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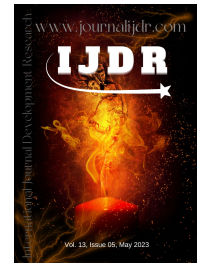
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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PROFILE OF SEXUALLY ABUSED MALE CHILDREN IN THE WOMEN AND CHILD PROTECTION UNIT OF A TERTIARY HOSPITAL IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES FROM 2003-2021

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual abuse and violence remains a problem. It affects both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as their families and communities. Reported victims commonly involved the female children. Males as victims of such violence is underestimated. It should be addressed through a public health preventative strategy. This study provided a background of sexually abused male children admitted or evaluated in a tertiary government hospital in the Southern part of the Philippine archipelago. **Objectives:** To describe the profile of sexually abused male children seen at Southern Philippines Medical Center, Women and Child Protection Unit (WCPU) from 2003-2021. **Method:** This is a descriptive, retrospective cross-sectional study that utilized medical records of abused male children admitted at the Women and Child Protection Unit from 2003 to 2021. **Conclusion:** Sexual abuse in male children is still a challenge not just in our country but also globally. The incidence is increasing involving mostly in their adolescent years. Socioeconomic status is still a risk factor. Majority of the perpetrator is known to the victims and these incidences happened in their community. The findings of this study provided important information that can be used to develop interventions in preventing sexual abuse and to provide appropriate support for male victims of sexual abuse.

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INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse affects millions of children, both boys and girls, in large and small communities across diverse range of cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Offenders include men and women, strangers, trusted friends or family, and people of all sexual orientations, socioeconomic classes, and cultural backgrounds. (Cromer, 2010). In a 2019 report of the World Health Organization, global estimates show that 120 million girls under the age of 20 have experienced some form of sexual contact while boys have experienced sexual violence in childhood by 17% (Ligiero, 2019). It has been argued before that childhood sexual abuse of males is not yet recognized as a problem. It may sometimes be unheard of, but a growing underestimated statistic has been observed, especially in sexual violence involving boys. Sexual abuse of boys appears to be shared, underreported, underrecognized, and undertreated (Holmes, 1997). It was found that 1 in 6 men experienced abusive sexual experiences before age 18 based on retrospective studies conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

In our country, a study conducted by UNICEF in 2016 revealed that sexual violence in children aged 13 to 18 years old claims that males have more significant experiences than females. In cases of severe sexual violence where 3.2% was reported, about 4.1% were males, which was significantly higher than females (UNICEF, 2016). Southern Philippines Medical Center, Women and Child Protection Unit has been an intervention center using a multidisciplinary approach in promoting the health and welfare of Filipinos by addressing the medical and psychosocial needs of the survivors of violence. To date, there has been no study that records the profiles of sexually abused male children. This study provided baseline information that will be used in establishing local and national programs to address this increasingly global issue.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive, retrospective cross-sectional study that used the medical records of sexually abused male children aged 18 years old and below who were examined by a pediatric resident/consultant at the

Women and Child Protection Unit from 2003 to 2021. Purposive sampling method was utilized. The data collected were encoded in an Excel file and subsequently analyzed. Frequency and percent were used for the prevalence rate of abused male children. The demographic profile, the location of the abuse, the type of abuse, the perpetrator and disclosure made use of descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Frequency and percent were used for qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Southern Philippines Medical Center, Women and Child Protection Unit recorded a total of 6,019 child sexual abuse cases from 2003 to 2021. A total of 157 cases were male children. Based on this data, the prevalence of male sexual abuse is 2.6%. Thus, 2 out of 100 children who reported sexual abuse were male children (Figure 1).

ages of 13 and 18 years experienced some form of sexual violence during their childhood. Also, according to an Annual Report of Child Protection Network last 2019, ages 13 and 15 years old were the most at risk for sexual abuse and out of these cases, about 4.6% were boys. Cases reported in WCPU were from Davao City, Philippines and majority were found to be in District I with 38%, district II with 36%, followed by district III with 22%. Reported incidence of sexual abuse in male children came from a nuclear type of family with 69%, followed by extended family (27%). Family structure is the most important indicator and a major risk factor for sexual abuse as well as the poor family background (Sedlak, 2010). However, in our reported cases, majority were from a nuclear family and only 1% came from a family with single parent (Table 1). In terms of economic status, which is also a major risk factor, most of the cases were from the low-income class with 34% while there is no significant difference between poor (19%), lower middle class (17%), and middle class (17%).

