

The Convolutions of the Concept of Age of Consent amongst Primary School Teachers in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The world over the age of consent is used as a child empowerment and protective tool. It has been argued that the age of consent supports teenagers as they negotiate the most profound aspect of childhood transition into adulthood. During this period, children and teenagers face abuse, bodily violence and exploitation. The study sought to analyse the perceptions and views of primary school teachers about age of consent within the educational setting. The study was guided by the interpretivist philosophy and was methodologically underpinned by the qualitative research design, particularly regarding data, which was collected utilising in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to solicit research participants' opinions, feelings, and thoughts that represent their world views. The study established that teachers had little knowledge about the age of consent due to misrepresentation in the legal frameworks and inconsistencies in the law on the matter. In addition, customary, cultural, and religious practices remain "blind" in the way they approach children's rights issues. Thus, the article advocates for a child-centred framework when dealing with issues that affect the well-being of children as a way of demystifying the age of consent in the educational sector, which should also be informative not only to teachers but traditional leaders and legal practitioners so as to have a shared understanding of the concept. It is recommended that the age of consent should be the same for both boys and girls just as the age of majority, which is at 18 years.

Keywords: age of consent; primary school teacher; childhood; adolescent; gender

Introduction

The world over the age of consent is used as a child empowerment, protective and preventative tool in the growth and development of children (Ahinkorah et al. 2021; Myers and Bourdillon 2012). It has been argued that the age of consent supports teenagers as they negotiate the most profound aspect of adulthood (Myers and Bourdillon 2012). The age of consent in Zimbabwe has become a subject of debate because there is no legislative specification that gives direction to parents and educators. During this stage in their lives, young children and teenagers face abuse, bodily violence and exploitation related to a lack of knowledge about the concept of consent. Despite Zimbabwe being a signatory to key international and regional instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), mixed feelings and limited knowledge persist in religious sects and cultural beliefs and practices about age of consent. The presence of legislation that does not specify the age limit becomes pertinent for the analysis of perceptions and understanding of primary school teachers as they represent the wider society in this regard. Primary school teachers are responsible for imparting knowledge directly to learners between six and 14 years of age. The group of learners under discussion is vulnerable and prone to sexual abuse by relatives and outsiders. In light of this, the main thrust of this article is to gain an in-depth appreciation of teachers' views, knowledge levels and world views about age of consent.

Literature Review

As alluded to earlier, the age of consent varies from country to country depending on the beliefs and cultural practices that govern the country (Ahinkorah et al. 2021). There is substantial evidence internationally that since the 19th century, the age of consent has occupied a central place in debates over the nature of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and this concept has been drawn into campaigns against child prostitution and child marriage, struggles to achieve gender and sexual equality and the response to teenage pregnancy (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and UNICEF 2018). The debates have been perpetuated by the fact that adults' conceptualisation of children often disregards their sexual agency despite the reality that children from a young age actively engage in sexual activities (Bhana 2017). Therefore, primary school teachers, like other adults, have their own understanding and conceptualisation of children regarding their sexual pleasures and sexual desires. In many instances, these physiological developments may contradict the socio-legal position regarded as age of consent.

Outside the United States of America, age of consent laws have been expanded to include same-sex relationships due to the growing tolerance of homosexuality (Kane 2012). European nations began establishing a uniform age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual acts in the 1970s (Kane 2012). Women reformers and advocates of social purity initiated campaigns to petition legislators to raise the legal age of consent

to at least 16, although their ultimate goal was to raise the age to 18 years (Rembe et al. 2011). The campaigns were successful by 1920; almost all states in Western Europe had raised the age of consent to 16 or 18 (UNFPA 2020). Laws around the world today define the socially appropriate age of consent as within the range from 13 years to 18 years. Despite considerable literature on consent laws globally, there is surprisingly little discussion on incorporating the views and concerns of educators, hence, the purpose of this study is to examine primary school educators' views, thinking and experiences of being at the frontline of working with young people affected by the age of consent matrix.

