being thrown out their homes, negative home environment riddled with family violence, criminality and comprised care to the adolescents [8].

There is a lot of literature on effects, strategies to prevent and protect children from abuse [8], yet little is said on the variations in Uganda on risk factors from the survivor’s views that force them into SEC which need to be highlighted for prevention purposes [17]. The Social Ecological Model (SEM) [18] explains the complex interactions and relationships between the child and her multiple social and physical surroundings during her development as key to human development and safety. A supportive environment in homes will allow a stable growth and if there are many deficits in the home, these negatively affect the child. This perspective informed the study and helped the researchers to examine retrospectively amongst the survivor’s risk factor perspective and thus construct an interpretive argument of the likely local causes that generate into SEC.

In the study we wanted to hear from the child survivors what set of risk factors faced prior to entering sexual exploitation, what differences and gaps do we note in the global discussions about SEC as literature is limited on this [8]. The mutation of risk factors and their impact to children in their local context need to be regularly investigated by social workers in order to design appropriate interventions.

Methods

Research design

A descriptive case study design was employed for this study using qualitative approaches to harness and explore live experience of survivors before entry in SEC. The survey used case study methodology and examined in depth the extent of hardships that forced children into SEC. The study used retrospective approaches to identify the risk factors that pushed the children into SEC from the children voices.

Study setting

The study is based on data collected from child respondents who are SEC survivors under rehabilitation at three child focused NGOs. The agencies were purposely selected basing on the emerging evidence from the literature available in Ministry of Gender Labor and Social development, NGO actors in prevention and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The agencies all are located in the populated slums of Kawempe, part of Kampala city, estimated to have over five hundred thousand people where most of their clients come from. The selected three included:

1. Set Her Free (SHF) is a registered Non-Governmental Organization found in Kawempe division, Kampala working to restore the lives of young girls and women formerly enslaved by the sex trade. It empowers young women of Uganda to live a life free from sexual exploitation by providing shelter, rehabilitation and reintegration services.
2. Uganda youth development link (UYDL): It started way back in 1993 and serves in six (6) divisions of Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono. It has implemented several grants to combat child trafficking, homelessness, drug abuse, alcoholism, child sexual exploitation, psycho-social support, vocational skills and economic empowerment.
3. SOMERO Uganda is a registered Non-Governmental Organization found in Kawempe division, Kampala. The organization works with girls in commercial sex exploitation to enable them start their own businesses and are trained to support their own communities.

Study population and sample

The study population comprised child survivors of SEC who were beneficiaries of the resilience enhancement activities at the three NGOs. Their age range was 14 - 17 years and from the central regional districts of Uganda.

Study sample size and selection

The selection of participants followed a non-probability sampling. Researchers used the NGO registers of child survivors to formulate a list that helped in generating a sampling frame. Using simple random sampling method, all the names of child survivors present on that day were assigned numbers put in a box and the first two to be selected constituted the participants for the study per NGO. This was done by use of purposive and convenient non-probability sampling techniques and a total of 6 cases for their elaborate responses were selected out 36 survivors that participated in the study.

Data collection

The study used two child friendly tools; the Venn diagram and River of life as elaborated further below; to collect more information from child survivors in a participatory and interactive way. These were used to avoid harm and traumatization given the sensitivity of the study; yet there was need to get the highest responses.

Venn diagram is a type of graphic organizer expounded by John Venn in 1891. Graphic organizers are a way of visually organizing complex relationships which allow abstract ideas to be more visible. The child survivors were able to express their ideas and the nature of traumatic experience they had.

River of life: The river of life is a type of drawing that aimed to help survivors of SEC to show situations, people and events which were particularly significant in their lives until the present day. Fisher and White (2001) observes that the “River of life is a visual narrative method that helps people tell stories of the past, present and future. Individuals can use this method to introduce themselves in a fun and descriptive way; a group can use it to understand and reflect on the past and imagine the future of a project; and it can be used to build a shared view compiled of different and perhaps differing perspectives. River of Life focuses on drawing rather than text, making it useful in groups that do not share a language. When used in a group, it is an active method, good for engaging people” [19].

