

Knowledge and Perception on Sexual Abuse Amongst Female Secondary School Students in Abia State Nigeria

Chigozirim Nlewem

Institute of Child Health, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

Olukemi K Amodu

Institute of Child Health, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

Abstract

Knowledge and perception on child sexual abuse has been poorly determined in developing countries. Female children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse due to ignorance of behaviours that are known to be abusive. The study was conducted to assess the knowledge and perception on sexual abuse among female secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria to raise awareness. The study employed a cross sectional design where 350 students between the ages of 13-17 years from six secondary schools were interviewed using a validated semi – structured questionnaire to collect information on knowledge and perception on child sexual abuse. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square. Three hundred and eleven (88.9%) of the respondents, believed that some children were sexually abused by older children, 72.3% believed that most people who sexually abuse children were not members of the child's family, 89.7% believed that most sexually abused children were vulnerable to abuse at night, when alone and outside their home. Seventy eight percent of respondents could correctly define child sexual abuse. The sources of information on sexual abuse were from teachers (48.7%), mothers (25.2%), media (23.8%), internet (15.5%) and friends (15.2%). Respondents that come from monogamous households were more knowledgeable on sexual abuse behaviours than respondents from either polygamous or single parent households ($p = 0.043$). This study showed that most respondents were knowledgeable about sexual abuse and teachers were the highest source of information. The fact that school played a significant role in the knowledge of sexual abuse in this study, poses a need to focus attention on increasing the awareness of students by integrating topics on sexual abuse in primary and secondary school curriculum.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, Knowledge, Perception, Female Secondary school students.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse in recent times, has received attention as a public health epidemic especially in developing countries. Child sexual abuse is generally condemned in most cultures. Many studies have shown that the severity of child sexual abuse has been found mostly related to the age of the child victim relative to the abuser; relationship between the child victim and the abuser; the extent of violence, threat, manipulation, inducement employed by the abuser; frequency of abuse; and injury associated with the abuse (Ladam, 2001; Dzimadzi and Klopper, 2007; Leher *et al.*, 2007; Audu *et al.*, 2008; Abdulkadir *et al.*, 2011; Yahaya *et al.*, 2012; Jubril, 2012; Bugaje *et al.*, 2012; Chinawa *et al.*, 2013; Akhiwu *et al.*, 2013; Badejoko *et al.*, 2014; Girgira *et al.*, 2014).

There is no generally accepted definition of sexual abuse as a result of differences in perception regarding what is acceptable as being abusive. In the past, child sexual abuse was defined as sexual behaviour between a child and an adult; between two children when one of them is significantly older or uses coercion; sexual body contact prior to age of 18 years by someone of any age and relationship to the respondent (Wyatt and Mickey 1988, Smith, 2002). Sexual abuse was restricted to incidents involving bodily contact, including breast or genital fondling and attempted or completed vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse (Wyatt *et al.*, 1990). In recent years, child sexual abuse is perceived as forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening (DCSF, 2010; Sedlak *et al.*, 2010). Sexual behaviours of this kind include touching breasts, buttocks, and genitals whether the victim is dressed or undressed, exhibitionism, fellatio, cunnilingus and penetration of the vagina or anus with sexual organs or with objects and also including pornographic photography (Smith, 2002, DCSF, 2010; Sedlak *et al.*, 2010; Alink *et al.*, 2011; Ogunfowoka and Fajemilebin 2012).

A study carried out amongst female students in Malawi (Dzimadzi and Klopper 2007) showed that majority of respondents (93.6%) were aware that sexual abuse is a crime but only a few could correctly perceive abusive acts as sexual abuse such as touching of private parts by a friend and touching of their breasts by a lover without permission. Most of the respondents (93.6%) however identified sexual intercourse that involves an adult and a child as sexual abuse. A study among young Igala women in Nigeria showed that young women view sexual abuse in the context of sex when one of the parties is not interested, longer than necessary, in a manner the woman dislikes, in an uncomfortable place, when the man is drunk with alcohol, during menstruation, rough handlings during sex, wrong positioning during sex, and rape (Tinuola and Olaogun 2009). A study carried out

in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria on perception of sexual abuse showed that although the majority of students correctly described what rape is, only few students knew that intercourse between a male or female adult and a male or female below 16 years of age, as well as intercourse under force are also considered rape (Eke et al., 2011). In a study among the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa), it was discovered that sexual abuse on a child below the age of 18 by an adult male was common among the three ethnic groups. It was perceived as sexual abuse among the Yoruba and Igbo tribes but not so among the Hausa tribe where child marriages are common (Aderinto, 2010; National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] & ICF Macro, 2009). In addition, among these three tribes most believed that there is a strong relationship between exposure to mass media and sexual abuse because of the perception that the introduction of mass media was the main source of moral decadence and sexual abuse (Aderinto, 2010).

