

The Role of Community Education in Reducing Child Sexual Abuse

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Abstract: Individual education seems not enough to deal with community-based problems; community education by community members themselves is of paramount importance to deal with any community-based problem including child sexual abuse. Community education programmes designed by the community members can improve the quality of life of children and develop harmonious interpersonal relationships. Although communities differ from one another, some of the programmes used in other communities could be used in another community provided community participation prevails. Community participation provides the community with an opportunity to employ one programme after another till there would be an indication of the reduction of child sexual abuse. The evaluation of the programme will suggest the next programme to employ. The study adopted a participatory action research approach utilising a qualitative technique to collect the data. Interviews were conducted with educators, nurses, social workers, traditional leaders, church leaders, members of the civic organisation, policing staff and the Victim Empowerment Group. According to the responses of all target groups, community participation is imperative to reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse.

Keywords: Community, Community education and community education programmes

I. INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of the type of community-based problem, they all need community involvement, formally or informally to be dealt with. According to Jarvis (1995) community education refers to any planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the people in a specific locality, as they learn and understand how to enrich the quality of human relationships and the quality of life of the citizens of that area.

Community education involves a way of viewing education in the community; a systematic way of looking at people and their problems. It is a type of education that should be relevant to people's needs and as such, those affected by education should be involved in decisions about the programme (Sharon and Phyllis, 1987).

According to Merriam and Brockett (1997), community education refers to any formal or informal action-oriented or problem solving education that takes place in the community. The seeds of the solution to a community's problems are contained within that community (Poster and Kruger, 1990).

Community education is the process that achieves a balance in the use of all the institutional forces in the education of all people in a community (Seay, 1991). Fellenz and Coke (1979) define community education as the process of identification of community needs and the marshalling of resources to meet those needs so that the community and all its members can grow through social and educational programmes.

Community education refers to the developing of self-guiding, self-directed communities which are able to identify and satisfy the needs of all their community members through coordination, cooperation and collaboration of all community resources (Boucoulvalas, 1979). According to Zitha (1991), community education is the educational process in which the provisions of all the educational agencies in a community are utilised in a cooperative and coordinated manner to provide for all the people of a community in order to develop the community and to solve the problems of the community.

Community education refers to any activity – planned or unplanned – that can improve the quality of life of the members of the community. This activity will enable community members to contribute towards the solution of any social problem.

For this study, community education was seen as any educational activity or programme which is aimed towards the improvement of the quality of life of the community members through community participation. In the process of community education, the community can identify a problem and contribute to solving the problem.

Community education is a theoretical construct of viewing education in the community, a systematic way of looking at people and their problems. The people affected by education should be involved in decisions making about the programmes. This type of education should have an impact on the community it serves. Community education serves the entire community by providing for all the educational needs of all its community members. Local schools together with community resources can be used for community education to improve community life. Those who are worthy community educators facilitate the process (Sharan and Phyllis, 1987).

It is the responsibility off the entire community to establish community education. The community alone cannot sustain such education; therefore the Government should support community education. Non-profit organisations and local schools should support community education in a particular community (Sharan and Phyllis, 1987).

The framework for community education:

Community educators should design their own learning environments according to the needs of the community with the assistance of information technology and multi-media systems. They should adopt a flexible approach to content options. Community education should provide for the recognition of prior learning, experience and the upgrading of knowledge. The training programmes must accommodate the working conditions of potential community members. The conceptual framework for community education provides for the accommodation of many views (Aulich, 1992).

Community education should be dominated by intervention. This implies that every community member is part of the process; therefore each community member can change the process or stop it if the situation demands. This should provide new alternatives or answers to the problem. Community education should empower community members (Aulich, 1992).

