CHAPTER 1

Trends in Child Maltreatment:
A Review of the Global Situation
Map showing the geographical location of Kenya, Zambia, and the Netherlands
1.0. Introduction

There is growing concern about the high incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment both in the developed and developing world. This concern is evidenced by the large body of research that has examined prevalence, characteristics, and potential consequences of the various forms of child maltreatment that include sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect and traumatic exposure to violence between parents (Clemmons, DiLillo, Martinez, DeGue & Jeffcott, 2003). The concern over child maltreatment is borne out of the realization that besides child maltreatment affecting a significant fraction of children (Finkelhor, 2002), the experience is often accompanied by wide ranging negative mental and physical health consequences for children, adolescents and adult survivors (Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2007; Scher, Forde, McQuaid & Stein, 2004). In this chapter, we discuss global prevalence data in child maltreatment.

1.1. Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

To date, numerous studies have examined the prevalence of child maltreatment. The literature shows that the prevalence of the various forms of child maltreatment varies remarkably across studies. For instance, the prevalence of reported childhood neglect may be as high 41.5% (Hussey, Chang & Kotch (2006)) and as low as 5% as was observed in a study involving Dutch adolescent students (Lamers-Winkelmann, Slot, Bijl & Vijlbrief, 2007). Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) rates may range from 4.5% in population samples (see Hussey et al., 2006; Scher et al., 2004) to 60.1% among secondary school students (Madu & Feltzer 2001). Childhood physical abuse (CPA) on the other hand, may vary from 0.6% (Euser, Van IJzendoorn, Prinzie & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010) to 28.4% (Hussey et al., 2006). Such variation is often attributed to differences in operational definitions of what constitutes maltreatment, in methods used (retrospective self-reports versus sentinel approaches), and sampling strategies employed by different studies (Smith, Ireland & Thornberry, 2005). This section therefore reviews the relevant literature on the prevalence of the different forms of child maltreatment.

Various researchers have examined either single types or multiple types of child maltreatment. Using data collected from a 50-state survey of Child Protective Services in the United States of America (USA) McDonald et al. (1999) reported that neglect as characterised by deprivation of care, necessities and medical attention accounted for 54% of all cases of child maltreatment. Physical abuse and sexual abuse on the other hand, accounted for 24% and 12% of all cases of maltreatment in the survey. Although neglect was the most common type of maltreatment in the USA, it was likely that the actual incidence of neglect could be even higher because of its subtle nature and hence the likelihood of it being underreported. Breire and Elliot (2003) carried out a survey on childhood physical and sexual abuse among 935 subjects living in the USA. In this survey 14.2% of males and 32.3% of females reported a history of CSA; while 22.5% of
male and 19.5 % of females reported a history of CPA. In addition, 21% of the participants reported having experienced both CSA and CPA.

In a different study Scher et al. (2004) examined multiple forms of maltreatment in a representative sample of 967 adult men and women residing in the US. Findings of this study showed that 35.1% of the respondents had experienced at least one form of maltreatment in childhood with 41% of the male respondents and 29% of the female respondents reporting at least one form of childhood maltreatment. The prevalence rate for CPA was 18.9%, with males reporting higher prevalence than females (21.0% and 17.1% respectively). CSA was reported by 5.0% of the respondents with 2.2% of males and 7.5% of the female participants reporting a history of CSA. In this study, the difference in the prevalence of CPA for the males and females was comparable to that found by Briere and Elliot (2003), whereas the CSA prevalences in the two studies was divergent. In examining neglect, Scher et al. (2004) found that more respondents reported physical neglect than they did emotional neglect. Physical neglect was reported by 17.9% of the respondents with more males (22%) than females (14.2%) reporting physical neglect. Emotional neglect was experienced by 5.1% of the respondents. The prevalence of the experience of emotional neglect in childhood by males and females was similar, amounting to 4.9% and 5.3% respectively. Thus both male and female participants were equally likely to report emotional neglect.

