



# **Knowledge on Child Protection among Children: A Study on Selected Schools in Munali Constituency of Lusaka, Zambia**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author UM designed the study. Author AM conceived the research methods. Author MHM did the analysis. Author BS managed the literature search. Authors VK and UM wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Child abuse remains a significant problem affecting children globally, manifesting in various forms such as sexual, physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Many children also face forced labor, prostitution, abduction, and trafficking. Motivated by the prevalence and persistence of these issues, this study focused on two key objectives: to examine the knowledge children in Munali Constituency have on child protection and to explore the sources of this knowledge. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative methods (QUAL+quant).

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The study involved 328 pupils selected through systematic random sampling and four key informants purposively chosen. Data were collected using questionnaires, Key informant interviews and three focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that children primarily received their knowledge of child protection from schools. However, this knowledge was largely inadequate to provide a clear understanding of child protection. Many children had limited knowledge of what child protection meant, including who to report abuse to, where to seek safety, and how to protect themselves from harm. The study concluded that children lack comprehensive knowledge of child protection and access to practical resources for reporting and addressing abuse. It recommended the need for more extensive and practical education on child protection, delivered through diverse sources, to ensure children are empowered to recognize, respond to, and prevent abuse effectively. The study faced limitations due to the vulnerability of children, as discussions about child protection could evoke emotional distress, especially for those with prior trauma. To mitigate this, researchers avoided intrusive questions and ensured a safe, supportive environment to promote participants' comfort.

**Keywords:** *Child; child protection; child abuse; abuse awareness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Child protection remains a critical issue worldwide, yet there is limited empirical evidence on the level of awareness among children about their rights and the mechanisms available to protect them (Bourdillon & Myers, 2013; Heilmann et al., 2021). Despite significant attention to child abuse in research and advocacy, the global prevalence of abuse remains alarmingly high (Save the Children, 2010). Between 2015 and 2016, an estimated 1 billion children experienced abuse globally, with the highest rates reported in Africa, Asia, and North America. Self-reported cases from meta-analyses reveal that 23% of children have suffered physical abuse, 36.3% emotional abuse, and 13% sexual abuse (Hillis et al., 2016).

A major challenge in addressing this issue is the lack of knowledge among victims. Many children do not recognize that they are being abused, while others are unsure of how or where to report such incidents (Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000; Kamuwanga, 2008). This lack of knowledge and reporting mechanisms perpetuates the cycle of abuse and leaves many children vulnerable to ongoing harm. Furthermore, early-life abuse has profound and lasting impacts on children's development, shaping their emotional, psychological, and social outcomes well into adulthood (Brenick et al., 2014; Afifi, 2017; Kempe et al., 1962).

In the context of Munali Constituency, this article focuses on two objectives: first, to examine the knowledge children have regarding child protection, and second, to explore the sources through which they acquire this knowledge.

Understanding these aspects is crucial to identifying gaps in awareness and strengthening child protection mechanisms within the constituency (Nickerson et al., 2010). By addressing these objectives, this article aims to provide insights into empowering children with the knowledge and resources needed to recognize and respond to abuse effectively.

## 2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Children's rights have gained global importance due to the increasing incidences of child abuse. According to UNICEF, (2015), approximately four in five children aged 2–14 experience some form of violent discipline in their homes, while one in ten girls under 20 years old is subjected to forced sexual acts. Additionally, an estimated 12 million girls under the age of 18 are married each year (UN News, 2018), and 1.2 million children fall victim to trafficking annually (ILO, 2005). Recognizing these alarming figures, the United Nations mandates all states to adopt and implement appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures to safeguard children's rights (CRC, 1989; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

In Zambia, children constitute nearly 50% of the population (Makasa, 2020; Likumbo et al., 2021). Despite progress, the African Report on Child Wellbeing ranks Zambia 22nd out of 52 countries in child protection, highlighting the need for more robust efforts. Abuse against children is prevalent in Zambian homes and communities, with girls under 18 frequently subjected to early marriages, indicating that existing interventions to combat child abuse are insufficient (World Vision, 2018). The rising cases of child abuse in Zambia persist despite perpetrators facing life

imprisonment in some cases. Notably, some NGOs advocate for bail options for offenders, allowing them to re-enter society and potentially reoffend. Furthermore, although an average of 50 cases of child abuse are reported daily, many incidents go unreported (Zulu, 2020), potentially due to victims' limited awareness of child protection mechanisms.

Children in Zambia endure various forms of abuse, including rape, violence, neglect, and exploitation, with many lacking awareness of their rights (Save the Children, 2018). This highlights a tension between children's rights and cultural or societal values that influence their well-being. For instance, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child emphasizes children's duties to contribute to family cohesion and respect for elders. However, such cultural expectations can be misused by adults to justify abuse, with children tolerating it due to a lack of knowledge about their rights.

Although Zambia has enacted several laws and policies to safeguard children, such as the Children's Code Act, 2022 (Act No. 12 of 2022), which mandates the provision of education and awareness programs to inform children about their rights and protective measures, the National Child Policy; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, evidence on children's awareness of these protective measures remains limited. Research suggests a gap in understanding whether children are fully aware of their rights and the mechanisms available to

protect them (Reading et al., 2008; Likumbo, 2021). Addressing this knowledge gap is critical to strengthening child protection efforts in Zambia.

### 3. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to explore the sources of knowledge on child protection and examine the level of knowledge children have on child protection in selected schools within Munali Constituency.