The content of community education:

The content of community education should include main themes such as the following (Aulich, 1992):

- Adult learning and development – This refers to Lifelong Learning, adult learning styles and practices of adult learning and adults with special needs.
- Curriculum studies – This refers to the training methods and techniques, needs analysis, assessment and evaluation techniques.
- Social context – This refers to social challenges facing organisations, such as unemployment and attitude towards unemployment.
- Organisational behaviour – This refers to understanding participants such as their role in community education; organisation and group processes; and working within one's role in an organisation and its direction.
- Administration and management related studies – this refers to total quality management, quality assurance, human resource management, principles and practices and project management.
- Current issues – This refers to educating people in rural and remote areas, and the implications of the national policy reform agenda.
- Communication and information technology – This refers to open learning techniques.

According to Aulich (1992), content alone is not enough without responsibility. Therefore community educators, government departments, tertiary institutions, industry and professional organisations are responsible for community education.

The aims and purposes of community education:

The aims and purposes of community education are usually determined by a particular context and culture. Aulich (1995)

contends that the aims of community education are based on two premises: (1) the community has its own needs and common causes and is the creator of its own culture; and (2) educational resources are to be dedicated to the articulation of needs and common causes.

According to a Scottish approach to community education, the following two aims are identified (Scottish Education Department, 1997):

The involvement of people as individuals and as members of groups and communities, irrespective of age, gender and circumstances in the ascertainment and assessment of people's needs opportunities to:

- discover and pursue interest;
- acquire and improve knowledge and skills;
- recognise their personal identities and aspirations;
- develop satisfactory interpersonal relationships;
- achieve competence in their roles within the family, the community and society as a whole; and
- participate in the shaping of their physical and social environment and in the conduct of local and national affairs.

To seek to meet ascertained needs in the most appropriate settings with the cooperation of individuals and groups and by identifying and deploying educational resources.

Seay (1991) highlights the following aims of community education:

- generating a learning society;
- developing communities;
- solving problems;
- improving the quality of life;
- effecting the self-actualisation of the individuals;
- fulfilling human needs including learning needs; and
- providing for lifelong learning.

According to Sharan and Phyllis (1987) the following are the objectives of community education:

- to develop community programmes;
- to promote interaction between school and community;
- to survey community resources and to coordinate their interaction;
- to bring better relationship between social and Government agencies;
- to identify community problems;
- to encourage community developments and
- to provide training in community education.

Community education differs from community to community as well as from aim to aim of community education. The community decides on the type of community education that should be established.

Types of community education:

The type of problem in a particular community dictates the type of community education to employ. The various types are briefly outlined below.

A participatory programme: This type of programme is one that has an impact at the individual, community and societal level. At a community level it results in the creation of new leaders. This type of programme is also known as a self-empowerment community education programme (Young and Padilla, 1990).

Community education that caters for training, information and entertainment: This type involves activities and projects that enrich the lives of the participants and provide avenues for others to exercise initiative and enterprise. The community-centred cultural education for blacks, which was started by the University of Natal (Van Graan, 1991), is one example.

Community education that focuses on attempts to educate the community on AIDs: This type refers to community-based AIDs programmes (Bersani, Chen, Pendleton and Denton, 1992).

Community education focusing on environmental education: This type of programme aims to make a positive contribution through educating the community education in environmental matters. It can enhance conservation at a much broader level (Todd, Dale and Johnson, 1994).

Community education focusing on museums and zoos: This refers to education that empowers the community to serve museums and zoos. The museum can address the cognitive needs of the community (Van der Stoep, 1990).

For this study, a participatory programme of education was employed together with community education that focuses on the attempts to educate the community on child sexual abuse. The type of education can also be influenced by the factors that are related to the problem.

II. DISCUSSION

Community Education And Child Sexual Abuse:

According to Richter (2005) and Barsk (1999), community education is required in dealing effectively with child abuse. For this purpose, the community needs participatory education workshops that include information about child abuse and neglect. The programme for the workshop should include ways through which children can be offered support. Strong networking between various organisations within the community needs to be implemented in order to deal with child abuse. In community education, the community will have to own a problem and be determined to address the problem.

The researcher agrees with both Richter (2005) and Barsk (1999) that community education is an important strategy in reducing child sexual abuse. If the community owns the problem, the community itself will be successful in reducing the problem. The fact that the community needed participatory discussions or workshops motivated the researcher to have discussions and interviews with the community stakeholders; hence participatory action research was chosen because the researcher is also from the community under study and is familiar with the community.

