

## **The Profiles of Abused Children in Ozamiz City, Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

Despite its importance and impact to the society and well-being of children, the issue of child abuse in the Philippines is still not studied intensively. It has been observed that street children in Ozamiz City are increasing in number. The purpose of this study was to describe the profile of children in the area experiencing abuse. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the social profile of the abused children and the circumstances related to the abuse they experienced. Documentary analysis was carried out to obtain records of child abuse from the City Social Welfare and Development office. Records showed that children experiencing abuse were mostly between 9-12 years old, male and drop-outs from school with low-level education. They belonged to a large household size living in crowded urban localities with parents having low income. Abused children still exhibited high educational or career aspirations. These children were either abandoned, neglected, physically, or sexually abused. Majority of the sexual abuse cases occurred once and outside the house of the victim with neighbor as the alleged perpetrator. The findings of this study are useful for possible interventions by professionals, organizations, and academic institutions in Ozamiz City.

**Keywords:** abandoned, drop-outs, income, perpetrator, sexual

## **Introduction**

Definitions of what constitute child abuse vary among professionals, and between social and cultural groups, as well as across time (Wise, 2006). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse or maltreatment as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (WHO, 2002). Child abuse may include commission or omission of any act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child (Leeb et al., 2008). It can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with (Abbasi et al., 2015). Despite differences in how cultures define what is abusive, it appears that there is general agreement across many cultures that child abuse should not be allowed.

Child abuse can take several forms but there are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, and sexual abuse (Abbasi et al., 2015). Based on the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) in 2010, neglect was the most common form of child abuse (78.3%), followed by physical abuse (17.6%), sexual abuse (9.2%), and psychological maltreatment (8.1%).

There are social theories that are linked to child abuse, establishing the core causes of the problem. The Social Learning Theory highlights the concept of the 'cycle of violence'. This concept suggests that children emulate the behavior of adults and finally put it into practice. Most abusers are those who were abused themselves at one stage in their childhood (Gómez, 2010). The Attachment Theory lays stress on the bond between the child and parent. The closer the bond, the better is the relationship. The theory reflects four types bonding namely: secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful. The latter three forms of bonding could render the children susceptible to abuse (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). The Ecological Theory suggests that child abuse and neglect are a consequence of multiple parameters that include the individual, family, community and culture (Dubowitz et al., 2011). The

Family Systems Theory suggests the ideology of having the root cause of abuse within the family itself (Lander et al., 2013). For example, in cases of incestuous relationship between the father and daughter, it is the mother's role that holds key importance (Herman, 2013). Her silence can be interpreted as approval that further promotes the abuse. The Self-Efficacy Theory highlights those parents who believe that they cannot be effective in their role of parenting without abuse (Bloomfield & Kendall, 2012). The Resiliency Theory suggests that not all survivors of abuse end up as unbalanced personalities owing to the trauma of the event (Trepper & Chew, 2014).

The issue of child abuse did not receive widespread attention by the medical profession or the general public until 1962, with the publication of a seminal work, *The Battered Child Syndrome* of Kempe et al. (1962). Since 2002, child abuse then has become a global problem (Runyan et al., 2002). Globally, a quarter of all adult individuals report having been physically abused as children and one in five women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child (Abbasi et al., 2015). There are an estimated 41,000 homicide deaths in children under 15 years of age. This number underestimates the true extent of the problem, as a significant proportion of deaths due to child maltreatment are incorrectly attributed to falls, burns, drowning and other causes. In armed conflict and refugee settings, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse by combatants, security forces, members of their communities, aid workers and others (WHO, 2014).

In the Philippines, obtaining an accurate count of child abuse cases is hindered by the absence of a nationwide reporting system. However, the increasing rate of reporting child sexual abuse for the past years, believed by researchers and clinicians to be due to increased public and professional recognition of the problem (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). Approximately, 40% of child abuse cases in the Philippines reported to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) from 1998–2007 involved sexual abuse of female victims (Romulo & Balamban, 2008).

In the Philippines, despite the significance and impact of child abuse (Ramiro et al., 2010), research on this topic remains in its infancy. In Ozamiz City, it has been observed that street children are increasing

in number. Most of these children are staying in crowded places begging for money and food from people. Few are observed to bully other kids and others tend to be aggressive when people do not give anything to them. Security guards in some areas would try to tell these children to stay away and not to ask from people. Child abuse may not only happen to street children but the likelihood of this situation to occur is higher in most abandoned children on streets. It is on these circumstances that the attempt to conduct a research on child abuse was conceptualized. The purpose of this study was to describe the profiles of children in Ozamiz City experiencing abuse. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the social profile of the abused children and the circumstances related to the abuse they experienced. The findings of this study are useful for possible interventions by professionals, organizations, and academic institutions in Ozamiz City.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study is descriptive in design using the survey method. Documentary analysis was carried out to obtain records of child abuse from the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD) office in Ozamiz City. Permission from the CSWD was secured before the conduct of the study. The permission was given with the assurance that the records shall only be used for research purpose only and the names of the children shall remain anonymous. Based on the CSWD criteria of child abuse, records of all 35 abused children on file were provided by the office. A checklist was prepared for easy gathering of information. Part 1 of the checklist includes the social profile of the child such as age, gender, education, grade level, number of siblings, home address, civil status and occupation of parents, and ambition of the child. Part 2 of the checklist includes the circumstances related to child abuse such as the nature, frequency, place, reasons of child abuse, child custodian, the perpetrator of the abuse, and the status of the case. The descriptive statistics used were the frequency count and percentage to describe the social profile of abused children and the circumstances related to the abuse experienced.