In Africa, child marriages bring an abrupt and unnatural end to girls' childhood and adolescence through imposing adult roles and responsibilities before girls are physically, psychologically and emotionally prepared (Bhana 2017). The situation is worsened by the fact that due to various customary and cultural beliefs and the pluralistic nature of the legal regimes, the age of consent differs from one jurisdiction to another, as is exemplified by the following example. In Angola, the age of sexual consent is pegged at 12 years (Nyanzi 2011) and in West African countries it is within the range of 13 to 18, with Tunisia pegged at 18 (Maswikwa et al. 2015). Although most African countries are signatories to various international and regional treaties such as the UNCRC and CRC, disparities and gaps on age of consent still exist (Tallarico, Ozah, and Orievulu 2021). For instance, in Zimbabwe, Ahinkorah et al. (2021) and Tallarico, Ozah and Orievulu (2021) concur that there is confusion related to the legal frameworks on the age of consent, which further complicates the stigma about matters of adolescent sexuality. This makes it difficult for adolescents to access sexual reproductive health (SRH) information and services when they need it most (Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network and the PACT 2018).

In the same vein, in Africa, cultural and customary practices such as forced marriages and child marriages, pledging children to appease vengeful spirits and affiliation to different religious sects are among some of the reasons the age of consent seems to have no shared meaning (Maswikwa et al. 2015; Petroni, Das, and Sawyer, 2019). To counter this, as a new paradigm for childhood research studies, attention and priority ought to be channelled towards the education of young people about sexual reproductive health issues and comprehensive sexuality education through advocacy networks at national and regional levels (Ahinkorah et al. 2021; Tallarico, Ozah, and Orievulu 2021). It becomes important to know how the young can be educated and the type of education they can get through exploring the views and perceptions of primary school teachers.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which covers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children (Bhana 2017; Kangaude and Skelton 2018; Myers and Bourdillon 2012). Section 61(1) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (Government of Zimbabwe 2004) defines a young person as a boy or girl under the age of 16. Chapter 70 then makes it a criminal

offense to have consensual sexual intercourse or perform indecent acts with a young person, which makes 16 years the age of consent in Zimbabwe. However, the introduction of Section 78 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe 2013) prohibits the marriage of anyone below the age of 18 years (to marry and be married), which produces some inconsistencies in the law on the exact age of consent. On the other hand, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Health and Child Care introduced a debate about revisiting the age of consent with the view of either reducing it, maintaining it at 16 or raising it to 18 years (Justice for Children 2019). However, after settling for 16 years through an amendment to the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, a group of child rights advocates challenged it in the Supreme Court, which raised it to 18 years (Mutsaka 2022). The debate, both in parliament and public spaces, was a pointer to the fact that there was a need not only to revise the age of sexual consent but to establish new knowledge parameters based on the voices of the public, educators, policy makers and legal experts.

In 2019, Zimbabwe held commemorations under the theme “Clearing the confusion around the age of consent” in Kadoma on the 1st of July where the society debated issues ranging from age of consent to sexual intercourse between adults and young persons and access to sexual and reproductive health services (Andreya 2019). The theme was contradicted by some of the child rights organisations, prosecuting authorities and Parliamentary Committee members who remarkably commented that girls as young as 12 are capable of consenting to sex and marriage. The remarks raised misconceptions and misperceptions on the age of consent and marriage in Zimbabwe. The comments raised a lot of debates in Parliament among human rights and gender activists and also among educationists.

It has been argued that society should address the issue of empowering and protecting the girl child through education (Nyanzi 2011). To this end, children’s education should clearly articulate an agenda that protects the vulnerable, particularly children, if we are to have a better tomorrow. The understanding of primary school teachers, who work directly with children from six to 13 years, on the meaning of the age of consent is equally important if public awareness is to be increased. The literature referred to above represents world and regional controversies and variations concerning the concept of age of consent. Even at a local level in Zimbabwe, the same misgivings and contradictions continue to exist as well as a dearth of literature representing the voice of teachers. Therefore, the literature review does not only show the research gap which ought to be filled but a justification for carrying out the study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study was based upon the relationship between the age of consent and primary school educators. Thus, the thrust was to explore the primary school teachers’ views and opinions of the age of consent in Zimbabwe. The age of consent and primary school teachers are the two concepts that are dissected in the section below.

