

# Childhood victimization and prostitution in Epworth. A developmental victimology perspective

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**Abstract:** Children are the most criminally victimized segment of the population, and a substantial number face multiple, serious "poly-victimizations" during a single year. And despite the fact that the priority emphasis in academic research and government policy has traditionally gone to studying juvenile delinquents, children actually appear before authorities more frequently as victims than as offenders. The considerable ignorance about the realities of child victimization can be chalked up to a field that is fragmented, understudied, and subjected to political demagoguery. In this paper, the researcher presents a comprehensive new vision to encompass the prevention, treatment, and study of juvenile victims, unifying conventional subdivisions like child molestation, child abuse, bullying, and exposure to community violence. Developmental victimology looks at child victimization across childhood's span and yields fascinating insights about how to categorize juvenile victimizations, how to think about risk and impact, and how victimization patterns change over the course of development. The paper also provides a valuable new model of society's response to child victimization. These models will be very useful to anyone seeking to improve the way we try to help child victims. Crimes against children still happen far too often, but by proposing a new framework for thinking about the issue, Childhood Victimization opens a promising door to reducing its frequency and improving the response. Professionals, policymakers, and child advocates will find this paradigm shifting book to be a valuable addition to their shelves.

**Keywords:** Childhood, prostitution, sexual abuse victimisation, victimology

## INTRODUCTION

This paper defines child prostitution before going over its causes globally and in Zimbabwe in particular. A brief examination of the human and child rights violations prevalent in child prostitution is done in order to contextualise the ruin of young lives inherent in child prostitution. The discussion of the international legal framework governing child prostitution is followed by a look at Zimbabwe's state legislation pertaining to the defence of children against prostitution. This is done in order to evaluate the suitability and efficacy of the application of such legal instruments for the protection of such affected or potentially affected children. Finally, recommendations are made for ways to strengthen Zimbabwe's efforts to safeguard kids from child prostitution.

### Background to the Study

A distinct type of negative life experience that sets interpersonal victimisation different from other life experiences is developmental victimology. This victimisation can be described as harms that people experience as a result of other people acting in ways that are against societal standards. Victimization has a unique potential for trauma because of the human agency and norm violation elements. In contrast to other stressors and traumas like sicknesses, bereavements, and natural disasters, it is unique. Although

we sometimes talk of "storm victims," "cancer victims," or "accident victims," interpersonal victimisation is the more general reference for the term victimisation. Issues of malice, treachery, unfairness, and morality are significantly more prevalent in interpersonal victimisation than they are in accidents, diseases, and natural disasters.

Children are victims of all crimes committed by adults, although many aggressive and abnormal human behaviours that cause harm to children are not clearly crimes. Although it is technically a crime, physical abuse of children is rarely punished and is often handled through social control organisations other than the police and criminal courts. Peer attacks are typically not taken seriously by the formal criminal justice system unless they involve older children or are really violent.

Child prostitution is defined as survival sex by children under the age of 18 who offer themselves or are offered for the sexual enjoyment of typically adult customers, typically in exchange for food, money, drugs, gang protection, shelter, and occasionally and oddly, love. According to Kembo and Nhongo, it is the sexual exploitation of a child for financial or in-kind gain that is commonly but not always coordinated by a middleman who could be a parent, relative, procurer, or instructor.

There are several synonyms for child prostitution, including children in prostitution, children forced into prostitution, and children prostitutes, however they all essentially refer to the same situation as described above. When children are coerced, enticed, or groomed into engaging in sexual activities, whether or not they are fully aware of what is happening, it is considered a form of child sexual abuse. The primary goal of this abuse, or the client in the case of child prostitution, is to satisfy the sexual needs of the perpetrator.