## Results and Discussion

### *Social profile of abused children*

Table 1 presents the social profile of abused children in Ozamiz City. A greater percentage of children belonged to 9-12 age range. The study of Maguire et al. (2015) also showed that majority of the school-children experiencing neglect and emotional abuse were 6-12 years old. In a study of case files of child victims of sexual abuse in one hospital in the Philippines, the average age of victims was approximately 10 years (Sugue-Castillo, 2009).

**Table 1. Socioeconomic profile of abused children.**

| <b>Profile</b>         | <b>F</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Profile</b>                  | <b>F</b> | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <b>Age</b>             |          |          | <b>Civil status of parent</b>   |          |          |
| 4-9                    | 10       | 28.57    | Married                         | 23       | 65.71    |
| 9-12                   | 15       | 42.86    | Separated                       | 10       | 28.57    |
| 13-16                  | 10       | 28.57    | Widow                           | 2        | 5.71     |
| <b>Gender</b>          |          |          | <b>Occupation of the father</b> |          |          |
| Male                   | 25       | 71.43    | Driver (Tricycle /Motorcycle)   | 20       | 57.14    |
| Female                 | 10       | 28.57    | Vendor                          | 3        | 8.57     |
| <b>Education</b>       |          |          | Laborer (Carpenter/ Vulcanizer) | 10       | 28.57    |
| In school              | 14       | 40.00    | Scavenger                       | 2        | 5.71     |
| Drop-out               | 21       | 60.00    | <b>Occupation of the mother</b> |          |          |
| <b>Grade level</b>     |          |          | Housewife                       | 14       | 40       |
| K-1                    | 1        | 2.86     | Saleslady                       | 1        | 2.86     |
| Grade 1                | 10       | 28.57    | Vendor                          | 13       | 37.14    |
| Grade 2                | 6        | 17.14    | Laundry Woman                   | 4        | 11.43    |
| Grade 3                | 4        | 11.43    | Scavenger                       | 3        | 8.57     |
| Grade 4                | 3        | 8.57     | <b>Ambition of the child</b>    |          |          |
| Grade 5                | 3        | 8.57     | Teacher                         | 12       | 34.29    |
| Grade 6                | 5        | 14.29    | Nurse                           | 1        | 2.86     |
| Grade 7-9              | 3        | 8.57     | Engineer                        | 1        | 2.86     |
| <b>No. of siblings</b> |          |          | Soldier                         | 1        | 2.86     |
| Two                    | 6        | 17.14    | Policeman                       | 15       | 42.86    |
| Three                  | 8        | 22.86    | Businessman                     | 3        | 8.57     |
| Four                   | 5        | 14.29    | Doctor                          | 2        | 5.71     |
| Five-Seven             | 16       | 45.71    |                                 |          |          |
| <b>Location</b>        |          |          |                                 |          |          |
| City proper            | 15       | 42.85    |                                 |          |          |
| City coast area        | 18       | 51.42    |                                 |          |          |
| Others                 | 2        | 5.71     |                                 |          |          |

F – Frequency

Majority of the victims were male and drop-outs from school having only a grade 1 education. In the report of Cashmore and Shackel (2013), victims were mostly boys which is in contrast with the report of Suge-Castillo (2009). However, the study of Hansen et al. (2010) showed that there is no difference in gender with child abuse. Almost half of the victims belonged to a large household size with five to seven siblings living in the city proper or highly populated city coast area. Large family size with overcrowded home is a predictor of child abuse (Farrington et al., 2010; Malik, 2010). Majority of their parents were married and living together but a considerable percentage was also separated. Broken home is also a factor of child abuse as children suffer from parental deprivation and household dysfunction (Furniss, 2013; MacMillan et al., 2013). Most fathers were motorcab drivers, others were laborers. Few were vendors and scavengers. Most of the mothers were full-time housewives or vendors. Very few were laundry women, scavengers, one was a saleslady. The study of Eckenrode et al. (2014) showed that poverty is significantly correlated with child abuse or maltreatment. Most of the abused children aspire to become a policeman or a teacher. Children who experienced abuse still exhibited high educational or career aspirations in the report of Phasha (2010). It is important that the local government in Ozamiz City and other institutions or organizations provide support for these child abuse survivors.