During data collection from child survivors, we were required to do a stakeholder analysis to map out spaces of risks, traumatic experiences and resources at the rehabilitation centre, home, community and other resources. Survivors recorded the people they interact with, and their activities to reveal the potential of their influence on them. During the survey, we used small numbers to allow maximum interaction, discussing their cultural norms as well as bringing in some element of fun. This ensured that interviews were conducted in a friendly environment with no interference but enabled children to feel safe, confident, emotionally secure without any secondary trauma. It also allowed them to reflect on the trauma they went through and open up if it had desensitisation effect and here how other survivors (therapeutically) managed to overcome it during the FGD discussion. The interviews were psychologically empowering (therapeutic nature) and unearthed other stressful issues which survivors had experienced.

The interview method enabled the participants to map their stories on the River of life drawing as elaborated below. We used the tool to retain the participants’ narrative in their natural form and the focus is on members’ perspective and experience. The researchers collected information from child survivors in a participatory way to allow maximum interaction, based on their age, cultural norms and an element of fun. This ensured that interviews were conducted in a friendly environment without any interference (i.e. felt confident, physically safe, free from harm, emotionally secure). The study later engaged survivors using a flip chart, paper and markers to plot on the map their rich River of life history about SEC. This was intended to prepare them to express their feelings and also be heard as they shared their stories about their experiences that had shaped them in different situations.

Survivors were asked to reflect on their experiences and create a diagrammatic picture in the River of life tool of their SEC experience the banks, tributaries and rapids, as well as what happened at that juncture of life. Enough time was given for everyone to freely share and explain their experiences. The River of life tool avoids a normal face to face interview where some of the questions are sensitive and could invoke past traumatic experience. The tool is also better in minimizing too many details which can be problematic.

Most information shared by study participants was descriptive (what had happened in their lives) and explanatory (how and why it was happening). The data revealed varying experiences and circumstances that helped to explain in detail a few but particular SEC survivors’ situation. One limitation encountered with the River of life method of data collection was that some child survivors could not express themselves or write in English. Researchers used local language and translated the information for clarity. To address causes and risk factor of SEC requires an understanding of the status of the problem and of complex risk factors and vulnerabilities [8]. A situation which can easily be derived from the case studies using the child friendly tools like Venn and River of life.

Data analysis

The data collected from the study participants was analysed using a method of thematic analysis [20] to find ways of working with data. The survey identified all key issues based on [8] discussion of risk factors common in the western world with a special focus on USA, very elaborate and covered many aspects. Olsen highlights several risk factors associated with entry in SEC according to published research in the USA. Their case studies were reconstructed as they shared personal information on entry into SEC and later the information extrapolated to see the similarities and differences and gaps that need further redress in addressing SEC.

Ethical consideration

During the study, researchers had to seek consent and assent from participants before conducting interviews. “Do no harm and mandatory reporting” was another vital ethical issue where CSE survivors were protected from any risks upon commencement and during the study. This was discussed with the child survivors as the survey never wanted to open up wounds of their traumatic past. During data collection, no serious risks were encountered warranting withdrawal. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Makerere University School of Social Sciences, Kampala, Uganda and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology; Ref SS.4984. Funding to conduct the study was obtained from Uganda Youth Development Link research fund.

Limitations of the Study

The study intended to reach a small sample of six female child survivors of SEC. Children who have fended for themselves for some time may conceal some information to escape from their past. Most children were school drop-outs only able to communicate in their mother tongue (Luganda). This means that there was some difficulty in drawing and explaining their River of life thus needed more time and guidance.

Results

Participant’s characteristics

A total of six cases were studied and all these were girls from the three NGOs. One participant was 16 years; the others were 17 years of age. All had separated from their families and not staying with their biological mothers. (2) paternal uncle (1), auntie (1) friends (2) and one with a spouse (1). All participants were early school drop-outs and attempts return to school failed. Two had stopped at primary level. The other four were of secondary level representing various level of educational attainment. See table 1 below.