According to a study of Chinese adults in China by Catherine (2004), child sexual abuse prevention programmes were initiated with an intention to encourage community participation in the reduction of the problem in Shenzhen. Participants who showed a definite intention to participate in the programmes endorsed fewer myths in relation to child sexual abuse and showed more worry about children being at risk of sexual abuse.

Obviously, all community stakeholders such as parents, educators, learners and other community members should be involved in the fight against child sexual abuse (Edleson, 2004). That is the reason why the researcher collected data from educators, nurses, social workers, church leaders, the civic group, the police, traditional leaders and the Victim Empowerment Group.

A multidisciplinary team approach to child sexual abuse is preferred as one of the ways that could reduce child sexual abuse through participatory action by the community members. There is a shift of the meanings of childhood and constructions of sexually abused children, and the structuring of team practice poses problems for multidisciplinary team members. In order for any programme of this nature to be successful, understanding child sexual abuse and developing community-based practice approaches must be informed by broader perspectives (Maxine, 2001).

According to a case study in a Midwestern USA community, the community approach to case management of child sexual abuse was adopted. Both case process and outcome variables were examined by the community. Community education was based on the outcomes of the criminal court files. It was concluded that communities can achieve successful outcomes when criminal prosecution of sexual abuse is sought. However, a child's testimony is not necessarily the centrepiece of a successful case (Coulborn and James, 2000).

According to Platt and Shemmings (1997), a programme in which children will be actively involved should be organised in the community in order to protect children. Listening to children and hearing what they have to say is at the root of developing effective human rights for children. It challenges the protectionist view that it is not fair to involve children in difficult decision making, particularly because they may be involved in considering some painful or upsetting outcomes. Children who are more informed are likely to be less vulnerable. They should have information about the child protection system and the possible outcomes and options to increase choice.

Community education was organised by Colleen in Dublin in 2002. The education programme was organised to benefit parents of infants and toddlers by alleviating parental stress and improving parent-child interaction. The effects of the programme were evaluated in terms of improvement in reducing child sexual abuse through community participation (Colleen, 2002).

According to David (2003) it is better to prevent unwanted outcomes than to repair physically and emotionally harmed children and relationships. He describes the Triple P (positive parenting programme) as an example of a community-based approach. This programme is based upon a range of social learning, information processing and ecological perspectives. Although there are cultural differences between children and families in communities, many aspects of child sexual abuse seem to be very similar. Therefore, the community should organise educational programmes to address the child sexual abuse problem. Several issues concerning the role of training and organisational factors need to be taken into account.

The effectiveness of programmes in promoting family wellness and preventing child sexual abuse depends on factors such as meta-analysis, employing a 3-step model testing procedure. Battams and Roche (2000) found that effect sizes for proactive interventions were larger at follow-up than at post-assessment, while effect sizes for reactive interventions were higher at post-assessment than at follow-up. Intensive family preservation programmes with high levels of participant involvement, an empowerment and a component of social support, had higher effect sizes than programmes without those elements.

In Athens-Clarke county and Georgia a formative evaluation of a child sexual abuse response team (CSART) was used. The purpose of the formative evaluation was to determine the congruence between the conceptualised collaborative objective of the CSART and its actual implementation during the first year of programme activity. The implementation of the community-based collaborative objective was found to have been achieved in a non-disruptive manner and to have been highly congruent with its conceptualisation. A greater congruence between conceptualisation and implementation of the collaborative objective resulted from the CSART members participating in the evaluation process (Michelle, 2000).

Problem Statement:

Child sexual abuse is a community-based problem which could be addressed by the entire community if community education was to play a role in motivating community participation in the reduction of child sexual abuse. The question is: In what way could community education motivate the community to participate in the reduction of child sexual abuse?

