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## Role of Inter-Professional Communication in Management of Child Abuse in Kenya: A Focus on Protective Intervention Strategies

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### **Abstract:**

*Child abuse remains a rampant and costly social problem worldwide; hence there is an urgent need to come up with suitable ways of addressing the problem. One of the traditional ways of addressing the issue of child abuse in Kenya and elsewhere entails communication by relevant professionals to disseminate information aimed at preventing and/or managing cases of child abuse. However, the extent to which the professional communication achieves this dissemination and management is not clear. This paper reports the results of a study that set out to investigate the role of communication between various professionals (inter-professional communication) in management of child abuse in Kenya. The study examined the nature of communication between various professionals involved in management of child abuse; the effects of the communication between the professionals on the management of child abuse and the challenges experienced by professionals in the communication of information on child abuse. It was conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya with data generated from five groups of professionals: doctors, police officers, lawyers, social workers and children officers and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of this analysis revealed that the communication between the professionals involved several channels and media with varied levels of effectiveness; while information disseminated by the professionals was useful in solving problems of child abuse, there were several factors that constrained access to child abuse information.*

### **1. Introduction**

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical, emotional, ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or other exploitation of the child. All these result in actual harm or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development and dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (WHO Report 1999). Promotion and protection of the Child's right is paramount in every society. The vision of every society is that children will thrive in safe and protective environment which at the same time is a critical challenge in society today.

There is still evidence that child abuse is a global problem occurring in a variety of forms and is deeply rooted in cultural, social and economic practices. There are various effects of child abuse on the child victim both physical and psychological. The long-term effect of child abuse is worse than any ill one can do to a child. He/she lives in a state of constant uncertainty never knowing what to expect, for example, "frozen watchful" attitude. Anger associated with child abuse can yield tragic outcomes. Such anger and hate may be carried into adulthood where the abused may become a child batterer (Segal 1995).

Many children have been abandoned by their mothers, while others have been thrown into the dustbins and left to die. Studies done by the African network for the Prevention and Protection against child abuse and neglect (ANPPCAN) in Kenya reveal that a large number of both children and adults have seen or experienced acts of child abuse (ANPPCA, 1997). Local newspapers and other media frequently report cases of children severely beaten by their parents. A reporting desk for cases of abuse created by the Coalition of Child rights and Child Protection in Kenya receives at least five reports of child abuse per day. This clearly shows the magnitude of child abuse in Kenya.

Child abuse is also a major problem in Kenya, where all types of child abuse have been reported in the media. Kilbride (1994), conducted a research on child abuse in Kenya in the mid 1980s, and reported that the growing cases of child abuse in Kenya in the recent years could be attributed to economic decolonization. Although child abuse cases in Kenya ought to be prevented through the adherence to the Children's Act Cap 586 (Government of Kenya, 2001) that came in force in 2001, there are continued reports of child abuse cases in the country.

It is important that the government and all the concerned stakeholders address the issue of prevalence of child abuse in Kenya. The stakeholders include parents, caregivers, teachers, children's officers, the police, medical personnel, psychologists and the judiciary.

One form of response to child abuse cases entails collaboration of several groups of professionals. These include the criminal and justice society who are responsible for the criminal investigation and arrest of the perpetrators; the judicial system responsible for the prosecution of cases and or for the custody of child victim and the medical system responsible for gathering collaborative evidence of

assault. Others are the school system responsible for access and ongoing monitoring of the child's learning and the mental health system – responsible for providing treatment services to victim's perpetrator Non-offending family members and the care givers are also expected to collaborate in the management of child abuse cases.

The failure of any one professional to act appropriately may mean the difference between stopping the abuse and allowing it to continue. Most of the time, response given to victims depends on whom they first see, and how they are perceived to fit within the category of service and not on the basis of their individual needs. This scenario jeopardizes the services the child victim receives thus this calls for a collaborative effort between these various professionals which would be more effective in service delivery.

In the world today people need to interact, and exchange ideas through communication. The communication process therefore shapes the interactive effects among humanity and in the process bring about close cooperation among the people from many areas. Christakis, 2009 asserts that communications has also influenced many facets of people's lives and has continued to influence key decision being undertaken by many. As such the presence and intensity of communication are increasingly recognized as an important part of the social ecology of humanity and as such the communication influence have become more visible in recent decades (Cutlip *et al.*, 2004; L'Engle *et al.*, 2006).

### *1.1. Communication about Child Abuse*

Communication as a process is the first fundamental element to understanding human behavior and methods that can be useful to find solution to problems and has been essential for individuals, relationships, groups, organizations and societies in solving most of the problems afflicting the society. Moreover, in groups, organizations, and societies, communication has also been found to be the means through, which human need and goals are coordinated with those of others (Krauss and Ezequiel, 2010). Even in a simple conversation there are many steps involved as one creates, sends, receives, or interprets a message (Rabinowitz and Shefsky, 2005). Ruben and Stewart (1998) explain that communication is our link to the world, our means of making impressions, expressing ourselves, and influencing others.

The ability to effectively communicate at work, home, and in life is probably one of the most important sets of skills a person needs in attempting to solve problems. A key to interpreting communication is to find the meanings of messages, and those meanings are found in people, not in words (Eng, Maxfield and Patrick, 1998; David and Wiese, 2009). This is because communication is a continuous process that begins with a first encounters between people and does not end until the last encounter in their lives. These encounters may involve functional messages that serve practical purposes, or, in cases of close ties, the encounters may also involve nurturing messages that convey a sense of caring and personal connection.

Communication needs to be effective; that means it conveys your message in such a way that it is understood by the person you are communicating with (Finnegan and Viswanath, 2006) regardless of the information you are trying to convey. Therefore good communication may allow management of some of the problems that affect the society including child abuse cases.