Using estimates based on sentinel data collected in The Netherlands, Euser et al. (2010) found one-year prevalence rates of 0.1% for CSA and 0.6% for CPA. The prevalences of physical and emotional neglect within the same period were 0.9% and 0.8% respectively. In a different study that involved self-report measures of child maltreatment among Dutch adolescents, Lamers-Winkel et al. (2007) found one-year prevalence rates of 4.4% and 8.3% for CSA and CPA respectively. When life-time prevalences were considered, 7.9% and 15.7% of this adolescent sample reported CSA and CPA respectively while 5.2% reported neglect. In addition, 4.1% reported witnessing interparental violence in the 12 months preceding the study, while life-time prevalence for this form of maltreatment was 11.7%.

Hussey et al. (2006) carried out retrospective assessments of various forms of child maltreatment among 15,179 young adults in the US. Their findings showed that supervision neglect was the most prevalent at 41.5%. The prevalence of CPA (28.4%) and physical neglect (11.8%) in this study differed from the findings by Scher et al. (2004). At 4.5%, the prevalence of CSA was similar to what had been observed earlier by Scher et al. (2004). Child maltreatment has also been examined on the basis of severity of abuse. Rich, Gidycz, Warkentin, Loh and Weiland (2005) examined child abuse among 551 female university students in the USA. Results showed that 6.2% reported moderate sexual victimization in childhood and 1.4% reported a rape in childhood. In this sample 16.7% and 21.8% reported moderate physical abuse from mother and father respectively. Severe physical abuse by mother and father was reported by 7.4% and 6.2% of the cases respectively.

Investigations into child maltreatment have also included convenience samples drawn from medical clinics and shelters for female victims of domestic
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violence. Studies that have examined multiple types of child maltreatment in non-representative female samples of this nature have reported high prevalence of maltreatment. For example, Griffing, Lewis, Chu Sage, Madry, and Primm (2007) examined 111 women survivors of domestic violence in New York. Of these women 27% had witnessed parental violence, 36% were victims of CSA and 11.7% had experienced CPA. In a different survey, Vranceanu, Hobfoll, and Johnson (2007) recruited 100 women awaiting medical appointments at a gynaecological centre in Mid-western USA, 39% reported to have witnessed family violence, 36% reported to be victims of CSA and 35% reported to have experienced neglect. A similar study in Brazil examined childhood maltreatment among 115 male and female participants awaiting pediatric and gynaecological services at a health centre (Grassi-Oliveira & Stein, 2008). The results showed that neglect was the most commonly reported form of child maltreatment with 36% and 30% of the participants reporting emotional and physical neglect respectively. In addition, 16% and 15% of the participants reported CPA and CSA respectively.

Although few in number, studies that have examined only CPA in their samples have reported prevalences that are divergent from those that have examined CPA alongside other types of maltreatment. For instance, Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, and Carnes (2007) found that 11.4% of the respondents (10.6% of males and 12.1% of females) in their large population–based sample of 2000 middle aged men and women reported CPA. These prevalences were lower than those found by Breire and Elliot (2003) and Scher et al. (2004) who examined multiple forms of abuse. Similarly, studies that have examined only CSA in their samples have also reported divergent prevalences from those that examined CSA and other types of maltreatment. Ullman and Filipas (2005) examined 733 college students and found CSA prevalence rates of 22.8%. More females (28.2%) than males (13.3%) reported CSA. Whiffen, Thompson and Aube (2000) found that 37% of women (N=109) and 25% of men (N=83) in their sample were CSA survivors. Again, these prevalences were higher than those found in studies that examined more than one type of abuse (Breire & Elliot 2003; Scher et al., 2004).