Prostitution typically involves physical contact during the performance of the sexual act, ranging from genital touching to oral, anal, and vaginal penetration with the child for a fee. This gendered issue affects girls the most globally and in Zimbabwe in particular. Even though the two ideas are separate, in reality, child prostitution and human trafficking are frequently related, with trafficked children frequently ending up in prostitution. While Kreston argues that child prostitution should be broadly defined to also include domestic movement of children from different cities to other places within the same country for sexual exploitation by adults, child prostitution that is linked to human trafficking is typically associated with crossing borders.

There may not be a large amount of child prostitution trafficking within Zimbabwe. However, due to the lucrative sex industry with long-distance truck drivers, the movement of children from one area to another is very common, especially to border towns like Beitbridge, Plumtree, or Chirundu Boarder Posts where long-distance truck drivers typically camp for days while clearing their loads. The same is true for certain busy business districts along key thoroughfares where long-distance truck drivers stop for a break, such as the Hwange-Victoria Falls highway.

The Runde River Truck-Inn stop, the Mhandamabwe turn-off where truckers sleep, the Rutenga Business Centre, and the Lutumba Business Centre are a few additional such locations along the Harare-Masvingo-Beitbridge highway. Young prostitutes typically roam from one business district to another along the highways with their trucks or in pursuit of new clients. Because child prostitution is an illegal and covert activity, statistics on it are generally acknowledged to be challenging to gather. Research indicates that

there may be up to 10 million children engaged in child prostitution globally. Due to a lack of empirical research on the issue, it is currently unknown how widespread child prostitution is in Zimbabwe.

### Statement of the Problem

One of the most significant responsibilities of the state is to defend children's rights. Zimbabwe has ratified a number of agreements that guarantee the protection of children's rights, including the Children's Act Chapter 5:06 (2001), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) of 1989, and the Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy, which was enacted in 1999. World Vision (2018) claims that Zimbabwe has not established a reliable framework to guarantee the coordination of all child-related initiatives. Zimbabwe must implement the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with other Convention signatory nations notwithstanding the difficulties it now faces (Welbourne and Hoare, 2008). As a result of ineffective policies, child sexual exploitation is still prevalent in Zimbabwe. Child prostitution has been one of the most pervasive forms of sexual exploitation of children. The researcher felt it was important to investigate the sources and effects of this problem because society has chosen to ignore it.

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the issue of childhood victimization and prostitution in Epworth and its effects of children. Other objectives are

1. T  
o determine the causes of child prostitution in Epworth
2. T  
o understand the challenges faced by victims of child prostitution in Epworth.
3. T  
o offer suggestions on how to end child prostitution in Zimbabwe

### Research Questions

1. W  
hat are the causes of child prostitution in Epworth?
2. W  
hat are the challenges faced by victims of child prostitution in Epworth?
3. W  
hat can be done to end child prostitution in Zimbabwe?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Child protection in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy 1999 (Section 81) define a child as any person who is under the age of 18.

A society's shared set of values, norms, and expectations for behaviour are known as its culture (World Health Organisation 2002:59). It is possible to hypothesise that culture influences how the accepted values

of what is known as CSE are defined. As a result, different cultures define exploitation in distinctly different ways. This study has taught us that what would appear to be SE in London may not necessarily have the same conceptual meaning in Harare. In that regard, this study highlights cultural determinants of the SWs' function in Zimbabwean child SE protection.

"Despite there being significant controversy around this problem, it has been observed that CSE/CSA in Zimbabwe is increasing. According to a study by Petrowski and Fry (2016), the overall rates in several African nations ranged from 12% to 44% for boys and 15% to 53% for girls. Zimbabwe was ranked as one of the top countries in the world with the greatest rates of CSA incidents by Laccino (2014) in her research, "Top Five Countries on Child Abuse." This opinion was reinforced by a report by the Zimbabwe Republic Police, which revealed that more than 100 girls are sexually exploited every day (Nyamanhindi, 2014).