The purpose of this present study was to access the knowledge and perception on sexual abuse among female adolescent girls between the ages of 13-17 years, attending secondary school in Abia State.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted in Aba zone, a commercial city in Abia State Nigeria, which is located in the South eastern region of Nigeria. Abia State is made up of 17 Local government Areas and has three zones namely Aba zone, Umuahia zone and Ohafia zone. The traditional language of the people is Igbo. English is widely spoken and serves as the official language in governance and business. Aba is a city and a big trading center (Hoiberg, 2010).

Study design and participants

This study is a descriptive cross sectional study that employed quantitative method of data collection. The study population consisted of 350 adolescent girls between the ages of 13-17 years, attending public and privately owned co-educational and only female secondary schools in Aba zone. Privately owned and Public co-educational and Girls' schools were used since the study focuses on female secondary school students

Sampling procedure

A four-stage sampling method was used in selecting study participants. A list of secondary schools registered with the Ministry of Education at the time the study was obtained. The first stage involved the random selection of three local governments from the nine local governments in the Aba zone. Then a random selection of two schools from each local government was done giving a total of six schools. The next stage involved a proportional selection of the population of students from each school that was selected. After this, a proportional allocation of the population of students was selected from each class in each selected school. In the fourth stage, the school's class registers were used as a sampling frame. Students were selected using systematic random sampling, a sampling interval (k) was determined and between 1 and k , a number was randomly selected as the first sample member. With this random start, every k th individual in the sampling frame was selected down the list.

Data Collection

The study utilized a semi structured interviewer-assisted questionnaire. The questions were grouped under different sections to elicit information on socio demographics, knowledge and perception of female secondary students on child sexual abuse.

Data were collected by trained research assistants and the researcher. Consent was obtained from the participants after explaining the purpose of the research, time that would be spent and the benefits of the research.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were checked for completeness. A serial number was given to each completed questionnaire for easy identification. The responses in each questionnaire were hand-coded using a coding guide and a careful review of the responses in the entire questionnaire. After the entire questionnaire had been coded, a template was designed and responses entered using SPSS software version 20. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Approval was obtained from the Joint University of Ibadan and University College Hospital Institutional Review Committee (IRC). Informed consent was obtained from the Principals of each school and an assent form signed by the respondents after the purpose of the study had been explained to them. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, serial numbers and not names were used for identification of respondents. The questionnaires were properly kept in a safe place and were accessible only to the lead researchers. The researcher explained the

purpose of the study to the participants and allowed them to ask questions about the research before asking them to complete the questionnaire (Babbie et al., 2005). The participants were assured that taking part in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw their participation at any stage (Gwirayi, 2013). The study was relatively risk free; however participants who felt distressed during the study were advised to withdraw and were counselled by the School Counsellor.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

The mean age of the respondents was 15.66±1.0 years. Two hundred and fifteen (61.4%) of them were in senior secondary school one (SSS1). Majority (99.4%) were Christians, and 342 (97.7%) were from the ethnic group Igbo. Of the 350 respondents, 267 (76.3%) were from monogamous family, 42 (12%) from polygamous family and 40 (11.4%) had a single parent (separated/divorced or widowed). Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Perceptions of respondents on child sexual abuse

Table 2 shows the perception on sexual abuse among respondents. Out of the 350 respondents, 311 (88.9%), believed that some children were sexually abused by older children, 72.3% believed that most people who sexually abuse children did not belong to the child's family, 89.7% believed that most of the children were sexually abused when they are alone, at night and outside their home. However, 204 (58.3%) did not believe that only girls were victims of sexual abuse, 59.1% believed that children from reputable families were not victims of sexual abuse. About, 46% thought that many children were victims while 40.3% had opposing views, believing that very few children were victims of sexual abuse. About 70% did not believe that only young children were victims of sexual abuse. One hundred and ninety five (55.7%) believed that reporting a sexual abuse situation even after a period of one year could still be prosecuted.