### ***Circumstances related to child abuse***

Table 2 shows the circumstances related to child abuse in Ozamiz City. Most children were abandoned, others were neglected, physically and sexually abused. Most abandoned children live in streets and their number is increasing in low- and middle-income countries (Woan et al., 2012). There are two overlapping groups of street children: *on-the-street* children, who are street-based but primarily sleep at home, and *of-the-street* children, who rarely, if ever, return home (UNICEF, 1990). In the Philippines, substance use in street children was documented (Merrill et al., 2010; Njord et al., 2010). Even nowadays, street children are seen using inhalants. In Ozamiz City, street children are observed waiting outside food chains like Jollibee, McDonalds, and

Chowking or even inside the church asking for money or food. The CSWD has been working to bring these children back to their homes but they keep coming back to streets for many reasons, mainly driven by poverty or neglect by parents. The likelihood of child neglect in the Philippines is higher because families are typically more exposed to poverty and associated issues (Ramiro et al., 2010).

**Table 2. Circumstances related to child abuse.**

| Circumstances                        |                                       | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Nature of Abuse</b>               | Sexual Abuse                          | 7         | 20.00      |
|                                      | Physical Abuse                        | 9         | 25.71      |
|                                      | Neglected                             | 9         | 25.71      |
|                                      | Abandoned                             | 10        | 28.57      |
| <b>Frequency of Abuse</b>            | Once                                  | 25        | 78.95      |
|                                      | Twice                                 | 7         | 15.79      |
|                                      | Thrice                                | 3         | 5.26       |
| <b>Place of abuse</b>                | House                                 | 10        | 28.57      |
|                                      | Outside of the house                  | 16        | 45.71      |
|                                      | Neighbor's house                      | 9         | 25.71      |
| <b>Alleged perpetrator of abuser</b> | Father                                | 8         | 22.86      |
|                                      | Mother                                | 3         | 8.57       |
|                                      | Both mother & father                  | 5         | 14.29      |
|                                      | Step-father                           | 1         | 2.86       |
|                                      | Neighbor                              | 18        | 51.43      |
| <b>Status of the case</b>            | Already in the court                  | 7         | 56.25      |
|                                      | Amicably settled                      | 28        | 43.75      |
| <b>Child custodian</b>               | Father                                | 16        | 45.71      |
|                                      | Mother                                | 9         | 25.71      |
|                                      | None                                  | 10        | 28.57      |
| <b>Reason/cause of the abuse</b>     | Broken Homes                          | 3         | 8.57       |
|                                      | Poverty                               | 16        | 45.71      |
|                                      | Poor value system                     | 3         | 8.57       |
|                                      | Laziness                              | 1         | 2.86       |
|                                      | Hard-headed                           | 1         | 2.86       |
|                                      | Drug addiction of parents/perpetrator | 7         | 20         |
|                                      | Alcohol addiction of parents          | 4         | 11.43      |

Children also experience harsh physical disciplining and corporal punishment, a common cultural practice in the family home (Runyan et al. 2010; Sanapo & Nakamura 2011). The more parents believed corporal punishment to be normative technique to modify children's behaviors, the more likely it was used (Lansford et al. 2015). Across four countries, including the Philippines, physical discipline influenced children's anxiety and aggression according to their mothers as Lansford et al. (2015) reported.

In the Philippines, approximately 40% of child abuse cases involved sexual abuse of female victims (Romulo & Balamban, 2008). In the report of Maiquilla et al. (2011), most victims of sexual abuse were female aged from 2 years to 18 years old. In most cases, the child victim knew the alleged offender. Sexual abuse can be transgenerational although there are other factors that mediate the effects of child abuse (Mandal & Hindin, 2015; Widom et al., 2015).

Results of this study also showed that majority of sexual offenses occurred once and outside the house of the victim with neighbor as the alleged perpetrator. As mentioned, in most cases of child sexual abuse, the victim knew the offender (Sugue-Castillo, 2009; Maiquilla et al., 2011).

Most cases of child abuse in Ozamiz City were amicably settled. Majority of sexual cases do not proceed to trial because victims choose not to testify against the perpetrator, many of whom are related to them (Maiquilla et al., 2011). Since cases are litigated largely based on testimonial evidence resulting in trials that take years to finish, victims and their families do not usually have the economic resources to finance. The findings may signify the need to examine the law enforcement and legal systems in Ozamiz City. It was found out that the custodian of the most children abused was the father or nobody taking the custody. Based on the result, poverty may be a risk factor increasing the likelihood of child abuse. Risk factors for child sexual abuse included low economic status and impoverished conditions, living in crowded urban communities (Terol, 2009). Extreme poverty means that providing children with food, clean water, medical care and education is extremely difficult. Experiences of poverty leave children susceptible

to exploitation and maltreatment that may lead to child prostitution (Williams et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2012; Urada et al., 2014).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Abused children in Ozamiz city were mostly between 9-12 years old, male and drop-outs from school having low-level education. Almost half of the victims belonged to a large household size living in crowded urban localities. Majority of the victims had parents living together with low income. Abused children still exhibited high educational or career aspirations. Most children were abandoned, others were neglected, physically and sexually abused. Majority of sexual abuse cases occurred once and outside the house of the victim with neighbor as the alleged perpetrator.

It is important that the local government in Ozamiz City and other institutions or organizations collaborate to provide a strong and sustainable support system to the victims of child abuse. Child protection policy has to be reviewed with the participation of other stakeholders in the community.

## **Acknowledgment**

The authors would like to thank the CSWD in Ozamiz City for the support given.

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