R1 is aged 17 years.	She currently lives in Bugalani area. She dropped out of school in Primary Four (P.4) before joining SOMERO Uganda.
R2 is aged 17 years	She currently lives in Kawempe and stays with her maternal aunt. She dropped out of school in Senior Three (S.3) before joining SOMERO Uganda.
R3 is aged 16 years.	She currently lives in Bwaise and stays with her paternal uncle. She dropped out of school in primary three (P.3) before joining Uganda Youth Development Link.
R4 is aged 17 years.	She currently lives in Kawempe and stays with a friend. She dropped out of school in primary four (P.4) before joining Uganda Youth Development Link.
R5 is aged 17 years.	She currently lives in Keeti Falaawo and stays with her spouse. She dropped out of school in Senior five (S.5) before joining SET HER FREE.
R6 is aged 17 years	She currently lives in Kawempe and stays with a friend. She dropped out of school in senior four (S.4) before joining SET HER FREE.

Table 1: Brief background of the girls interviewed.

Child individual triggers and factors

The study was able to identify several child individual triggers and factors as enumerated below.

Child abuse and family settings

Families are the primary care providers to children for all psychological, nutrition and all the basic needs. We noted that all survivors had experienced both physical and psychological abuses in their host families. Their case studies revealed that children repeatedly experienced physical violence at the hands of their stepparents, caretaker and relatives.

One of the survivors reported in her river of life tool saying, “I grew up with both my parents but everything got disorganized when my father got another wife and abandoned our family which later led to my dropping out of school while in senior five (S.5). After that, we were transferred to the new house my dad had built and we started staying with my father and his new wife. Not being her biological children, our stepmother mistreated us. She was jealous of the love and care our dad gave us. She then turned our dad against us, abused us every day, denied us food and beat us. When I got to senior five (S.5), our step mother told my father that I had grown up and so she suggested that they find me a husband to marry. I was only 17 years and never wanted to get married when I was still a young girl. I left home and started staying with my grandmother. Our maternal grandmother treated us well for the first months but when she realized that we were going to stay longer she changed her ways. She started mistreating us asking why we were not finding men to give us money. My sister got pregnant in the process of looking for money from different men at only 16 years.

Intensive psychological torture forced all the survivors interviewed to leave such homes early. Forms of abuse covered exhibited and narrated by the survivors included being beaten, verbal abuse, kicked, burned, and occasionally hit with objects. We noticed there were un-precedented levels of parental separation, divorce, discord forcing children to separate and move to stay with relatives.

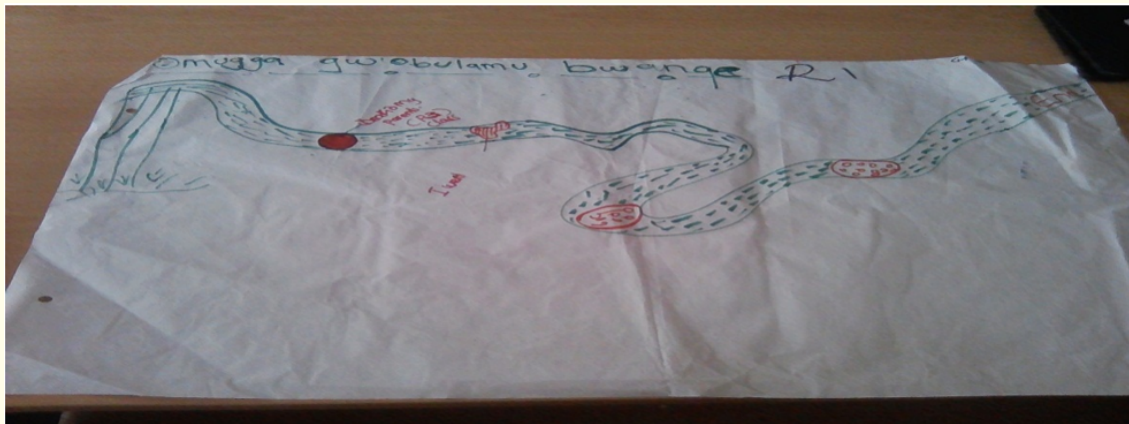


Figure 1: River of life of one of the child survivors of SEC.