Knowledge of respondents on child sexual abuse

Majority (77.9%) of the respondents had a very good knowledge on child sexual abuse. About (81.7%) recognized an adult or an older child forcing a child to be fondled (caressing, rubbing, kissing on the whole body or and the genitals) and submitting to full sexual intercourse with penetration as sexual abuse (Table 3).

Sources of information

Majority of the respondents, 170(48.7%) got their information on sexual abuse from their teachers, 26.9% from both parents, 25.2% from mother alone, 23.8% from the media (film, radio, TV), 15.5% from the internet, 15.2% from their friends (see Table 4). However, 51 (14.6%) of the respondents reported that nobody told them anything on sexual abuse and very few (2.9%) got their information from their fathers (Figure 1)

Association between respondents' knowledge on child sexual abuse and family type

Two hundred and eight (79.4%) respondents who recognised an adult demanding or forcing a child to look at his genital as sexual abuse ($\chi^2 = 6.267$, $p = 0.044$) and 213 (78.3%) respondents who recognised an adult demanding or forcing a child to look at pornographic pictures, drawing, films, videotapes or magazines as sexual abuse were from monogamous households ($\chi^2 = 10.127$, $p = 0.006$). In addition, 221(77.3%) respondents who recognised an adult demanding or forcing a child to submit to full sexual intercourse with penetration as sexual abuse ($\chi^2 = 6.287$, $p = 0.043$) and 209 (78.0%) respondent that recognised an adult demanding or forcing a child to submit to having his/her fingers or an object introduced in your body as sexual abuse were from monogamous home ($\chi^2 = 8.937$, $p = 0.011$).

In summary respondents from monogamous households recognised displaying of genitals, forced to watch pornography, child rape and fingering of the genitals as child sexual abuse than respondents from polygamous household ($p < 0.05$). Shown in table 5

Discussion

This study accessed the knowledge and perception of students on child sexual abuse, the sources of information on child sexual abuse and associations between the students' family types and knowledge on child sexual abuse. Findings show that majority of the respondents (88.9%), believed that some children are sexually abused by older children. This was consistent with the findings by Ikechebelu et al. (2008) that revealed that majority of people that abuse children are older children. Majority of the students (72.3%) also believed that most people who sexually abuse children do not belong to the child's family. This corroborated findings of Girgira et al. (2014) that showed (13.4%) of abusers of children were relatives of the children, and 86.6% do not belong to the child family.

About (89.7%) of the students believed that most children are sexually abused when they are alone, at

night and outside their home. The perception of the students was consistent with the study by Badejoko et al. (2014) that found the peak hour of sexual abuse to be 8.00pm. More than half of the students did not believe that only girls were victims of sexual abuse. This is confirmed by studies by (Halperin *et al.*, 1996; Jekayinfa and Olawepo 2000; Madu and Peltzer., 2001; Saweyc *et al.*, 2003; Ajuwon *et al.*, 2006; Bassani *et al.*, 2009; Adudans *et al.*, 2011; Gwirayi, 2012) that revealed that sexual abuse of children occurs in both sexes. In addition, more than half of the respondents did not believe that children from wealthy families are victims of sexual abuse. This may be due to the fact child sexual abuse is not a function of family wealth and urban residency as confirmed by a study conducted in an urban city in Zimbabwe by Gwirayi (2012) that reported a high prevalence of sexual abuse of children of about 56.3%. About, (40.3%) did not believe that few children are victims of sexual abuse. The respondents' perception is consistent with studies that found a high prevalence of child sexual abuses in Nigeria (Ikechebelu et al., 2008; Nduka and Duru, 2014). However this is not widespread and may be due to the hidden and silent nature of child sexual abuse. A majority (71.1%) did not believe that only young children were victims of sexual abuse. This corroborates findings by Fawole et al. (2002) that reported a sexual abuse prevalence of 30.4% among teenagers, suggesting that when issues of child sexual abuse are not disclosed, children become victims of sexual violence in the later age.