The Age of Consent

The study adopted age of consent as a conceptual framework in interrogating primary school teachers' knowledge levels and attitude. It acknowledges the fact that age of consent is controversial, debatable and raises emotions when discussed in public forums. The research article starts by conceptualising the word "consent" for a better understanding of the phrase "age of consent." The study adopts Coggon and Miola's view (2011), which suggests that consent is about an individual's ability to self-determine and right to make self-governing decisions that are sound. Therefore, consent is about the capacity of an individual to give valid permission; in this context, it is about adolescents consenting to a variety of things, including sexual activity, with a sound understanding of their consequences. King (2007) poses the question: How is a particular age identifiable as sufficient to consenting? The use of time regarding when one reaches puberty, which was historically used the world over, is problematic because individuals enter puberty at different times. King (2007) further argues that while puberty denotes physical transformation into adulthood, it does not translate to emotional and psychological maturity. Thus, the research article further views age of consent as the minimum age at which a person is considered legally competent to consent to sexual activities and equally to enter into legally binding contracts. Waites (2005) historicises the concept and states that in the 19th century, it referred to the legal age for females to consent to sexual intercourse with a male. Thus, age of consent originated from a patriarchal ideological standing bent towards discriminating against females. Thus, the study concurs with and adopts Waites's (2005) conceptualisation that age of consent is about prohibiting the involvement of young people in any sexual behaviours below a certain age.

This conceptualisation is strengthened by Beresford (2014) who raises two aspects about age of consent: (a) that the age of consent should be understood as the age at which individual young persons can legally engage in sexual activities, and (b) that it is the age at which the law deems those individuals to be capable of giving genuinely informed consent, which requires a requisite level of cognitive and emotional understanding. Thus, the position of this study on age of consent is that young people below a certain prescribed age have insufficient judgement and lack the psychological maturity that enable them to give sufficiently informed consent to many issues including sexual acts. Ahinkorah et al. (2021) further state that the age of sexual consent refers to the minimum age at which a person is considered to have the legal capacity to consent to sexual intercourse. Similarly, Pitre and Lingam (2021) view it as the stage at which an individual is considered legally old enough to consent to participation in sexual activity. In Africa, the age of consent varies from 13 years to 18 years. In Comoros, the age of consent is 13 years, and it is 18 years in countries like Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland and Tanzania. In Namibia, it is 14 years, and it is 16 years in countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and South Africa (Kangaude and Skelton 2018). In Zimbabwe, Section 78 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe 2013) prohibits the marriage of anyone below the age 18 years, which produces some inconsistencies in the law on the exact age of consent. Kangaude and Skelton (2018) further acknowledge

that many educators in the education sectors in Africa sexually exploit adolescents, with a large number going uncaught. There is a need therefore to examine the position and knowledge of primary school teachers as frontline workers regarding these inconsistencies and prevailing debates.

Primary School Teachers

Primary school teachers are professionals who work with children from six to 13 years old (Murunga 2015). The teachers specialise in developing the whole child, giving special focus to the child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs (Murunga 2015). In Zimbabwe, according to the new educational curriculum, teachers are expected to be acquainted with both educational and social policies that govern the present and future well-being of children (MOPSE 2015). The curriculum is organised according to levels, namely, infant school, junior school and secondary school. The article is focused on teachers who teach the junior school level, which runs from Grade 3 to 7. It is within this context that the research article interrogates and explores primary school teachers' knowledge and views about age of consent within the educational setting.

The Gender Analysis Framework

The study is guided by the Moser gender analysis framework originated by Caroline Moser (1993). It is one of the many gender analytical frameworks that are employed to explain gender issues in society. While Caroline Moser was using the framework to understand extension agents in an agro-based setting, this study takes the framework to an educational setting to enable an understanding of teachers as agents of knowledge impartation and transformation. The study adopts the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's (UN Women 2007) definition of gender analysis as "a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights affect men, women, girls and boys in certain situations or contexts." Thus, in this context, the framework brings to the fore and unpacks the primary school teachers' knowledge levels, attitudes and how they view boys and girls from the vantage point of the concept of age of consent. The main argument in this regard is that school teachers are not gender neutral; they are affected by gender socialisation and patriarchal ideological grooming they undergo despite the fact that they are imparters of knowledge, culture and life skills to learners (March, Smyth, and Mukhopadhyay 1999; Rutoro et al. 2013). The gender analytical framework helps one understand the difference between sex, which is the biological difference between men and women, and gender, which is a social construction. The gender analytical framework breaks down the divide between male and female teachers' understanding and operationalisation of the age of consent in the education sector.