Source: Study participant (female).

One of the girls illustrated in her River of Life that life flowed smoothly until she reached Primary Three when her life worsened as her father got another woman and he abandoned them. Life became difficult with the mother as she was the only breadwinner for the family. After primary seven, she stayed home because there were no school fees for about one year until her mother got the money to join senior one. In Senior Three, life was so unbearable at home that she got some boyfriends to provide her needs which was not sustainable hence dropping out of school.

Another girl had reached senior one when her mother left their marital home having separated with the father. She noted that she was left behind with father. In her senior two, the father was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was in a very critical condition. This marked the end of our schooling. In most of these cases of survivors there was separation of the survivors from their parents largely due to family break-ups which escalated economic hardship.

Low emotional support yielding more negative energy

Emotional support for children in homes helps to promote a healthy life style. The positive attitude and experience children get and constructive support helps to improve their sense of optimism and humour away from anger and mistrust. Children experienced instances of separation of parents, denial of food, insults, lack of money, shortage of basic things and abuse. These lead to stress, trust, anxiety and negative energy thus limiting positive outlook to life. In one of the interviews, this child looked out for ways of escaping this situation. This respondent explained that one day as the father was moving on the road, he was knocked down by a speeding car, making him lame. He could no longer provide anything that they needed. The mother had also been weakened by an unknown illness. The situation became worse because the girl had to look for money from kind “men” to support her father in hospital. Lack of emotional support from parents and other family members became the problem and was abandoned at paternal aunt’s home. At this tender age she decided to find anyone who could give her money for school fees and other basic necessities.

In this study, we can see that girls had experienced little or no emotional support this can partially lead to low self-esteem which generated negative energy, self-condemnation leading to negative behaviour, poor anger management and giving room to quick negative survival means including CSE.

Negative coping strategies

Children need to be assisted to develop strategies that help them deal positively with their past riddled with distressing experiences. We noted during interviews that girls developed survival strategy and many resorted to men to provide them money for their basic needs as one girl illustrated, “I got another boyfriend that I hang on to support me for all my needs. This stone indicates that after sometime with this boyfriend, I got pregnant and I couldn’t move in with him because he was still staying with his parents. I went to start living with my maternal grandmother. Life was not any easy! When I gave birth, I decided to leave that home for my mother’s home but life was even more difficult. I had to fend for myself and a friend of mine suggested that we relocate to find men or ways to get money and that’s how we got caught up in the vice”.

We also noticed that some homes for survivors did not provide positive coping strategies to help children have a positive outlook to life. During the interviews, we noted that survivors kept changing boyfriends time and again these pretended to care but just wanted sex from the girls. Girls also had to walk long distances as parents could not afford paying for boarding section. They faced a myriad of problems including threats of defilement hence inducing trauma. Other men demanded pay back for the money given to the girls.

Early sex involvement and sexual abuse

The researchers noted that most the children who participated in the interview had gotten into sexual exploitation at an early age. In some instances, it is deceptive consent but largely taken advantage of by men making empty promises to meet the girls’ basic needs

as the economic situation in most of their homes were distressing. More worrying was defilement and other forms of sexual abuse which painfully was inflicted by people close to the children such as stepparents, relatives and teachers. This created a serious risk factor for increasing the trauma and motivation escalating interests in SEC and other depressive actions.

Teachers were also cited in the interview as perpetrators of sexual exploitation by pressuring girls for sex as explained in this case; “The other problem I found at school (as illustrated in the River of life) was that, the teachers always suggested sexual relationships to the female students and whenever one refused they could harass you; by beating you. I moved to a different school and found the same problem. So, I dropped out of school and moved to stay with another woman in the city who was selling cassava. Life almost became unbearable!”.

Another situation was revealed by a girl who opened up to her teacher about her school fees challenges and to which the teacher agreed to support her in order to complete her studies. The teacher decided to get her a place in another school in Mityana district which she accepted. During third term of senior three, the teacher approached the girl and revealed to her that he had special admiration for her and was never interested in her studies hence persuaded her to leave school for a better life with him. That’s where her academic journey ended.

