

Silence and Disclosure: Exploring Sociocultural Barriers to Reporting Child Sexual Abuse in Southeastern Nigeria

¹Stella C. Ekweme,

²Damian C. Ogbuabor,

³Oluchi M. Okwuoto,

⁴Akuchinyere O. Titus-Okpanachi,

⁵Raphael Azubuine, &

⁶Daniel D. Dike

¹Department of Religion and Cultural Studies;

²Department of Library and Information Science;

^{3&5}Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

⁴Public Health, Liberty University, USA

⁶Department of Public Health, Abia State University, Nigeria

Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a significant child protection concern in Nigeria, yet disclosure and reporting are often complicated by sociocultural attitudes and limited access to support services. This study examined perceived sociocultural barriers to CSA disclosure and reporting among residents of Nsukka Local Government Area, Southeastern Nigeria. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 200 adult respondents recruited through convenience sampling from three communities in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire assessing CSA awareness and experiences, reporting behavior, perceived stigmatization, attitudes toward police reporting, and awareness of victim-support services. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used for analysis. Most respondents (96.5%) were aware of CSA, while 10.0% reported experiencing sexual abuse during childhood. Among respondents with childhood abuse experiences ($n = 20$), 70.0% had not reported the incident. Furthermore, 65.0% believed that reporting CSA results in stigmatization, while 40.5% considered reporting CSA to the police inappropriate. Despite widespread awareness of CSA, 65.0% were unaware of agencies providing assistance to survivors. The findings reveal substantial nonreporting among respondents who experienced CSA, alongside perceived reporting-related stigma, reservations about police reporting, and limited awareness of victim-support services. Strengthening community education, confidential and survivor-centered reporting pathways, and coordinated child protection services may help create more supportive environments for CSA disclosure and reporting in Southeastern Nigeria.

Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijdsshmss.v16.i2.22

Keywords:

Child sexual abuse;
Disclosure; Reporting
barriers; Perceived
stigma; Victim-
support services;
Southeastern Nigeria

Corresponding Author:

Akuchinyere O. Titus-Okpanachi

Background to the Study

Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a significant public health, human rights, and child protection concern, with profound implications for children's physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Globally, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2024) estimated that more than 370 million girls and women, approximately one in eight, experienced rape or sexual assault before the age of 18, with the estimate increasing to approximately 650 million when noncontact forms of sexual violence are considered. Although these estimates demonstrate the substantial global burden of childhood sexual victimization, they also highlight the importance of recognizing abuse that may remain concealed within families and communities. In Nigeria, findings from the 2014 Violence Against Children Survey indicated that approximately one in four girls and one in ten boys experienced sexual violence before adulthood (UNICEF, 2016).

Regional empirical evidence further illustrates the magnitude of the problem. In a cross-sectional study involving 506 adolescents attending secondary schools in Enugu and Ebonyi States, southeastern Nigeria, Manyike et al. (2015) found that approximately 40% reported experiences classified as sexual abuse under the study's operational definition. Similarly, David et al. (2018), in a community-based study conducted in southwestern Nigeria, documented childhood sexual abuse among 25.7% of participating adolescents. Although prevalence estimates vary according to study populations, measurement approaches, and forms of abuse assessed, these findings collectively demonstrate that CSA constitutes an important concern within Nigerian communities. Beyond identifying the occurrence of abuse, however, an equally pressing challenge involves understanding why experiences of sexual victimization frequently remain undisclosed and how sociocultural conditions influence decisions to seek assistance.

Disclosure of child sexual abuse represents an important pathway through which affected children and survivors may access protection, psychosocial support, healthcare, and legal assistance. Nevertheless, disclosure is rarely a straightforward process, as individuals may struggle to recognize abusive experiences, anticipate negative reactions, or fear the consequences of revealing what occurred. Alaggia et al. (2019), in a review of 33 studies, conceptualized CSA disclosure as a complex and evolving process shaped by individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, environmental circumstances, and broader sociocultural influences. Similarly, Morrison et al. (2018), through a systematic review of qualitative studies, identified emotional distress, fear of consequences, anticipated disbelief, and concerns about the reactions of significant others as recurring barriers to disclosure.

Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) further identified internal, relational, and social barriers, including self-blame, family dysfunction, unequal power relationships, and prevailing social attitudes that discourage open discussion of sexual victimization. In Southeastern Nigeria, Eya et al. (2026), in a qualitative study of parent-child relationships in Enugu Urban, identified challenges involving family communication, emotional closeness, and trust. Although the study did not examine childhood sexual abuse, its findings provide

contextual insight into the family relationships within which sensitive conversations may occur. Importantly, disclosure and formal reporting are conceptually distinct. While disclosure involves communicating an experience of abuse to another individual, formal reporting generally entails notifying an institution or authority responsible for responding to the incident. Consequently, revealing abuse to a family member, friend, or trusted adult does not necessarily result in institutional intervention or access to protective services (Alaggia et al., 2019; Manay & Collin-Vézina, 2021). Understanding this distinction is essential because the social responses that follow initial disclosure may either encourage further help-seeking or reinforce continued silence. Evidence from related forms of interpersonal violence further reinforces this concern. Kapur et al. (2026), in a scoping review of digital disclosure among intimate partner violence survivors, identified both supportive responses and challenges, including victim-blaming and negative social reactions, highlighting how the responses survivors receive may influence their experiences of disclosure and help-seeking.

Within Nigeria, empirical studies have documented considerable gaps between experiences of childhood sexual abuse and subsequent disclosure. David et al. (2018), in their community-based investigation of adolescents in southwestern Nigeria, found that only 32 of the 93 respondents who reported experiencing sexual abuse (34.4%) had disclosed the incident. Among those who had not disclosed, 40.4% identified shame as a reason for remaining silent, while 31.6% believed that disclosure would not produce a meaningful outcome. Other respondents cited fear of the perpetrator (10.5%) and concerns about not being believed (17.5%). These findings illustrate how emotional, interpersonal, and institutional considerations may converge to discourage disclosure. Comparable patterns emerged from Nigeria's national Violence Against Children Survey, which found that among young adults aged 18–24 who experienced sexual abuse before age 18, only 38.3% of females and 26.9% of males had disclosed an incident to someone (National Population Commission of Nigeria et al., 2016). The survey further revealed substantial limitations in access to professional assistance, with only 5.0% of affected females and 2.6% of affected males reporting that they had sought help for their experiences. These findings suggest that the challenge extends beyond the initial act of disclosure to include the availability, accessibility, and perceived usefulness of formal response mechanisms.

Sociocultural expectations surrounding sexuality, family reputation, gender, and acceptable public behavior may further complicate the disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse. In social environments where sexual victimization is associated with shame or dishonor, survivors may anticipate being blamed, rejected, or subjected to negative judgments rather than receiving protection and support. Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) identified sexual taboos, social labeling, and internalized victim-blaming as important influences on survivors' decisions to remain silent, while Alaggia et al. (2019) emphasized the interconnected roles of family relationships, cultural expectations, and anticipated social consequences. Nigerian evidence provides further insight into these dynamics. In a qualitative investigation involving 16 student leaders from eight public secondary

schools in Ibadan, Asaolu and Oladepo (2026) identified fear of stigma and shame, distrust of adults, emotional manipulation by perpetrators, strained parent-child relationships, and limited knowledge of CSA as barriers to reporting.

Although the study examined adolescents' perspectives rather than parents' attitudes, its findings demonstrate how anticipated social reactions may discourage young people from seeking assistance. Similarly, Aborisade (2014), in research examining rape reporting among female university students in Nigeria, identified fear of retaliation, social stereotypes, and distrust of the criminal justice system as barriers to reporting sexual victimization. While these findings cannot be directly generalized to childhood sexual abuse, they provide contextual evidence of the broader social and institutional conditions that may shape reporting decisions in Nigerian settings.