Current research suggests that communication processes among various professionals are more powerful predictors and therefore help the management of physical child abuse than any of the psychological or sociological variables commonly studied (Finkelhor and Berliner, 2008; Wasik and Roberts, 2010; Green and Kreuter, 2010). Research also shows that sexual abuse does occur randomly; but rather, firmly managed when embedded in the processes of professionals' interaction, which help to regulate the occurrence of abuse. Thus, communication patterns and processes are inextricably connected to the most rudimentary aspect of family life-family talk. As a result, communication patterns among professionals are inherently useful for studying physical child abuse.

Reports of interpersonal communication among professionals in managing child abuse in the country are rarely undertaken. When undertaken they are done through the media without any tangible solution on how these help to achieve effective child abuse management in Kenya (Daro, 1994). Toward this end, the purpose of this paper through the research conducted is to contribute to a communication perspective from which to understand management of child abuse by determining if communication among various professionals helps in the management of the vice in the country particularly in Uasin Gishu county where there has been no such study.

Communication is a vital concern and perhaps the main ingredient in collaboration between the professionals involved in management of child abuse cases. Lack of communication between the professionals discourages the victims leaving them more desperate than they already were. Communication is basically a process intended to facilitate the sharing of a common meaning between the sender and the receiver (Freithmuth Stein and Kean, 2005). As a process, communication is the first fundamental element in understanding human behaviour and is useful in seeking solutions to problems afflicting the society. Communication is the means through, which human beings needs and goals are coordinated (Krauss and Ezequiel, 2010).

Current research suggests that relevant and effective communication processes between various professionals could be a useful means of management of physical child abuse (Finkelhor and Berliner, 2008; Wasik and Roberts, 2010; Green and Kreuter, 2010). Research also shows that although child abuse does occur randomly; it could be firmly managed when embedded in the processes of professionals' interaction.

Thus, this paper further seeks to investigate the role of communication between various professions (hereafter inter professional communication) in the management of child abuse in Kenya, particularly in Uasin Gishu County

### *1.2. The Kenyan Context*

As pointed out in the background above, child abuse is a serious problem in Kenya and many other parts of the world (Kilbride, 1992). The magnitude of the Kenya case is captured in a study by Ruto (2009). A related problem is the lack of effective coordination

between the different professionals involved in protection of the child; those generally and specifically charged with the responsibility of dealing with cases of child abuse in the country in various ways (Daro, 1994).

Literature suggests that appropriate communication (at various levels) is one of the possible sources of solution to the problem of child abuse (Cohen, 2001). This could be in terms of enhancing access to reliable, valuable and accurate information with regard to societal problems such as child abuse (Canary and Kathryn, 2008). Appropriate communication between various professionals could lead to a significant reduction of cases of child abuse cases (*ibid*). Yet, there is no evidence that communication about child abuse generally and between the concerned professionals in particular has been explored as one of the possible strong remedies to the problem of child abuse in Kenya.

In almost every County in Kenya, there is a Children's Department charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the rights of the child as well as dealing with cases of child abuse. Furthermore, in every county, the Children's Department (usually made up of professionals trained in the management of children's issues) is expected to collaborate with other professional bodies such as the police, the Ministry of education, the department of justice (including law courts), the department of health (e.g. district hospital) etc. One of the expected facets of such collaboration would be a sustained communication between these professionals. The problem that prompts this study is that there is no evidence that the nature, extent and role of such a communication have been empirically established in Kenya. Uasin Gishu County, which has been chosen as the site for this study, like other county in Kenya, has various professionals dealing with matters of the child in the area. Though as stated above, there is no documented research that has been undertaken in the area to determine whether there is any communication between professionals with regard to management of child abuse cases.

In line with this, professionals have different ways of defining the magnitude and scales of problems. The cases of child abuse can be seen as medical one by a doctor, criminal by the police, psychological by a psychologist, spiritual by a pastor, madness by villagers, lack of information by a communication specialist, etc. This scenario possibly creates diversity in opinion among professionals on the concise definitions and approaches to cases of child abuse. To manage the cases of child abuse therefore requires synchronization of the information among all these professionals in order to establish the best possible unified approach to solve the problem.

Therefore the question this paper seeks to answer is. *Is it true then that communication between the various professionals and proper use of information are vital and key ingredients to management of child abuse cases?* Hence, this paper explores the communication dimension to managing of the problem of child abuse in Kenya, with a focus on Uasin Gishu County in Kenya.

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the background presented above, the main objective of the study was to investigate the role of communication between various professionals in management of child abuse in Kenya using Uasin Gishu County as a research site. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To determine the nature of communication between various professionals involved in management of child abuse.
2. To explore the effects of the communication between the professionals on the management of child abuse.
3. To identify the barriers experienced with regard to communication between professionals involved in management of child abuse.

### 1.4. Scope of the Study

In terms of the objectives, first, the study was concerned with the nature of communication between the professionals, the initiators of communication among the key professionals, the targeted receivers of such communication, the actual messages communicated, and channels of communication used and the frequency of the communication. Secondly, the study was concerned with the effects of the communication on the management of child abuse cases. Key questions were: did the communication lead to increased awareness? Better coordination? Identification and punishment of perpetrators? Treatment (in various ways) of victims of child abuse? Enhancement of preventive measures against child abuse? Thirdly, the study covered barriers experienced in the course of communication between these professionals.

In terms of research site and sample, the study was confined to Uasin Gishu County especially Eldoret town because the town has a large population of children from diverse backgrounds. The presence of big industries and large farms also present possibilities of several reported cases of child abuse. Eldoret town is also the place where professionals dealing with all cases of child abuse in Uasin Gishu County are stationed.

In terms of respondents, the scope of the study covered five different cadres: police, magistrates, social workers, children officers and medical doctors. In terms of research methods, the scope was restricted to the use of a survey involving questionnaires as they were considered the most effective way of data collection.