Methodological Contours of the Research

The field-based excursions undertaken for this study involved the exploration of the primary school teachers' understanding, testing their knowledge levels and attitudes towards the concept of age of consent in the education setting in Zimbabwe. Based on the nature of the data, which was solicited throughout the field visits, the study was guided by the qualitative research approach whose philosophical anchor is that people interpret their environment in ways that are shaped by the particular cultures and environments in which they live (Salkind 1997). Hence, the methodological frame of this research was attuned to unpacking issues and environmental factors that shape primary school teachers' world views about age of consent. The qualitative research design allowed for the extraction and excavation of rich and complex data, which represented primary school educators' lived experiences in line with Marshall and Rossman's (1989) promulgation.

Data collection and generation focused on two main thrusts, that is, the unstructured interview schedule and the focus group discussions, which were complimented by observations from the researchers. The unstructured interview was most useful for gaining in-depth facts and developing an understanding of primary school teachers' different insights, behaviours, approaches, and practices, as articulated by Yin (2017). The interviews with the primary school teachers were carried out at schools and at a teachers' college. The same applied with the focus group discussions. Each interview guided by a researcher took approximately 20 minutes; recording was done manually and electronically for the purpose of transcribing data later. Focus group discussions (FGDs), which were carried out on different days, gave the researchers an opportunity to reflect on issues for the purpose of engaging the next group in more informed discussions and to capture deeper thoughts. Due to their shared or common backgrounds, as discussed by Krueger and Casey (2000) and Morgan (2010), they shared their views, perceptions and beliefs after careful evaluation. The selection of research participants was done through a purposive sampling technique, which targets research participants with particular characteristics of a population that is of interest and enables the study to answer its research questions (Yin 2017). A sample of 20 primary school teachers was selected from four schools and a teachers' college in Mutoko District. Mutoko District, which is about 143 kilometres in a general northeast direction from the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare (Mvumi, Donaldson, and Mhunduru 1998), is in Mashonaland East Province (Chagonda 2010).

After collecting and generating data from Mutoko District, the data analysis followed the traditional thematic data analysis. The data analysis framework was deployed in order to elicit meaning, gain an understanding and develop empirical knowledge. Braun and Clarke (2006) posit that thematic data analysis gives an interpretation and, in the process, helps the researcher select codes and construct themes that help the researcher to summarise and highlight key features of data and interpret it. Accordingly, themes that arose in the study were about primary school teachers' knowledge level about age

of consent and the primary school teachers' gender socialisation that shaped their attitudes, as discussed below.

Study Findings

The findings of the study were representative and are presented under the three themes, namely, educators' knowledge levels on the age of consent, primary school teachers' world views in the context of gender socialisation, and bypassing or non-participation of children in age of consent teachings.

Teachers' Knowledge on the Age of Consent

Field-based empirical evidence indicated participants felt that the age of consent is a form of legal jargon and is the preserve of lawyers and others in educational administration. It was divorced from their daily lived experiences; hence there was no shared understanding of its meaning amongst primary school teachers. The teachers showed a lack of adequate knowledge of the basic legal framework with regard to the age of consent, despite the fact that they are at the frontline of dealing with and managing age of consent issues in learning environments. They concurred that as educators they only read about the issues in the newspapers or at one point heard about the parliamentary debates and deliberations on radio. One of them explained:

This is foreign language to me. I am not aware of the fine details about age of consent in general. The issues of age of consent do not make part of our syllabuses as educators nor was it in our training syllabus at teacher's training college or university. It was only mentioned in passing by our lecturers whom I believe were not acquainted too. Education begins with training at teacher training colleges. We should be furnished with all knowledge and information concerning children. This knowledge should form part of the curriculum.