### 4. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- i) To explore sources of knowledge on child protection among children in selected schools in Munali Constituency.
- ii) To examine the knowledge children in selected schools in Munali Constituency have on child protection.

### 5. RESEARCH SETTING

The study was conducted in Munali Constituency, located within Lusaka District, Zambia. Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, is the most populous city in the country. Munali Constituency was chosen for its central location in Lusaka, which incorporates both urban and peri-urban characteristics. Three wards—Munali, Kalingalinga, and Chakunkula were purposively selected to ensure representation of low, medium, and high-density areas within the constituency.

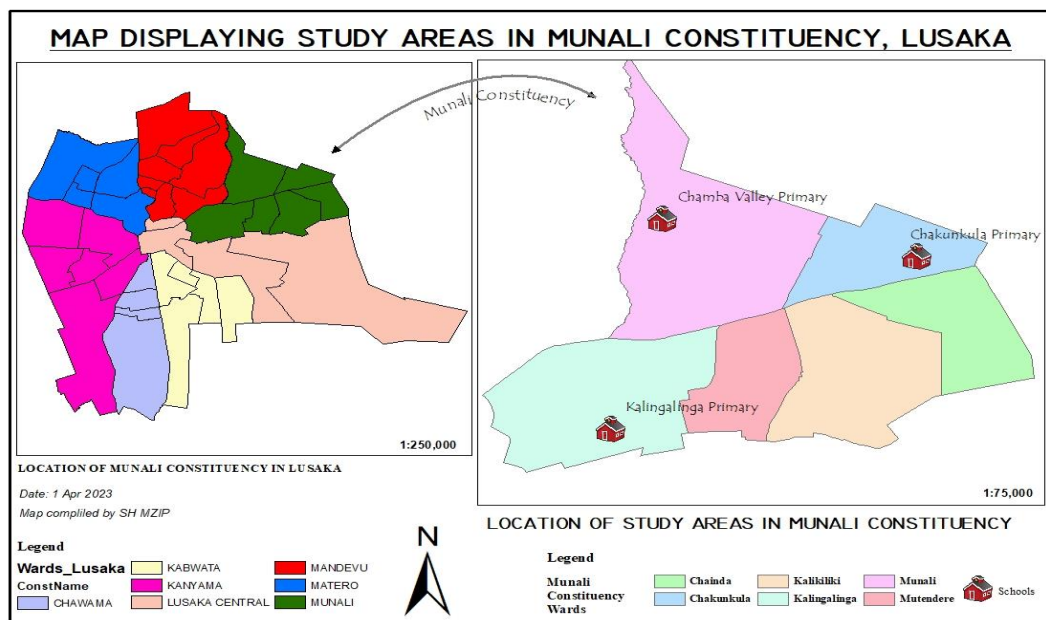


Fig. 1. Map of study area

The study focused on school-aged children, and schools were randomly selected by placing all public schools from each ward in a box and drawing one school from each. The study specifically targeted upper primary pupils in grades 5 to 7, as they are at a critical stage in their development, with ages ranging from 9 to 16 years. This age group aligns with the typical range for upper primary school pupils, as noted in Burr & Fay's, (2018) study. Fig. 1 illustrates a map of Munali Constituency, highlighting the three wards selected for the study.

## 6. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a mixed methods research methodology, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Specifically, a convergent parallel mixed methods design was used, aiming to compare various perspectives (Creswell, 2013). A QUAL+quant type of mixed methods was employed which is a largely qualitative design but supported by a small quantitative component. This design was chosen to cross-validate and corroborate findings from both data types. Given the nature of the topic, the approach allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, capturing both qualitative insights and statistical trends.

### 6.1 Sampling and Sample Size

The sampling technique used for selecting pupils for the quantitative component was systematic random sampling. The head teachers of the three selected schools provided a list of the total number of pupils in grades 5, 6, and 7. The combined population from the three schools was 2,775 pupils. Using Krejcie & Morgan's, (1970) formula, a sample size was determined from this population.

The formula for calculating the sample size is as follows:

Sample size,

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where,

S is the required sample size

N is the given population size of the group under consideration

P is the estimated proportion

$d^2$  is the degree of accuracy

$X^2$  is the confidence level (1.96)

In this study N= 2775 (Kalingalinga Primary School: 719, Chakunkula Primary School: 1397 and Chamba Valley Primary School: 659).

Which is:

$$S=1.96^2$$

For this study, the total population was N=2775, with the breakdown as follows: Kalingalinga Primary School (719 pupils), Chakunkula Primary School (1397 pupils), and Chamba Valley Primary School (659 pupils). Using the formula, the sample size was calculated to be 338 pupils. To ensure proportional representation, the number of pupils selected from each school was based on its share of the total population:

Kalingalinga Primary School: 88 pupils.

Chakunkula Primary School: 170 pupils.

Chamba Valley Primary School: 80 pupils.

The research team then requested a list of all pupils from each grade, sorted alphabetically, to guarantee an equal chance of selection. Systematic sampling was applied, with an interval of 8 pupils from each school. Of the 338 pupils selected, 328 agreed to participate, while 10 did not. Table 1 presents the total sample distribution across the three schools.

For the qualitative component, respondents who were not selected from the list of those systematically selected were purposively selected. There were three focus group discussions of 10 respondents per group from Kalingalinga Primary School, 10 from Chakunkula Primary School and 10 from Chamba Valley Primary School (making it 30) participants. Additionally, 4 Key informants were purposively selected looking at who had both a direct and indirect effect on the children and were knowledgeable on child protection and children's awareness on the matter. These included 1 head teacher, and 1 school matron from Kalingalinga Primary School, 1 teacher from Chamba Valley School and 1 guidance and counselling teacher from Chakunkula Primary School.

