

## ADOLESCENT SEXUAL ABUSE IN DIGITAL AFRICA: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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### Abstract

Adolescents have historically been known to be susceptible to sexual grooming and abuse by peers and trusted adults. However, the vulnerability of adolescents to sexual abuse and exploitation is exacerbated by their access to the internet and social media. Sexual predators are increasingly using digital technology to sexually groom and exploit young people. Nowadays, adolescents in Africa experience different forms for sexual abuse perpetrated by their parents, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, clergies, other trusted adults and strangers. Due to their naivety, sexually abused adolescents (SAAs) are often reluctant to disclose their victimization. Arguably, sexually abused adolescents are in dire need of both physical and emotional healing which the conventional criminal court proceedings may not provide. Sometimes, the emotional healing process is slow. Using narrative review method, this study examines the patterns and prevalence of adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) in Africa in the age of digital technology and how restorative justice can assist in fast-tracking the healing process of victims as well as its challenges. The study found that adolescent sexual abuse can be perpetrated through different means such as drugging, charming or threatening of the victim. It also found that ASA is exacerbated by the emergence of the internet and that girls are more targeted than boys. Moreover, it found that restorative justice is a viable option in the pursuit of justice for victims of adolescent sexual abuse. The study provides a strong foundation for academic and policy discussions on ASA and restorative justice in Africa.

**Keywords:** Adolescent; digital Africa; restorative justice; sexual abuse, victimisation.

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### Introduction

Adolescence is a period of transition that occurs between childhood and adulthood. It is typically characterised by a high level of curiosity. Adolescents want to know something about virtually everything. This curiosity also extends to the changes that occur in their bodies. In many African societies, conversation around sex matters is not common between parents and their children. Therefore, adolescents are usually at the mercy of their peers and adult groomers who are likely to give them inaccurate information on sexual matters. The grooming

is made a lot easier with the emergence of digital technology. Arguably, the problem of adolescent sexual abuse has escalated with the advent of the internet and proliferation of digital devices.

A cross-sectional Swedish study that sampled 594 adolescents aged 12 to 20 years to investigate online and offline sexual harassment association of anxiety and depression revealed that 48.50 percent of girls and 28.19 percent of boys had experienced sexual harassment. The study also found that online harassment had a significant correlation with increased anxiety and

depression symptoms in girls rather than boys (Stahl & Dennhag, 2020). Children aged 17 years and below constitute almost 70 percent of all reported cases of sexual assault (Ywca, 2017). Sexual assault and sexual exploitation of children are the worst categories of sex crimes (McClure & Eimermann, 2012). A study found that the prevalence of child sexual abuse in its narrow and broad sense in Africa is between 2.1 percent to 68/7 percent for females in Tanzania and Ethiopia and 41.1 percent to 60 percent for males in South Africa (Selengia, 2020). A study conducted in Ghana with a sample of 1692 students aged 13 to 19 years on sexual violence victimization revealed that 10.4 percent males and 24.3 percent females reported sexual violence victimization during the previous 12 months (Quarshie, 2021). Also, a recent study that investigated the drivers and prevention strategies for sexual violence among adolescent girls and young women in Kicukiro, Rwanda identified the drivers as substance abuse, transactional sex, poor family protection, gender stereotyping and poor legal literacy (Kawonga et al., 2025).

It is concerning that some adolescent sexual abuses even when uncovered by parents and guardians are not reported to law enforcement agencies. For example, a recent study that was conducted in Ghana found that many mothers and fathers preferred not to report family members who sexually abuse their children to the police (Amo-Adjei et al., 2022).

Furthermore, sexually abused adolescents suffer severe mental health and other consequences. A study that systematically reviewed the effects of sexual abuse on self-esteem among adolescents from studies conducted in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America found the prevalence of sexual abuse among the participants; an inverse relationship between sexual abuse and

adolescents' self-esteem was found (Okunlola et al. 2021).