The influence of family relationships and community responses is particularly important because children frequently depend on adults to interpret disclosures, provide emotional reassurance, and facilitate access to appropriate services. Manay and Collin-Vézina (2021), in a systematic review of 37 studies, found that children and adolescents commonly disclose experiences of sexual abuse to peers and other informal recipients, underscoring the importance of interpersonal relationships in disclosure pathways. However, the responses received following disclosure may influence whether survivors obtain further assistance or withdraw from help-seeking. In a mixed-methods study involving secondary-school adolescents in Sokoto Metropolis, northern Nigeria, Omar et al. (2026) reported a disclosure rate of 37.3% among adolescents who had experienced CSA. Their qualitative findings revealed that some disclosures were met with disbelief, minimization, or instructions to maintain secrecy, particularly when alleged perpetrators were family members or individuals occupying positions of authority.

The study also identified concerns about stigma, family disruption, perpetrator threats, and limited trust in formal reporting systems. These findings are consistent with the broader literature emphasizing that disclosure occurs within relational and social environments in which anticipated reactions may influence survivors' decisions (Alaggia et al., 2019; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Morrison et al., 2018). Consequently, efforts to improve reporting must address not only children's willingness to disclose but also the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of adults who may receive disclosures and influence subsequent responses.

The relevance of these concerns to southeastern Nigeria is reinforced by existing regional evidence concerning the occurrence and social context of CSA. Manyike et al. (2015), examining adolescents in Enugu and Ebonyi States, documented experiences of sexual abuse involving perpetrators who included family members and relatives, highlighting the importance of considering relationships within children's immediate social environments. Although the study contributed valuable evidence regarding the prevalence and patterns of CSA in southeastern Nigeria, its primary focus was not the sociocultural conditions influencing disclosure or community attitudes toward formal

reporting. Similarly, national findings from UNICEF (2016) and the National Population Commission of Nigeria et al. (2016) demonstrated that fear, shame, stigma, and limited knowledge of available services may inhibit help-seeking, but national-level estimates do not fully capture the circumstances of particular communities. Studies from southwestern and northern Nigeria have provided additional evidence regarding shame, anticipated disbelief, negative disclosure responses, and institutional distrust (Asaolu & Oladepo, 2026; David et al., 2018; Omar et al., 2026). Nevertheless, differences in geographical setting, participant characteristics, and research objectives make it important to investigate how these issues are perceived within specific southeastern Nigerian communities rather than assuming that findings from other regions apply uniformly across the country.

An additional consideration concerns the role of adult community members, particularly parents, in shaping the social environments within which CSA is disclosed and reported. Existing Nigerian research has frequently examined adolescents' experiences, prevalence patterns, or disclosure behavior (Asaolu & Oladepo, 2026; David et al., 2018; Manyike et al., 2015; Omar et al., 2026). While these investigations provide important evidence about survivors' experiences, understanding adult perceptions is also necessary because parents and other caregivers may influence whether disclosures are believed, whether incidents are reported to authorities, and whether children are connected with protective services. The national Violence Against Children Survey demonstrated that many survivors had limited knowledge of available assistance and that relatively few accessed professional services following sexual abuse (National Population Commission of Nigeria et al., 2016). These findings raise important questions about the extent to which community members perceive reporting as socially acceptable, anticipate stigmatization following disclosure, and recognize available sources of assistance. Examining these issues within Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State may therefore contribute evidence relevant to community-based child protection strategies, public education, and social work interventions aimed at strengthening supportive responses to sexual victimization.

Against this background, the present study examines perceived sociocultural barriers to the disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse among adult residents of Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, Southeastern Nigeria. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey, the study focuses on respondents' reported childhood sexual abuse experiences, perceptions of stigmatization associated with reporting, attitudes toward reporting CSA to the police, and awareness of organizations providing services to survivors. Specifically, the study addresses two research questions: (1) What perceived sociocultural barriers to the disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse are identifiable from the attitudes and experiences of adult residents of Nsukka Local Government Area? and (2) What do respondents' perceptions of stigmatization, attitudes toward police reporting, and awareness of victim-support services reveal about the social environment surrounding CSA disclosure and reporting?