Similar sentiments that the age of consent is a legal term only dealt with by lawyers at courts and in their training were shared by research participants during focus group discussions. The research participants' level of knowledge was very low, and three issues arose in the discussion: that age of consent was terminology for lawyers, that it was not taught to them during basic educators' training, and that even local law enforcement agents do not conscientise them about it. The issue of blaming law enforcement agents for not including them and the children in this matter was emotionalised and represented bad relations between educators and law enforcers. One participant said:

We only get to know more about the issue of children's rights including age of consent when one of us is said to have breached it. We then feel the age of consent and other aspects about rights within the education sector is weaponised against us.

Those with little knowledge get it from newspapers and the radio, which trivialises the exceptional role of primary school teachers. The primary school level is the foundation

phase of education for children; hence, matters concerning the age of consent centre on the social and emotional development of the child and should be known by the primary school teachers. Therefore, it is imperative to have a shared meaning of the age of consent right from the foundation phase.

Teachers' World Views and the Age of Consent

While research participants held divergent views on the operationalisation of the age of consent in the school's environment, they held a common background view about age of consent. The teachers viewed the concept of age of consent as applying to girls and their weak morals about engagement in sexual contact. To the research participants, age of consent represents a classical Victorian gender ideology that views consent as based on the girl child only (Waites 2005). When one discusses age of consent, it is synonymised with girls and sex, with less reference to boys. These gender distortions represent a level of ignorance which is displayed and shared by teachers and the rest of society. Based on the above thinking, some in-depth interviews also established that some teachers feel that early childhood development (ECD) classes and primary school teaching ought to be done by female educators rather than males because they are seen as better positioned to handle puberty issues of female learners. To this end, the study established that both male and female educators were products of a gendered socialisation process in which even basic issues of gender may be mistaken to mean femininity. One of the female educators had this to say:

The age of consent is a subject and matter easily handled by female educators because they come from a similar background of experiencing puberty, hence they are positioned to give pragmatic help.

Based on the gendered views on age of consent, research participants also felt that the law reform process should be brought to their doorstep so that they can contribute to the issue of fixing a new age for the age of consent. They felt that the age of consent should be locked at 16, commenting that the child would have reached puberty at that stage and grown psychologically to understand the consequences of certain behaviours. Participants echoed that according to the Zimbabwean education system, at the age of 16, the child will be completing Ordinary level and would have successfully passed through various milestones. As such, they recommended that at 16, children ought to be exposed to intensive sexual reproductive health education at home and at school. However, a few female educators suggested adjusting the age of consent to 12. One of them said the following:

The upbringing of children these days is now different from few decades ago. Due to technology, children are exposed to different platforms where they learn about sexual reproduction at an early age. In addition, the primary school curriculum exposes learners to sexual reproduction topics as early as 10 years so by pegging the age of consent at 16 I think we are denying them their rights.

The above data suggests that while research participants had shared thoughts about age of consent, they also had mixed feelings on what the age of consent should be. Those who suggested the age should be 12 had their supporting reasons for their arguments. The sentiments also suggested that 16 as the age of consent is prejudiced because it denies children access to sexual health education. The variations in the specific age of consent may result in children taking advantage and engaging in premature sexual practices. The results of premature sex are devastating because the underage group of children is excluded from accessing relevant health services in the false belief that children are protected from sexual exposure.

The third aspect of the educators' different views originated from the different geographical locations in which they were working. The rural educators were more concerned about access to basics, that is, sanitary wear, clothes and uniforms, and the ability to pay school fees and proceed with schooling, while those in an urban environment were more concerned about consent to sexual contact. The educators also brought up issues to do with cultural and religious practices which make it difficult to handle the education surrounding age of consent. In particular, cases of girls dropping out of school because of unintended pregnancy left the educators with little control over children's well-being since these issues were taking place at homes and in communities. While educators concurred that such practices should be banned, such views about children's rights only came from educators located geographically in the rural enclave.

Participants blamed authorities in government for not speaking with one voice against such practices or enforcing the law to stop the practices. One of the participants said:

Religious institutions should align their practices with the law which prohibits child marriages and uphold basic rights for children.