### 6.2 Data Collection Methods

Data was gathered using Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews. A semi-structured questionnaire with

both open-ended and closed-ended questions was used. The questionnaire captured demographic information, children's, knowledge of child protection and sources of knowledge about child protection. The use of this instrument ensured that all data concerning children's knowledge on child protection and their sources was obtained. Questionnaires ensured uniformity in the questions asked and data collected. This tool was suitable in that being an urban setting, children in grades of interest were able to read and write. To administer the questionnaires, researchers with the help of head teachers, found open spaces where the pupils sat to respond to the questionnaires. This was done to ensure that they could easily be monitored by the researchers and research assistants and help provided accordingly.

Regarding Focus Group Discussions, a focus group discussion guide/protocol was used to collect in-depth qualitative data from the participants on similar questions as in the questionnaire. The Focus Group Discussion Protocol consisted of the same set of questions focusing on children's knowledge and sources of knowledge of child protection. These were conducted in groups of 10 pupils each; with one focus group discussion per school. All focus group discussions were conducted in classrooms which were specifically allocated for such exercises. Through this protocol, researchers obtained useful insights on the level of awareness of child protection and their sources of knowledge. The FGD protocol was designed in such a way that it allowed the researchers to probe, ask follow up and exit questions.

For Key Informant Interviews, semi-structured interview guides were used to collect in-depth data from the 4 key informants. The researchers aimed to obtain useful information on whether there is essential and adequate information disseminated to children through their school curriculums and clubs in which the children were members.

### 6.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This is a method where patterns are identified, analysed and reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews were recorded using audio recorders after getting consent from participants. The audio recordings were later transcribed and analyzed manually. Various codes were

identified and later grouped to generate sub-themes. These Sub-themes were then grouped to generate main themes. For the quantitative data, codes were allocated to the responses to enable specificity of findings. The researchers then employed the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics) and Excel. The data collected was imported into IBM SPSS and Excel to generate tables and figures. Desired commands were given to get accurate results. Thereafter, the procedure was run for results, focusing mainly on descriptive statistics to observe trends. The final results from both qualitative and quantitative analysis was thereafter compared and merged for interpretation.

### 6.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study. Information sheets and written consent forms were provided to the participants before participating in the study. Consent forms were given to pupils to take to their parents/guardians, they were signed by parents and guardians of each child and sent back to school to be collected by the researchers and the children in this case, who were the respondents. Permission was also obtained from the head teachers of each of the selected three primary Schools from Munali Constituency. Before beginning the study, potential ethical concerns were clearly communicated to the participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point without facing any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, as participants' real names were not used, and the data was solely utilized for academic purposes. Personal information was kept confidential and anonymized in all reports. All sources referenced in the study were properly acknowledged, and ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia Ethics Committee. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, a pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility of the research approach. The pilot study also served to ensure the validity of the research. To check for inconsistencies, a questionnaire was administered to 10 children selected through convenience sampling before the main research. Based on the feedback, revisions were made, such as rephrasing certain questions that were initially too complex for the children to understand. Also, to address any potential weaknesses in the data collection, the researchers employed triangulation, allowing for corrections and adjustments.

**Table 1. Total sample**

| School                   | No of Respondents | No of Consenting Respondents |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Kalingalinga Primary  | 88                | 88                           |
| 2. Chakunkula Primary    | 170               | 164                          |
| 3. Chamba Valley Primary | 80                | 76                           |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>338</b>        | <b>328</b>                   |

## 7. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### 7.1 Respondents' Characteristics

Respondents' characteristics were analyzed based on gender, age and head of households to which the children belong.

#### a. Gender and age of respondents

The study had male and female participants which helped in offering insights into whether there are gender-related differences in how children learn about or experience child protection issues. Table 2, show the gender and age distribution of respondents from the three schools.

#### i. Quantitative information: Gender and age of pupils

Table 2 shows that there were more males than females and the majority were aged between 12-

14 years. Understanding the gender and age distribution of the sample helped in analyzing potential differences in knowledge or awareness of child protection based on these factors. For example, the age range (12-14 years) suggests that the participants were at an age where they may be more capable of understanding complex issues like child protection, and their knowledge may vary depending on the sources available to them.