The study was of necessity limited to the scope explained above in terms of content, research site and research method. The content is limited in that it would have been more informative to explore not only the communication between the professionals but also within the media and among other stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Another limitation is in terms of the research site – perhaps two or more counties would have presented more manifestations of the management of child abuse cases in Kenya.

Similarly the failure to include more sectors of the society as participants including the church, village elders, politicians etc might be considered a limitation. These limitations in terms of scope were however necessary due to the necessity to make the study focused, manageable, and affordable considering the fairly limited time, restrictive guidelines and resources available to a researcher at a Masters Degree level. These limitations notwithstanding, the study still contributes worthwhile knowledge to the field of communication studies especially on the role of communication in the management of societal issues – in this case child abuse.

### *1.5. Rationale for the Study*

Little research has been conducted on how child abuse cases are being managed by various professions, this study greatly contributes to the existing body of knowledge of child protection by shedding light on not only how the individual professionals manage child abuse but also on the role of communication between the various professional in the management of child abuse in Kenya.

The study also enables different professionals who work or might be required to work together in future to have a clear focus on the importance of communication towards solving a common problem. It also raises the importance of working together as a team of professionals towards achieving a common goal and the need to improve communication between them for better achievement of their goals.

The study is also significant to policy makers as it raises the need to factor in the communication component in policies intended to guide the management of child abuse. Furthermore the government could (referring to the findings of this study) institute a more structured collaboration between the different professionals in order to manage child abuse more effectively.

This study will also provide future researchers with empirical literature on the role of inter-professional communication in managing child abuse. Such literature would be useful in informing further research on other areas of inter professional communication. Ultimately the study will also contribute to the body of knowledge in Communication Studies in general and inter professional communication in particular.

### *1.6. Research Methodology*

A survey research method was employed in undertaking the study. Uasin Gishu County presented a scenario that poses challenges to children making it a suitable study area for the present study. Sampling was done from five categories of professionals who are directly responsible for managing child abuse in the study area. These are doctors, lawyers, police officers, children's officers and social workers, out of the target population of 1190 a sample of 246 was chosen.

Data was then generated from this sample population using questionnaires which were tested for validity and reliability. Ethical considerations of accuracy, anonymity and honesty were upheld during the study. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

## **2. Findings**

### *2.1. Demographics of the Respondents*

In order to establish the nature of the respondents sampled, the study established the background information of the professionals. It was found out that 84% of the respondents in the study were male while 16% were female. Gender distribution is important in this study because previous studies have suggested gender affects how individuals react to issues of child abuse and also is important in communication as conversational interaction between professionals is pre organised by each gender.

In terms of age most respondents sampled were age between 26-55years. For all the sampled professionals there was significance difference in the age distribution. Like gender age is important as it determines the level of interaction in inter professional communication.

Over 60% of the respondents sampled were married, like any other social factor marital status affect communication as it's an attribute people consider when communicating especially in social issues like child abuse.

The most relevant background information sought in this study was the highest levels of education and work experience. This is because the two are considered as crucial social identities and in the study it would indicate levels of familiarity with issues of child abuse in the professional sense.

### *2.2. Nature of Communication between Various Professionals Involved in Management of Child Abuse*

The first objective of the study was to determine the nature of communication between various professionals involved in management of child abuse in Uasin Gishu County. As I explained in the scope of the study, the nature of communication include the sources of communication among the professionals, the targeted receivers of such communication, the actual messages communicated, channels of communication used and the frequency of the communication.

#### 2.2.1. Rate of Professional Communication with Each Other

First the researcher inquired from the respondents whether they communicated with other professionals on issues of managing child abuse. The results indicated that 79% of the doctors, 80% of the police officers, 76% of the lawyers, 95% of children officers and 80% of the social workers communicated with other professionals on the need to curb child abuse cases. This means that 82% of the professionals communicated with other professional on issues of child abuse as shown in table 4.4. It implies that majority these professionals take reasonable measures to ensure that risk of harm to children's welfare are minimized and that they address concerns of child abuse by partnering with each other.

#### 2.2.2. Sources of Sources of Information on Child Abuse for the Various Professionals

Table 1. below show the sources of information of child abuse cases for each cadre of professionals. It shows the level of communication with each other. Most victims run to the police to report the mater and what the police seek to know is the location and the perpetrator. Thus this is the kind of information the police will in turn offer to the other professionals. And thus their main source of information is the victims.

The doctors on the other hand get their information from the children's officer and the social workers. ie 57% of their information. More than 50% of the information given to lawyers is from doctors this is mainly because they are looking for scientific evidence to present in the courts as they push for justice for their client. As for the children's officers their main source of information is from the victim same applies to the social workers this is because the victim feels obliged to approach the for further assistance.

|          |      | Victims | Doctors | Police | Lawyers | C.officers | S Workers |
|----------|------|---------|---------|--------|---------|------------|-----------|
| Doctors  | (19) | 2       | -       | 5      | 3       | 7          | 4         |
| Police   | (16) | 23      | 2       | -      | -       | 30         | 11        |
| Lawyers  | (46) | 2       | 23      | 5      | -       | 8          | 8         |
| Children |      |         |         |        |         |            |           |
| Officers | (29) | 20      | -       | -      | -       | -          | 9         |
| Social   |      |         |         |        |         |            |           |
| Officers | (37) | 16      | -       | 5      | -       | 16         | -         |

Table 1: Sources of information on child abuse for the various professionals

From the above table it can be concluded that these professionals communicate on regular basis when they get cases of child abuse and on the other hand it can also be determined which profession rarely communicate with which one for instance the lawyers and children's officer rarely communicate and thus there is need to sensitize them on the importance of communicating with one another. From this study it can also be concluded that the primary source of information to all these professionals is the victim and this include their parents and guardian of the child victim. This study clearly shows that they communicate with each professionals and it's clearly indicated that most that is a high percentage of the victim run to the police on the first to report on the incidences.