Trends in the literature show that studies examining CSA are many and continue to increase while those examining CPA are on the decline. Consistently low are those that involve neglect and emotional abuse (Behl, Conyngham, & May, 2003). Due to the many studies examining CSA, a number of reviews that report on its prevalence have been done. Gorey and Leslie (1997) found that studies on nonclinical samples mostly report CSA prevalence rates of around 22% for females and 8% for males. In a review of 166 studies on sexual abuse of boys, Holmes and Slap (1998) reported that male prevalence rates ranged from 4% to 76%. This differed significantly from a review by Finkelhor and colleagues (1986) which estimated that 3% to 4.8% of males had a history of pre-pubertal sexual contact. In a later review of studies conducted from the 1970s to the 1990s, Finkelhor (1994) concluded that a history of sexual abuse was reported in at least 7% of females and at least 3% of males. A recent review of studies done since 1994, however reported different findings. In this review Pereda, Guilera, Forns and Gomez-Benito (2009a) found the prevalence of CSA among males in most studies to be below 10% while the prevalence among females was between 10-
20%. The authors however noted that a few other studies had reported female prevalence of between 30-40%. Further, a recent meta-analysis on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples by the same authors (Pereda, Guilera, Forns Gomez Benito, 2009b) reported a mean prevalence of CSA in males of 7.9% while that of females was 19.7%. Notably, student samples did not necessarily report lower prevalence of CSA than community samples. It was also found that besides the moderating effect of gender on prevalence, the highest prevalence rates were found in Africa and the lowest were found in Europe.

1.2 Prevalence of Child Maltreatment in Africa

Although all African governments except Somalia have ratified the 1989 United Nations Child Rights Convention, a bulk of children across Africa continue to be victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect (Mulinge, 2010). Despite this, there is an enormous gap between Western countries and African nations in the amount of research on child maltreatment (Dunne, 2009). In the first half of this decade, peer reviewed research on child sexual abuse was mainly South African while CSA research in the larger sub-Saharan Africa was limited (Lalor, 2004a). Indeed research on child maltreatment on the continent is growing (Dunne, 2009) but a recent meta-analysis of studies on prevalence of CSA shows that these are few compared to studies done in America and Europe (Pereda et al., 2009b). In addition, scientific research on other forms of child maltreatment is limited. To date the scientific studies available are still largely South African with almost all other countries not having even one single prevalence study except for Zimbabwe with two studies and Tanzania, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Zambia with one study each.

Collings (1991) examined CSA in 284 male undergraduate students at a South African university. In the study, 28.9% of the respondents reported a history of CSA as defined by both contact and noncontact forms of CSA before the age of 17. In this predominantly white sample (60.9%), abuse was perpetrated by both male and female sexual offenders. It was also noted that Black students who comprised of 16.2% of the total sample were more likely to report abusive sexual experiences relative to the white students. When only contact forms of childhood sexual abuse were considered, the prevalence rate was 9.0% (see also Collings, 1995). In a subsequent study that involved 640 mainly White (64.2%), female university students in South Africa, Collings (1997) studied the prevalence of CSA. In the study, 34.8% of the respondents reported contact CSA. Although these two studies (Collings, 1991; 1997) are important studies of CSA among university students in South Africa, generalization of these findings to other African contexts needs to be made with caution because of underrepresentation of Black male and female students in the samples that were examined.

Madu (2001a) also examined CSA among male and female university students in South Africa, but unlike the previous South African studies that were predominantly White, the 649 participants in this study were mostly Black.
Using a retrospective self-report questionnaire on childhood experiences, the results showed that 25.6% of the sample experienced contact CSA. In this study, 21.7% of the male participants and 23.7% of the female participants reported contact CSA. It should be noted that the difference between male and female prevalences in this study was nonsignificant. Notably, when the definition of CSA was narrowed to include only serious acts of violation that involved sexual intercourse, the prevalence of CSA among university students dropped to 8.7%. This difference underscores the significance of operational definitions in the studies. It is remarkable that when asked about their perceptions of their experiences, most students who reported acts of CSA according to the researcher’s definition (68.2% of female victims and 83% of male victims) did not consider themselves as sexually abused—apparently they only perceived themselves as sexually abused when they were forced into sexual intercourse. In a similar study in Tanzania, McCrann, Lalor and Katabaro (2006) found that 27.7% of the 487 university students sampled reported being victims of CSA. The prevalence of CSA was higher among females (31%) than males (25%). The four studies cited above show a similar trend in prevalence of CSA in university student samples. In addition, the prevalence rates are at par or even exceed retrospective studies of CSA in developed countries (Finkelhor, 1994; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; Pereda et al., 2009a).

