

# Victimological characterization linked to the complaint process on victims of child sexual abuse

## Abstract

This article is part of an investigation to evaluate sexual abuse of children. According to Bessharov (1987) "Child abuse is a serious social problem" and this particular issue is reflected in its aftermath. The objective of this article is to provide a victimological characterization on aspects related to the complaint process of the crime of child sexual abuse that will allow protection mechanism and guarantee the child's physical and mental integrity and the adoption of legal measures against the offender, as also prevention programs against this type of crime. Some of the most notable aspects linked to the complaint process are: 32 percent of sexual assault victims are aged between 10 and 12, and 20 percent are adolescents between 10 and 18 years old and 18 percent are aged between 7 and 9. In all the countries of the world sexual violence against young boys and girls remains and crimes against them are less visible and least punished. This article states that 100 percent of rape or sexual cases were done by male offenders. 83 percent of the population groups is assigned to criminal rape offense against young boys and girls and is considered one of the most shameful crimes by its population. In most situations, sexual abuse happens in places known by the child, like in their own house, 56 percent of our cases, and 23 percent in the abuser's house.

**Keywords:** victimology, victim, child sexual abuse, sex offender, rape

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**Javier Alberto Bladés Pacheco**

Psychologist, Forensic Expert, University Professor of Psychology Career, UAJMS

**Correspondence:** Javier Alberto Bladés Pacheco, Psychologist, Forensic Expert, University Professor of Psychology Career, UAJMS, El Tejar (University Campus), Box 51 Humanities, Block 2nd. Floor, Bolivia, Email [dpgcli@uajms.edu.bo](mailto:dpgcli@uajms.edu.bo)

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## Introduction

Practices of violence and sexual abuse, especially if they are carried out against girls or boys, represent in themselves a very complex issue that is sporadically addressed by some state campaign or, when they have the support and resources, also addressed by certain groups human rights organizations. The truth is that beyond still constituting a scourge that is difficult to eradicate, when it is associated with resistance and social prejudice, it increases to the point of becoming an issue that as a society we can contact only through police news or in the tabloid chronicles.<sup>1</sup> But, with minimal exceptions, no media takes advantage of the events to develop an investigation into the abuses regularly committed against women and children, nor does anyone accompany the victims' families in the extensive and prior pilgrimage for justice to assert their rights. There are many origins of this reality, first of all the absence of a clear and forceful sexual education policy designed to be understood beyond any moment or evolutionary stage. This becomes the best ally of abusers and the worst enemy of potential victims. Then, when the abuse became present, in the midst of helplessness and loneliness, fear and shame, victims of double discrimination, women and children (the main victims), subjected to violence and abuse, passed into the territory of the silence. A silence fueled by the absence of the State and the taboos imposed by a society that does not feel capable of embracing the problem or addressing its consequences.<sup>2</sup>

It is no coincidence that cases of rape in our environment have occurred in needy sectors of society. Unavoidable factors such as economic and social are closely linked to this reality. In the agendas of organizations such as the UN or the World Bank, joint strategies have been developed for some years to work with child sexual violence and poverty, since it is known that there is a reciprocal generation relationship between both factors: poverty is a risk factor for the incidence of this social evil that affects thousands of boys and girls in the world.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the damage caused to victims of sexual violence socially affects their own body image and personal esteem,

potentially exposing them, since, victims of isolation, prejudice and social exclusion, they are stranded in a marginal area without representation or containment. They even see themselves isolated within the women's groups themselves and with it from the possibility of accessing and knowing their rights.<sup>2</sup>

Discrimination, poverty, isolation, low esteem, are all risk factors that encourage abuse and violate the basic right of every child to a dignified life without violence of any kind. This work aims to show how women and children are more vulnerable to be victims of sexual violence due to:

- I. The fact of being less able to defend themselves physically.
- II. Having greater difficulties expressing abuse due to communication problems.
- III. The difficulty of accessing information and advice points.
- IV. Lower self-esteem and contempt for one's own image as a woman.
- V. The confrontation between the traditional roles assigned to the condition of women.
- VI. Fear of reporting abuse due to the possibility of loss of ties and care provision.
- VII. Less credibility when reporting events of this type to some social strata.
- VIII. Frequently living in environments that favor violence: broken families, institutions, residences and hospitals.
- IX. Children are not prepared to face risks of sexual assault.
- X. Girls are at greater risk: for many parents, concern about their daughters' sexuality manifests itself when they reach puberty. The fear of pregnancy makes them think that only they are at risk.<sup>3</sup>