Majority of the respondents identified factors that constitute sexual abuse, while very few respondents demonstrated limited knowledge. Most of the responses on the correct definitions and description of child sexual abuse were above 70%. In addition, the respondents recognised sexual abuse involving physical contacts more than sexual acts not involving physical contacts. An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to look at his genitals was recognised as sexual abuse by more than 70% of the respondents. This corroborates finding among female Malawian students (Dzimadzi and Klopper 2007). An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to be fondled (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole body and/or private parts) was recognised as sexual abuse by 87.7% of the respondents. Findings in Malawi by Dzimadzi and Klopper (2007) reported that an adult touching buttocks and backside of female children in a sexual way was recognized by 70.8% as sexual abuse, but they failed to recognize a friend touching a private part of a child as sexual abuse.

An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to fondle him was recognised as sexual abuse by 78.3% of the respondents. This finding was similar to the study of Dzimadzi and klopper (2007) in Malawi which reported 75.3%. An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to submit to full sexual intercourse with penetration (child rape) was largely recognised as sexual abuse by 81.7% of the female respondent. This collaborated finding by Dzimadzi and Klopper (2007) and Tinuola and Olaogun (2009) but was contrary to findings by Fawole et al (2002) who showed a low recognition of 28% by young female hawkers in south western Nigeria.

The major sources of information on child sexual abuse were teachers (45.7%). This study also showed (26.9%) parents efforts to educate children on child sexual abuse, indicating that only few parents educate their children on child sexual abuse. This finding differs from a survey in New Jersey that reported 79% of caregivers' effort to educate their children on sexual abuse (Deblinger *et al.*, 2010). An increased awareness on topics on sexual abuse by teachers and parents may help to curb this potential public health epidemic. There was a significant association between the knowledge of the students on child sexual abuse and different types of households. Respondents from monogamous homes were more knowledgeable on sexual abuse behaviours than respondents from either polygamous or single parent households.

Conclusions

The study has shown that schools played a significant role in increasing awareness about child sexual abuse; parents were found to be second highest source of information on child sexual abuse. In addition, the family settings also played a role in the knowledge of sexual abuse among the respondents. There is therefore a need to focus attention on increasing the awareness of students by integrating topics on sexual abuse in primary and secondary school curriculum. Public awareness is the foundation on which understanding and empowerment are built. Increased public enlightenment on child sexual abuse can lead to implementation, increased advocacy and positive proactive responses to child sexual abuse. Therefore, there should be an effective and frequent public awareness on the media.

Competing interests

The authors declares that they have no competing interest

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Table 1 Socio demographic characteristics of female secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria

| Characteristics | N= 350 | % |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------|
| Age group (Years) | | |
| 13 | 6 | 1.7 |
| 14 | 40 | 11.4 |
| 15 | 100 | 28.6 |
| 16 | 126 | 36.0 |
| 17 | 78 | 22.3 |
| Type of school | | |
| Public | 219 | 62.6 |
| Mission | 131 | 37.4 |
| Class | | |
| SSS 1 | 215 | 61.4 |
| SSS 2 | 135 | 38.6 |
| Religion | | |
| Christianity | 348 | 99.4 |
| Islam | 1 | 0.3 |
| Traditional | 1 | 0.3 |
| Ethnic group | | |
| Igbo | 342 | 97.7 |
| Yoruba | 5 | 1.4 |
| Hausa | 2 | 0.6 |
| Others ⁺ | 1 | 0.3 |
| Family type | | |
| Monogamy | 267 | 76.3 |
| Polygamy | 42 | 12.0 |
| Single parent | 40 | 11.4 |
| Others [*] | 1 | 0.3 |

Others ⁺ Ibibio ^{**} mother marries another man

Table 2 Perception on sexual abuse among female secondary school students in Abia State Nigeria

