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PERCEPTIONS ATTITUDES OPINIONS: *CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE*

A STUDY ACROSS SIX CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

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**National Social Workers Congress 1st Joint Congress of ASASWEI and NASW,
SA**

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Methods

1. Document Analysis
2. Review of existing statistical data
3. Stakeholder Analysis
4. Stakeholder Consultation Sessions
5. Focus group discussions
6. Practice-focused interviews
7. Policy-focused interviews
8. Survey of perceptions, attitudes and opinions
9. Narrative interviews with adult survivors

PAOOQ

Perceptions , Attitudes and Opinions Child
Sexual Abuse Questionnaire

An integrated socio-cultural instrument

The Questionnaire

Using a likert measurement scale, the PAOQ is a self-reporting assessment of perceptions, attitudes and opinions on child sexual abuse designed for adults with average levels of literacy. It contains 73 items divided into sections: construction of childhood, perceptions of abuse, attitudes to those involved, opinions on action needed, and personal experiences of abuse and protection.

Theoretical Framework

- ◆ Based on social reality and cultural context
- ◆ Did not impose pre-determined definitions of child sexual abuse
- ◆ Avoidance of assumptions
- ◆ Avoidance of value-laden terms such as 'abuser', 'paedophile', 'perpetrator', 'predator'
- ◆ Explored the relationship of CSA and gender inequality

How childhood is constructed

1. I do not consider anyone over the age of 13 to still be a child
2. A girl who has sex is no longer a child
3. A girl who becomes pregnant is no longer a child
4. A girl ceases to be a child when she begins menstruation
5. A boy stops being a boy once he has his first experience of sex
6. A boy is no longer a boy when he enters puberty
7. Even though someone over the age of 13 is a teenager he/she is still a child until the age of 16
8. Even though someone over the age of 13 is a teenager he/she is still a child until the age of 18

Checking out Social Myths

1. Sex with a father can prepare girls for becoming women
2. Sex between a man and a boy will lead to the boy becoming a homosexual
3. Only homosexual men engage in sex with boys
4. Women do not engage in sex with children
5. Sex between an adult and a child is OK if the child agrees to it
6. If women refuse to have sex with their partners, this can lead to men seeking sex with children
8. As it is a man's role to provide for his children, it is up to him to decide when his children can be involved in sex
9. It's OK for boys to have sex with women
10. In some families sex between adults and children is considered normal

Some Findings:

Caribbean Society is generally clear about the unacceptability of child sexual abuse, cognizant of where the dangers lie and in some cases the reasons for this.

There are protective factors within many Caribbean families that can be harnessed to protect children.



Scale of the Problem

Child sexual abuse is a serious and extensive problem in the region

Respondents presented an alarming picture of a social problem that is escalating and has increasingly severe consequences

CSA is perpetuated not only by adults who carry out harmful sexual practices but also by non-abusing adults through *complicity, silence, denial and failure to take appropriate action*

Abusers

- ◆ Most child sexual abuse is committed by adult men (both heterosexual and homosexual) of all ages and across all levels of social class, educational background and professional status.

The role of women

- ◆ While women abuse children too, the major contribution women make is in failing to protect children even when they are aware of abuse, disbelieving the child, putting male partners before the protection of the child, minimising the harm that abuse does, physically abusing children and, in some instances, permitting or actively encouraging abuse to take place for material gain.

Victims

- ❑ Most victims are girls
- ❑ Sexual abuse of boys also common

*The growing phenomenon of the abuse of boys
(both within and outside the home) was
reported as a major issue*

Main forms of sexual abuse

- ◆ Intra-familial abuse (abuse that happens in the privacy of the home)
- ◆ Non-family abuse (abuse that takes place outside of the family setting)
- ◆ Transactional sexual abuse