Abuse by relatives (INCEST)

Relatives and kinsmen have also been identified as a risk factor and escalated the vice of sexual abuse as illustrated in this case: one of the survivors noted that “It all started with the long illness of my father which left her with no option except to move in with one of her uncles who promised to support me with her school fees. It was at this time that I had to flee from her uncle’s home who attempted to rape her in the middle of the night. All her pleas fell on deaf ears, so I decided to stay with her young brother who could hardly sustain himself hence abruptly ended her education journey. The interviews indicated that survivors faced multiple problems faced by girls in pursuit for support from deceptive predators like relatives and friends has escalated the problem.

Economic hardship/lack of basic necessities

Literature affirms how economic strengthening can reduce sexual risks and adversities on vulnerable youth and their families [21]. Lack of capacity to support the survivors was a common trend from most of the girls. One of the respondents noted that her life had always been challenging because her parents had separated she grew up in a situation of dire need for basic needs at her aunt’s place. Here, things never worked out, she did not complete school, got a bad illness and was returned to her helpless mother.

Sexual peer influence

Interviews revealed that the survivors had engaged in early sexual involvement with peers commonly referred to as boyfriends whom they often dropped and jumped onto another sex partner to get money and other needs. This paved way to getting multiple partners and the argument advanced by survivors was that they needed money to buy necessities. One girl narrated, “I was too young to work yet I needed the money. I ended up having sex with boys in exchange for money”. The study participants confessed engaging in peer relationships and was very supportive as many gave them some money whenever they faced challenges and provided options to try out as many so as to get more money. We noticed that this support was always done as a survival strategy amidst many hardships at their places of stay. Done in the negative as many of their peers encouraged escaping from home to engage in sexual acts and eventual recruitment into SEC by peers active in SEC.

Sexual exploitation and the community toxic environment

We noticed during the interviews that there were several tendencies in the community that could indirectly promote SEC. These included encouraging of girls to watch pornography and inappropriate body touches by men. The places where girls went to seek employ-

ment also paved way for further abuse and exploitation as this case illustrated, “I went to Naguru teenage health Centre for treatment before joining club Casablanca for work as a waitress. Drunkards played with my breasts which made me very uncomfortable! Later, I decided to rent a small room with my pregnant sister who had been abandoned by the SEC perpetrator. We only ate when we chanced to get food from the men we slept with in exchange for money “nga tweyiya”. Some men could escape without paying which was very painful. I could sleep with around 8 men in one day. Someone would connect me to the men she knew would pay after the game. She convinced me that instead of sweating for little money I could go and spend nights with these lonely men and they pay a rate of UGX 100,000. One of those men promised to give me money to pay for rent, shopping and all other things so that I abandon the vice but I am now addicted and have failed to leave the practice.

Pressure from clients and pressure to survive/fend self

Certain forms of employment such as working in bars, hawking food, restaurants, being a karaoke dancer can be so risky as to make girls candidates for sexual exploitation. Having run away from stressing homes, the interviews revealed that the girls were pressurized by perpetrators and inevitably yielded in dire need for money, shelter and other needs.

The case study following illuminates this case further, “The big stone you see in ‘The River of Life’ means, I got pregnant and the man responsible for the pregnancy run away as he feared to be arrested because I was only 16years. The small stones you see mean the challenges I faced after I gave birth. Looking after my baby was so difficult because sometimes I even never had the money to buy for her food to eat and this forced me to do odd jobs and also get other men to give me money to look after my baby. I started preparing tea for boda-boda men but the money was very little and to supplement that money, I would have sex with them. These men often abused me, were violent, and sometimes refused to pay. Even sometimes, men would forcefully take my money and even threaten to rape me”.

Children born as pimps

Even when peers are said to play a key role in sharing negative and positive experiences and improving the social and emotional well-being of their colleagues, the girls in this study revealed a section of peers who instead encouraged them to join SEC as a solution. One girl mentioned that her friend lured her into commercial sex as the easiest means of survival. “I participated in the vice for a year and I got pregnant and aborted at one of the clinics. Here, the money was easy to get until one of the community members directed me to an NGO for more support”.