After the victims have informed the various professionals then the professionals also share the information with other relevant professionals. And from the study it can be noted that the social worker share information with the entire professional and same to the children officers. The children officer and doctors also communicate with the police who in turn may share information with the lawyers so as to obtain justice for the victim. In this study hence it's evidenced that each professional is a potential source of information to the other and that they need each other to achieve their common goal which is effective and timely service to the victim of the child abuse.

As much as each of these professionals communicated to each other and provided information there are some short coming is relaying their information For instance the medium of communication, timely communicate feedback, jargon use in communication, professionalism formality.

### 2.2.3. Messages Communicated between the Professionals

The study further sought to find out the type of messages each professional communicated to the others. It was found out that doctors mostly communicated the medical reports they presented this as evidence to the lawyers. Doctors would produce not only evidence of abuse (injury sexual assault, neglect etc) but also other information that might indicate the nature of past care of the child and future needs. E.g. comments on physical and behavioural growth and development, psychological and emotional rate, intellectual developments and relationships with parents, and also in court they also communicated the extent of injury of the victims. This kind of message was found out to be important especially when presenting the cases to court.

The police officers communicated the time and location of the crime in this case child abuse. This information is attained from the statements the victims record when reporting the incidents. This type of information by the police to other professionals helps in facilitating further investigation in the cases at hand. The information by the police comes in handy when the cases were taken to court and the prosecutor needed evidence against the perpetrators, thus helpful to the lawyers.

The children's officers on the other hand communicate information concerning the state of the child or the victim because they have to make home visits to the victims home to ascertain the factors that facilitated the abuse of the child as it's their duty to do so. The social workers offer counseling to the victims and the caregivers cautioning them on social situations that can lead to child abuse. They also present reports to other professionals on the conditions of the child whether they need to be place under special care or not. The lawyers then present to the magistrate the facts and evidence they have found concerning the cases of child abuse and this evidence presented to the court pave way for justice to be obtained for the victims.

From this study, it was found out that the lawyer's benefits most from the process of inter professional communication because all the information needed for court cases can be attained from the other professionals. It is noteworthy that the messages between the various professionals were very important in managing child abuse but there was no evidence of clear coordination between all those professional on how to relay these was no structured and formal way of relaying the messages to each other.

### 2.2.4. Channels of Communicating Child Abuse Cases in Uasin Gishu

The researcher also sought to determine the channels of communication used by various professionals in communicating the child abuse information within Uasin Gishu. The researcher sought further to establish which of these channels disseminate child abuse information effectively. The weaknesses of the channels in communicating child abuse information within Uasin Gishu County was also established by the researcher in order to determine the best way forward that can be used to distribute the child abuse information freely. The channels that were being used for transmission of information in Uasin Gishu District are presented in Figure 4.1. Four

main channels of communication were used. The most frequently used channels of communication were written communication (45%), verbal (30%), audio (15%), and audio visual (10%).

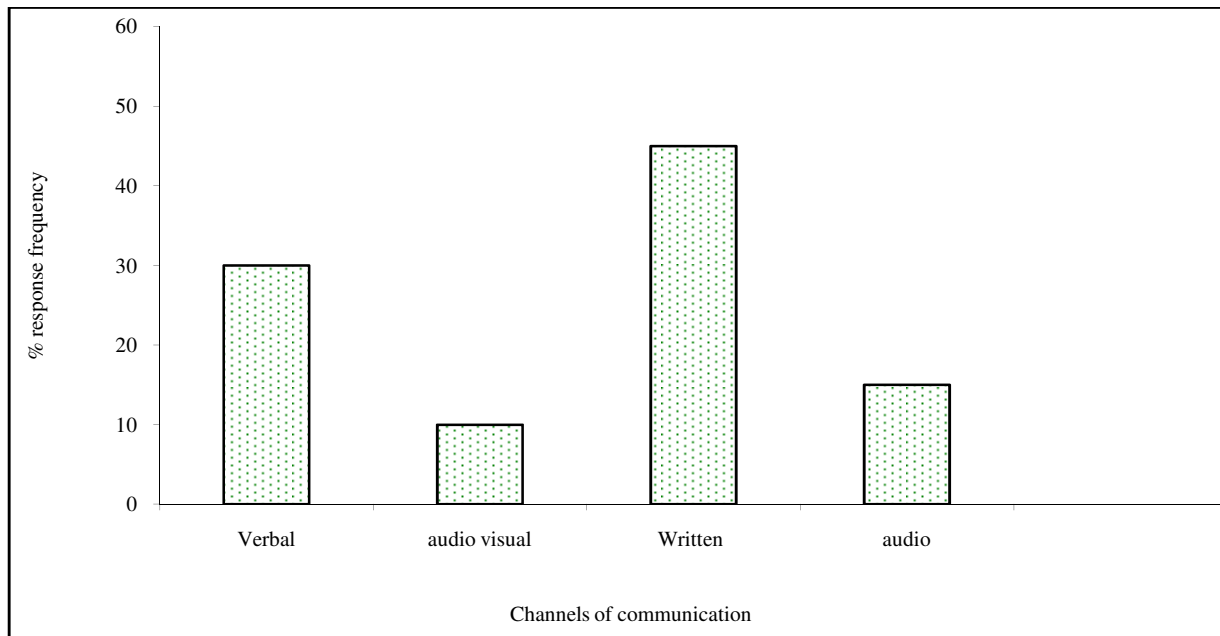


Figure 1: Channels used to communicate child abuse information in Uasin Gishu County

Information on whether the existing channels of communication have enhanced acquisition of child abuse information among the professionals was also sought. Based on the responses, the channels of communication have not enhanced access to child abuse information as 70.0%, did while only 30.0% believed that it had enhanced acquisition of child abuse information. This implies that the channels of communication that are used to disseminate the child abuse information have not actually benefited the intended beneficiaries mainly because of the various barriers of communication. The other possible reasons could be that the channels of communications being used to pass the child abuse information are not suitable for the various professionals while relaying information to each other. And also apart from this could be the feedback given to the victims of child abuse was done via the wrong medium which they didn't understand.