It does appear that adolescent sexual abuse is an understudied area in Africa as most studies on sexual abuse of minors are skewed towards children. In some studies, adolescents are lumped together with children and not recognized as a distinct and delicate developmental stage that it actually is. Adolescents, particularly older ones enjoy relative freedom that are not granted to children. This is because it is assumed, and rightly so, that they have become more 'matured' to take care of themselves and handle issues that children cannot handle. But in reality, although adolescents are no longer children, they are not yet adults. So they are in the process of becoming adults. By implication, they are likely to still exhibit the traits associated with children. For example, they are likely to trust people easily; including strangers. Fundamentally, the adolescent stage of life is marked by heightened level of curiosity, adventurism, and quest for peer validation. These traits perhaps make the adolescent more prone of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Sexually abused adolescents need physical and emotional healing. But such healing may not be provided by conventional criminal court proceedings. Given the protracted and public nature of conventional criminal court proceedings, victims of adolescent sexual abuse may find it tiring. As a result, they may not be willing to report abuse to law enforcement, and if they do, they may not be interested in going to court. This kind of scenario underscore the need for the application of restorative justice to cases of adolescent sexual abuse. Therefore, the objective of this study is to discuss the patterns and prevalence of adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) and how restorative justice can

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assist in facilitating the healing process of victims of ASA in Africa in the digital age.

### Defining Adolescent Sexual Abuse

It is arguably difficult to arrive at a consensus on the definition of adolescent sexual abuse (ASA). The difficulty in defining adolescent sexual abuse is partly because of the lack of consensus on the age bracket of the adolescent. This is also further compounded by the fact that from a legal perspective, while some adolescents are minors (those below 18 years of age as obtains in many jurisdictions), others are adults (those aged 18 years and above). So while a minor cannot consent to sex with an adult, a legal adult can.

Adolescent sexual abuse refers to the engagement of an adolescent (usually defined as those within the teenage bracket of 13 and 19 years) in a sexual act of any nature; whether of contact or non-contact type by an adult or older adolescent through manipulation, coercion, intimidation, blackmail, threat or deception. Because the adolescent and the abusive older adolescent or adult are not on the same pedestal in terms of age, such act is often regarded as criminal (see Ndubueze, 2024).

Sexual abusers employ several tactics in order to sexually exploit their victim. Such tactics may be subtle or overtly hostile. The abuser may use manipulation. In this case, the adolescent may be made to believe that the sexual act is normal or that the abuser is doing him/her a favour. Persuasion may be used to convince the adolescent that if they do not engage in the sexual act that they may suffer some health challenges. Deception may involve the showing of pretentious concern about the adolescent's welfare or showering the adolescent with gifts in order to get the adolescent to yield to the abuse. In some cases, the adolescent may be physically overpowered and forced to engage in the

sexual act. Also, the adolescent's drink may be spiked to induce him or her to sleep so as not to be conscious of the abuse.

Adolescent sexual abuse can occur offline in the physical space on a face-to-face basis. It can also occur online through the internet, cell phone or other digital devices. Oftentimes emphasis is laid on offline sexual abuse without taking into cognizance the fact that in this age of digital technology; online sexual abuse of adolescents can be more widespread and covert. Nowadays, adolescents own smartphones and increasingly use them without the supervision of their busy parents and guardians. Unfortunately, through these smart devices many adolescents are groomed and abused by sexual predators who take undue advantage of their naivety and curiosity (see Ndubueze, 2024). Also, offenders oftentimes extend their online sexual abuse of their adolescent victim to the physical space. Perpetrators sometimes record the offline physical sexual abuse and share it online perhaps to humiliate the victim.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) by Ward and Beech (2006). They argue that sexual abuse occur as a result of several interacting variables. According to them, the interaction occur between the following three sets of factors: a) biological factors (shaped by genetic inheritance and brain development), ecological factors (i.e. social, cultural and personal circumstance) and neuropsychological factors. They believe that genetic composition and social learning shape brain development and produce those related neuropsychological system. They further argue that genes, social learning and neuropsychological systems combine to produce the clinical problem found in sexual abuse offenders such as deviant arousal,

offense related thoughts and fantasies, negative/positive emotional state, and social difficulties. It is these aforementioned factors that result in sexually abusive action.