Significance Of The Study:

The ultimate result of the study will be the improvement of the situation in which child abuse takes place. The study will also enhance the understanding of the practice of child abuse by the practitioners of child sexual abuse and help to improve the situation. It is obvious that this study can stimulate and guide change.

It is believed that this study will effect change or transformation that will be part of the solution. It will make change a self-generating and self-maintaining process that will continue after the research has been completed. As participatory research, it will motivate those directly involved.

The Aims And Objectives Of The Study:

The following aims of the study were identified:

- To encourage community participation in the reduction of the problem
- To educate the community about child sexual abuse

The objectives of the study were the following:

- To document the participants' experiences of child sexual abuse
- To generally improve the quality of life of the community members

III. RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

The researchers opted for a participatory action research approach within a critical research paradigm theory. The data was collected in five different phases. The first phase was a preparatory, the second phase consisted of focus group interviews and discussions, the third phase consisted of individual interviews while the fourth phase consisted of further focus group interviews and discussions. The fifth phase consisted of children who were victims.

Population and sampling:

Participants in the research were parents, educators, church leaders, social workers, civic members, traditional leaders, police, nurses Victim Empowerment members in the study.

The researcher worked qualitatively within the critical paradigm theory by means of participatory action research. In the preparatory phase, the researcher worked with 16 participants. The participants included two of the following: nurses, educators, church leaders, social workers, members of the civic organisation, traditional leaders, policing staff, Victim Empowerment members, children and parents. The participants were selected purposively in view of their experience of the problem under study.

There were 16 participants in the focus group; the same participants and the same number as in the preparatory phase. In the third phase, 16 participants were interviewed individually at their homes. In the fourth phase, 30 focus group participants were interviewed in the hall. In the fifth phase, victims and parents were interviewed individually.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis includes the responses of the focus group and individuals to the interview questions. During interviews and discussions, the focus group reported a number of recent cases of child sexual abuse of which some were reported to police stations. Below are the responses to questions based on the following themes:

V. RESULTS

The availability of community education programmes in the community:

The educators pointed out that there are community education programmes such as home-based care centres and a victim empowerment centre in this community. They claimed that these community education programmes are not effective; therefore, they need the community's support.

The nurses mentioned that community education programmes are available although some of the programmes do not focus on child sexual abuse but on feeding and cleaning. However, they indicated that victim empowerment groups and home-based care programmes also focus on child sexual abuse and that HIV/AIDS programmes, drug abuse programmes and malaria programmes are available in this community.

Church leaders indicated that the available community education programmes are not effective; the community needs people who can help to establish community education programmes that address a variety of community-based problems, including child sexual abuse.

The Victim Empowerment Group pointed out that community education programmes such as a home-based care programme and a drop in centres programme (including an orphanage programme and a child-line programme) are available. The Victim Empowerment Group mentioned that some of the programmes are not effective due to poor management. The Victim Empowerment Group indicated that an HIV/AIDS community education programme is also available.

The members of the civic organisation indicated that community education programmes are available but they are not effective; these programmes need to be extended to include the child sexual abuse programme. Traditional leaders indicated that community education programmes are available but not effective.

The responses of all the individuals to the interview question showed that community education programmes are available in the community. They further indicated that the existing programmes are not effective due to a lack of support from the community and Government.

Responsibility for handling child sexual abuse cases:

The educators mentioned that child sexual abuse cases are handled by the civic structures, social workers, police and local councils. They further indicated that civic structures refer the case to the traditional leaders who call a local council meeting. The traditional leaders refer the case to social workers who thereafter refer the case to the police. They said that records were not taken into consideration as long as the case could be dealt with.

Nurses indicated that child sexual abuse cases are handled by civic structures, the Victim Empowerment Group, nurses, community rehabilitation groups, social workers and the police. They further stated that traditional leaders also contribute in the handling of child sexual abuse cases.

The church leaders indicated that child sexual abuse cases are handled by the police via social workers. They further indicated that traditional leaders also contribute to the handling of child sexual abuse cases. The social workers mentioned that child sexual abuse cases are usually handled by the families affected, because family members are afraid of each other. They further indicated that some cases are handled by the tribal council which usually fails because most of the children do not want to speak out in front of many people. They indicated that very few cases are referred to social workers.