| Characteristics | N = 350 | % |
|--|---------|------|
| Some children are sexually abused by older children | | |
| Agree | 311 | 88.9 |
| Disagree | 18 | 5.1 |
| I don't know | 21 | 6.0 |
| Most people who sexually abuse children do not belong to the child's family | | |
| Agree | 253 | 72.3 |
| Disagree | 53 | 15.1 |
| I don't know | 44 | 12.6 |
| Most of the children are sexually abused when they are alone, at night and outside their home | | |
| Agree | 314 | 89.7 |
| Disagree | 16 | 4.6 |
| I don't know | 20 | 5.7 |
| Only girls are victims of sexual abuse | | |
| Agree | 112 | 32.0 |
| Disagree | 204 | 58.3 |
| I don't know | 34 | 9.7 |
| Children from reputable families are not victims of sexual abuse | | |
| Agree | 65 | 18.6 |
| Disagree | 207 | 59.1 |
| I don't know | 78 | 22.3 |
| Few children are victims of sexual abuse | | |
| Agree | 162 | 46.3 |
| Disagree | 141 | 40.3 |
| I don't know | 47 | 13.4 |
| Only young children are victims of sexual abuse | | |
| Agree | 55 | 15.7 |
| Disagree | 249 | 71.1 |
| I don't know | 46 | 13.1 |
| A majority of sexual abuse perpetrators are retarded or mentally ill | | |
| Agree | 136 | 38.9 |
| Disagree | 108 | 30.9 |
| I don't know | 106 | 30.3 |
| Even if one lets a year go by before talking about a sexual abuse situation, it is still possible to do something about it. | | |
| Agree | 195 | 55.7 |
| Disagree | 39 | 11.1 |
| I don't know | 116 | 33.1 |
| In sexual abuse cases, the children him/herself is never responsible | | |
| Agree | 125 | 35.7 |
| Disagree | 142 | 40.6 |
| I don't know | 83 | 23.7 |

Table 3 Knowledge on sexual abuse among female secondary school students in Abia State Nigeria

| Characteristics | N = 350 | % |
|---|---------|------|
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to look at his genitals | | |
| YES | 262 | 74.9 |
| NO | 88 | 25.1 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to undress and show her genitals (private part) | | |
| YES | 277 | 79.1 |
| NO | 73 | 20.9 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to look at pornographic pictures, drawings, films, videotapes or magazines. | | |
| YES | 272 | 77.7 |
| NO | 78 | 22.3 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to be naked and to expose your genitals for picture taking or filming. | | |
| YES | 257 | 73.4 |
| NO | 93 | 26.6 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to be fondled (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole body and/or your genitals). | | |
| YES | 286 | 81.7 |
| NO | 64 | 18.3 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to fondle him (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole body and/or your genitals). | | |
| YES | 274 | 78.3 |
| NO | 76 | 21.7 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to submit to full sexual intercourse with penetration. | | |
| YES | 286 | 81.7 |
| NO | 64 | 18.3 |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to submit to having his/her fingers or an object introduced in your body. | | |
| YES | 268 | 76.6 |
| NO | 82 | 23.4 |

Table 4 Sources of information on sexual abuse among female secondary school students in Aba zone, Abia State, Nigeria

| Characteristics | n | % |
|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Mother | 88 | 25.2 |
| Father | 10 | 2.9 |
| Both parents | 94 | 26.9 |
| Teacher | 170 | 48.7 |
| Friend | 53 | 15.2 |
| Internet | 54 | 15.5 |
| Media (Film/radio/TV) | 83 | 23.8 |
| Nobody told me | 51 | 14.6 |
| Others | 1 | 0.3 |
| Multiple responses | | |

Table 5 Association between family type and knowledge of sexual abuse among female secondary school students in Aba zone, Abia State, Nigeria

| Variable | Family type | | | χ^2 | p - value |
|---|-------------|----------|---------------|----------|-----------|
| | Monogamy | Polygamy | Single Parent | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to look at his genitals | | | | | |
| Yes | 208(79.4) | 29(11.1) | 25 (9.5) | 6.267 | *0.044 |
| No | 59(67.0) | 13(14.8) | 16(18.2) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to undress and show her genitals (private part) | | | | | |
| Yes | 217(78.3) | 32(11.6) | 28(10.1) | 3.880 | 0.144 |
| No | 50(68.5) | 10(13.7) | 13(17.8) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to look at pornographic pictures, drawings, films, videotapes or magazines. | | | | | |
| Yes | 213(78.3) | 35(12.9) | 24 (8.8) | 10.127 | *0.006 |
| No | 54(69.2) | 7(9.0) | 17(21.8) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to be naked and to expose your genitals for picture taking or filming. | | | | | |
| Yes | 202(78.6) | 32(12.5) | 23 (8.9) | 7.155 | *0.028 |
| No | 65(69.9) | 10(10.8) | 18(19.3) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to be fondled (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole body and/or your genitals). | | | | | |
| Yes | 221(77.3) | 38(13.3) | 27 (9.4) | 9.260 | *0.010 |
| No | 46(71.9) | 4(6.2) | 14(21.9) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to fondle him (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole body and/or your genitals). | | | | | |
| Yes | 214(78.1) | 34(12.4) | 26 (9.5) | 6.055 | *0.048 |
| No | 53(69.7) | 8(10.5) | 15(19.7) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to submit to full sexual intercourse with penetration. | | | | | |
| Yes | 221(77.3) | 37(12.9) | 28 (9.8) | 6.287 | *0.043 |
| No | 46(82.8) | 5(7.8) | 13(20.3) | | |
| An adult or an older child demanding or forcing a child to submit to having his/her fingers or an object introduced in your body. | | | | | |
| Yes | 209(78.0) | 35(13.1) | 24 (8.9) | 8.937 | *0.011 |
| No | 58(70.7) | 7(8.5) | 17(20.7) | | |