By examining these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute context-specific evidence concerning community perceptions of child sexual abuse reporting and to inform culturally responsive social work practice, community sensitization, and strategies for improving access to child protection services.

Method

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design (Wang, & Cheng, 2020) to examine perceived sociocultural barriers to the disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse (CSA) among adult residents of Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), Enugu State, Southeastern Nigeria. Data were collected in May 2026 from three communities-Ihe-Owerre, Obukpa, and Edem. The study included respondents from urban, semi-urban, and rural residential settings, allowing for the examination of community perceptions and experiences related to CSA reporting.

Study Population and Sampling

The study population comprised adult parents aged 18 years and above residing in Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), Enugu State, Southeastern Nigeria. Participants were recruited from three communities: Ihe-Owerre, Obukpa, and Edem, using a nonprobability convenience sampling technique. Eligibility criteria included being a parent, aged 18 years or older, residing in one of the selected communities, and being willing to participate. Parental status was established during recruitment before questionnaire administration and was therefore not included as a separate item in the survey instrument. Participants were selected based on their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate. Of the 204 questionnaires distributed, 200 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 98.0%. The final analytical sample comprised 200 respondents.

Data Collection and Measures

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire comprising 27 questions organized into two sections. The first section assessed sociodemographic characteristics, including age, sex, educational attainment, marital status, religious affiliation, occupation, and residential location. The second section examined respondents' awareness and experiences of CSA, reporting behavior, perceived stigmatization, attitudes toward police reporting, knowledge of victim-support agencies, and perceptions of CSA prevention.

Respondents' experiences of childhood sexual abuse were assessed by asking whether they had experienced sexual abuse during childhood (yes/no). Those who reported such experiences were subsequently asked whether they had reported the incident. Because the questionnaire did not identify the recipient of the report, this measure captured self-reported reporting behavior without distinguishing between informal disclosure and formal reporting to authorities. Perceived stigmatization was assessed by asking whether reporting CSA results in stigmatization (true/false), reflecting respondents' beliefs about

potential social consequences rather than their personal experiences of stigma. Attitudes toward formal reporting were measured by asking whether respondents considered it appropriate to report CSA to the police (yes/no). Awareness of support services was assessed by asking whether respondents knew of agencies providing assistance to CSA victims (yes/no), followed by questions concerning the types of agencies and services available. Additional questions examined perceived causes, consequences, and prevention strategies associated with CSA.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, experiences of CSA, reporting behavior, perceived stigmatization, attitudes toward police reporting, and awareness of victim-support services. Percentages were calculated using the relevant valid-response denominators. Analyses of reporting behavior were restricted to respondents who indicated experiencing CSA during childhood. Findings were organized around the study's research questions and interpreted descriptively, without drawing causal conclusions from the cross-sectional data.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, before data collection. Prospective respondents received an introductory statement explaining the academic purpose of the study and assuring them that their responses would be treated confidentially. Participation was voluntary, and respondents indicated their willingness to participate before completing the questionnaire. Departmental permission and participant consent constituted the reported authorization procedures for the study.

Result

A total of 200 respondents were included in the analysis. As shown in Table 1, more than half of the respondents were aged 18-25 years (55.5%), and the majority were female (59.5%). Most respondents were single (82.0%) and identified as Christians (94.0%). Regarding educational attainment, 31.0% had no formal education, 24.0% had completed primary education, 26.5% had Ordinary Level qualifications, and 18.5% held bachelor's degrees. Trading was the most frequently reported occupation (31.5%), followed by civil service (27.5%), student status (24.5%), and artisanal work (16.5%). Respondents resided in urban (43.5%), rural (41.5%), and semi-urban (15.0%) areas.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 200)