**2.2.4. Type of Language Used to Convey Messages by the Professional**

As part of the nature of communication, the study also explored the type of language used by the professionals to communicate among themselves. The results are shown in figure 4.2 below. It's evidenced that the most commonly used type of language is the professional and simple language and the least used type of language was the coded and local languages. In this study coded language means the type which would only be understood by members of a certain profession example lawyers only or doctors only. This can also be compared with the technical type of language. In this study, it is important to bring out this aspect as we will see later that this types of language contributes to some barriers of communication among these professionals.

Local language here means the vernacular language understood by persons of a particular tribe only. This study showed that at least the majority of professionals understood each other to a greater extent because of the use of professional language. Most professional were from the area i.e. Uasin Gishu county and the local language was Kalenjin less than 10%of these professionals spoke to each other in local language. This was because child abuse was great social ill and some felt at ease to talk about them in local language.

**2.5. Effects of Communication on the Management of Child Abuse Cases**

The second objective of the study was to determine the effects of the nature of communication on the management of child abuse cases. The professionals were asked about the effectiveness of the child abuse information that they acquired. The responses as shown in Table 4.6 show that a higher percentage of the respondents (55%) also agreed that the child abuse information they get from other professionals is useful in helping them to make better decisions concerning the child abuse cases.

| Inter Professional Communication | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very Effective                   | 79        | 40         |
| Effective                        | 30        | 15         |
| Not Effective                    | 79        | 40         |
| Poor                             | 9         | 5          |
| Total                            | 197       | 100        |

Table 2: Effectiveness of inter-professional communication in child abuse cases

The researchers also sought from the professionals whether the information that they communicated helped them in solving problems of child abuse. Results indicated that 23.4% stated that it does not, 42.3% said it help moderately, and the rest (44.3%) stated that it help very much. Thus from this response its evidence that the information shared between this professionals goes a long way in helping them solve the cases of child abuse the handle.

The respondents further stated that communication between them i.e. the professionals helped most of them in creating and increasing awareness on the issues of child abuse, for instance most police officers acknowledged that from their interaction with lawyers they were made more aware of the children's rights and from the doctors the importance of sending the victims of child abuse for medical examination immediately they report the incident. The doctors on the other hand also acknowledged that from the interaction with the social workers and children's officers they could treat the victims appropriately because of the vital information given to them.

### 2.6. Barriers in the Communication of Information on Child Abuse

The third objective of this study was to identify the barriers experienced with regard to in communication between professionals involved in the management of child abuse. Professionals of Uasin Gishu County attested to existence of several barriers that hindered them from acquiring much of the needed child abuse information especially from the victims. This section will deal with both the barriers in communication with the society and with the professionals communicating with each other. The factors that constrained communication of child abuse information from the society are depicted in Figure 4.3

Four major barriers were highlighted. The major barriers constraining dissemination of child abuse information from most residents of Uasin Gishu District were stigma (50%). Other barriers were secrecy (15.2% most people tend to believe that it's culturally insensitive to talk about a sensitive subject such as child abuse and that why child abuse in most African culture is of hidden nature. Fear of blame (12.2%) and lack of awareness (25.8%). Educational background also was a contributing factor in constraint of information dissemination in that some people were not aware of the prevalence and the deadly consequences of child abuse.