Besides college samples, a few studies in Africa have examined child abuse among adolescents. Slonim-Nevo and Mukuka (2007) carried out a national survey among 3360 Zambian adolescents. In this sample, 27% reported being physically abused and 10% reported being sexually abused in childhood by a family member. Although the rates reported in this study are similar to what has been observed in the literature, it is likely that higher prevalences would have been observed if the experience of abuse was extended to include also perpetration by non-family members. For instance, Madu and Peltzer (2001) studied CSA among 414 secondary school students in South Africa and found an overall prevalence of 54.2%. In this study, males did report a higher prevalence (60.2%) than did females (53.2%). The findings of this study differ significantly from studies carried out in the region and even studies worldwide. The authors attributed the exceptionally high rates to socioeconomic factors that were unique to the area of study. The study sample was drawn from a geographical area in which many parents worked as migrant labourers either in the provinces or at faraway places. The authors speculated that many children were left alone at home during week days after school with nannies or grandparents who may not provide proper care. Thus they are vulnerable to sexual abuse from opportunistic perpetrators. It should be noted that in the terminology of child abuse this would be considered neglect rather than CSA. This is because the caregivers did not protect the children against abuse by non-family members. In Ethiopia, Worku, Gebremariam, and Jayalakshmi (2006) found very high CSA prevalence of 68.7% among 323 female high school students. The high prevalence is attributable to the broad definition of CSA which included verbal harassment that was reported by 51.4% of those who reported CSA. Actual sexual intercourse and unwelcome kissing was reported by 18.0% and 17.1% respectively.
In a study that examined psychological, physical, emotional and ritualistic abuse among 559 high school students, Madu (2001b) found that 70.7% met the criteria for psychological abuse, physical abuse was experienced by 27.0%, 35.3% were emotionally abused and 10.0% were ritualistically abused. Participants were also asked about their perceptions of their experiences. Using an estimate of the participants’ self-rated perception of abuse during childhood, it was found that a significant proportion of those abused did not perceive themselves as having been abused. They too may have considered sexual abuse to have only occurred if they had been forced into sexual intercourse (see also Madu, 2001a).

Chiroro, Tendayi, Frodi, Muromo & Tsigah (2006) examined CSA among 1059 female college and high school students in Zimbabwe and found a prevalence of 41.3%. In a smaller sample of 112 female student teachers in Zimbabwe, Gwirayi and Shumba (2008) found a similarly high CSA prevalence of 43.8%. The CSA prevalences found in these studies were within the range of prevalences found among female students in other studies conducted on the continent (Collings, 1997; Madu, 2001a; Madu & Peltzer, 2001). In Nigeria however, Esere, Idowu and Omotosho (2006) found a prevalence of 90.0% for physical violence, 80.0% for psychological violence and 10.0% for sexual violence in a sample of 20 children purposively selected from two SOS children’s homes in Nigeria. The findings by Esere et al. (2006) should be viewed with caution because of the extremely small sample size purposively selected from a group of children who had previously been at risk of maltreatment.