### **Theoretical framework**

Social theories are answers to why people behave the way they do, the cause or reason for which needs to be understood (Blaike, 2010). In this sense, the theoretical perspective is seen as a lens that enables a researcher to go through the process of an investigation (data collection and its analysis) and gives direction to the types of questions asked (Creswell, 2015; Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2017). In other words, the theoretical perspective helps identify a suitable methodological paradigm (Kuhn, 2012).. Therefore, in order to involve the SWs in talking and sharing their lived experiences and to unearth their world as interpreted and described by them, the study adopted a phenomenological theoretical perspective. deMarrais and Lapan (2008:56) posits that phenomenology empowers researchers to explore "everyday human experience in close, detailed ways". The researcher wanted to create an environment where, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013), participants would freely give their own views for me to capture the essence of their experiences and to determine whether they had shared meanings. Tarozzi and Mortari (2010:10) view phenomenology as a "way to educate our vision, to define our posture, to broaden the way we look at our world".

### **3. MATERIALS & METHODS**

The qualitative phenomenological approach was used in this study because it helps identify areas and systems that SWs perceive as inhibiting their practice. The method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. The fundamental assumption is that qualitative research in social work is consistent with values and therefore focuses on topics of vulnerable and oppressed people, social and economic justice, and social problems (Fortune et al, 2013). Children are a vulnerable group and this study seeks to address the sensitive topic of CSE (McNaughton Nicholls et al, 2014) with an aim to hear explanations from SWs.

The population is the subject under study or interest to the researcher. In this case the population was based on the victims of child prostitution and members of Child protection systems in Epworth. The number of victims was not available as a result the population was based on an estimate. To save time and resources the researchers did not examine everything under the study, a sample was selected to represent the population. The study was based on a sample of who were 5 victims of child sexual abuse identified in Epworth, 5 members of child protection centres and the 5 members from the department of social welfare.

The researcher chose to interview the participants since their number was manageable. Saunders et al (2009) argued that the sample which is representative must produce the same results that can be produced if the whole population was used. In other words the sample must have acceptable margin of error. The sample was selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling technique to ensure that a representative sample was selected. In order to ensure construct validity, the researchers made sure that all questions on the interview schedule were concise and clear.

#### 4. P **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This section discusses findings emanating from the data collection procedures. Findings will be presented according to the study objectives which are to determine the causes of child prostitution in Epworth, to understand the challenges faced by victims of child prostitution in Epworth and to offer suggestions on how to end child prostitution in Zimbabwe. The researcher intended to conduct 15 interviews. Nonetheless, all intended interviews were successfully conducted. Thus the combined response rate was 100% which according to Mugenda (2003) is ideal in any research in order to generalize findings. It was discovered that of the 15 respondents, 6 were males that's representing 40% of the respondents recruited for the study, while 60% were females.

The study shows that there were more female participants than male participants. This was because of the 5 victims chosen who were all females hence females already had an upper hand. Gender equality could not be achieved because of the nature of the research. The researcher had deliberately tried to be gender sensitive, however the researcher later realised that she might end up collecting unreliable data by including same number of men and women. According to Christian aid, (2020). Nearly 60 % of women and girls aged 15 to 40 years experienced sexual abuse.

#### **Causes of childhood prostitution**

There are quite a number of reasons why children engage in child prostitution. Of all the reasons and hence the different categories of child prostitutes, the one underlying cause identified by the research was poverty in Epworth, as is the case globally. Accordingly, to one of the interviewees from the department of social welfare;

“There is a strong correlation between poverty and commercial sexual exploitation of children in Zimbabwe. As a result of poverty, there is a desire either by the child prostitute herself or her handlers to get financial returns in exchange for the sex with the child hence the overlaying economic gain for child prostitution.”( Source primary data, 2022)

There respondents reported other causes besides economic gain such as unbridled multiple love relationships and sometimes prostitution for fun but these are in the minimal.