XI. But perhaps there is no tool more far-reaching than inclusion itself. The more linked children are to educational and health services (spaces with great potential for the detection, protection and prevention of abuse), to work and to community life, the lower the risk that abuse will not come to light or even that they are committed.<sup>4</sup>

Silence and misinformation are the greatest allies of abuse, and our society is unprotected in this regard, it lacks constant support for the monitoring and promotion of children's rights, as well as for the incorporation of issues related to sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

## Materials and methods

### In this work the following methodology was developed:

To carry out the analysis of the sample, the following variables were established: age, sex of the victim, sex of the aggressor, relationship with the victim of the aggressor, type of sexual abuse, sex and relationship of the complainant and place of the sexual abuse. It is important to mention that the personal file of each of the victims is attached to the fiscal investigation notebook, which collects data on the victim, the crime committed, the place of the crime and other background information on the case referring to the complaint and the police and prosecutor's actions. public ministry carried out in the investigation process of the case being pursued where the aggression reported by the person is reported in a general way. Social and forensic medical reports are also integrated. Each of the files was reviewed to obtain these data and compute them so that it was subsequently possible to prepare a descriptive analysis through tables or tables, which would show the frequencies and percentages of each of the indicators of the established variables. Considering the basic principles of ethical research, the data were handled in accordance with the established premises regarding the confidentiality of the results.<sup>6</sup>

### Sample

The sample was integrated with the data obtained through the review of the personal files of 40 expert cases of children and adolescents with and without disabilities between the ages of 6 to 17 years, who reported being victims of sexual abuse and filed a complaint for said crime. The analysis of the fiscal investigation notebooks was developed in the Municipality of Cercado in the Department of Tarija, Plurinational State of Bolivia during the years 2002 to 2012.

## Results

The following results obtained in this research are presented below, which are explained according to the following aspects:

### Age of sexually abused children

The results presented in Table 1 show a higher incidence of sexual abuse in girls (29) compared to boys (5). When the age of the boys and girls who were sexually abused is analyzed, similar percentages are observed between men and women with 32% and 35% respectively for an age range between 10 and 12 years of age, that is, For this age range they are the most vulnerable to suffering sexual abuse.

On the other hand, it is also observed that sexual abuse in girls presents differences in terms of the age at which they are sexually abused, that is, the abuse occurs at younger ages, 4 to 6 years, up to 16 to 18 years. . While in the case of children the age range ranges from 7 to 15 years.

**Table 1** age of sexually abused children

Age	Women		Men		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
4 to 6 years	4	14	-	-	4	12
7 to 9 years	3	10	3	60	6	18
10 to 12 years	10	35	1	20	11	32
13 to 15 years	5	17	1	20	6	18
16 to 18 years	7	24	-	-	7	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

### Sex of sexually abused children

In the results presented in Table 2, it can be seen that the sex most sexually assaulted is that of girls (85%) in relation to (15%) boys. This is explained by the gender inequalities that still exist and the vulnerabilities and discrimination against women in our current social context Table 2.

**Table 2** Sex of sexually abused children

Sex	Total	
	Freq.	%
Women	29	85
Men	5	115
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

### Gender of sexual offenders

Regarding the sex of the sexual aggressors of boys and girls, it can be stated that 100% of cases of rape or sexual abuse correspond to the male sex. Because the risk factors associated with sexual assault are more frequent in men than in women, such as high alcohol consumption, social pressure to have sex, sexual myths linked to rape such as the idea that no means yes, jokes and hostile sexist language against women, access to pornography and the machismo prevailing in our social environment.<sup>7</sup>

### Type of bond that the sexual offender had with the victim

The results of Table 3 show us that the type of bond present in the cases of rape studied is that of social bond (41%), this is because the perpetrators of sexual assaults are men who are known and close to the victims, such as neighbors, friends of the family, acquaintances of the family through business or work relationships, and taking advantage of this position, they commit the criminal act by having easy access and trust with the victim. In second place is the family bond (32%) which is related to sexual offenders who are from the victim's own family environment such as parents, brothers, stepfathers, uncles, grandparents, stepfathers, which make up a dramatic situation for the victim. minor who is attacked by his own relatives, leaving him completely helpless physically, mentally and socially.