We also noted that in some instances the young girls were born by commercial sex workers and so grew up with the belief that this was a normal means of survival. In most cases, they too became sex workers as their parents.

Parents encouraging girls to get CSE

In a point of distress and economic doldrums parents become desperate and regarded their children as a source of income to help reduce the pressure for survival. One girl narrated how such a situation arose and found herself hooked in SEC “It was one day when I got a serious accident as I moved to the market. I badly needed medical attention which my grandmother could not afford. One of the men in the bar where she usually drinks from volunteered to help with the hospital bills on condition that he sleeps with me after healing. Grandmother inevitably accepted and that marked the beginning of my journey into sexual exploitation”.

Discussion

Despite the few cases reached, abuse and violence to children appears to be going on in various ways in homes, schools and the community unabated. The findings revealed that many incidents of abuse happened in various homes, where there was no love, care and

under economic instability. Olsen highlights several risk factors associated with entry in SEC in the western world with more focus on the United States. A comparative review was undertaken of risk factors as expounded by Franchino-Olsen [8] similar factors were identified among survivors who participated in this study in Uganda.

Risk factors	Earlier research (Olesen 2019)	Uganda context
Individual child factors (Peer or family influence, survival sex, early sexual initiation, running away or thrown away, negative mental health or negative view of self or psychoticism, witnessed family violence)	✓	✓
Family based factors (Early sexual initiation, child abuse and maltreatment, conflict with parents, compromised parenting Poverty or material need and caregiver strain)	✓	✓
Community based risk factors (Prior rape or adolescent sexual victimization.	✓	✓

Table 2: Showing risk factors highlighted similar to those published in earlier research by Olesen (2019).

We deduced that there were risk factors discussed by Olsen [8] which are not common in Uganda context see table 3 below.

Not common in Uganda context	Earlier research (Olesen 2019) common in US	Not common in Uganda context
Child protection involvement	✓	■
Juvenile detention involvement or delinquency	✓	■
Early substance use/first alcohol or drug	✓	■
Demographics	✓	■
Difficulty in school	✓	■
Witnessed criminal activity	✓	■

Table 3: Showing risk factors not common in Uganda context.

During the interviews we never registered children with juvenile detention history, neither early substance use, difficulty in school or witnessed a criminal activity. Alcohol use come in later and difficulty in school was more a failure to pay school dues that performance.

Risk factors that are common and unique to Uganda context and not in US were identified. See list below:

- Early involvement in child labour (as maid, work in bars and dance karaoke) precursor to SEC.
- Children born to pimps and later recruited into SEC.
- Exploitation places such as bars, lodges, cultural events.
- Sexual relationships with older women taking advantages of boys to meet their sexual gratification.
- The emergency of new spouses in homes escalated the challenges faced by children.

The investigation of risk factors in a particular context is important, not to assume all causes are similar in order help a social worker map appropriate intervention. The theories, frameworks and tools need to guide delivery that meet the survivor vulnerability needs and to emphasise the local context so as to create effective programmes [8].

Uganda appear to have risk factors unique factors.

The risk factors and their context vary, despite that some are likely to be similar to those in other countries. The risk factors as observed by survivors sometimes were likely to have been spontaneous with multiple abuses; in combination with other causes leading to prolonged trauma as per the children's narratives. The case studies showed that in terms of risks factors survivors experienced low parental care and many of their families were of big size affecting family functioning. In all the six cases, separation or divorce was highlighted as largely due to parental discord arising out of multiple marriages causing the separation of the child and the mother. The survivors mentioned that this was the genesis of the hard times and precursor to entry in SEC. In fact, joining SEC was considered as a quick source of income and survival. Many survivors' narratives indicated that their families were of low social economic classes with little skills and quite often experienced financial challenges with low paying jobs. This led to little or no emotional support, denial of responsibility, abuse in their family setting and poor coping strategies.