Several factors account for adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) and such factors can be genetic or learned. They can produce deviant sexual arousal and fantasies such as rape in the offender. It is common to find adults who sexually abuse children regret their actions when they are apprehended. There is evidence that some adults who were abused as minors are likely to abuse minors as adults (see Naidoo & Hout, 2022; Ogloff, 2012). Therefore, persons who sexually abuse adolescents in Africa may be influenced by a combination of biological factors, ecological and neuropsychological factors. These factors may be responsible for their deviant sexual behaviours.

### Methodology

Narrative review method was adopted for this study. In narrative review, the researcher describes known facts about a topic and conducts a subjective examination and critique of the literature (Sukhera, 2022). Narrative literature reviews are comprehensive in terms of coverage and overview of relevant literature (Tunbull et al., 2023). Articles on adolescent sexual abuse and restorative justice were selected and reviewed based on their relevance to the objective of the study. The findings of the study were analysed using narrative thematic analysis. This entails reading the articles sourced to be able to appropriately describe and appraise them. The attachment theory guided the discussion of findings and conclusion.

### Patterns of Adolescent Sexual Abuse

Adolescent sexual abuse cuts across gender lines in Africa. However, historically, girls

are generally perceived as constituting the abused, while boys are seen as the abusers. This orientation tends to obscure the fact that many boys also suffer from sexual abuse. Even though, girls are undoubtedly more at risk of sexual abuse than boys, cases of sexual abuse of boys are perhaps underreported.

Adolescent sexual abuse can take the following forms: exposing an adolescent to unwanted pornographic content, such as text, picture, audio, illustration, graphics, or video; unwanted indecent physical or virtual exposure of an adult or older adolescent to an adolescent; unwanted kissing, cuddling or caressing of an adolescent; unwanted touching of an adolescent private parts;

forcing or persuading an adolescent to touch the perpetrator's private parts; engaging an adolescent in unwanted sexual jokes, stories or conversation; raping or gang raping of an adolescent; luring an adolescent into transactional sex; pimping an adolescent; engaging in transactional sex with an adolescent minor; drugging or charming an adolescent in order to have sex with him or her; forcing an adolescent into any kind of sex act; unwanted tape recording of an adolescent engaging in a conversation or sexual act; and unwanted taking or sharing of an adolescent nude photographs, videos; or sexual audio conversations (see Maduakolam et al., 2023; Naidoo & Hout, 2022; Ndubueze, 2016; Ritcher et al., 2018; Tetteh & Markwei, 2018).

It has been argued that whereas sexual abuse is distinct from sexual exploitation, they usually overlap and affect school-aged adolescent across sub-Saharan Africa (Rizo et al., 2021). Sexual abuse is related to and sometimes overlap with sexual exploitation. In Africa the following patterns of adolescent sexual abuse can be found.

- ***Victims are abused by relatives:*** A study that investigated child sex

offending patterns in South Africa using a sample of 12 males who had sexually abused children found that 9 out of the 12 participants were victims of sexual abuse; 7 of the participants were sexually abused by family members such as fathers, uncles, grandmothers, cousins and siblings. Furthermore, the study found that 5 of the participants were sexually abused by non-family members such as neighbours, peers, family friends, doctors and principals. It also found that 2 of the participants were abused by both family and non-family members. Moreover, the study revealed that 4 of the participants were exposed to pornography when they were between the ages of 6 to 10 years (Naidoo & Hout, 2022). An earlier study conducted in South Western Nigeria found a 7.5 percent cases of intra-familial sexual abuse (David et al., 2018).

- ***Victims are also abused at school.*** Several studies have shown that adolescents can be sexually abused at school. For example, a study on child's sexual assault in Kano State, Nigeria indicates that there are several reports of girls are being abused to and from or at school (Taft & Biyth, 2016). The abuse in the school environment can be perpetrated by a teacher or an older adolescent.
- ***Grooming may precedes abuse.*** There are four stages of sexual grooming: a) victim selection, b.) gaining access and isolation, c.) development of trust and, d.) desensitization to sexual content and physical contact (Winters & Jeglic, 2016). Grooming behaviour is not usually identified before the abuse (Winters & Jeglic, 2016). Although adolescent sexual abuse may be covert

or overt, sometimes it is preceded by sexual grooming when the abuser is close to the victim. This is so especially where the abuse is a family member, family friend or teacher.