#### b. Head of households to which the children belong

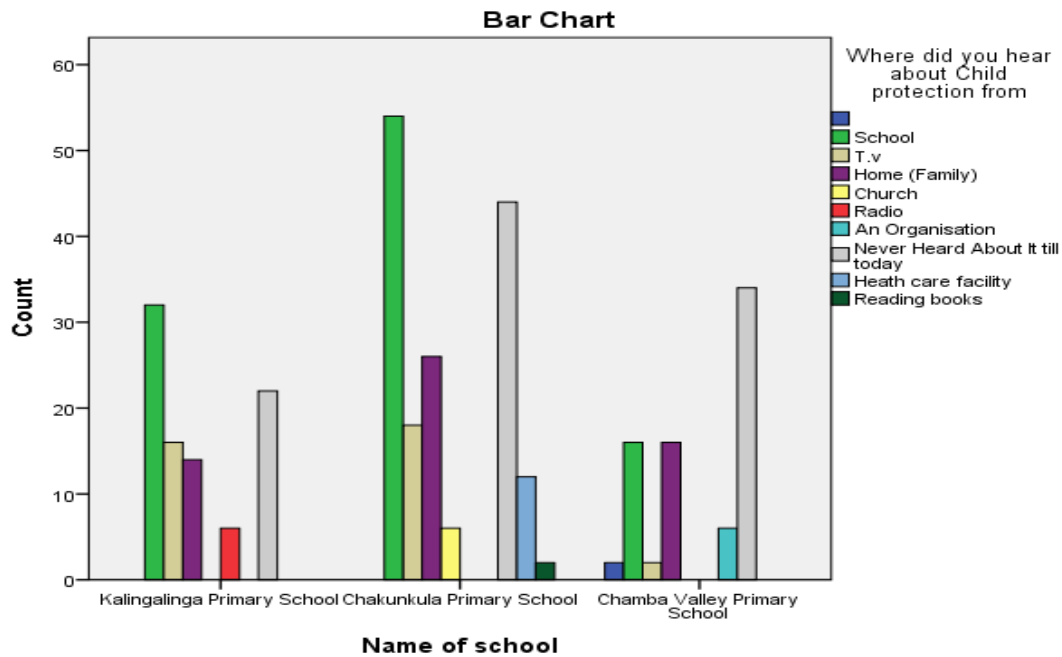
Study findings revealed that across the three schools, most pupils came from households with both parents. Knowledge about the head of the households where children came from provided insights into the family dynamics that influence a child's awareness and understanding of child protection. The Table 3 depicts head of households to which children belong.

**Table 2. Gender and age of pupils**

| School |        | Kalingalinga Primary School |       | Chakunkula Primary School |       | Chamba Valley Primary School |       | Total |
|--------|--------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Gender | Male   | N                           | %     | N                         | %     | N                            | %     |       |
|        | Female | 42                          | 23.59 | 88                        | 49.43 | 48                           | 26.97 | 178   |
|        |        | 46                          | 30.67 | 76                        | 50.67 | 28                           | 18.67 | 150   |
| Age    |        | 0                           | 0     | 22                        | 91.67 | 2                            | 8.33  | 24    |
|        |        | 20                          | 17.24 | 86                        | 74.13 | 10                           | 8.62  | 116   |
|        |        | 54                          | 33.33 | 56                        | 34.56 | 52                           | 32.09 | 162   |
|        |        | 14                          | 53.85 | 0                         | 0     | 12                           | 46.15 | 26    |

**Table 3. Household heads**

|          |               | Kalingalinga Primary | Chakunkula Primary | Chamba Valley Primary |
|----------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Guardian | Both Parents  | 42                   | 110                | 42                    |
|          | Single parent | 30                   | 28                 | 12                    |
|          | Grandparents  | 14                   | 12                 | 2                     |
|          | Aunt/Uncle    | 2                    | 10                 | 14                    |
|          | Other         | 0                    | 2                  | 6                     |
|          | <b>Total</b>  | <b>88</b>            | <b>162</b>         | <b>76</b>             |



**Fig. 2. Sources of knowledge on child protection**

The head of household typically holds authority and may be responsible for decision-making regarding the child's education, access to information, and safety. This demographic data helped to identify patterns in the availability and types of child protection knowledge. For example, households led by parents or guardians with higher levels of education may have more access to child protection information and be more proactive in ensuring the child's safety, which may impact the child's knowledge and awareness of their rights and protection mechanisms.

## 7.2 Sources of Knowledge on Child Protection

The participants from the selected schools in Munali Constituency were asked about the sources of their knowledge on child protection. Specifically, they were inquired about where they had first heard about child protection, if they had heard of it at all. The findings are illustrated in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 suggests that across all schools, formal education (school) plays a significant role in raising awareness about child protection, with a substantial proportion of respondents also reporting no prior knowledge. The combination of school (31.1%) and no prior knowledge (30.5%) implies that while educational institutions are key sources of learning, a significant number of

pupils still enter those environments without adequate prior awareness. Other sources of information, like family, television, and NGOs, are also contributing, but to a lesser extent. Looking at the family's, (17.1%) considerably limited role, this suggests that heads of families where children come from may hold assumptions that children inherently know what is right or wrong, or that they will learn such topics from formal education, rather than through explicit guidance from family members.

This also suggest that families may also prioritize other aspects of upbringing, such as moral or religious teachings, without explicitly addressing the practical aspects of child protection, like understanding abuse, recognizing exploitation, or knowing how to seek help. This is important especially that family-based discussions may reflect cultural norms or values related to child socialisation and the parenting styles being followed.

Qualitatively, results amplified variations across schools on the sources of knowledge. Findings revealed that children from Chakunkula and Chamba valley Primary Schools reiterated the lack of prior knowledge and unfamiliarity with the concept of child protection. For example, one respondent said;

*"I have never heard of child protection before. Nobody has talked about it at school or at home"*  
FGD 2 participant (Female, 14 years old).

This lack of proper sources extended to the wider community as put by one male respondent;

*"In our community, no one teaches us about how children should be protected. We just live our lives"* FGD 1 participant (Male, 16 years old).

In contrast, some respondents acknowledged familiarity to the concept of child protection through the school and other sources. For example, one female respondent had this to say;

*"I learned about child protection from my teacher. They told us how to stay safe and report bad things."* FGD 3 participant (Female, 15 years old).

Another one added;

*"At church, we were told to always speak up if someone tries to harm us. That's how I know about child protection.... they told us to be careful around strangers"* FGD 3 participant (Female, 13 years old).