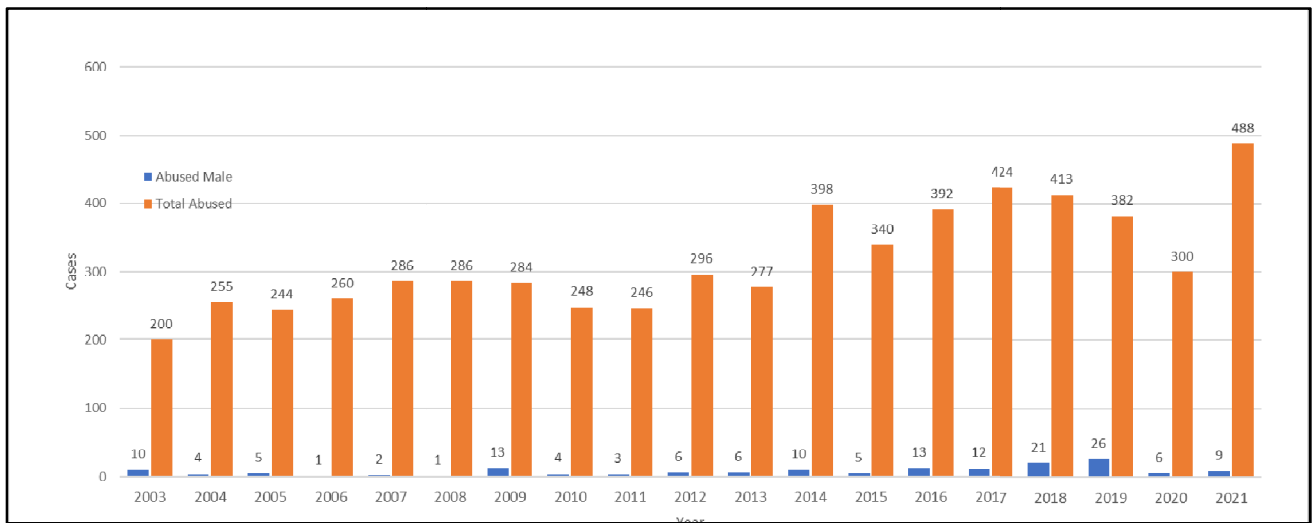


Figure 1. Prevalence of sexually abused male children from 2003 to 2021

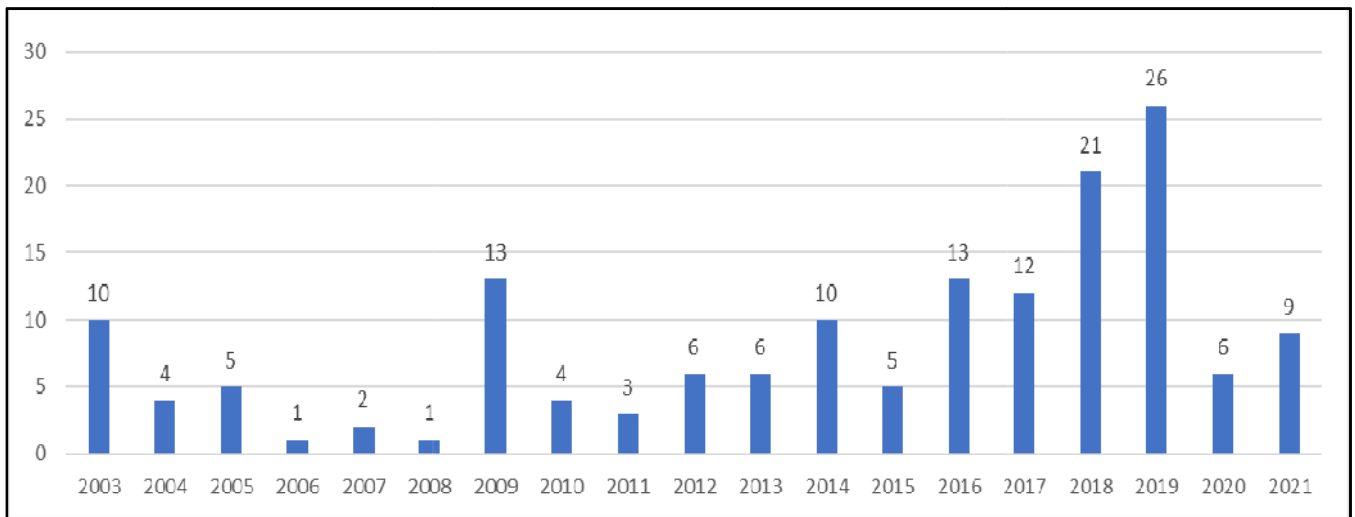


Figure 2. Total number of sexually abused male children from 2003-2021

From 2003 to 2021, there was an increasing trend of males who were sexually abused from 2017 to 2019. A decrease in cases during the COVID 19 pandemic were noted from 2020 and 2021 (Figure 2). Several factors may contribute to this decrease and it needs further study. Boys between the ages of 12 to 18 years old account for the majority of the reported cases (43%). This was closely followed by boys between the ages of 6 to 11 years old at 41%, and those ages 3 to 5 years old at 16%. No reported cases of male sexual abuse from 0 days until 2 years old. This result is comparable to a recent study made by UNICEF Violence against Children (2016). It has been reported that about 21.5% of children (24.7% are boys) between the