The study identified the most common type of child prostitution in Zimbabwe. This type was Individual 'voluntary' child prostitution. According to the respondents this involves a child individually deciding to venture into selling sex for various reasons, chief among them to get monetary returns as a result of poverty. The respondents indicated that this type of child prostitution is done by both children staying at home and those that have run away from home or have left home for various reasons. The most common

are those that have runaway or left home due to domestic violence, dropping out of school, family breakdown, orphan hood, alcohol and drug abuse and/or sexual abuse in the family.

Forced child prostitution by handlers was also identified as a cause for child prostitution, One of the former victims of child exploitation lamented how she was forced in child prostitution

“ Its very unfortunate that fall victim to sex handlers and I was detained somewhere here in Epworth where I was been used as sex slave” ( Source primary data, 2022)

The researcher also established the methods used to persuade the children who included misrepresentation or coercion. This category often involves child trafficking where children are taken from one area, normally with the promise of a job in the city and therefore a better life for the child and her family. When they get to the big cities or any place of perceived greener pastures, the promised better life is nowhere to be found but instead the children are enslaved into child prostitution.

Street life was also identified as another cause for child prostitution. According to the former victims of street child prostitution, street prostitution is survival of the fittest and in order to survive, the older boys normally form gangs and have specific areas that they control in terms of scavenging for food, begging from motorists, good places to sleep and sometimes lucrative places for stealing from the public. The younger and vulnerable street kids are therefore forced to belong to a particular gang if they want to have it easy on the streets. The gang leaders offer protection and freedom around their areas of control and in return they get a share of the takings that the other street kids bring which include money begged or stolen and food scavenged. For girls, once they are living on the streets, it is difficult to survive without help from men. As such they instinctively have to belong to a gang or a particular boy for protection and they make their payment in kind, that is through having sex with the older boys.

However the study established that there are few female street kids as compared to boys. As such, the demand for sex is normally high among the many boys while the supply in the form of the young girls is low. This presents an opportunity for the few young girls to fancy making some money out of this by providing their sexual services for a price to those that can afford to pay, thereby developing themselves into child prostitutes on the streets. The older gang leaders sometimes also become handlers for the girls, thus becoming pimps. Street child prostitutes are, however, not limited to other street boys as clients.

The diagram shows a summary of the causes of prostitution identified by the researcher