Discussion

The study explored the intricacies of primary school teachers' knowledge and attitude towards the age of consent in the education sector in Zimbabwe. The findings as represented and presented thematically by the above sections bring out a number of debatable issues. The teachers' lack of knowledge about the basic laws that affect their work in the education sector represents a fractured teacher training syllabus that does not relate to the realities experienced in schools. The study argues that while educators are well groomed through training in terms of educational pedagogies and knowledge of subjects they specialised in, a lack of knowledge of what the age of consent is and how it is operationalised and managed in schools indicates that the teachers' training course should be revisited so that it becomes holistic and inclusive of issues that affect contemporary education. Empirical evidence from other studies showed that the concept of age of consent is a sensitive aspect of educational delivery, hence Rutoro et al. (2013) report that the role of teachers is not only to facilitate the impartation of knowledge to learners but to be part of the broad socialisation process and to equip learners with life and practical skills. This critical role can only be accomplished when teacher training

programmes take up basics in law at a serious level. Borrowing Klaus Schwab's (2017) concept of "disruptive technologies and disruptive thinking," the teachers training course ought to be re-engineered and restructured to represent the realities of 21st century life. The training of educators ought to shift from the traditional, mainstream formations that borrowed so much from the colonial system, which aimed to achieve its colonial objectives through the education system.

The study also shares Thorne's (1987) view that gender socialisation is an ongoing process that should be revisited and supported by law reform, law enforcement and conscientisation. The study raises the argument that a skewed gendered mentality in disfavour of girls amongst teachers originates from a Victorian and colonial training that produces biased knowledge against women and girls in a subtle way. The teachers' misconception of the age of consent as jargon and the domain of lawyers and administrators represents that colonial mindset. The study argues that even some feminist theorisation remains adult-centric and in that sense regards adolescents and children as nonautonomous and non-agentic (Kangaude and Skelton 2013). Primary school teachers represent adults' conceptualisation of children, which disregards their agency; hence, they contradict Bhana (2017) who argues that children from a young age actively engage in gendered power relations and express sexual desire and invest in it to a great extent. Therefore, maintaining a view of learners as innocent, non-gendered and asexual leaves a gap in the way teachers take up their roles as life skills trainers, and that view about children and learners eventually disadvantages them. Bhana (2017) agrees that the asexual world view is characterised by the penalisation of children rather than moulding them. As such, our study concurs with scholarship (Nyanzi 2011) which argues that children's interests are "muted" in research and have no representation in law and policymaking processes. Myers and Bourdillon (2012) further point out that even law at an international level represents the voice of adults and not those of children. Adults continuously regard children as voiceless beings who need adults' help in every aspect of their lives. However, Nyanzi (2011) and Bhana (2017) acknowledge that considerable efforts by many scholars for a more critical theorisation of childhood matters are slowly taking shape. Thus, it is important to prioritise the participation of teachers and learners in issues that affect them such as the age of consent.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore and reflect on the knowledge levels of primary school teachers as well as their attitudes towards and perceptions of the concept of age of consent within the education fraternity. After giving a general background to the study, the conceptual, methodological and theoretical frameworks, the study deliberated on the findings, of which the main was that primary school teachers lack relevant and required knowledge about the age of consent despite the fact that they are central in knowledge impartation and life skills training to learners. This finding points to the nature and quality of educators' training in colleges and universities, which ought to be revisited and strengthened so that it speaks to the realities of contemporary society.

The study also deliberated on the educators' world views of age of consent and found that these are affected by a patriarchal ideological background rooted in Victorian and colonial framing. This framing causes teachers to perceive age of consent as restricted to children exercising innocence and an asexual lifestyle. Thus, the study argues that teachers' attitudes and perceptions on age of consent represent a society that is fractured and characterised by "muting" children's voice as it pursues policies and lifestyles that are adult-centric. Therefore, the study recommends the revision of the educators' training syllabus such that it becomes inclusive of relevant basic laws such as those relating to age of consent. Through the relevant government department, refresher courses should be held that deliberate not only on pedagogic matters but age of consent too. At community level, law enforcement agents should work closely with educators and other line departments that deal with gender and women's affairs so as to share notes rather than work in isolation. The study recommends a paradigm shift in childhood research that articulates and advocates for a child-centred framework to see improved participation of children in matters that affect their lives and future. Lastly the study recommends promoting children's rights in all cultural, customary, religious and economic activities so as to have a better future for generations to come.

Author Biographies

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