There were also reported cases of patients belonging to the upper middle class with 10%, and the upper income and rich classification at 1%. Children belonging to the low socioeconomic class are three times as likely to be a victim of child abuse (Sedlak, 2010). Most of the sexually abused male children (46%) happened within the community where the victim is residing. This is followed by the neighboring towns and private establishments with 26% and home with 22%. On the other hand, private establishments such as Inns and Internet Cafés, are also notable locations of sexual abuse especially for ages 12 to 18 years old (Table 2). A study of both regions of Africa and Asia, the location of sexual abuse was spread among home,

school, perpetrator's home, public/open spaces and at special events. Majority of studies in Asia and Africa indicate victim's home to be the most common place of abuse followed by outdoors or public spaces and in school (Selangia, 2020). In some of these incidences, perpetrators bribed them financially in exchange of the sexual act.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Sexually Abused Male Children

Demographic Profile	Values
Age	
0 days – 28 days old	0 (0%)
29 days old – 12 months	0 (0%)
13 months – 2 years old	0 (0%)
3 years old to 5 years old	25 (16%)
6 years old – 11 years old	64 (41%)
12 years old – 18 years old	68 (43%)
Address	
Davao City:	
District I	59 (38%)
District II	57 (36%)
District III	35 (22%)
Outside Davao City:	6 (4%)
Family classification	
Nuclear Family	108 (69%)
Extended Family	43 (27%)
Single Parent Family	2 (1%)
Family with OFW Parents	4 (3%)
Socioeconomic Status	
Poor	30 (19%)
Low Income Class	54 (34%)
Lower Middle Class	29 (18%)
Middle Class	26 (17%)
Upper Middle Class	15 (10%)
Upper Income Class	2 (1%)
Rich	1 (1%)

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of the location of the occurrence of the abuse

Place of Occurrence	Values
Home	34 (22%)
School	9 (6%)
Community	73 (46%)
Others (Neighboring town, private establishment)	41 (26%)

Table 3. Percentage and Frequency of the type of sexual abuse

Types of Abuse	Values
Sexual Penetration	88 (56%)
Oral Sex	52 (33%)
Fondling/Touching	14 (9%)
Child Pornography	3 (2%)
Voyeurism	0 (0%)

Table 4. Demographic Profile of the Main Perpetrator

Profile of Perpetrator	Values
Age of Perpetrator	
12 and below	18 (11%)
13-22	63 (40%)
23-31	40 (25%)
32-40	20 (13%)
41-49	8 (5%)
50-58	3 (2%)
59 and above	5 (3%)
Gender	
Male	153 (97%)
Female	4 (3%)
Relationship	
Family Member	26 (17%)
Neighbor	45 (29%)
Friends	12 (8%)
Acquaintance	44 (28%)
Stranger	30 (19%)
Employer	0 (0%)

Sexual penetration was the most common form of sexual abuse with 56%, followed by oral sex (33%), fondling/touching at 14% and child pornography at 2%. No reported cases of voyeurism (Table 3). In a study done by Ferragut 2021, results of the study are comparable to our data. Demographic profile of the perpetrators showed that majority belonged to 13 -22 years old with 40% followed by 23-31 years old at 25%. Most were males (97%) and a few reported cases were females at 3% (Table 4). This finding is supported by a study of Penso, et al (2019) where 80.8% were male offenders compared to 19.2% of female perpetrators. Majority of these perpetrators were victim's neighbor (29%), acquaintance (28%), stranger (19%) and family member (17%) primarily uncle or cousin (Table 4).

Table 5. Percentage and Frequency of the Disclosure of Assault

Disclosure of Sexual Assault	Values
Parent	92 (59%)
Other members of the family	36 (23%)
Friends	14 (9%)
Teacher	6 (4%)
Physician	2 (1%)
Police	4 (3%)
others	4 (3%)

Disclosure is a very important aspect in cases of sexual abuse. In this study, sexually abused male children disclosed the abuse primarily to their mother (59%). They also disclosed to other family members (uncle, grandmother, and aunt) at 23%. Some victims divulged it to their friends (9%) while the rest disclosed it to persons in authority such as police, teachers, or physicians. Low rates of disclosure to professionals may be due to fear of mandatory reporting, lack of awareness of the services available and negative views about the involvement of social services (Allnock & Miller, 2013). In cases of child sexual abuse, most children do not have physical findings of sexual abuse. Therefore, the child's disclosure is often the most important piece of information in determining the likelihood of abuse. (Lahoti et al 2001).

CONCLUSION

Locally and globally, male sexual abuse in children remained a challenge. Adolescents are increasingly affected. Socioeconomic status remains a major risk factor. Most of the perpetrator is known to the victims and the community is the common setting of the abuse. The findings of this study provided important information that can be used to develop interventions in preventing sexual abuse and to provide appropriate support for male victims of sexual abuse.

Declaration of competing of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

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