**Table 3** type of bond that the sexual offender had with the victim

Link type	Total	
	Freq.	%
Family bond	11	32
Sentimental bond	4	12
School bond	1	3
Social bond (neighbors, friends, acquaintances)	14	41
Employment relationship	4	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

## Type of sexual abuse suffered by the victim

The results corresponding to Table 4 show us that the main type of sexual abuse suffered by victims is rape, both in men and women. Carnal access understood as the physical act of vaginal and anal penetration of penis, objects, fingers, which due to its magnitude is the one that generates the most psychological, physical and social damage in the victim, even leaving lifelong consequences. Other results also show that women are the ones who suffer the most from attempted rape and the corruption of minors.

**Table 4** type of sexual abuse suffered by the victim

Age	Women		Men		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Rape	25	86	4	80	29	83
indecent abuse	1	3	1	20	2	11.5
Corruption of minors	1	3	--	--	1	1.5
Rape attempts	2	8	--	--	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

## Sex and relationship of the complainant

In this Table 5, it is highlighted that in the process of reporting the crime of sexual abuse, committed against boys and girls, the people who report it are women, and their relationship with the victim is that of a mother (76%). This is explained in the sense that emotionally it is the mothers who are closest to the boys and girls, they share most of the day and become the safest and most stable link for the child, hence they are the people who, when changing of clothes, bathing them, etc., discover what happened or in other cases the child tells the mother what happened to them, which out of fear or shame they would do with another person. In second place are parents and social institutions (9%) that protect the rights of children to a lesser extent since someone needs to alert them or notify them of what is happening.

**Table 5** sex and relationship of the complainant

Reporting Relationship	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Mother	--	--	26	76	26	76
Aunt (maternal or paternal)	--	--	2	6	2	6
Father	3	9	--	--	3	9
social institution	--	--	3	9	3	9
Legal guardian	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

## Location of sexual abuse

The results expressed in Table 6 show us that the most frequent place of sexual abuse takes place in the house or home where the victim lives. This indicates a high rate of sexual assaults perpetrated by family members themselves, thus generating a physical environment of lack of protection for the child since not even in her own home would she be safe. In second place would be the aggressor's own house, which also correlates with the previous data that the aggressors are people close to the victim's family environment, known and trusted by the victim. In open fields or solitary places, only (12%) cases occur. showing that insecurity is not exactly on the street but in family homes.

**Table 6** location of sexual abuse

Place	Total	
	Freq.	%
victim's house	19	56
Aggressor's house	8	23
Clearing	4	12
Park	1	3
Motel	1	3
School	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100</b>

## Discussion

Regarding the age at which they suffer sexual abuse, it was established that the most affected are girls who are between 10 and 12 years old. Results that agree with those mentioned by Ferreyra (2000), who points out that "childhood sexual abuse constitutes a true public health problem and the group that is most affected is women, especially those who are at the beginning of childhood." puberty between the ages of 10 and 13 years of age. With respect to the sex of children who are sexually abused, the results generated in this research (women 85% and men 15%) coincide with those found by Rodríguez Escobar JA<sup>8</sup> who points out "that there is a greater predominance of sexual crime in women (76.9%) than in men (23.1%). Both results are related to the power imbalance stated by Heire, Pitanguy and Germain, who argue the presence of authority and dominance in gender relations, the establishment of a society based on the domination of one sex over another. With respect to the gender of the sexual aggressors of boys and girls, 100% correspond to the male sex, which is corroborated with those mentioned by Benítez Quintero F<sup>10</sup> who points out, with regard to the sex of the aggressor, the highest concentration was found in men. Sexual offenders target children because they would be incapable of having satisfactory sexual relationships with adult women. Children become a sexual alternative.