- ***Parents do not recognize warning signals or simply ignore them:*** Many parents in Africa are reluctant to give their children sex education. A study that investigated the impact of parental education on child sexual abuse among adolescents in selected secondary school in Enugu, Nigeria found that 72.1 percent of the respondents were not informed that children can be abused family members or family friends and 73.8 percent were not instructed to inform an adult if they were abused (Manyike et al., 2015). Parents who are interested in the well-being of their adolescent children will naturally observe when there is a change in their behaviour. They will observe when the adolescent is unusually fond of the abuser. But some parents or guardians do not see these and even when they do, they do not bother to ask questions and probe answers.
- ***Victim may be charmed:*** It has been argued that child abuse linked to witchcraft, exorcisms and possession is age-long and found in all traditions and cultures across the world (Taramsari et al., 2022). In Africa some sexual predators use charms to force the victim into sexual relationship. Often times, the victim is not aware that he or she is acting under the influence of the charm. For example, in Nigeria the 'touch and follow' charm has being in existence for a long time. Some male sex predators procure this charm from some 'witch doctors' and use it to touch their victims who are typically

girls who end up following them. They end up sexually abusing them.

- ***Victims may be drugged:*** Serial rapists are known for typically drugging their victims in order to rape them without resistance. They may drug their drinks during a date or party and eventually take them home or to a hotel in order to rape them. Many teenagers have been victims too. It has been found that methamphetamine; a stimulant drug that can increase libido and impulsive behaviour among users known by many adolescents and its use can lead to unintended group sex (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2021)). There are instances where adults introduce this kind of drug to adolescents with a view to increasing their sexual urge in order to have sex with them.
- ***Treat of violence may be used to overcome the victim's resistance:*** Threat of violence is an old and enduring tactic used by perpetrators of sexual abuse in African societies. A study that investigated the trends and pattern of sexual abuse in North Central Nigeria found that threat of violence was mostly used to suppress the resistance of the victim (Adewole et al. 2021).
- ***Cultural aspect is a risk factor:*** Culture constitute a risk factor to sexual abuse involving children and of course adolescents in several ways. These ways include facilitating sexual abuse, preventing disclosure and even the definition of what sexual abuse is (see Bohm, 2016). Cultural factors that are believed to make children more vulnerable in many African countries are: desirability of female virginity, emphasis on family loyalty and (dis) honour, taboo against discussing sexual topics, holding

children in low esteem and expecting unquestionable obedience from them, paternal authority, male dominance over females and girls/female subjugation, a belief in the uncontrollable of male sexual desire, traditions that harm children and a stigmatization of 'undesirable' children and minorities (see Bohm, 2016, pp.8-9). A study identified some socio-cultural factors that normalize child sexual abuse in Ga community, Accra, Ghana (Markwei & Osei-Hwedie, 2019). It is reported that because of the stigmatization of the victim of sexual abuse and the potential shame that will come to the family, child sexual abuse is kept secret and in some instances the problem is resolved through the payment of monetary compensation to the victim by the perpetrator rather than reporting the case to the police (see Kpalam & Ahiataku, 2023).

- ***Girls are more vulnerable than boys:*** It has been argued that adolescence now represents a period of increased vulnerability to male instigated sexual violence against girls across the globe (Ngidi, 2022). A study that used a sample size of 403 students and 20 teachers from four public senior high schools in Mfantseman Municipality, Ghana found that respondents believed that sexual abuse was prevalent and that female students were mostly the victims, while teachers were mostly the perpetrators (Prah, 2016).

### Digital Dimension of Adolescent Sexual Abuse

The internet and digital technology have exacerbated the problem of adolescent sexual abuse in Africa and around the world (see Ndubueze, 2024). Before the emergence of

digital technology and digital culture, sexual predators and paedophiles typically groomed and abused their victims in person. Therefore, the offenders were normally trusted people who often come in contact with their victims such as relatives, older peers, teachers, and so on. In addition, there were cases where the offenders were complete strangers such people whom the adolescent met by the coincidence of being in the same place, at the same time or period with them. Such places could be recreational centres, malls, cinema, markets etc. But such opportunistic or spontaneous victimization was not common. Thus, adolescent sexual abuse in the pre-digital technology era was for the most part premeditated. In that era, in order to protect adolescents from sexual abuse, parents and guardians ensured that their children and wards did not come in physical proximity with strangers or un-trusted family members.