Studies on CSA in Africa have also included convenience samples drawn from antenatal and mental health clinics. Using a conservative measure of CSA which included only acts of coercion, Dunkle et al. (2004) studied CSA among 1395 (16-44 years) mothers attending antenatal clinics in South Africa. The results showed that 8.0% were victims of CSA. When the definition of CSA was narrowed further to include only acts of rape, the prevalence dropped to 5.0%. This finding was much higher than that found by Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga and Bradshaw (2002) in a population based survey in which 1.6% of the 11,735 women aged between 15 and 49 years reported childhood rape. A recent study involving 94 youth aged between 8 and 19 years and attending a Youth Stress Clinic in South Africa found that 53% had a history of CSA (Carey, Walker, Rossouw, Seedat, & Stein, 2008). In this sample, female participants were more likely to report CSA than were male participants. The findings of these clinical samples provide important CSA data, however the extent to which these samples are representative of the general population is in doubt.

Although corporal punishment is widely used in Africa as a means of discipline, control and power assertion by parents, its use may be understood to be an act of violence against children. Youssef, Attia and Kamel (1998) examined the prevalence of physical violence against children in Egypt whose parents used corporal punishment. Out of 2170 students sampled, 37.5% reported being subjected to corporal punishment that ranged from being beaten with bare hands to being burnt and scalded with hot water or cigarettes. The acts described by Youssef et al. (1998) obviously exceed corporal punishment and are indeed abusive. Kaminer, Grimsrund, Myer, Stein, and Williams (2008) examined lifetime
exposure to various forms of interpersonal violence in a nationally representative sample of 4351 adults living in South Africa. In this study, 12% of the participants reported a history of CPA.

Besides studies discussed above, Non-Governmental Organizations have also surveyed child maltreatment on the African continent. Using data from the Global School-based Student Health Survey by the World Health Organization (WHO), Brown et al. (2009) found that 23% of the 22,696 respondents drawn from five African countries (Namibia, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe), were victims of forced sex. Although the survey found that females were more likely to be exposed to sexual violence than were males, the difference was small. At 9%, Swaziland had the lowest prevalence of sexual violence against school children while Zambia had the highest at 33% (Brown et al., 2009).

In a different survey the Children in Need Network in conjunction with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Zambia found a prevalence of 42.0% for child maltreatment. Of these, 72% of the girls and 28% of the boys were found to be sexually abused (Nkandela, 2001). In Kenya, data provided by African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) indicates that neglect is the most common type of maltreatment in the country. In the year 2005/2006 74% of all cases handled by the association involved neglect, 12% involved CSA while 20% involved CPA (ANPPCAN, 2006). In the year 2006/2007, the proportion of the cases handled by the association remained largely the same. Cases involving neglect comprised of 75% of all cases, 17% involved CSA and 20% involved CPA (ANPPCAN, 2007).

In fact, the WHO report on Violence and Health states that 21.9% of children in Kenya have been neglected by their parents (WHO, 2002). Although data based on reports by non-governmental organizations provide useful information on the status of child maltreatment on the continent, the methodology by which this data is arrived at cannot be vouched for. This is because most organizations do not define their sampling procedure; neither do they explain their research methodology in arriving at the findings that are presented in the reports. In addition, most research carried out by humanitarian organizations report on predetermined areas of concern in order to justify need for additional funding to run particular humanitarian projects. For these reasons, scientific methods of research remain the only reliable source of data on child maltreatment.

Although scientific data on child maltreatment in few countries of Africa exist, this is still scarce in relation to the magnitude of the problem and the vastness of the continent. All the available studies on the continent except two (Madu, 2001b; Slonim-Nevo & Mukuka 2007) have examined only one type of maltreatment. Even where two or more types of maltreatment were examined, there was no differentiation of prevalence data by gender. In addition, no study in Africa has examined the prevalence of childhood neglect and witnessing interparental violence as forms of child maltreatment. Therefore, this thesis will for the first time provide prevalence data on four types of childhood maltreatment; CPA, CSA, neglect, and witnessing interparental violence, in two African countries, Kenya and Zambia. In addition, prevalence data will be presented separately for males and females, and comparisons will be drawn with data from The Netherlands.