Key informants also supported the above views and reported disseminating child protection information to children through various platforms such as, sex education forums with experts from NGOs, drama clubs, and sensitization programs. For example, one key informant had this to say;

*"We organize sex education forums where experts from NGOs come to educate the children about child protection. They teach them about their rights and how to recognize and report abuse"* Key informant (Male, Guidance and counselling teacher).

Similarly, one school matron reiterated the role of drama as a source. She said;

*"Drama clubs have been an effective way to spread messages about child protection. Through plays, children learn about the dangers of abuse and the importance of speaking up"* Key informant (Female, School matron).

During such events, children are taught about the effects of child abuse and are informed about where to report incidents if they experience abuse. Although this was reiterated by all key informants, they also expressed the view that more needs to be done to protect children from abuse. One head teacher said;

*"While we are trying to educate children about abuse, the efforts are not enough. More programs need to be introduced to ensure*

*children are fully protected"* Key informant (Male Head teacher).

In similar vein, some key informants also noted that children are not being taught through the appropriate channels about where and how to report incidents of child abuse, pointing towards the need for more involvement of parents and other figures of authority in communities. One said;

*"The information being shared with children is not reaching them through the right channels. Many of them still don't know where to go or who to talk to if they are abused...and also the platforms we are using are not sufficient. We should involve more parents, community leaders, and schools in spreading this information effectively"* Key informant (Female teacher).

The need to use other platforms is also evident in the quantitative findings where books (0.6%) and Radio (1.8%) represented some of the least common sources. This could mean that these media are not effectively utilized for child protection education and need to be effectively brought on board.

### 7.3 Knowledge children have on Child Protection

The children were asked several questions to examine their knowledge on child protection. The data presentation was based on the themes identified through the information collected from the participants. These themes included: knowledge of child protection, understanding child abuse, and reporting abuse.

#### a. Knowledge of child protection

From both the quantitative and qualitative accounts, participants indicated that the knowledge they had about child protection was inadequate. Findings from the quantitative data are shown in Fig. 3.

What is clear from the Fig. 3 is that across all three schools, knowledge of child protection among study participants was not enough. Partly, this could be attributed to the inadequate sources of knowledge already presented in section 7.2.

These findings align with the qualitative results, as most children from all three schools expressed that the knowledge they had about child protection was inadequate and needed to

be expanded. One key argument was that child abuse manifests in various forms, making it essential for them to be educated through multiple methods of knowledge transfer. As one male respondent said;

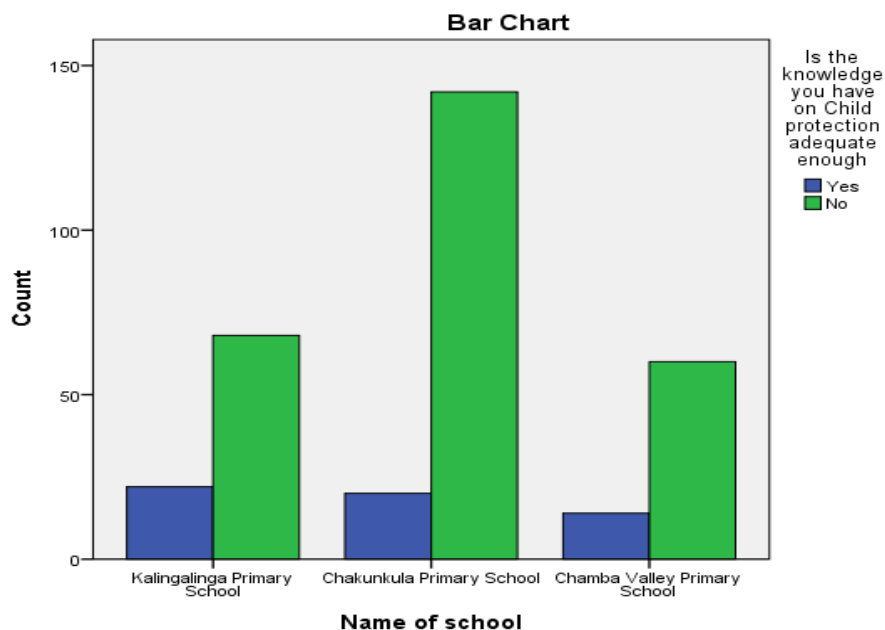
*"I think one can be abused in a lot of ways. So I think as young ones, we need to learn more so that we can know how to protect ourselves from rape or harassment... because now we do not know that much"* FGD 2 participant (Male, 14 years old).

A female respondent agreed with the male respondent, emphasizing that the information on child protection was not being disseminated effectively enough for children to fully understand

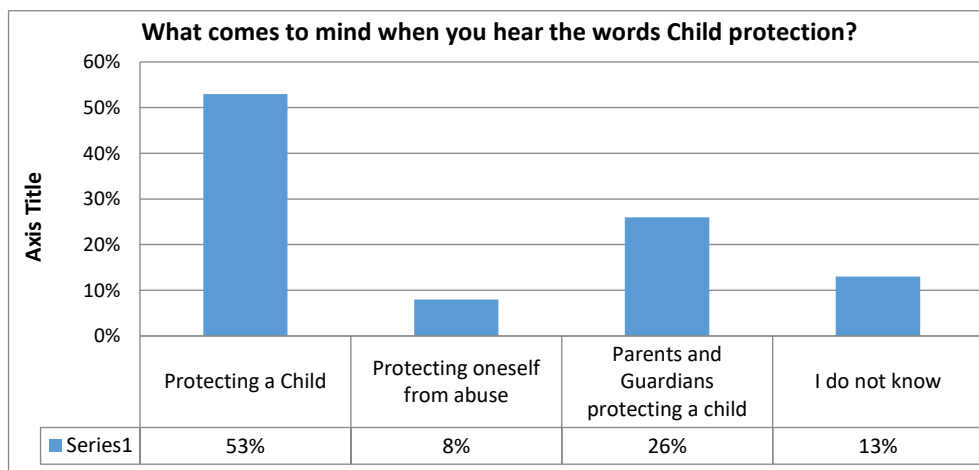
reporting and protection mechanisms. She added that children need to be taught about accessing proper facilities where they can report cases of abuse and seek help. She intimated;