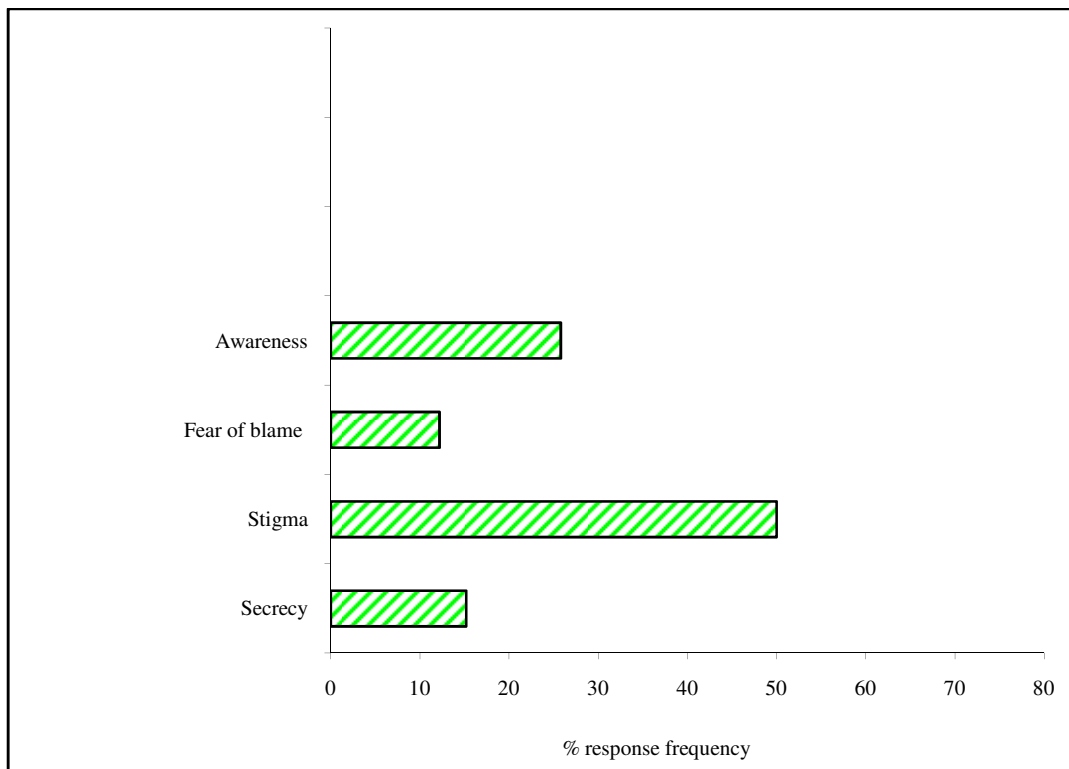


Figure 2: Barriers that constraint acquisition of child abuse information

Other constraints that limited access to child abuse information was lack of meeting places, funding for such meetings etc. When the local residents were asked whether there were any social organizations that offered child abuse information, majority (73.1%) said that there are no organizations that offered child abuse information. However 40.3% of males and 21.5% of the females reported that there were social professionals that offered child abuse information to the local residents. Other residents felt that there were no areas where they could meet and share information on the child abuse. This therefore implies that social professionals that could help disseminate child abuse information to the local residents was lacking within Uasin effective dissipation of child abuse information to the local residents could be effectively Gishu District. In absence of such professionals then, there was very little guarantee.

Apart from the above discussed barriers, there were also barriers from within the professionals themselves which hindered them from efficiently communicate with each other. When the professionals were asked of the challenges they faced when communicating with each other, they attested to the following barriers as highlighted in the figure 4.4 below.

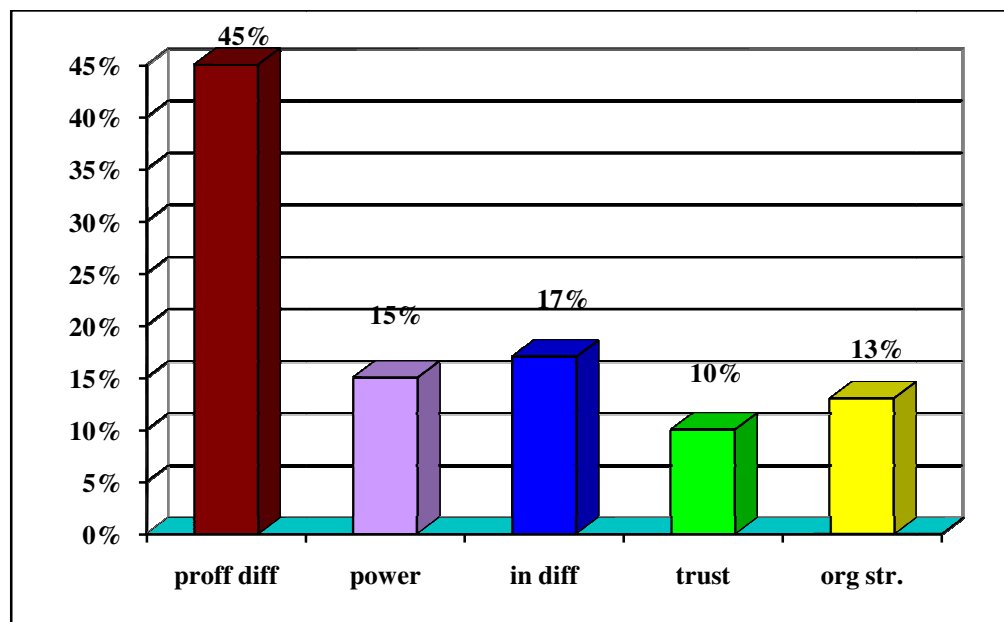


Figure 3: Barriers to inter professional communication

Professional difference accounted for 45% of the barriers the professional encountered, these professional thought the frame of reference in the cases created communication problems among them. For instance, the police officers and lawyers tend to operate on a justice model while the doctors and social workers on a more deterministic approach.

The professionals also felt that the issue of power relation also caused barriers of communication at a proportion of 15%. This is explained by the fact that different professionals have varying degrees of responsibilities for the action required after incidents of abuse are reported. The amount of influence the professional has over the outcome will depend on his position and responsibility.

Personal feelings and individual differences also was one of the barriers identified among the professionals in the interaction and this was rated at 17%. This constituted individual knowledge on issues of child abuse, and also individual reaction to this matter.

Agency structure the professionals also agreed that difference in organizational structure leads to problems of communication and decision making among them and this they rated at 13%. The issue of trust and confidentiality was also a major concern among the professionals. This according to them posed a challenge in the process of communication. Some professionals like doctors feel it was their obligation to keep their client information and record confidential. This was rated at 10%.

### 3. Discussion

As already stated above, this study had three main objectives which were, to determine the nature of communication between various professionals involved in management of child abuse cases, to find out the effect of communication between the professional on the management of child abuse and identify barriers experienced by the professionals in management of child abuse. The discussion is done in order of these objectives.

#### 3.1. Nature of Communication

As Van de Ven, Delbecq, and Koenig (2006) describe it, "communication among professionals means integrating or linking together different parts of an organization among professionals to accomplish a collective set of tasks" (p. 322). Yet, Green and Kreuter (2006), state that communication mechanisms used by professionals differ in their degree of formality - that is, in their degree of pre-specification, conventionality, and rule-boundedness. Explicit communication among the professionals is therefore necessary in part because individuals within an organization have only partially overlapping goals. Thus, one of the aims of communication is to ensure that the disparate individuals come to share the same goals. But even if these aims were achieved, and their goals were identical, the input-output dependencies among individuals require that their efforts be sequenced and interrelated efficiently.

In this study there was ample evidence that communication among professionals occurred in Uasin Gishu aimed at solving problems of child abuse within the area. The findings of the study were that these groups of professionals communicated with each other at one point or another in the course of discharging their daily duties. From the study, at least 82% of the professionals attested to the presence of inter-professional communication. This owes to the fact that for each of these professionals to develop a good case plan they would need complete information on the cases. Thus the input from the other professionals is seen as a necessity.