The aggressor figures are mainly concentrated in men who are part of the closest family and social circle of the victims of sexual violence, especially those who represent the father figure, giving rise to an environment that allows constant abuse, since committed inside the family home where the victim lives, which generates total helplessness in the victim and the abuse remains hidden from the view of others. When the type of bond that the sexual offender had with the victim is analyzed, it shows firstly the social bond (41%) and secondly the family bond (32%), which is related to the results found by Benítez Quintero F<sup>10</sup> who points out "that in the group of children, the person who most frequently turned out to be the aggressor was the stepfather, followed by the uncle, the neighbors, and in the adolescents the perpetrator was the father figure." The child abuser usually knows the children and despite this, the aggressors can have very different relationships with the victims. In urban environments, abuse by acquaintances is more common or frequent, because there are more situations of overcrowding, promiscuity, poverty and more widespread anonymity. Regarding the type of sexual abuse suffered by the victim, the results indicate that rape is the most common (86%) followed by attempted rape (8%), results consistent with those mentioned by Benítez Quintero F<sup>10</sup> for whom "the type of sexual assault most frequently reported in the group of children was touching and vaginal penetration."

In child sexual assault, there are misconceptions about what a child is and what their rights are. Rapists because their empathy, understood as the ability to suffer with, or put themselves in the place of another,

is very limited and they always tend to justify their action either by denying its existence or by blaming the victim for the action.<sup>9</sup> The place of sexual abuse suffered by the victim is firstly the child's home and secondly the aggressor's own house and thirdly an open field or unknown solitary place. These data correlate with the results found by Benítez Quintero F<sup>10</sup> which indicates that in terms of the place where the attack occurred, the highest concentration of the percentage was recorded firstly in the victim's house, secondly in the aggressor's house and thirdly an unknown area.

The majority of these children live in one-room houses, where the cultural level of their parents is almost zero, brief conversations, pigeonholed in machismo, where the demographic aspect is largely uncontrolled; Families have an average of 4 to 6 children, which causes overcrowding problems. The low cultural level of these people translates into a regrettable socioeconomic level, since they receive very low salaries, which is not an impediment for men to dedicate themselves largely to the consumption of alcoholic beverages and hallucinogenic substances such as marijuana or cocaine almost daily.

In many of these homes, in addition to the basic family nucleus, other relatives or acquaintances live who generally share the rooms with the children, due to the limited existential space. Children are often left in the homes of relatives or acquaintances who offer to help take care of them. In these homes there is no privacy, which is indicative of the fact that they are observed while bathing or dressing. It is noteworthy that fathers or stepfathers give too much confidence to their drinking friends, a situation that they take advantage of to touch or abuse the girls. The problem of sexual abuse is not only normative, but also cultural, and this is where all social actors must put their maximum effort to progressively change a mentality that affects a sector of society, which should have measures of protection. Special protection given their condition as human beings in training.<sup>11-14</sup>

## Conclusion

Having studied in detail the available scientific sources, the authors of this study come to the following conclusions. Regarding the age at which children suffer sexual abuse, it was established that the most affected are girls who are between 10 and 12 years old. Sexual offenders target children because they would be incapable of having satisfactory sexual relationships with adult women. Children become a sexual alternative. The aggressor figures are mainly concentrated in men who are part of the closest family and social circle of the victims of sexual violence, especially those who represent the father figure, giving rise to an environment that allows constant abuse, since committed inside the family home where the victim lives, which generates total helplessness in the victim and the abuse remains hidden from the view of others. The child abuser usually knows the children and despite this, the aggressors can have very different relationships with the victims. In urban environments, abuse by acquaintances is more common or frequent, because there are more situations of overcrowding, promiscuity, poverty and more widespread anonymity. In child sexual assault, there are misconceptions about what a child is and what their rights are. The place of sexual abuse suffered by the victim is firstly the child's home and secondly the aggressor's

own house and thirdly an open field or unknown solitary place. The majority of these children live in one-room houses, where the cultural level of their parents is almost zero, brief conversations, pigeonholed in machismo, where the demographic aspect is largely uncontrolled; Families have an average of 4 to 6 children, which causes overcrowding problems. The low cultural level of these people translates into a regrettable socioeconomic level, since they receive very low salaries, which is not an impediment for men to dedicate themselves largely to the consumption of alcoholic beverages and hallucinogenic substances such as marijuana or cocaine almost daily. The problem of sexual abuse is not only normative, but also cultural, and this is where all social actors must put their maximum effort to progressively change a mentality.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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