Characteristic	n (%)
Age (years)	
18–25	111 (55.5)
26–33	12 (6.0)
34–41	31 (15.5)
42–49	46 (23.0)
Sex	
Male	81 (40.5)
Female	119 (59.5)
Educational attainment	
No formal education	62 (31.0)
First School Leaving Certificate	48 (24.0)
Ordinary Level	53 (26.5)
Bachelor's degree	37 (18.5)
Marital status	
Single	164 (82.0)
Married	30 (15.0)
Divorced	6 (3.0)
Religious affiliation	
Christianity	188 (94.0)
Islam	6 (3.0)
African Traditional Religion	6 (3.0)
Occupation	
Student	49 (24.5)
Civil servant	55 (27.5)
Trader	63 (31.5)
Artisan	33 (16.5)
Residential area	
Urban	87 (43.5)
Semi-urban	30 (15.0)
Rural	83 (41.5)

Note. N = 200. Percentages are based on the total sample. Categories with no reported responses are omitted.

Childhood Sexual Abuse Experiences and Reporting Behavior

Awareness of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) was widespread, with 193 respondents (96.5%) indicating that they had heard of CSA (Table 2). Twenty respondents (10.0%) reported having experienced sexual abuse during childhood, whereas 180 (90.0%) reported no such experience. Among the 20 respondents who reported childhood sexual abuse, six (30.0%) indicated that they had reported the incident, while 14 (70.0%) had not. Thus, nonreporting was more common than reporting within this subgroup. The questionnaire did not identify the recipient of the report or distinguish informal disclosure from formal reporting.

Table 2: Childhood Sexual Abuse Awareness, Experiences, and Reporting Behavior

Characteristic	n (%)
Awareness of childhood sexual abuse (N = 200)	
Yes	193 (96.5)
No	7 (3.5)
Experienced sexual abuse during childhood (N = 200)	
Yes	20 (10.0)
No	180 (90.0)
Reported childhood sexual abuse (n = 20)	
Yes	6 (30.0)
No	14 (70.0)

Note. CSA = child sexual abuse. Percentages for reporting behavior are based on the 20 respondents reporting childhood sexual abuse; all other percentages use N = 200. The survey did not specify to whom incidents were reported.

Perceived Stigmatization and Attitudes Toward Police Reporting

Perceived stigma was common among respondents. As shown in Table 3, 130 (65.0%) believed that reporting CSA results in stigmatization, compared with 70 (35.0%) who did not hold this belief. Regarding formal reporting, 119 respondents (59.5%) considered it appropriate to report CSA to the police, whereas 81 (40.5%) did not. These results describe community attitudes toward reporting; they do not establish whether perceived stigma influenced individual reporting decisions.

Awareness of Victim-Support Services

Only 70 respondents (35.0%) indicated awareness of agencies providing assistance to individuals affected by CSA, while 130 (65.0%) reported no such awareness (Table 3). Among the 70 respondents who identified support agencies, 27 (38.6%) selected UNICEF, 25 (35.7%) selected the agency described in the original questionnaire as F.R.E. Anti-Child Abuse Agency, and 18 (25.7%) selected religious centers. The same subgroup identified sex education (42.9%), counseling (21.4%), advocacy (18.6%), and shelter (17.1%) as services offered by agencies. These responses reflect participants' perceptions and awareness, not verification that specific services were available locally.

Table 3: Perceived Stigma, Police Reporting Attitudes, and Support-Service Awareness

Characteristic	n (%)
Believes CSA reporting results in stigma (N = 200)	
Yes / true	130 (65.0)
No / false	70 (35.0)
Considers reporting CSA to police appropriate (N = 200)	
Yes	119 (59.5)
No	81 (40.5)
Aware of victim-support agencies (N = 200)	
Yes	70 (35.0)
No	130 (65.0)
Agency identified (n = 70)	
UNICEF	27 (38.6)
F.R.E. Anti-Child Abuse Agency	25 (35.7)
Religious centers	18 (25.7)
Service identified (n = 70)	
Sex education	30 (42.9)
Counseling	15 (21.4)
Advocacy	13 (18.6)
Shelter	12 (17.1)

Note. CSA = child sexual abuse. Percentages for agency and service categories use n = 70; other percentages use N = 200. The agency label follows the original study instrument and should be checked against the underlying responses.