*"I agree with him... the information on child protection is not being shared in a way that helps us young ones to fully understand how to report abuse or protect ourselves. As children ....we need to learn about proper places and facilities where we can go to report abusers and get help"* FGD 2 participant (13 years female).

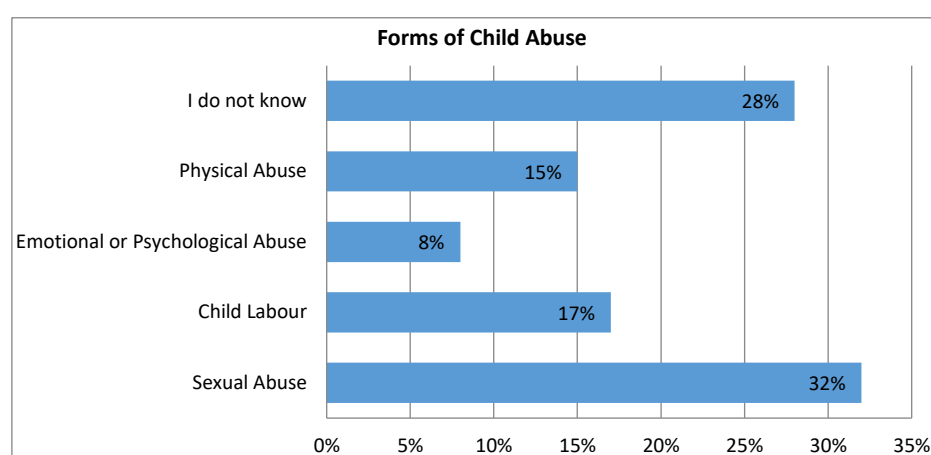
While most participants decried the need for adequate information, when asked what child protection really meant, various meanings were cited. Fig. 4 show the responses.



**Fig. 3. Knowledge of child protection**



**Fig. 4. Meaning of child protection**



**Fig. 5. Forms of abuse**

Given that the majority of the children (53%) said that child protection involved protecting a child, it suggests that a large portion of them understood child protection mainly as the act of ensuring the safety and welfare of a child. The Table 4 also shows that a significant minority of children expressed uncertainty, reiterating a gap in knowledge or understanding of what child protection entails.

The different meanings of child protection were also reflected in the qualitative findings. In a focus group discussion with children from Kalingalinga Primary School, when asked what child protection meant, one girl responded;

*"Where children need to be protected"* FGD 2 participant (female, 14 years old).

For others, they emphasized the role of parents and guardians in child protection, underscoring the perceived responsibility of older family members in safeguarding children. For example, one male responded said;

*"I think what comes to mind when I hear the word child protection...I think it's about parents and guardians protecting a child, yeah, I think so"* (FGD 1 participant (Male, 15 years old).

This further indicates a belief among children that caregivers play a direct and active role in ensuring children's safety.

Even though some children brought out various meanings of child protection, for others, especially at Chamba Valley Primary School, when asked what they understood by the term child protection, a notable minority of them were unaware. One male respondent said;

*"I really do not know what it means...I am just hearing about it now"* FGD 3 participant (Male, 13 years old).

The lack of awareness may suggest uncertainty about what child protection means. This suggests a need for targeted education and sensitization efforts to enhance understanding as well as awareness.

#### **b. Understanding child abuse**

To further explore children's knowledge of child protection, the study sought to establish the types of child abuse children were aware of. When asked about the type of child abuse they may know, the respondents seemed to show some level of understanding as the Fig. 5 shows;

As Fig. 5 shows, sexual abuse (32%) was identified as the most recognized form of abuse. This suggests that there seems to have been more attention or awareness campaigns about this type of abuse compared to others. It is crucial to ensure that such knowledge of abuse translates into protective measures. Table 4 further shows that the smallest number of children knew about emotional or psychological abuse. This suggests that this form of abuse may not be widely understood and may be hard to recognize. Also, 28% of respondents had no idea of what forms of abuse are in existence, pointing to a major gap in awareness and education on child protection issues.

Although the quantitative findings generally showed a gap in awareness and education, qualitative findings from key informant interviews contrasted this view due to the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in schools. For example, one key informant intimated that;

*“Well, the fact that sex education...I mean comprehensive sexuality education has now been introduced in schools and is like compulsory, I think it has increased chances of children being knowledgeable of things like sexual or physical abuse as well as other types...”* Key informant (school matron).

In similar vein, another key informant added that;

*“if a child is abused at home, some are able to understand this is against their rights and they report to school and a follow up is made and reported to relevant stakeholders”* Key informant (Male Head teacher).

Excerpts from key informants suggest that some children were increasingly aware of what abuse was, and of their rights to be protected against abuse.

Furthermore, in view of the different types of abuse, respondents were asked about who they thought needed to protect them from any form of abuse. Table 4 show the responses.