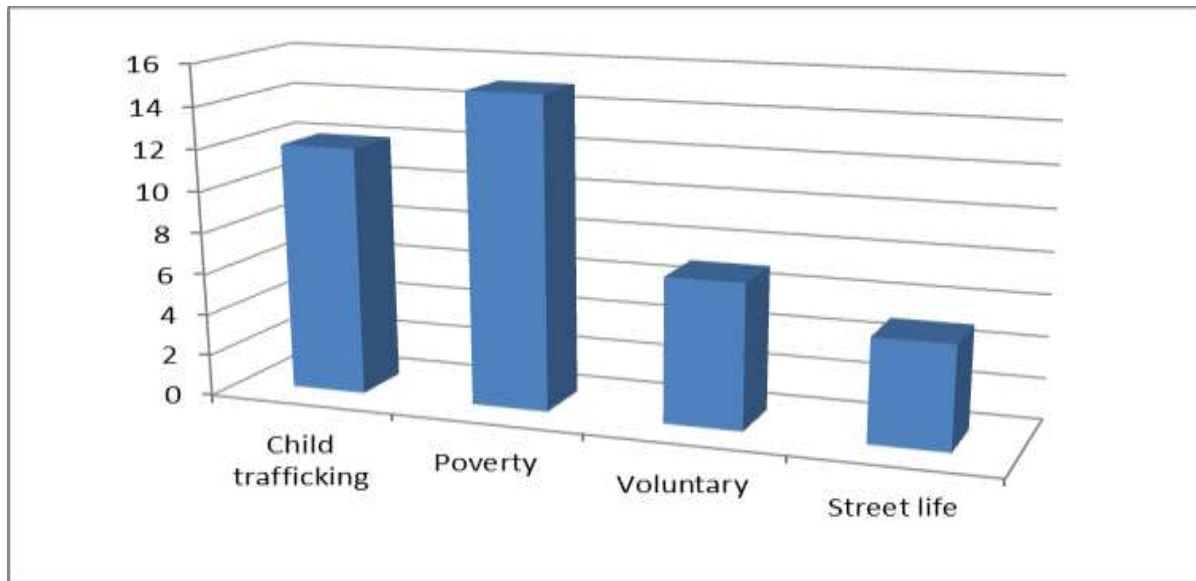


Figure 4:1 causes of prostitution

The column graph shows that all the 15 respondents indicated that poverty was the main driver to child prostitution, followed by child trafficking, voluntary prostitution and street life respectively.

The data gathered shows that there a number of reasons why children engage in child prostitution. Of all the reasons and hence the different categories of child prostitutes, the one underlying cause identified by the research was poverty in Epworth, as is the case globally. The study findings on the issue of poverty and voluntary prostitution supported Hesselink-Louw, Bezuidenhout & Boniface (2018) who stressed that children chooses prostitution as a career as a result of their unbearable circumstances at home. This is buttressed by Montgomery who notes that “While prostitution is not a positive choice for many children, it is nevertheless a choice made with knowledge that there are no good options”. As the children leave home and reach their new area of destination, some join up with friends or acquaintances that have also left home earlier and are already involved in prostitution and the children are easily initiated into the trade. This is most common for those in Zimbabwe who go to the aforementioned border towns that are popular with long-distance truck drivers who are considered a lucrative clientele for prostitutes. However, many leave home with the hope of getting decent jobs in the cities as housemaids or otherwise but sometimes fail to find the jobs. Without food and shelter and therefore destitute, many become vulnerable and desperate and end

### The challenges faced by victims of child prostitution in Epworth

The researcher sought to establish the challenges faced by victim of child prostitution in Epworth and the was no better way of obtaining such information like recording the life stories of the victims. Five victims were recorded and their responses are recorded below:

**Editor’s note:** The full names of the victims are withheld to protect their identity

Chipo was just a 14 year old girl when she met a man online who proposed her. She had no idea the instant connection she had with the man led to months of brainwashing or how long it would take her to realise the man prostituting her out of hotel rooms wasn’t really her boyfriend.

“He made me feel special, I never wanted to leave him”,

Chipo narrated.

“I thought I was in love with him, I thought I was going to be with him for the rest of my life”

Many people around Zimbabwe still think child trafficking as portrayed in movies like “Taken” where a young woman on a trip overseas was kidnapped by a gang and forced into sexual servitude. Chipo said that her trafficker would travel with her around Zimbabwe and usually at night where they stayed away from policy radar. Chipo only realised that she was in the hands of a pimp after she had fallen pregnant and the man disappeared. According to Chipo that marked a shift in her life as she was an orphan who had to look after her unborn baby and also take care of her siblings. Chipo also faced resistance from the community as people saw her as a social outcast. This led her to venture into street prostitution as she was in desperation. To worsen the situation, Chipo ended up contracting HIV and this affected her health as she is now living with HIV and AIDS

Mercy narrated how she ended up being a sex worker at 16 years.

“I had just finished my Ordinary level then I saw a job vacancy on a whatsapp group. They had advertised for an acting audition, I told them I was interested and they asked me to send my pictures. I complied and after some few hours they called me back and send me money to travel to Harare CBD from here in Epworth. My mother was happy that I had finally got a job. I was surprised to be told that we had to go for inspection. They drugged me and some other girls before they had sex with us. What pained me most was that I lost my virginity under the influence of drugs. They kept us in captivity for almost 2 weeks. Since then I have been mentally damaged. It’s almost 6 years down the lane but it feels like yesterday. I lost my dignity”

Moreover, Mary narrated how she injured an artisanal miner after refusing to pay her.