Discussion

This study examined childhood sexual abuse (CSA) experiences, reporting behavior, perceived stigmatization, attitudes toward police reporting, and awareness of victim-support services among residents of Nsukka Local Government Area, Southeastern Nigeria. Although awareness of CSA was high (96.5%), only 10.0% of respondents reported experiencing sexual abuse during childhood. This proportion was lower than the 25.7% reported by David et al. (2018) among adolescents in Southwestern Nigeria and the approximately 26% reported by Nguyen et al. (2021) among girls and young women in Nigeria. These differences may reflect variations in sampling, participant characteristics, measurement approaches, and willingness to disclose abuse (Ifayomi et al., 2024). Notably, 70.0% of respondents who acknowledged experiencing CSA had not reported their experiences, consistent with David et al. (2018), who found that only 34.4% of affected adolescents disclosed abuse. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2021) documented substantial nondisclosure among Nigerian survivors of sexual violence. These findings align with international evidence indicating that CSA disclosure is shaped by individual, interpersonal, and sociocultural circumstances, including fear, shame, anticipated negative reactions, and limited social support (Alaggia et al., 2019; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Lemaigre et al., 2017; Morrison et al., 2018).

Perceived stigmatization emerged as a prominent concern, with 65.0% of respondents believing that reporting CSA results in stigma. This finding is consistent with Nigerian studies identifying shame, anticipated social judgment, and sociocultural expectations as

barriers to disclosure (David et al., 2018; Ifayomi et al., 2024). Similarly, Asaolu and Oladepo (2026) identified stigma, distrust of adults, and perpetrator manipulation as perceived barriers to reporting among adolescent student leaders in Ibadan, while Aborisade et al. (2023) emphasized the influence of sociocultural beliefs on child protection responses in Southwestern Nigeria. International research likewise identifies victim-blaming, anticipated disbelief, and negative reactions as factors that may discourage disclosure (Abdul Latiff et al., 2024; Alaggia et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 2018). Similarly, Kapur et al. (2026), in a scoping review examining digital disclosure among intimate partner violence survivors, identified negative social reactions, including victim-blaming and minimization of survivors' experiences, alongside supportive responses that provided emotional reassurance and information about available services. Although focused on intimate partner violence, these findings reinforce the importance of social responses in shaping the broader context of abuse disclosure. Although these studies provide context for the present findings, the survey measured perceived stigma rather than actual stigmatization or its direct relationship with reporting behavior.

Regarding formal reporting, 59.5% of respondents considered it appropriate to report CSA to the police, whereas 40.5% did not. This finding suggests differing attitudes toward formal reporting within the study population. Aborisade et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of specialized policing, community engagement, and institutional collaboration in strengthening child protection responses in Nigeria. Similarly, Manay and Collin-Vézina (2021) found that children and adolescents frequently disclose abuse to trusted individuals before approaching formal institutions, highlighting the distinction between informal disclosure and official reporting. Despite widespread awareness of CSA, 65.0% of respondents were unaware of victim-support agencies, suggesting a gap between recognizing abuse and knowing where to obtain assistance. This finding is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2021), who documented limitations in service awareness and help-seeking, and Ifayomi et al. (2024), who identified challenges in victim-support responses in Nigeria. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening community education, confidential reporting pathways, and coordinated referrals involving social workers, healthcare professionals, schools, law enforcement, and child protection agencies.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for interventions that address perceived stigma, promote supportive responses to disclosure, and improve awareness of available child protection services. Social workers have an important role in community sensitization, survivor-centered counseling, advocacy, and coordination of appropriate referral services. However, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations, including the cross-sectional design, convenience sampling, reliance on retrospective self-reports, and the small number of respondents who acknowledged experiencing CSA ($n = 20$). Furthermore, the questionnaire did not identify disclosure recipients, directly assess reasons for nondisclosure, or establish whether respondents experienced stigmatization after reporting. Future studies should incorporate qualitative interviews and more comprehensive measures to investigate how family relationships, community attitudes,

and institutional responses shape CSA disclosure and reporting practices in Southeastern Nigeria.

Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

The findings have important implications for child protection policy, research, and social work practice in Nigeria. From a policy perspective, the high proportion of respondents who perceived reporting-related stigma and the limited awareness of victim-support agencies underscore the need to strengthen the implementation of existing child protection policies, including the Child Rights Act and relevant state-level legislation. Policymakers should prioritize accessible, confidential, and child-sensitive reporting mechanisms, strengthen coordination among law enforcement agencies and social welfare institutions, and expand community awareness of available protection and support services. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that reporting procedures protect survivors from secondary victimization and facilitate timely access to appropriate services.

From a research perspective, the findings highlight the need for further investigation into the sociocultural and institutional factors influencing CSA disclosure in Southeastern Nigeria. Future studies should employ qualitative and mixed-methods approaches to examine how perceived stigma, family expectations, community attitudes, and institutional responses shape survivors' disclosure decisions. Longitudinal research could also provide insight into how disclosure experiences and help-seeking behaviors evolve over time. Additionally, studies involving survivors, caregivers, social workers, and child protection professionals could identify context-specific barriers and inform the development of culturally responsive interventions.

From a practice perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of strengthening social workers' roles in CSA prevention, disclosure support, and survivor-centered interventions. Social workers should collaborate with schools, healthcare providers, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies to promote awareness of reporting options, challenge stigmatizing attitudes, and improve referral pathways. Trauma-informed counseling, confidential case management, and community-based education are particularly relevant to supporting survivors and encouraging safe disclosure. Strengthening professional training in recognizing CSA, responding appropriately to disclosures, and coordinating multidisciplinary services may contribute to more effective child protection responses in Nigeria.

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design and use of convenience sampling limit the generalizability of the findings and prevent causal interpretations. Reliance on retrospective self-reported experiences of childhood sexual abuse may have introduced recall and social desirability biases. Additionally, the relatively small number of respondents who reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse ($n = 20$) limits conclusions about reporting behavior. The questionnaire did not directly assess reasons

for nondisclosure, identify disclosure recipients, or examine actual experiences of stigmatization. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into community perceptions of childhood sexual abuse disclosure, reporting attitudes, and awareness of victim-support services in Southeastern Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study highlights important challenges surrounding the disclosure and reporting of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in Nsukka Local Government Area, Southeastern Nigeria. Although awareness of CSA was widespread, most respondents who acknowledged experiencing abuse during childhood had not reported their experiences. Perceived stigmatization, reservations about police reporting, and limited awareness of victim-support agencies further illustrate concerns within the social environment surrounding disclosure. These findings underscore the importance of creating supportive, confidential, and accessible reporting pathways that encourage survivors to seek assistance without fear of negative social reactions. Strengthening community awareness, institutional responsiveness, and coordinated child protection services is essential to promoting safe disclosure and improving support for survivors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening community-based education on CSA disclosure, reporting procedures, and available victim-support services, particularly in underserved communities. Social workers, schools, healthcare professionals, religious and community leaders, and child protection agencies should collaborate to challenge stigmatizing attitudes and promote supportive responses to survivors. Government agencies should strengthen confidential, child-sensitive reporting mechanisms and improve coordination between law enforcement and social welfare services to facilitate timely referrals and appropriate assistance. Additionally, training for frontline professionals should emphasize trauma-informed communication, confidentiality, and survivor-centered care. Future research should investigate the specific sociocultural and institutional factors influencing nondisclosure to inform culturally responsive prevention and intervention strategies in Southeastern Nigeria.