As can be seen, the majority of children placed their trust in parents as their main protectors. This underscores children's perception of parents as the primary protectors and places emphasis

on the trust that children place in them. Also, of critical importance was that very few children (0.61%) identified formal support systems such as victim support as agencies they could seek protection from. This suggests that there is a significant lack of awareness about organizations or institutions dedicated for protection against abuse.

### c. Reporting abuse

To extend children's awareness of child protection, they were also asked questions on various facets pertaining to reporting abuse. Table 5 shows the questions asked, the option respondents picked and the total number of respondents for each response.

As Table 5 shows, regarding who children would be comfortable sharing their abuse experience with if they were abused, a significant majority of children felt most comfortable confiding in their parents or guardians. This emphasizes the vital role of family in their support system. While more respondents (11.8%) identified the police as a viable option than helplines (5.6%) or teachers (3.8%), the relatively low number suggests reluctance by children to approach law enforcement due to fear, distrust, or lack of understanding of their role.

**Table 4. Protection from abuse**

| <b>Who do you think needs to protect you from any abuse?</b> | <b>n=328</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Parents  | 184          | 56.09    |
| Any Adult  | 24           | 7.32     |
| Parents and any Adult  | 72           | 21.95    |
| All family members   | 20           | 6.09     |
| God  | 6            | 1.83     |
| Victim Support   | 2            | 0.61     |
| The Government   | 8            | 2.44     |
| I don't Know   | 12           | 3.66     |

**Table 5. Reporting abuse**

| <b>If you were abused, who would you be comfortable sharing your experience with?</b>                     |     |       |  |
|---|-----|-------|--|
| Parents/ Guardians  | 230 | 71.88 |  |
| Teacher   | 12  | 3.75  |  |
| Call the National helpline  | 18  | 5.63  |  |
| Police  | 38  | 11.88 |  |
| Friends   | 22  | 6.88  |  |
| <b>If your friend or sibling told you about an abuse they experience, what would you tell them to do?</b> |     |       |  |
| Tell their parents  | 204 | 64.15 |  |
| Tell teacher  | 18  | 5.66  |  |
| Report to police  | 64  | 20.12 |  |
| Tell them to call the National helpline   | 30  | 9.43  |  |
| Other   | 2   | 0.63  |  |

**Table 6. Factors influencing reporting of abuse**

|   |     |       |
|---|-----|-------|
| <b>I cannot report an abuser because they are an adult</b>                  |     |       |
| Strongly agree  | 36  | 11.39 |
| Agree   | 30  | 9.49  |
| Disagree  | 166 | 52.53 |
| Strongly disagree   | 84  | 26.58 |
| <b>I cannot report an abuser because I will be beaten if they found out</b> |     |       |
| Strongly agree  | 30  | 9.55  |
| Agree   | 22  | 7.01  |
| Disagree  | 154 | 49.04 |
| Strongly disagree   | 108 | 34.39 |

In addition, when asked what course of action they would tell their friends or siblings to take if they experienced abuse, most children would advise seeking parental support, consistent with their own preference for confiding in parents. This does not only underscore the importance of parents, but also, it highlights a potential risk to children if parents are unaware, unresponsive or the source of abuse themselves. Interestingly, a larger proportion of children (20%) saw the police as a key authority for addressing abuse compared to those who would personally confide in them (11.9%). This indicates children's understanding of the role of the police, while at the same time reflecting the potential apprehension in approaching them as already indicated in the preceding paragraph.

Furthermore, in gauging how active the respondents were in bringing the abusers to book, they were asked if they could not report an abuser because the abuser was an adult or was threatening them with harm. Table 6 presents the responses;

In gauging how active the respondents were in bringing the abusers to book, they were asked if they could not report an abuser because the abuser was an adult. Table 6 shows that most children rejected this notion (disagree 52.5% and 26.6% strongly disagree), indicating that most of them believed that adults can, and should be held accountable for abusive behaviour. This is crucial, as it reflects increasing awareness of their rights and the need to feel protected. Despite this positive, a considerable number of children (11.4% strongly agree and 9.5% agree) felt that they could not report abuse if the abuser was an adult. This suggests that there were children who felt powerless to report abuse when the perpetrator was an adult. This could be located within the broader cultural norms characterised by fear of authority, or a belief that adults cannot be held accountable.

In addition, Table 6 shows that most respondents were not afraid of physical repercussions for reporting abuse. This suggests that they either feel protected or do not perceive abuse as carrying risk from abusers. This could point to improved support structures or confidence in their safety emanating from various players such as parents, adults, family members and other formal institutions such as government and victim support as already presented in preceding sections. However, some respondents still indicated fear of reporting abusers due to dangers of physical abuse such as being beaten. For such children, the fear of physical retaliation for reporting abuse could be coming from their lived experiences, threats, or societal acceptance of punitive violence.

Qualitative findings from key informants buttressed children's views regarding the fear of reporting violence. One key informant said;

*"You know... sometimes children are scared of reporting adults who have abused them especially in our society where like you know...because of maybe the norms that we have in the country...culturally where it is considered taboo to report an adult and even sometimes when you look at the Bible, it tells children to respect elders..."* Key informant (Female teacher).

Thus, key informants commonly reiterated the need to strengthen education programs which emphasize children's rights, particularly the right to safety and the ability to report abuse, regardless of the abuser's status or position.