*significant

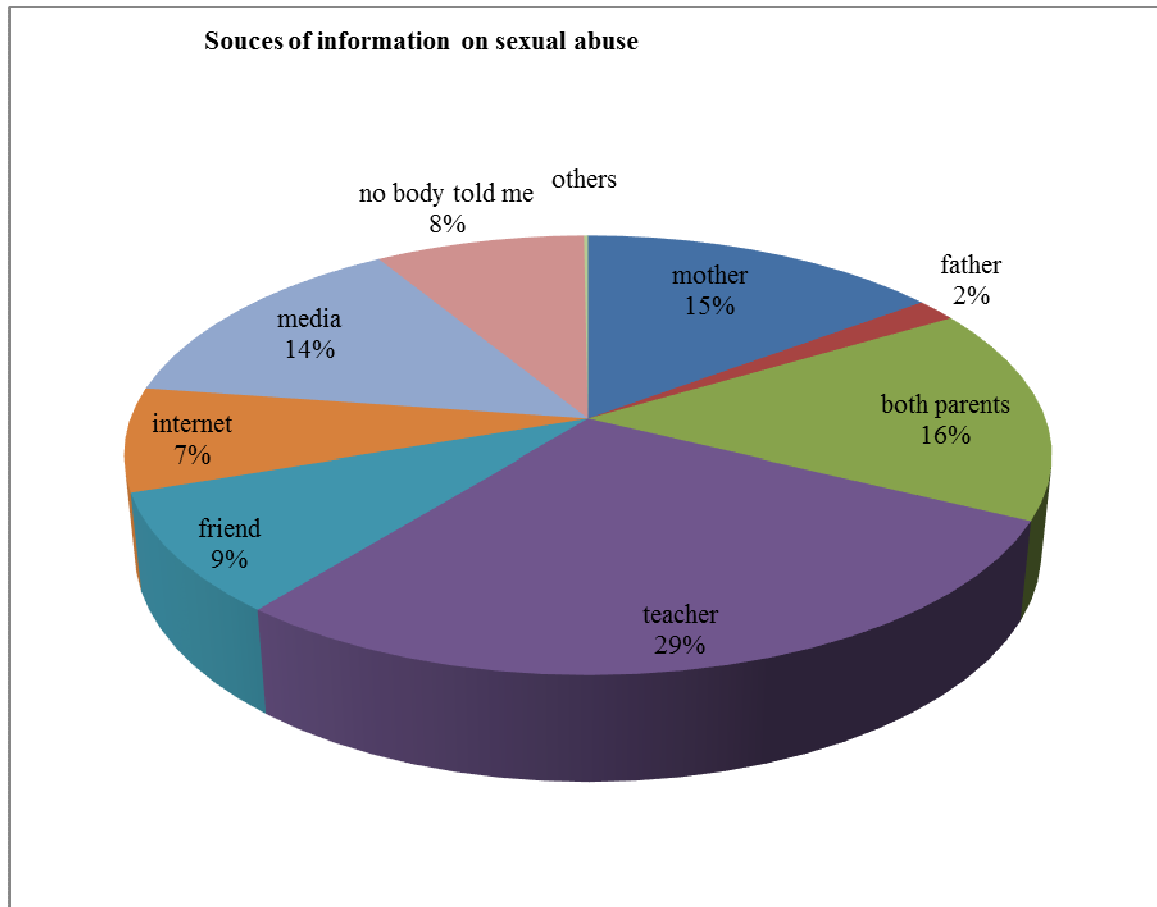


Figure 1 Sources of information utilized by female secondary school students in Abia state, Nigeria.