The landscape of adolescent sexual abuse in Africa has changed with the increasing access of adolescents to smartphones and other smart devices. Nowadays, while parents and guardians can possibly prevent their children and wards from coming into physical contact with suspected sexual predators; they may have difficulty doing so online. Adolescents may be groomed and sexually abused online and this can go on for a long time without their parents or guardians knowing (see Ndubueze, 2024; Omiunu, 2020).

Technology facilitate communication between perpetrators and victims of child and adolescent sexual abuse (Quaresma et al., 2024). A recent study revealed that although victims of penetrative technology-assisted child sexual abuse and penetrative child sexual abuse had victim characteristics that are largely similar, technology involvement in the abuse had to do with its severity, which is demonstrated in terms of multiple perpetrator, high abuse frequency and earlier age of onset

(Chauvire-Gelb et al., 2025). Also, a Norwegian study found that the emergence of digital forms of sexual victimization may have resulted in the rise in cases of adolescent sexual abuse (Pedersen et al., 2023).

Online sexual abuse is much more complicated than people often realize. This is fundamentally because the internet and particularly social media allow people to maintain 'dual identity'. One identity offline and another online. Whereas the offline identity is easily verifiable. People know their colleagues at work and in school normally by their real names and relate with them in-person. Conversely, the scenario is different online. For instance, some people use pseudo or fake names, address, gender, age to open social media accounts. Some users impersonate other people by creating social media accounts in their names. Such accounts could be used for committing different criminal offences including adolescent sexual abuse. For example, an otherwise respected professional in the physical space may hide under the veil of the internet and use a pseudonym to create a social media account for the purpose of sexually soliciting adolescents.

A recent study found that over 95 percent of children in South Africa frequently access the internet and can be victims of violence, abuse and exploitation because of their risky behaviour online (UNICEF, 2022). Adolescents' not younger children are involved in the majority of cyber-sex crimes (Maguire, 2015). Technology assisted sexual abuse refers to the various abuses experienced by children and young people such as online grooming or physical offline sexual abuse that is recorded and shared online (Ndubueze, 2016; Thomas et al., 2023). The act of recording adolescents engaged in sexual act and sharing it online is increasingly becoming widespread nowadays.

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### Prevalence of Adolescent Sexual Abuse in Africa

Although, cases of adolescent sexual abuse in this digital age is widespread in Africa, it has not been well explored by researchers. However, some studies have investigated the problem over the years. In this section examples of such studies from South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana are cited.

A study that examined the prevalence and incidence of physical, emotional and sexual abuse victimization of adolescents in South Africa found a 56 percent prevalence for lifetime physical abuse (Meinck et al., 2016). The Optimus Study South Africa which sampled 9,717 adolescents aged 15 to 17 years from schools and households to investigate the prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa found a prevalence of child and adolescent sexual abuse, with 36.8 percent of boys and 33.9 percent of girls reporting some form of sexual abuse (Leoschut, et al., 2018). Also, a longitudinal study in South Africa that collected data on abuse at six age points between the ages of 11 and 18 to investigate sexual abuse of boys found that virtually all sexual activity at age 11 was forced, and that the highest rates of coercion occurred between the ages of 13 and 14 years. The study also found that 45 percent reports of forced touching were reported at 14 years of age; 41 percent of forced oral sex occurred at the age of 13, while 31 percent of penetrative sex occurred at the age of 14 (Ritcher et al., 2018).