The policing staff claimed that cases of child sexual abuse are handled by the Victim Empowerment Group first. Thereafter the Victim Empowerment Group refers the case to the police.

The Victim Empowerment Group pointed out that child sexual abuse cases are handled by social workers, nurses, home-based care groups and Childline groups. The Victim Empowerment Group also handles child sexual abuse cases together with the police. The Victim Empowerment Group indicated that all the parties mentioned play important roles in the settling of cases.

The members of the civic organisation suggested that the civic structure is responsible for handling child sexual abuse cases together with the Community Policing Forum. They further indicated that the two structures refer the case to the tribal council which will refer the case to the police. They contended that these structures are not effective.

According to the traditional leaders, educators are also responsible for the handling of such cases because they can easily discover if the child is abused sexually if the child's schoolwork shows signs of deteriorating. They mentioned that parents and social workers are responsible for the handling of child sexual abuse together with the police, civic structures, tribal councils and the Community Policing Forum.

The responses of the individuals to the interview question indicated that educators, nurses, social workers, church leaders, traditional leaders, the Victim Empowerment Group, the police and the civic group are all responsible for child sexual abuse. Therefore the entire community is responsible.

The best way to encourage the community to report suspected child sexual abuse to the local authorities:

The educators emphasised that community members must know that such information is confidential and that the name of the informer will not be mentioned. Another educator indicated that the community must be educated through community education to understand the consequences of child sexual abuse and the impact on the community at large.

The nurses suggested that community members can be encouraged to report suspected child sexual abuse by introducing a suggestion box at the clinic, the local council's offices and police stations. They further indicated that community awareness campaigns can encourage community members to report child sexual abuse. The community should be aware of all community empowerment structures. Such community awareness campaigns should take place more than twice a year.

The church leaders proposed that workshops on the channels for reporting child sexual abuse should be held for community members. Community members must be encouraged not to hide any information on child sexual abuse. They further indicated that awareness campaigns should be organised and that suggestion boxes be introduced to encourage the community to report child sexual abuse.

The social workers also indicated that a suggestion box should be introduced to encourage community members to report child sexual abuse. They emphasised that the community must know that the police will guarantee the confidentiality of

any informers. Policing staff suggested that youth development programmes should be established to fight against child sexual abuse and that the youth should be engaged in all activities to fight child sexual abuse.

The Victim Empowerment Group commented that awareness campaigns can encourage the community to report suspected child sexual abuse. They commented that the introduction of a suggestion box can contribute towards motivating the community to report child sexual abuse. The Victim Empowerment Group indicated that the community should be aware of ethical considerations such as fair treatment towards any individual who can report child sexual abuse.

The members of the civic organisation proposed that a suggestion box be established in clinics and schools to encourage community participation and guarantee confidentiality. They indicated that awards can encourage community members to report suspected child sexual abuse. A Community Policing Forum can be established to encourage the community to report child sexual abuse. They pointed out that a toll free number can also encourage the community to report child sexual abuse.

The traditional leaders suggested that one of the best ways to encourage the community to report child sexual abuse is to promote a sound relationship between traditional leaders and civic structures. They further pointed out that the relationship between the community and the police is another way of encouraging the community to report child sexual abuse.

The respondents pointed out that community education programmes are important to encourage the community to report child sexual abuse. The introduction of a suggestion box can also help the community. They further indicated that confidentiality must be emphasised to whoever reports the case to the Community Policing Forum or the police.

VI. CONCLUSION

It appears as if a community should use a variety of programmes in order to succeed in reducing child sexual abuse. Community should also use different strategies to encourage community participation. Community education involves all age groups irrespective of their qualifications. Based on the responses to discussions, the recommendations are made to minimise child sexual abuse not only in the community under study also in the entire province of Limpopo. It is believed that it could ultimately help to reduce child sexual abuse throughout the whole of South Africa.

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