However, the lower proportions of professionals who did not attest to the existence of communication among them, points to a gloomy picture of inter-professional communication in solving problems of child abuse. This is perhaps because of the controversy of identifying cases of child abuse. In many countries it was difficult for these professionals to effectively communicate information on child abuse among themselves. In terms of functional characteristics, formal and informal communication systems seem best suited to different types of activities, (Briere and Elliot, 2004; Backer, Rogers and Sopory, 2008).



The type of message each professional conveyed was also important in this study. When child abuse is reported to the social worker, the social worker will want as much relevant information as possible from you, including the name and address of the child, the parents, anyone else involved, and the reasons why you think that the child has been or will be abused. Theorists have long recognized that professionals make use of communication methods varying in formality, which they deploy these different methods for tasks varying in uncertainty, and that matching the informality of the methods with the uncertainty of the task leads to better outcomes (Harris, 2010). At both the organizational and the small group level, the coordination of activity is the production-oriented task that has been examined in most detail. Coordination is the activity of directing individuals' efforts towards achieving common and explicitly recognized goals (Blau & Scott, 1962).

It has been generally agreed that the nature of the communication influences the formality of communication in it (Mirabits and Morgenstein, 1990). In conveying message by the professionals, written forms of communication were found to be common with some differences noted among the professionals on the modes of conveying the information on child abuse to the other professionals. It has also been noted that forms of communication itself may partially determine the formality of a communication event.

In this study, formal nature of communication was used for communicating child abuse information within the groups and among the professionals. Formal communication is often treated as the residual category in dissemination of information (Robinson et al., 2004) and that could explain its much usage during communication in Uasin Gishu District. According to this perspective, formal communication is that which remains when rules and hierarchies, as ways of coordinating activities, are eliminated. More positively, formal communication is communication that is spontaneous, interactive and rich. Coordination by feedback (Ouellet, 2003), through communication networks (Olguer, 2005), or by clan mechanisms (Northouse and Northouse, 1998) are alternate ways of describing coordination by formal communication. Formations are prepackaged and then shipped intact to a recipient; courses of action are pre-computed and then executed without modification. Information is often exchanged interactively, through meetings and conversations, and courses of action are worked out in the context of the circumstances into which the actions must fit.

Channels of communication are means through which information can be relayed to the audience in a way that the audience will utilize the information satisfactorily. This study determined the channels used in communication of information that would be useful to prevent cases of child abuse from escalation among the five categories of professionals. In order to disseminate the child abuse information to the local residents, the researcher sought to know generally, the channels of communication that are used in diffusion of the information to the local communities. Four main channels of communication were used. The most frequently used channels of communication were verbal, written audio and audio visual. By their nature, for example, telephone and face-to-face discussion are more interactive and richer than are computer mail systems and as a consequence, more useful to send the required information.

Verbal communication was most preferred in that during its course the communication changes to take into account the participants' current interests and understandings. In this sense, communication is truly interactive but initiated by the professionals, with all participants in the communication being able to respond to what they perceive to be the current state of affairs, including the communication up until that point and their perception of the other participants' reactions to it (Lent, 2004). Through this feedback mechanism, informal communication can be more effective than formal channels, as participants in the conversations elaborate or modify what they have to say in order to deal with someone else's objections or misunderstandings (Jackson and Duffy, 1998).

Audio communication was also the most popular mode of communication as viewed by the professionals within the area. More than a half of those interviewed were listening tentatively to the radio programmes as a means of obtaining information. This scenario is highly anticipated where majority of the people are poor and radios are quite cheap (Northouse and Northouse, 1998). Radio also has been reported to reach large audience because it is one of the most popular mass media in Kenya today. Compared to most other conventional means of communication, radio remains the cheapest, most affordable and above all portable. Radio can be listened to at any place with much ease. It is thus imperative that for successful dissemination of information, radio communication should form the backbone of communication to be used.

### *3.2. Effects of Communication on the Management of Child Abuse Cases*

True communication is designed to achieve a mutual understanding of the meaning of the message (information, ideas, opinions, feelings) that each person intends to convey, in exactly the way they want the message to be received. These methods are in line with Riley (1965) communication model to reach larger audience. The model indicates that the communicator, who is the child abuse professional, send messages of child abuse in accordance with the expectations and actions of other persons and groups within the same social structure and the receiver benefits from the messages - in the communications process sends feedback to the communicator who is also a member of a primary group. Both the communicator and receiver of the message are part of an overall social system.

In this study the information gathered through communication among the professionals was found to be useful in helping them to make better decisions concerning the child abuse information in their line of duty. There is reason to think that communication among professionals is particularly useful in supporting the social functions of groups. This is because professionals are less explicit in regulating social relationships than they are in regulating other aspects of work procedures. For example, personnel communication guides frequently describe the bureaucratic procedures for annual performance appraisals when information is disseminated, but they neither attempt to regulate the *ad hoc* personal judgments that communication make of the people reporting to them. A vast literature in communication psychology suggests that relatively unstructured and informal communication is at the basis of social processes, such as person perception and liking, which underlie group maintenance and member support (e.g. Fuerstein, 1986; Gibson and Hanna, 1992).

However, in this study it was hard to establish from the respondents whether the mode of communication used by the professionals had enhanced access to child abuse information. This implies that the mode of communication that were used to disseminate the child abuse information needed to be improved. The researcher also established more than half of the professionals stated that they do find the nature of communication among professional appropriate and effective. The roles of the child abuse information were quite important to the local residents. Even though the roles of this information were not far reaching because of the low percentage of people accessing them, and the low frequency of obtaining them, nevertheless they were of paramount importance to the local residents. If majority of the locals can be able to acquire this child abuse information then most of the residents were able to better their lives in child abuse issues.