A cross-sectional study on adolescent sexual abuse that sampled 10 to 19 years old adolescents in a summer camp in Anambra State, South-east, Nigeria revealed that 12.0 percent of the respondents claimed to have been sexually abused (Udigwe et al., 2021). Another study that examined the knowledge and experience of sexual violence using a

sample of 325 female adolescents aged 10-19 years in public schools in Enugu State, Nigeria found that 90.8 percent had knowledge of sexual violence. The study also found that 40.4 percent of the offenders were uncles and 28.6 percent cousins. It also found that among 9.8 percent of the respondents who were forced to have sex, 65.6 percent were raped 2 to 5 times (Maduakolam et al., 2023). A community based study that used a sample of 398 adolescents aged 10 to 19 years to examine the burden and pattern of child sexual abuse in South Western Nigeria found that the prevalence of child sexual abuse was 25.7 percent (David et al., 2018). A study that systematically reviewed 16 hospital based studies on cases of sexual abuse in Nigeria found that out of 1,553 confirmed cases of sexual abuse, 1,164 (74.95%) occurred in children that are less than 18 years of age and 1,115 (99.23%) were female (Akin-Odanye, 2018). A study that investigated the trends and patterns of sexual abuse in the North Central region of Nigeria found that 84.4 percent of the cases occurred in children that were less than 16 years of age (Adewole et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a Ghanaian study that investigated the prevalence and associated factors of sexual abuse among girls during COVID-19 pandemic found that its prevalence during COVID-19 lockdown and school closure was 35 percent (Owusu-Addo et al., 2023). Reports indicate that between 2010 and 2014, a total of 5,752 children were sexually abused in Ghana and of this figure, 342 (17 %) were perpetrated by victims' family members (Kpalam & Ahiatau, 2023). Cultural factors influence the disclosure of adolescent sexual abuse in Ghana. Because disclosure may likely result in self-blame, the victim is less likely to disclose the victimization (Boakye, 2009). A study that used 79 media reports from 2000 to 2019 to investigate clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse in

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Ghana found that the survivors were mostly females aged 10 to 19 years, while the perpetrators were all males who were found guilty lone rape, incest, defilement, indecent assault, sodomy, attempted rape or gang rape (Quarshie et al., 2022).

Due to the deep psychological trauma and feeling of betrayer that is associated with rape, many victims are reluctant to report their victimization to the police (Dabney, 2013). In Ga community, Accra, Ghana victims of child sexual abuse are accused of seducing the offender and engaging in sex for monetary reward. They are consequently labelled as children of bad character and this labelling disempowers them and encourages abuse of children (Tetteh & Markwei, 2018).

These studies underscore the prevalence of adolescence sexual abuse in African societies. This problem is endemic but for some cultural reasons are sometimes not reported. Many adolescent are abused by people whom they are entrusted with. They are left traumatized and are in need of healing. This healing can be sought through restorative justice programmes.

### **Prospects and Challenges of the Applicability of Restorative Justice to Cases of Adolescent Sexual Abuse**

It has been argued that investigators, detective and forensic experts usually deify or vilify victims: deification entails idealizing young victims or those pre-deified by the press or public, while vilification has to do with regarding particular victim populations such as drug dealers, drug addicts, runaways and so on as worthless or inherently disposable (Turvey, 2002). The victimization of young people such as children and adolescents should concern the society. This category of victims are vulnerable and needs protection from older members of the society who may want to take undue advantage of them.

However, beyond interacting with the criminal justice system some victims may want to meet in-person with their offender (Diagle, 2015). This kind of meeting though may be traumatizing for many victims; as it would remind them of the abuse that they suffered in the hands of the offender, is very crucial for healing. Once the victim and offender are successfully reconciled through frank and open conversations about how they feel, closure would likely be fast. This way both parties can move on with their lives.

Restorative justice was developed in the 1970s and 1980s across the world (see Gude & Papic, 2018). It focuses on the relationship between the victim and the offender as well as other members of their communities and believes that repair can best be achieved through dialogue (Presser & Letteney, 2015). Whereas there is a growing body of research on the application of restorative justice to cases of sexual violence (see Gang et al., 2024; Hardar & Gal, 2023; Sardina & Ackerman, 2022), there is a dearth of studies on applicability of restorative justice on cases of adolescent sexual abuse. Therefore, this study attempts to fill in that gap in literature.