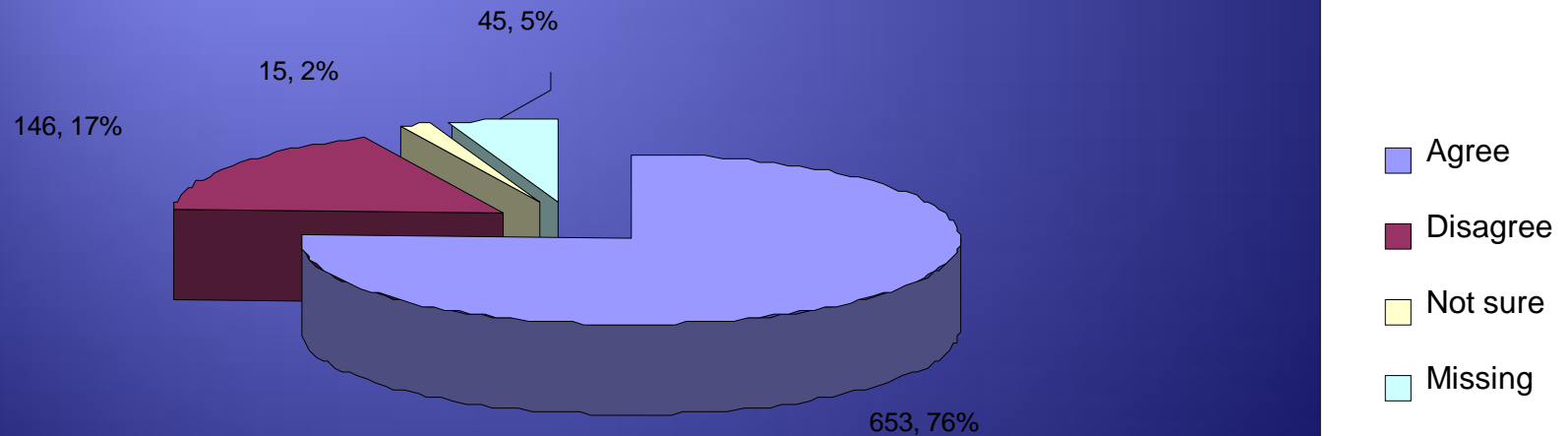
Plus some emergent trends

Transactional sexual abuse

- ◆ Primarily older men and teenage girls
- ◆ Increasingly boys are involved
- ◆ Isolated examples of women targeting young girls and boys
- ◆ High rates of transactional sex *between* young people increases risk of being targeted by men
- ◆ Often carried out openly
- ◆ Is sometimes widely known about
- ◆ In some circumstances is socially sanctioned

Sexual activity between adults and children is never OK no matter what

Not everyone thinks so....



Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Contributing factors – women's complicity

- ❑ Poverty - single mothers economically dependent on men, ignore abuse within the home in order ensure the family's economic survival.
- ❑ The commodification of sex within society
- ❑ Patriarchal values typified by men's sense of entitlement to sexually abuse the female children of their partners because they are the breadwinners.

- ❑ Gender socialisation and gender norms.
- ❑ Cyclical abuse - many mothers were victims themselves and do not know how to end the cycle of abuse.
- ❑ Predatory behaviour of men who target vulnerable families.

“Who would they go to stop it, we didn't protect them as children and they know we won't protect their children”

Contributing Factors – childhood status

Some men indicated that they considered girls to be 'legitimate sexual prey' once they reach their teens.

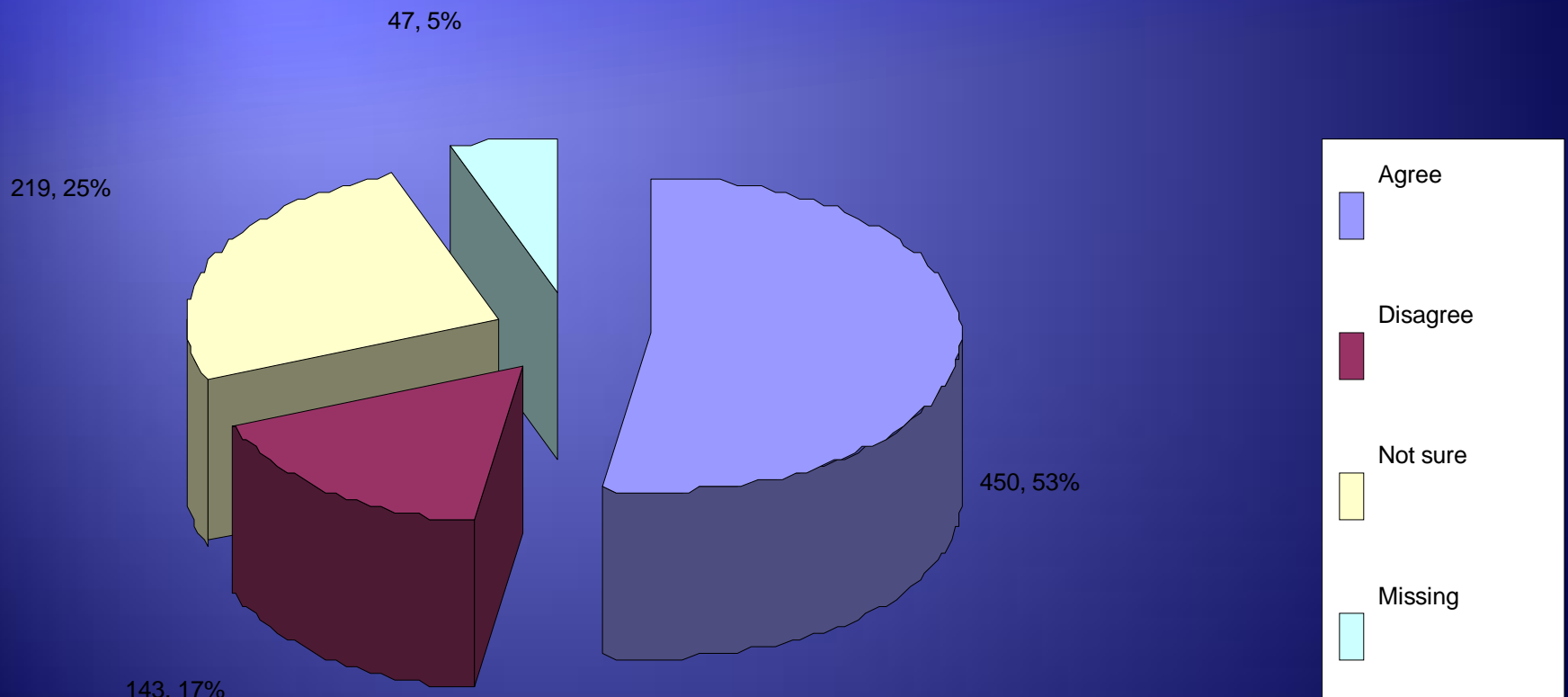
The bible says that when a woman goes through puberty she is ready, so if it happens at 11 she is ready