The other key role played by child abuse information was mobility that seemed to have acceptance by fewer residence. Mobility refers to movement of persons, ideas or ideas or information from one place to another. This could particularly be expected because mobility only is attributed to expertise that disseminate the information and may be restricted among the general populace. Some authors also report that inter-professional communication working plays a major role in promotion of better outcomes for children (Ward and Peel, 2002) and in avoiding further harm to children. Though others (Glisson and Hemmelgam 1998) have argued that inter organizational culture rather than communication is the determinant of better services.

### *3.3. Barriers in Communication of Information on Child Abuse*

Communication barriers are obstacles that distort communication processes. Barriers can take many forms, such as physical, emotional, or structural. Each barrier may not be preventable or anticipated. The barriers can be on the end the receiver, sender, or both. There are ways to overcome barriers and achieve successful communication. Successful communication can be achieved by overcoming barriers. If a message is delivered to the right person at the proper time with the correct amount of emphases on the important parts, the information likely to be perceived by the receiver is at its fullest potential. It doesn't matter how important or impressive the subject of the communication is, if it is delivered without any 'punch', it will not get people to take the desired action intended.

This study determined the challenges in communication of information on child abuse posed by various barriers. Although the professionals of Uasin Gishu County attested to existence of communicating child abuse information, there could be several barriers that hindered them from acquiring much of the needed child abuse information, which was one of objectives of the study. It has been estimated that only 20% of actual cases of child abuse ever come to the attention of professionals (Finkelhor 1984). This means that majority of cases are never detected or reported. Some of the major barriers that cause this are: Ambiguity, some people admit that they do not report this cases because they are not sure the abuse is taking place and this clearly indicate that there is lack of awareness. They only take cues from the environment, the victim or bystanders. This can be attributed to poor educational background and lack of awareness.

Economic constraints stood out as the major barriers to acquiring child abuse information. As was reported in the foregoing discussions, if one lacks the economic willpower to purchase information, they will never acquire such information. In majority of the rural areas in Kenya where the income earnings are so low, and the cost of living increasing daily, most locals would prefer to purchase most important items first. As noted by Cliver (2005) they will purchase the basic items first upon which they have to grapple with school fees for their children leaving less financial commitments to purchasing literature of whatever sorts. However, even those who have more savings to make after purchasing their basic needs, have to buy certain literature unrelated to child abuse, men would prefer literature on politics and sports and women on fashion and beauty. The end result is that information about child abuse is relegated to the periphery and little attempts made to acquire them. The solution here lies in provision of cheap and reliable source of literature for the local residents.

The professionals also within themselves have barriers that hinder effective communication among them. Some of these barriers are professional difference, power relation, individual differences, issues of trust and organizational structure. Individual differences were also found to be one of the barriers of communication among the professionals. This is so as the professionals fail to notify another of significant information or decisions, relevant information not being shared and failure to call for or attend scheduled meetings or conferences to discuss the cases.

Review of fatal child abuse regularly identify with the above communication problems between the professionals. Effective communication therefore requires a mindset that can be developed through training and hence the need for joint training for the professionals. The above challenges and barriers in this study leads to the need to provide the conditions to allow for effective communication among the professionals. This would therefore require the promotion of constructive working relationship among the professionals. Blair (2006) concluded that if child welfare professionals are to reach and assist 'the excluded of the excluded' then the condition for the practices need to change before the practice itself can improve.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study investigated the role of communication between various professionals in enhancing management of child abuse in Kenya: case of Uasin Gishu County. The professionals interviewed for this study had a considerable amount of experience in working with cases of child abuse. Therefore their views are important indicator of the role of communication in enhancing management of child abuse. The study established that: Communication between the various professionals is very important for the success in managing child abuse cases. It was also found out that this communication existed among the professionals though in low levels. There was existence of both oral and written communication among the professionals. The nature of communication was also found to vary significantly among the professionals.

The study further determined the most used channels of communication among the professionals were both verbal and non-verbal communication thus information was conveyed through discussion and dialogue among the professionals. Mostly through the formal channels of written these are mails, reports and referral letters. Further it was determined that the type of information or rather messages the professionals communicated depended on their background on the issues of child abuse and also the line of profession.

Various barriers were also attributed to challenges in inter professional communication, mainly due to their different backgrounds and experience in the subject of child abuse. Communication involves a complex inter-play between information processing, interpersonal relationship and inter-professional communication and collaboration. The need thus to communicate purposefully and with meaning relevant to others must be borne in mind by all professionals at all times.

Effective communication is the responsibility of both the message initiator and the receiver and as such is a mindset and skill that can be learnt, rehearsed and refined. Only then can will policies and technological aides have their optimal benefit. From the above findings it was important to come up with several recommendations to enhance the process of inter-professional communication. The next section below will highlight the important recommendations for this study.

## 5. Recommendations

Having established the findings from Uasin Gishu County on the role of inter professional communication in enhancing management of child abuse cases, the following recommendations would be necessary;

In terms of the nature of communication among the professionals, communication was mainly informal uncoordinated and irregular. And in view of these it would be necessary for these professionals to have formal communication between them. For example case conferencing, and referrals.

This study found out that Proper management of child abuse can be achieved by proper sharing of the child abuse information among professionals. It is recommended therefore that these professionals should undergo further training on the best way to share the information and further disseminate it to the local residence for consumption. And apart from this working relation between the professionals would be enhanced through integrated learning programmes.

## 6. Suggestions for further Research

There are important issues that this study was unable to address due to its limited scope. In view of this the researcher makes the following recommendations for further studies. A study should be done to determine communication from other non-professionals in enhancing management of child abuse information. In this way, such a study would be addressing the society as a whole entity responsible for managing child abuse cases. There is need to replicate the same study in other districts to establish the role of communication in addressing child abuse cases in as many regions as possible. In this way, there will be cumulated knowledge that could be collated to address the problem of child abuse in Kenya. There is need to investigate the role of modern methods of communication using the technological advancement on the successful implementation of child abuse management. Since the world is changing technologically such a study would ascertain if more efficient method of communication can be applied.

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