The study established that there are several factors at child, family and in the environment, which perpetuate SEC. In most cases the risk factors work in combination to mount pressure to survivors to opt for SEC which was not well articulated in previous studies. The multiple problems girls faced including early sexual abuse, and abuses by people known to them like, teachers, boyfriends and men who pretended to be Understanding the SEC survivor's experience from the individual, family setting and other macro factors that push the child into SEC is important to discuss and prevent in future. These findings agree with Studies done by Clawson, Dutch and Williamson [22] and Lederer [23] which showed that victims of SEC are at increased risk of psychosocial challenges including addiction to substance abuse, trauma, suicide and variety of physical and mental health needs.

The urban slum communities were found to be toxic, characterized by high tolerance for male perpetrators who harass and abuse girls, sleep with children and the tendency of the girls to survive alone with little or no social economic support. This at times forced girls to look for jobs in bars, lodges which were risky and increased exposure to sexual exploitation. There were situations of economic hardships where parents encouraged girls to go out and look for men, in essence exposing and introducing them to the vice. Some victims of SEC graduated into pimps, recruited and oriented other girls into the sexual exploitation vice. According to Dodge [24], children who have experienced abuse are less likely to yield positive relationships or interpersonal strategies but instead may see others as less trustworthy and unpredictable.

Some families tried so much to support girls especially mothers but they were overwhelmed by the needs. The survivors brewed lots of negative emotional energy and always turned to their peers for support hence lured them into looking for quick survival support. In most of these predicaments presented by the survivors, we never heard of victims who bore positive energy and emotions such as love, interest in life and gratitude; a sign of eroded hope amongst the survivors. We saw more negative emotions such as sadness, fear, crying and anxiety. The survivors' minds were void of humour and optimism to develop positive energy [25] which is a key aspect of coping in such adversities. The emergency of new spouses in homes escalates the challenges among children who eventually become prey to sexual predators and traffickers who end up abusing them.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that risk factors are real and span across continents with similarities and differences. Adequate prevention efforts should seek to understand local factors that make minors vulnerable to SEC in order to design programmes to prevent victimi-

sation of children. They are placed at Individual level, family and society. Family dysfunctional, poverty and violence were a common risk factors amongst families irrespective of the location. These have dire consequences on children as is a strong predictor of likely recruitment of children into SEC and thus needs to be urgently addressed.

The risk factors for sexual exploitation as expressed by the survivors in Kampala were noted to be intermittent and multiple in nature or work in close relation building on the other according to the girls interviewed. These risk actors need to be critically reviewed in their local context, purposing to address violence and economic challenges in homes with policies and interdisciplinary interventions that can help families manage to cope with minimal stress. The findings confirmed further that SEC survivors grew up in homes which lacked a supportive environment to allow a stable growth. There were many deficits (love, poverty, violence) and dysfunctional homes as observed in the Social Ecological Model (SEM) developed by Bronfenbrenner [18] and these negatively affect the survivors. There are marked differences amongst the risk factors that affect children in different environments and these need to be thoroughly marked so as to develop appropriate interventions.

In terms of programming, child survivors of such stressful experiences of sexual exploitation need holistic interventional support to enable them to build resilience in areas of psychological, social, moral and economic interventions in order to be able to return to normal life. Survivors need to boost their capacity in terms of decision making, be optimistic, be able to identify risks and protective factors in order to navigate positively into their future.

The child protection systems need to be revamped with strengthened community sanctions against abuse in homes by relatives and other sexual abusers. Increase community awareness about the social norms that support violence and sexual exploitation of children and their negative consequences of violence on children. There is need to address family economic instability early as well as cultural intolerance that exacerbates violence to reduce vulnerability and create positive social change to save children from entering SEC.

A study that profiles SEC survivors in hard-to-reach populations provides partial prevention and intervention answers to practitioners and strongly suggests that early child abuse, parental instability, individual and peer factors as well as early sexual involvement are highly linked to risk factors of recruitment of young girls into SEC which needs to be urgently addressed. This vary from context to context and provides more room to understand SEC vulnerabilities. A multi- professional- sector approach both in terms of prevention and intervention is desirable given the complexity and hidden nature of SEC [8]. There is also need for further research as the study never weighted the risk factors like age and gender to establish which one had more impact on the vice as well as dinging further how these factors evolve by age, location and gender.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this survey.

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