(Male Focus Group Participant).

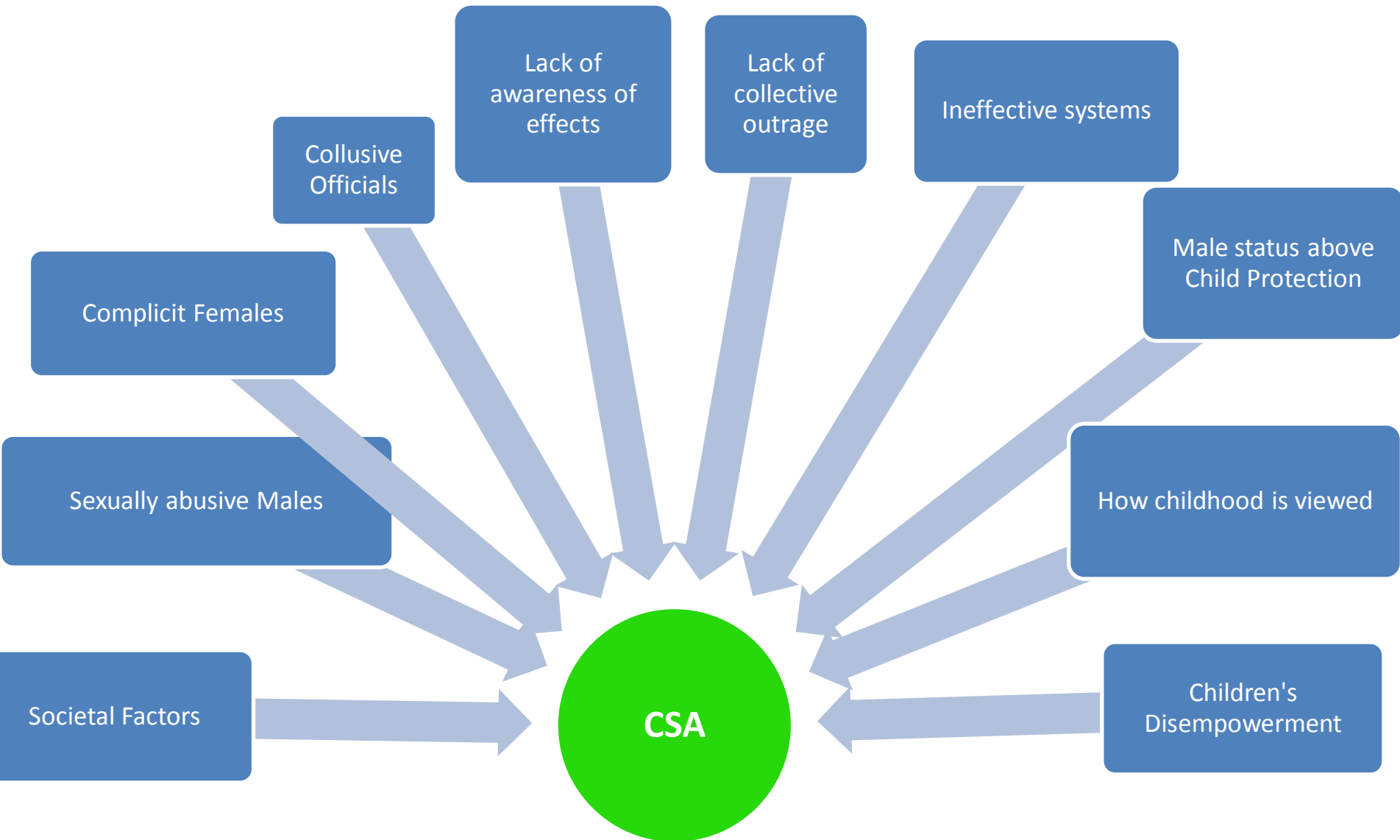


Some women regard men having sex with their daughters as OK for financial reasons if the girl is at an age *they* (the mother) considers appropriate even though, in all the instances reported, the girls were minors.

Cycle of abuse: *some men who abuse were abused themselves*



SUSTAINING FACTORS: A Systems Model



Recommendations

Social and cultural factors also evident in the recommendations e.g.

- ◆ Role of religion
- ◆ Challenges of small societies
- ◆ Vulnerability of dependence on tourism
- ◆ Use of cultural media for public education