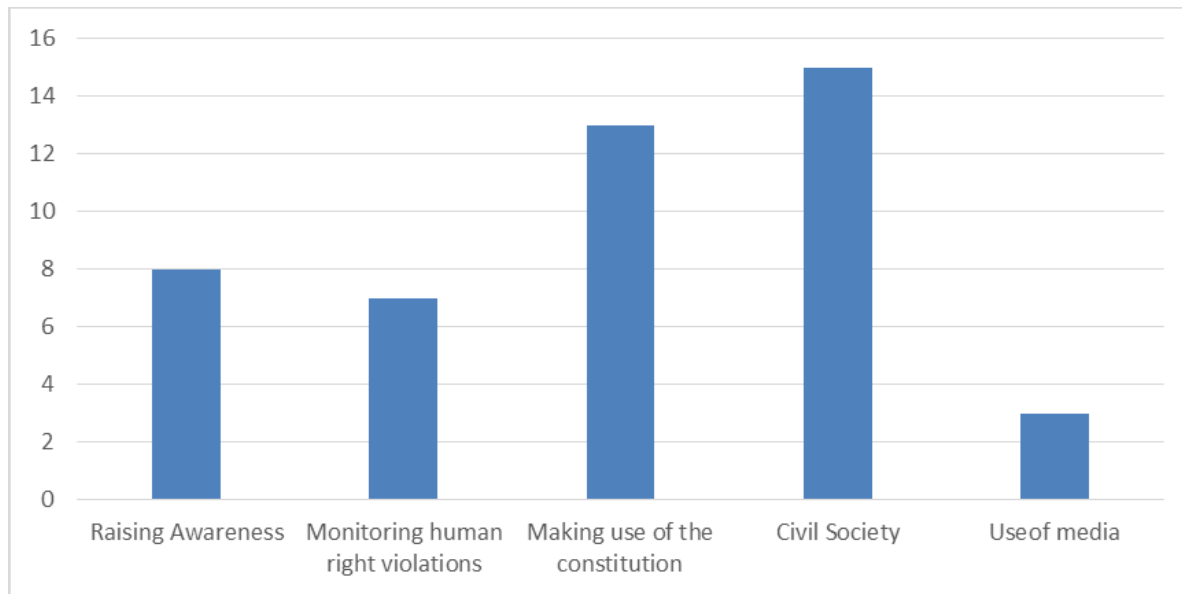
“I had been living in the streets i was very young. I don’t know any of my relatives; I started engaging in sex work voluntarily at 13years as I was trying to make ends meet. It only went wrong one day when I offered my sexual services to one artisanal miner who had made a lot of money from Mazowe. After I offered her my sexual services he refused to pay me and he started telling me it was illegal for a young gal like me to be involved in commercial sex. I hit him with a bar of soap and he fall down and started bleeding. I called my colleagues in desperation thinking he was dead. The police was called and I was arrested. However the man recovered upon arrival at the hospital. To worsen the situation, the man was married and the local population had to insult me using all sorts of words. I suffered emotionally as the community no longer entertained me”

Asked about the challenges faced by victims of child prostitution, the interviewed members from social welfare and CPU in Epworth cited that most of the victims usually end up contracting sexually transmitted infections. They also added that some victims suffer from societal neglect and emotional trauma.



## How to end child prostitution in Zimbabwe

The researcher sought to find solutions to the gaps and shortages of formal and informal child rights safe guarding mechanisms in Zimbabwe. The respondents were asked to identify their suggestions and the following responses were obtained.



Most of the respondents suggested making use of NGOs will assist towards ending child prostitution in Zimbabwe, one of the respondents had the following to say,

“NGOs have been active in ensuring that children both in rural and urban set ups get adequate protection, they also works in empowering the child through education and providing access to information”

The majority cited the need for engagement with civil society organizations. The findings were in line with ( UNICEF,2009) who stressed that Civil society generally fills the gaps left by the market and the state in promoting and defending rights and welfare of people ( in this case children ) , Organizations like Musasa, Childline, Shamwari yemwanasikana have been active in ensuring that children both in rural and urban set ups get adequate protection. They play a monitoring, documentation and assistive role in combating sexual abuse of children. Especially under COVID-19, NGOs were active on the ground. Civil society also works in empowering the child through education and providing access to information. CSOs also advocate and influence policy and legal framework to shape the environmental empowerment of the children and also inform government on the gaps in the existing system as to how it is working or not working to combat child sexual abuse under COVID-19.