## 8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that while many children have heard of the term child protection, some only encountered it during the research. This indicates limited exposure to the concept, despite its importance. Schools

emerged as the most commonly mentioned source of information about child protection, followed by homes, churches, NGOs, books, and healthcare facilities. However, some respondents revealed that they had never heard of child protection before, implying either a lack of coverage in their schools or missed opportunities to engage with such lessons. This gap presents an opportunity to increase outreach efforts and integrate child protection education into various aspects of society, given that family, television, and NGOs, were also contributing, but to a lesser extent. Nonetheless, the high mention of schools as a source suggests that schools play a significant role in introducing children to child protection. The importance of schools was buttressed by Gubbels et al., (2021), who found that school-based prevention programs were effective in improving children's knowledge about abuse and self-protection. Reiterating the importance of the school's role, key informants emphasized that teachers and NGOs are making efforts to sensitize children about child protection through drama clubs and sensitization programs. Yet, it was also noted that these sources needed to provide more comprehensive lessons, particularly on children's rights and reporting mechanisms. The need for in-depth education on child protection is supported by Masilo & Dintwe, (2019), who emphasized the importance of awareness programs on child sexual abuse in their study in South Africa. However, it is worth noting that while schools emerged as the most common source of knowledge on child protection, Finkelhor, (2007) raised concerns about the ability of minors to fully grasp such information but agreed that sensitization programs are valuable if well-designed and of high quality.

Another key observation is that no children mentioned learning about child protection from peers or siblings. Those who identified the home as a source of information only referenced parents and guardians. This finding points to a gap in peer education, which could be a powerful tool in promoting awareness. Baker et al., (2012) emphasized the importance of children confiding in trusted friends to combat child abuse effectively. Encouraging peer-to-peer interaction on child protection issues could enhance children's ability to protect themselves and support one another.

Regarding the knowledge that children had about child protection, despite the efforts by schools and NGOs, the findings revealed significant gaps

in children's awareness and understanding of child protection. While participation in the research improved some children's ability to identify trusted individuals to share their abuse experiences with, the overall knowledge remained inadequate. Although children's knowledge of child protection was limited, a large portion of them understood child protection mainly as the act of ensuring the safety and welfare of a child. However, both survey data and focus group discussions revealed that children are not fully aware of their ability to protect themselves, the types of abuse and the responsibility of those around them to safeguard their welfare, or the available reporting mechanisms. Masilo & Dintwe, (2019) observed similar challenges in South Africa, where many children were unaware of their constitutional rights and failed to recognize when these rights were being violated. This highlights the importance of teaching children their rights and the various forms of abuse so they can report violations to appropriate authorities.

In the context of abuse and seeking protection, the majority of children placed their trust in parents as their main protectors. The trust placed in parents highlights the importance of their involvement in child protection and the role parents play in their children's lives (Mubita, 2021). Parents and guardians need to create open, supportive environments where children feel safe discussing sensitive issues. This finding aligns with broader literature emphasizing the critical role of family in fostering child protection awareness (Blakey & Thigpen, 2015). However, Naker, (2005) complicates this narrative, noting that in some cases, fathers and stepmothers were identified as perpetrators of violence at home. This duality underscores the need to sensitize parents, ensuring they understand their role as protectors and educators on child protection. Parental sensitization programs could help mitigate instances where the home environment becomes a site of abuse rather than safety.

In gauging children's knowledge on their ability to identify and report abusers to ensure protection, the findings revealed that fear plays a significant role in deterring children from reporting abuse. Many children expressed reluctance to report incidents involving adult abusers, citing threats of punishment or respect for adult authority. These findings are consistent with Casares, (2011), who identified fear of retaliation, punishment, or societal norms as key barriers to reporting.

Abusers often use threats and intimidation to maintain control, which reinforces the need to educate children about these tactics and empower them to report without hesitation. Norms, traditions, and customs also influence children's ability to report abuse. Medrano & Tabben, (2012) argue that in communities where cultural practices condone or tolerate violence or sexual exploitation of minors, children are less likely to be safe. Conversely, societies that view child abuse as taboo and uphold children's rights provide a more protective environment. Thus, addressing harmful cultural norms and fostering child-centered values within communities are essential components of effective child protection strategies.

## 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aimed at exploring the sources and level of knowledge of child protection among children in selected school of Munali Constituency. Their main source of knowledge was gotten from school. Schools are a good institution and starting point that could help in the way information on child protection is disseminated. However, this does not mean it ends there; children have also heard about child protection from other institutions, which shows that every institution does play a role and have to play a role in providing information to children on child protection. While efforts by schools, NGOs, and other stakeholders to raise awareness about child protection were evident, children felt the knowledge of child protection which they had was inadequate. There remains a significant need for more comprehensive, consistent, and engaging education on the subject. Thus, programs must focus not only on introducing the concept of child protection, but also on teaching children practical strategies for self-protection, understanding their rights, and accessing reporting mechanisms. Additionally, fostering peer-to-peer discussions and building stronger trust between children and their support systems, parents, teachers, and friends can further enhance child protection efforts.

In summary, there is a pressing need to intensify efforts to educate children about child protection, addressing both the barriers to reporting abuse and the cultural norms that enable it. By fostering a supportive environment and empowering children with knowledge, stakeholders can enhance children's ability to protect themselves and reduce their vulnerability to abuse.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that there is need to improve children's curriculum to include more information on child protection including ways children can protect and defend themselves, where to report an abuse and who to report to. Both formal and non-formal institutions need to come on board to foster children's knowledge on child protection beyond the school curriculum.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

All sources referenced in the study were properly acknowledged, and ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia Ethics Committee.

## CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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