Reference

- Abdul Latiff, M., Fang, L., Goh, D. A., & Tan, L. J. (2024). A systematic review of factors associated with disclosure of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 147, 106564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106564>
- Aborisade, R., Adeleke, O., Adegoke, N., Ebobo, U., Ogunmefun, F., Chineyemba, L., & Adedayo, S. (2023). Child sexual abuse in Nigeria: Exploring vulnerability and prevention from a policing perspective. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 49(4), 461–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2023.2236141>
- Alaggia, R., Collin-Vézina, D., & Lateef, R. (2019). Facilitators and barriers to child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosures: A research update (2000–2016). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(2), 260–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017697312>
- Asaolu, A. A., & Oladepo, O. (2026). “They will use her as a proverb”: Exploring adolescent leaders' perspectives on barriers to reporting child sexual abuse in Nigerian schools. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605251414438>
- Collin-Vézina, D., De La Sablonnière-Griffin, M., Palmer, A. M., & Milne, L. (2015). A preliminary mapping of individual, relational, and social factors that impede disclosure of childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 43, 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.03.010>
- David, N., Ezechi, O., Wapmuk, A., Gbajabiamila, T., Ohihoin, A., Herbertson, E., & Odeyemi, K. (2018). Child sexual abuse and disclosure in South Western Nigeria: A community based study. *African Health Sciences*, 18(2), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v18i2.2>
- Eya, O. I., Ogbuabor, D. C., Ekwueme, S. C., & Eya, C. C. (2026). Families in the digital age: How technology is reshaping parent-child relationships in Enugu Urban, Nigeria. *Ikenga*, 27(2), 486–513. <https://doi.org/10.53836/ijia/2026/27/2/005>
- Ifayomi, M., Ali, P., & Ellis, K. (2024). Child sexual abuse in Nigeria: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(5), 3597–3614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241254077>
- Kapur, I., Ravi, K., Eya, O., & Rai, A. (2026). Digital disclosure of intimate partner violence on social media: A scoping review. *Journal of Family Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-01039-0>
- Lemaigre, C., Taylor, E. P., & Gittoes, C. (2017). Barriers and facilitators to disclosing sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.05.009>

- Manay, N., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2021). Recipients of children's and adolescents' disclosures of childhood sexual abuse: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116, Article 104192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104192>
- Manyike, P. C., Chinawa, J. M., Aniwada, E., Udechukwu, N. P., Odutola, O. I., & Chinawa, A. T. (2015). Child sexual abuse among adolescents in southeast Nigeria: A concealed public health behavioral issue. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 31(4), 827–832. <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.314.7115>
- Morrison, S. E., Bruce, C., & Wilson, S. (2018). Children's disclosure of sexual abuse: A systematic review of qualitative research exploring barriers and facilitators. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(2), 176–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1425943>
- National Population Commission of Nigeria, United Nations Children's Fund, & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). *Violence against children in Nigeria: Findings from a national survey, 2014*. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/1586/file/Nigeria-violence-against-children-national-survey.pdf.pdf>
- Nguyen, K. H., Kress, H., Atuchukwu, V., Onotu, D., Swaminathan, M., Ogbanufe, O., Msungama, W., & Sumner, S. A. (2021). Disclosure of sexual violence among girls and young women aged 13 to 24 years: Results from the Violence Against Children Surveys in Nigeria and Malawi. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(3–4), NP2188–NP2204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518757225>
- Omar, M., Joseph, A. K., Abubakar, A. U., Isezuo, K. O., & Adamu, A. (2026). Disclosure pathways and correlates of child sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents in Sokoto metropolis, Nigeria. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 14, Article 1805885. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2026.1805885>
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2016). *Ending violence against children in Nigeria: A multi-sectoral response to the 2014 Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey*. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/ending-violence-against-children-nigeria>
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2024, October 10). *Over 370 million girls and women globally subjected to rape or sexual assault as children*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/over-370-million-girls-and-women-globally-subjected-rape-or-sexual-assault-children>
- Wang, X., & Cheng, Z. (2020). Cross-sectional studies: Strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. *Chest*, 158(1 Suppl.), S65–S71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chest.2020.03.012>