## 5 RESEARCH NEEDS

The research needs in the field of developmental victimology are vast and urgent, given the size of the problem and the seriousness of its impact, and they range from studies of risk factors to studies of treatment efficacy to studies of criminal justice policy. But in the limited space of this discussion, we will mention only three important points.

First, if we are to take it seriously, we need much better statistics to document and analyze the scope, nature, and trends of child victimization. The national data collection system about child abuse also has severe methodological limitations, restricting the way in which the information can be aggregated nationally or compared among states (Finkelhor & Wells, 2003). We need comprehensive yearly national and state figures on all officially reported crimes and forms of child abuse committed against children. These need to be supplemented by regular national studies to assess the vast quantity of unreported victimization, including family violence 2nd child-to-child and indirect victimization. While there are methodological challenges in such efforts, studies such as the ones referenced in this paper demonstrate that this is feasible.

Second, we need theory and research that cuts across and integrates the various forms of child victimization. A good example is the work on post-traumatic stress disorder in children, which has been applied to the effects of various victimizations: sexual abuse, stranger abduction, and the witnessing of homicide (Boney-McCoy- Kr Finkelhor, 1995, 1996; Eth & Pynoos, '1 985; Terr, 1990). Similar cross-cutting research could be done on other subjects, such as what makes children vulnerable to victimization or how responses by family members buffer or exacerbate the impact of victimization. To be truly synthesizing, this research needs to study the pandemic victimizations, not just the acute and extraordinary victimizations, which have been the main focus in the past.

Finally, the field needs a more developmental perspective on child victimization. This would begin with a better understanding of the mix of victimization threats that face children of different ages. It would include the kind of factors that place children at risk and the strategies for victimization avoidance that are appropriate at different stages of development. It also would differentiate how children at different stages react to and cope with the challenges posed by victimization. It is ironic that until recently the problem of children as aggressors has had more attention in social science than has children as victims, reflecting perhaps the priorities of the adult world. It is encouraging that as the needs of children are more fully recognized, this balance is finally changing.

## Conclusion

While Zimbabwean legislation may not have explicitly provided for child prostitution as a crime, the offence is relatively adequately provided for in various pieces of law which can be used to combat this horrific practice on children for now. What really lacks is the effective enforcement of these laws on the ground through proactive identification of such cases in communities, effective investigation by police and indeed effective prosecution by the state. While there are many reasons for this apparent lack of enforcement including the hidden nature of the practice and lack of willing complainants as discussed above, political will to tackle the problem still be seen in various initiatives.

Public awareness, for one, is critical to dispel the misconception that child prostitutes are 'willing participants' therefore 'victims by choice'. It is high time that society is educated to begin to see this phenomenon as nothing lesser than the actual rape of a child and should be equally despised. Such awareness should be accompanied by information on how to identify child traffickers and child prostitutes and where to report. This increased activism on child prostitution should ideally be accompanied by victim specific reform-oriented interventions such as rehabilitation, family reunification, back-to-school

programmes or special skills training among others that provide viable alternatives to such children thereby giving them an opportunity in life.

In addition, there is need for specialized training of law enforcement agents to sniff out perpetrators, to conduct effective and successful prosecution and the imposition of deterrent sentences as a warning to would be offenders. As with other sexual offences, children in schools also need to be educated on child prostitution and its negative consequences as a preventive measure. With such collective efforts, child prostitution can at least be reduced in the meantime with a view to completely eradicating it the long term.

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