Advocates of the use of restorative justice in cases of sexual violence argue that there is no evidence to suggest that conventional criminal justice systems are more effective in responding to sexual violence (O’Nolan et al., 2018). They also argue that in relation to sexual assault crimes restorative justice can diffuse power relations between parties and heal the harm done to the victim (Cossins, 2008). Some proponents of restorative justice believe that it allows victims and survivors to tell their stories more elaborately enabling greater control and validation and reducing the likelihood of victim-blaming (McGlynn et al., 2012). A study that explored restorative justice relevance to sexual violence found that while some respondents focused on

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preventing recidivism as their main goal, others focused on victim's well-being or the goal identified by the victim and offender prior to the restorative justice process (O'Nolan et al., 2018).

Despite the several arguments of the advocates of the use of restorative justice in managing cases of sexual abuse, some scholars do not believe in the efficacy of the approach. For instance, the concern about power imbalance in restorative justice has raised the argument as to the relevance of restorative justice to cases of domestic and sexual violence (Willis, 2018). The use of restorative justice has also been opposed by those who do not feel that it should be an alternative to the conventional adversarial justice system (Marsh & Wager, 2015). Opponents of the use of restorative justice in sexual assault crimes have also argued that it may make light of cases of violence against women, victimize the vulnerable, and jeopardize the safety of victims as well as survivors (McGlynn et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding the arguments against the use of restorative justice in cases of sexual abuse, the approach seems promising for handling of cases of adolescent sexual abuse. Like children; adolescents are still in their formative years and need an avenue for them to be effectively healed of the pains resulting from their abuse. Bringing adolescent victims of sexual abuse to discuss with their victims and the community will perhaps bring them relieve and succour and allow them to move on with their lives. This is also important because it can enable them to get quick closure and possibly minimize the likelihood of them becoming perpetrators of sexual abuse when they become adults.

### Discussion

Adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) remains prevalent in Africa and takes different forms.

The study found that perpetrators are usually relatives and victims are abused in school. Also, the abuse is typically preceded by grooming. There are often warning signals which are either not noticed or simply ignored by parents. There is also the likelihood that victims may be charmed, drugged or coerced through threat of violence by the perpetrator. Moreover, there are some cultural factors that such as stigmatization that discourage reporting of ASA cases and girls fall victims than boys. These several patterns of adolescent sexual abuse buttress the assumption of Ward and Beech's (2006) integrated theory of sexual offending that sexual abuse is a product of several interacting causal variables evident in biological, ecological and neuropsychological factors. Perpetrators of adolescent sexual abuse may have been abused as children or may have some psychological disorders that may be driving their sexual deviance.

Furthermore, the scope of adolescent sexual abuse has changed with the emergence of the internet, social media and digital devices. This is expected because the internet provides perpetrators with a large pool of targets. This finding is supported by previous studies (see Chauviré-Geib et al, 2025; Pedersen et. al., 2023; Quaresma et. al., 2024).

The need for quick healing for victims of adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) is critical. The use of restorative justice (RJ) in the treatment of ASA cases in Africa seems promising. The opportunity for the victim to dialogue with the perpetrator will perhaps allow him or her to vent and also to engage with a frank conversation with the perpetrator. This would hopefully result in respite for the hitherto depressed victim. If this happens, it would possibly hasten the processes of healing for the abused adolescent. This argument is supported by previous studies. For example, a recent study revealed that there is potential in

restorative justice to provide some measure of justice to victims-survivors of sexual violence (McGlynn et al, 2012) and enable them recover from harm and experience accountability (Burns et al, 2021).

### Conclusion

Adolescent sexual abuse (ASA) is a critical problem that affects the health and social development course of the adolescent. Although, ASA is endemic in Africa and exacerbated by the internet, it is still not well explored by criminologists and victimologists in the continent. There is therefore, great prospects for the use of restorative justice (RJ) in managing cases of adolescent sexual abuse in Africa. However, there are also certain challenges that tend to hinder the effective application of restorative justice to ASA cases. Despite the controversies around the use of restorative justice in ASA cases, it remains one of the best strategies for getting succour for adolescent victims of sexual abuse. Restorative justice is a sure path to getting speedy and sustainable closure on cases of adolescent sexual abuse. Therefore, there is need for more advocacy by relevant stakeholders on the prospects of the application of restorative justice to cases of adolescent sexual abuse. Moreover, victims of adolescent sexual abuse should be encouraged to explore the option of restorative justice in their quest for justice. Future research can explore the role of technology in restorative justice processes.

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